**Faith and Encouraging Words**

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*Be on guard. Stand firm in the faith. Be courageous. Be strong. And do everything with love. 1 Corinthians 16:13-14 (NLT)*

When I came across this verse this week, I thought, “wow, what a nutshell of instruction we should all follow”. There are such universal thoughts bound up into these two scriptures, I just wanted to share them. They urge and provoke me to good works, how about you?

Be on guard. Are you being watchful? Are you honing the gift of discernment? We should be. 1 Peter 5:8 tells us why we need to be on guard. *Your enemy, the devil is like a roaring lion. He prowls around looking for someone to chew up and swallow.*(NIRV) I don’t know about you, but I like to think I would never be that “someone”. But, in truth, each of us could find ourselves being chewed up or on by him. People are caught off guard and hoodwinked by the scam artists that steal their money and identity all the time. These are usually smart people who fall for a subtle, sneaky line that hooks them in, and they find themselves having to deal with the consequences. So, my friends, we must all be on guard, watching for any pitfalls or traps.

Stand firm in the faith. Put on the whole armor of God, including having your feet preparation of that gospel of peace. It is important to know truth, much even more important to know the God of all truth. Jesus declares, I am the Way, the Truth and the Life. I think people want to know the way to life, but often forget that He has the Truth as well. We can’t stand firm when we are standing on lies. So many people are adjusting their truth so it “feels right”, we must conform to His truth.

Be courageous. We must “courage up” to live this Christian life. Our courage comes from the Lord, because we know He is with us, and we are not alone. It does not mean that fear won’t be present, it means that we will be able to live our life fully even in spite of that fear. Divorce rates up? Does that mean you won’t get married? No, it means you will follow God’s plan for a successful marriage. Children going awry? Does it mean you will not have children? No, it means you will cover yourself in God’s grace, mercy and raise those kids the best you can. Courage means you fight on your knees till you are strong enough to stand. Courage means you seek His will and His ways through the dark valleys of grief and heartache. Courage means you persevere till He comes.

Be strong. Be strong even when you feel weak. Ah, so often lately I have felt weak and powerless. Out of control and needy. After I pitch my fits, I turn to Him who has all strength and lean on Him. He makes the way I need. He gives power to the faint. Spending time with Him, in quietness and peace, gives me the strength and courage to accomplish those things I need to do, try it.

Ah, the last bullet point. *And do everything with love.*How important and useful this last verse is. I have found when I don’t know what to do, I rely on I Corinthians 13: 8, love never fails. So, I ask myself what is the most loving thing I can do right now, in this present situation. It is often not the easiest thing to do, because it is based on God’s idea of loving in a situation, not mine! But I have always found it to work. We can do everything with love, because we have His love, His care and His grace working in us. We love Him because He first loved us, so we can love those around us, because we are first loved as well.

*Father, I thank you for using this scripture to provoke us to good works. That we can be on our guard and stand firm in our faith. I thank you for helping us be courageous in every area that we might want to retreat from. We choose to be strong in those areas we feel weak in and by your grace, we will do everything with love. I thank you for helping us in each of these areas. You are our mighty Savior, who we need. Thank you for being trustworthy. In Jesus’ Name, amen.*