



THE ONE YEAR® BOOK OF

Encouragement

*365 Days of Inspiration and Wisdom
for Your Spiritual Journey*

HAROLD MYRA



Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Carol Stream, Illinois

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The One Year Book of Encouragement: 365 Days of Inspiration and Wisdom for Your Spiritual Journey

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ISBN 978-1-4143-3428-8

Printed in the United States of America

16 15 14 13 12 11 10
7 6 5 4 3 2 1

WELCOME TO *Encouragement!*

If you probe beneath the surface of believers today, many of them will admit to anxieties and deep discouragement.

“I’m concerned about what’s happening in the world. Things feel as if they’re falling apart, and I fear what we may have to go through.”

“Life is overwhelming—far more demanding and confusing than I ever thought it would be.”

“My family has gone through so much; I’m fearful of what’s next.”

“I long to make a positive difference, but I’ve been surprised by how often I’ve failed—and I’m afraid I’ll fail again.”

Do you resonate with any of these comments? Whether or not they mirror your feelings, you’ll likely agree that we’re all living through sobering global disruptions and cultural chaos. We face an uncertain future, and many are in the middle of life-changing difficulties.

In crushing circumstances—or even in the ordinary, yet demanding, rhythms of life—we all need courage and encouragement. Personally, I’ve found marvelous refreshment and challenge in the deep, authentic rivers of our Christian heritage. From Brother Lawrence to Jill Briscoe, from John Wesley to Philip Yancey, from Martin Luther to Luci Shaw, my soul has been nourished by their scriptural wisdom hammered out on the anvil of life’s realities.

My prayer is that you’ll find these daily insights as bracing and compelling as I have. For years, I’ve underlined nuggets that, for me, were spiritual gold. For each quote selected, I’ve tried to unpack the meaning and provide some context so you can absorb it and apply it.

Especially today, we need spiritual meat, and the sages quoted in the pages to follow speak from demanding, real-life circumstances: Alan Paton, battling apartheid in South Africa; John Wesley, living in a tough marriage and praying on horseback; Luci Shaw, coping as a new widow; Oswald Chambers, speaking to men facing death (and soon to die himself); Amy Carmichael, rescuing young girls in India from sexual slavery; Mother Teresa, tending the dying. Three stalwart Christians—Helmut Thielicke, Ole Hallesby, and Corrie ten Boom—resisted the Nazis and paid heavy

prices. Others with less dramatic experiences lived with eyes wide open to life's rugged turns and mysteries, yet they clung to a living faith.

Despite their differences from us, their longings and repentance and prayers resonate with immediacy. It's fascinating to me, for instance, how many of my friends say they often find François Fénelon's words from several hundred years ago exactly what they need for a given day.

For me, the men and women in this volume are truly soul mates. As I've read their words, they've often stung, but always with astringent healing, or they've opened a fresh way of viewing how God works. Other times, they've calmed me and lifted me to surrender and praise.

Life has been described as a crucible. The word describes what most people in the Bible endured, and we have much to endure today. Life not only is difficult but is a crucible that refines us. As we move through life, face adversity, bury our loved ones, and recognize the world's brutality and unfairness, we begin to appreciate more and more the depths of Scripture. We also realize we need guidance, fresh encouragement, and no-nonsense spiritual insight from those who have gone before us and have followed hard after Christ.

Fortunately, we have a rich heritage from which to draw.

Yet for most of us, life keeps quickening its pace, and we find too little time for soul nourishment. My hope is that this devotional will prove flexible for you. How might you use it? Start with today's date, or start anywhere. Read and pray through the daily devotions, or read several entries when you have the time. Personally, I mark the ones that hit home and copy quotes to carry with me. These challenges and prayers are for life as we meet it, in all its challenges, in all its opportunities, in all its wonder and grace from the loving Father.

Harold Myra

THE WAY TO FREEDOM

January 1

OSWALD CHAMBERS, in his famed devotional, paraphrases the apostle Paul, saying, “My determination is to be my utmost for His highest.” Paul had exactly that spirit, and so did Chambers.

“Obey the call of Jesus,” Chambers urges. “Keep yourself before God for this one thing only—my utmost for His highest.” Then he switches to his own personal commitment: “I am determined to be absolutely and entirely for Him and Him alone.”

When he declared that, Chambers was likely recalling his own inner turmoil as a young man. David McCasland’s excellent biography *Oswald Chambers: Abandoned to God* reveals his intense struggles and the extraordinary dedication that resulted.

Chambers’s determination resonates throughout his devotional, so it’s no wonder countless Christians have read and reread his challenges and have been drawn into deeper commitment.

“We have to decide,” Chambers says. “Surrender your will to Him absolutely and irrevocably.” That was his challenge, and today we’re faced with that opportunity.

Opportunity? Yes! Does surrendering our wills to God “absolutely and irrevocably” feel threatening and grim? Chambers didn’t think so—and he was far from a grim, shackled person. For instance, he loved children and entertained them with sketches, having a sense of humor and love of life. He understood that the way to freedom—and ultimately to joy and laughter—lies through giving up our “rights” and allowing God full control.

As you begin the New Year, are you determined to hear the whispers and guidance of the Holy Spirit, who can equip you to experience God’s highest? Here is Chambers’s counsel: “Keep your life so constant in its contact with God that His surprising power may break out on the right hand and on the left. Live in a constant state of expectancy.”

*Lord, you know my struggles. Urgent duties clamor
for my attention! “Special offers” lure me to spend
time and money on superficial things. Fill me, I pray,
with the resolve to surrender myself to you.*

Work hard to show the results of your salvation, obeying God with deep reverence and fear. For God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him. PHILIPPIANS 2:12-13, NLT

WHY CRINGE? BE ENCOURAGED

January 2

MARTIN LUTHER says, “We can be sure of this: a sorrowful, timid, and frightened heart doesn’t come from Christ. He came to this earth, fulfilled his mission, and ascended into heaven to take away sorrow and fearfulness from our hearts and replace them with cheerful hearts, consciences, and minds. That’s why he promises to send the Holy Spirit.”

The reformer wasn’t always waging great historic battles; out of the doldrums of his own discouragement he spoke to the hearts of his fellow believers. Jesus says, “Don’t let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, and trust also in me” (John 14:1, NLT). Here’s how Luther unpacks that: “It’s as if Christ is saying to us, ‘What are you doing? Why are you cringing? Be encouraged and take heart. All is not lost, even if the devil, the world, or your conscience plagues and terrifies you. You’re not ruined if you don’t feel my presence.’”

Sometimes we can feel ruined—when it seems the Lord is absent and the devil is near us instead. But Luther tells us that Jesus’ promise of the Holy Spirit is real, even when we don’t feel his presence.

We’re urged to pray, whether we feel spiritually comforted or not, for the Holy Spirit is at work, whether we sense it or not.

Luther tells us that if we are Christians, the Lord speaks to us “with friendly and comforting words and actions.” In addition, Luther challenges us to pray with confidence. “We think small, but the Lord is great and powerful. He expects us to ask for great things. He wants to give them to us to demonstrate his almighty power.”

Holy Spirit of God, so often my feelings are flat or fearful. Grant me confidence and comfort, I pray. Thank you for your guidance and the wonderful things you’ve done. Help me not to cringe, but to take heart.

Jesus spoke to them at once. “Don’t be afraid,” he said. “Take courage. I am here!”

MATTHEW 14:27, NLT

RAGS AND BLOSSOMS

January 3

AMY CARMICHAEL chose happiness. In her later years, she wrote, “The sunshine is streaming into my little room, and I can see by twisting my head a tiny glimpse of the sky. It is a joy to feel the air coming on my face, though sometimes, and particularly in the spring, I have a big longing to get right out of doors beyond four walls, and to feel the wind and sunshine, and the rain too, upon me.”

Why did she have to twist her head to see the sky, and why did she have to long for the wind, sun, and rain?

“It is twenty-one years since I could sit up, and for nineteen years it has been this one position in bed; but isn’t it wonderful that He enables us to triumph, and to rejoice in Him?”

Despite being bedridden, she turned to what was good, especially the goodness of the Lord. She writes of finding pleasure in all the intricate details of the petals, stamens, and shadows in spring blossoms. In her ministry to children in India, she had experienced the dashing of many hopes; and then, for years, she endured the limitations of her body. Yet, in the ruins, she found beauty and blessed gifts from God.

Amy writes of the prisoner Jeremiah being drawn up by ropes from the miry dungeon in Jerusalem. He was grateful for the rags that kept his arms from being cut by the cords. In other words, if we look for blessings we can find them. She quotes a prayer by Stephen Phillips: “Aid me, when I cease to soar, to stand; make me Thy athlete, even in my bed.”

That’s what she was! In this context, we think not only of Amy Carmichael but also of Joni Eareckson Tada and many others who have lived astounding lives of faith despite extreme limitations.

“What is my heart’s desire?” Carmichael asks. “Relief from fatigue? The dearth of pain? The cheery flowers of earth? Those blossoms may be given, but if not there remains the prayer, ‘*Make me Thy athlete, even in my bed.*’”

*Father, in spite of my limitations, open my eyes to
see your blessings. Fill me with your Holy Spirit.
Enable me to be your athlete when the big hurdles
and gigantic challenges stretch before me.*

Praise the LORD! Sing to the LORD a new song. . . . Let the faithful rejoice that he honors them. Let them sing for joy as they lie on their beds. PSALM 149:1, 5, NLT

HE HEARS THE PICCOLO PLAYER

January 4

JOHN HENRY JOWETT says that when we think of ourselves as insignificant in a huge world—as just one among billions, with our contributions little appreciated—we should recognize that the eyes of God are on us. He recognizes all we do and all we intend. Jowett illustrates this by the story of a piccolo player who thought he could take a little break.

“At a great orchestral rehearsal, which Sir Michael Costa was conducting, the man who played the piccolo stayed his fingers for a moment, thinking that his trifling contribution would never be missed. At once, Sir Michael raised his hand and said, ‘Stop! Where’s the piccolo?’ He missed the individual note.”

Our Lord is aware of and sees each contribution we make. Those around us may or may not appreciate us, but they need not be our reference point.

One believer, discouraged by a lack of recognition for his constant hard work and pure intentions, wrote these words in large, bold letters on a card: “FOR HIS EYES ONLY.” He carried the card in his pocket, where it would show up when he reached for his pen. He would then pull it out, look at the proclamation, and smile. His efforts were seen by the one who would not only judge but encourage and bless, the one who ultimately mattered.

Jowett says the Lord uses “the note of my life to make the music of his kingdom, and if the note be absent he will miss it, and the glorious music will be broken and incomplete.”

In contrast, Jowett affirms this hope: “By the power of his grace we can accomplish wonders.”

Lord, put me in tune with your music. Keep my eyes on you as my Conductor, and help me move with your rhythms. Draw me into full harmony with you, praising you for wonders to come.

God has given each of you a gift from his great variety of spiritual gifts. Use them well to serve one another. I PETER 4:10, NLT

EMBRACING ADVENTURE

January 5

LUCI SHAW tells us, “Each of us is at risk. And each of us must learn to live with it and even thrive on it.”

Really? Thrive on risk? Isn't that for the few who long for wild adventures? But Shaw observes that in this age of terrorism, “dread is almost guaranteed”; furthermore, even ordinary tasks such as driving in traffic can make life risky indeed.

Shaw makes these assertions in her book *The Crime of Living Cautiously*, with the subtitle *Hearing God's Call to Adventure*. She highlights Jesus' parable about the timid servant burying his master's money and asserts that Jesus saw the servant's timidity as criminal neglect.

Does God call us to adventure? If so, adventure by its nature requires dangerous risk. That's one reason we like action movies! Yet it's one thing to watch an adventure film with the heroine on a grapevine dangling over crocodiles; it's another to actually face our own troubles, with their crocodilian teeth.

In these tumultuous times, how can we confront our fears?

Over and over in the Bible when an angel appears, his first words are, “Fear not.” The angels bring news of what God is up to. As Luci Shaw notes in 1 John 4:18, “Perfect love casts out fear” (NKJV).

Life as adventure? It's a matter of faith. The truth is, we're all plopped down in circumstances that can threaten, dishearten, or even overwhelm us. Yet most of us also have many good things happening around us. Only as we see life as an adventure from God do we experience life's tang and purpose.

Luci Shaw asks, “Has your heart ever been blown open by the sudden exhilarating thought, *This could be my Year of Living the Adventure?* And if not, why not?”

Father, you know how my anxiety rises when I think about all that can go wrong! When life seems not an adventure but a miserable muddle, please cast out my fear. Help me to embrace my adventure.

The LORD directs the steps of the godly. He delights in every detail of their lives. Though they stumble, they will never fall, for the LORD holds them by the hand.

PSALM 37:23-24, NLT

SOURCES/BIBLIOGRAPHY

Treasure hunt. That's the way this devotional was developed. Books, periodicals, sermons, Web postings, and personal interactions were all rich soil in which to find nuggets of gold for the soul.

In the listings below, no attempt has been made to link quotes to specific pages and sources. At times, quotes for one day were cobbled together from different pages scattered throughout a book—or even from several books and/or sermons. Communicators typically revisit themes and illustrations, so a particular quote might be found in several sources.

Because many of these classic books have been published by more than one publisher, or in more than one edition over the years, only titles are listed here. In the case of past spiritual writers such as Thomas à Kempis, Brother Lawrence, François Fénelon, and Martin Luther, sometimes several translations contributed to a condensed rendering of their ideas.

What follows includes sources and bibliography—but it's far from an exhaustive list. For instance, Oswald Chambers's classic *My Utmost for His Highest* was one source, yet his dozens of other books provided context and additional material.

Today, all that's needed is a name and Web access to find biographical information and content. My hope is that the brief listings below will serve as an invitation to a personal treasure hunt.

Jill Briscoe: *Prayer That Works; Faith Enough to Finish; By Hook or by Crook; Wings; The One Year Book of Devotions for Women; God's Front Door; The Garden of Grace*

Rosemary Budd: *Journey of Prayer; Moving Prayer*

Amy Carmichael: *Gold by Moonlight; Rose from Brier; If*

Oswald Chambers: *My Utmost for His Highest; Not Knowing Whither; Baffled to Fight Better; If Thou Wilt Be Perfect; Conformed to His Image; Disciples Indeed*

Ed Dobson: *Prayers and Promises When Facing a Life-Threatening Illness*; articles in *Christianity Today*

François Fénelon: various translations of his writings and letters, including *The Seeking Heart*; *Let Go*; *Selections from Fénelon*

Billy Graham: *Hope for the Troubled Heart*; *Approaching Hoofbeats*; *The Leadership Secrets of Billy Graham*; *Just as I Am*; articles in *Christianity Today*

Nancy Guthrie: *The One Year Book of Hope*; *Holding on to Hope*; *When Your Family's Lost a Loved One*; *Hearing Jesus Speak into Your Sorrow*

Ole Hallesby: *Prayer*; *God's Word for Today*; *Under His Wings*

Thomas Howard: *Splendor in the Ordinary*; *Christ the Tiger*

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Thomas à Kempis: various translations of *The Imitation of Christ*, including those by E. M. Blaiklock, Leo Sherley-Price, and Joseph N. Tylenda

Jay Kesler: *Growing Places*; *Being Holy*, *Being Human*; speeches; personal correspondence and conversation

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C. S. Lewis: *Mere Christianity*; *Miracles*; *The Weight of Glory*; *A Grief Observed*; *A Mind Awake* (Clyde Kilby, editor)

Martin Luther: *Faith Alone* (James C. Galvin, editor); *Come Thou Long-Expected Jesus* (Nancy Guthrie, editor); various Luther Web sites

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Calvin Miller: *Disarming the Darkness*; *The Singer*; *The Song*

D. L. Moody: *D. L. Moody on Spiritual Leadership* (Steve Miller, editor); Moody Web sites and sermon Web sites

Henri J. M. Nouwen: *With Open Hands*; *The Way of the Heart*; *Spiritual Direction* (with Michael Christensen and Rebecca Laird); *Beyond the Mirror*; *The Inner Voice of Love*; articles in *Leadership Journal*

John Ortberg: *Living the God Life*; *Everybody's Normal Till You Get to Know Them*; *The Life You've Always Wanted*; articles and columns in *Leadership Journal*

J. I. Packer: *Knowing God; I Want to Be a Christian*; articles in *Christianity Today*

Alan Paton: *Instrument of Thy Peace; Cry, the Beloved Country*; *Alan Paton: A Biography* by Peter F. Alexander

Ben Patterson: *He Has Made Me Glad; Deepening Your Conversation with God; Waiting; God's Prayer Book*; articles in *Leadership Journal*

Eugene Peterson: *Leap Over a Wall; Run with the Horses; Reversed Thunder; A Long Obedience in the Same Direction; A Year with the Psalms; Eat This Book*; articles and interviews in *Leadership Journal*

Francis Schaeffer: *The Mark of the Christian; The God Who Is There; Escape from Reason; How Should We Then Live?*

Luci Shaw: *The Crime of Living Cautiously; Water My Soul; The Secret Trees; God in the Dark*

Lewis Smedes: *Standing on the Promises; Union with Christ; Forgive and Forget*

Fred Smith: *Breakfast with Fred*; www.breakfastwithfred.com; *You and Your Network*; articles in *Leadership Journal*; interviews; personal correspondence and conversations

Charles Haddon Spurgeon: sermon Web sites and collections; *Encounter with Spurgeon* by Helmut Thielicke

Tim Stafford: *Personal God; Knowing the Face of God; Surprised by Jesus*; articles in *Christianity Today*

Ray Stedman: *Body Life; The Power of His Presence* (Mark Mitchell, editor); www.raystedman.org

Joni Eareckson Tada: *The God I Love; Joni; A Quiet Place in a Crazy World; Holiness in Hidden Places; A Step Further; Choices . . . Changes*

Corrie ten Boom: *The Hiding Place; Amazing Love; Tramp for the Lord*

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A. W. Tozer: *The Knowledge of the Holy; The Pursuit of God; Tozer on Worship and Entertainment*

Ellen Vaughn: *Radical Gratitude*; books and articles coauthored with Charles Colson

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