

Encourage A Leap of Faith in One Another

For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord,
“plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.
Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you.”
Jeremiah 29:11-12 (NIV)

We are called to encourage one another, to share and uplift one another, to love and respect one another and to shine the light of God’s love in all we do with one another. God, our Heavenly Father, loves to encourage us to trust in Him for all things. He even encourages us to encourage one another to share and lift each other up in love and support—just as *He does for us every moment of every hour of every day*. He sometimes uses a friend, family member, colleague, or mentor to give us the words of encouragement at the moment when we need them the most.

If it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously;
if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.
Romans 12:8 (NIV)

Therefore encourage one another **and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.**
1 Thessalonians 5:11 (NIV)

I recently read about a group of three young boys who were so taken with the work of artist, Eugene Delacroix, a French romantic painter, that they would climb a wall in a courtyard to spy on the old man in his workplace. They watched with awe as this master took an orderly mess of a palette and turned into a compositionally precise masterpiece on canvas.

Through a steady hand and an active brushstroke, Delacroix could render life in ways that others could not. He could paint with precision and show the viewer a realistic representation of an animal. He could also paint with unrestrained brushstrokes and give the viewer the impression of a horse running in the wild. His impression of the horse seemed more alive than the realistic portrait. Though Delacroix did not know it, he was a touch point of inspiring a new genre of art: Impressionism.

The young boys were a group of friends who encouraged and inspired one another to pursue their interest in art. Jean Frederic Bazille’s fascination of Delacroix’s work began when his family visited the home of an art collector who had two of his paintings in their collection.



It was Delacroix's biblical painting, *Daniel in the Lion's Den*, that captured Bazille's imagination. The other two boys that climbed the wall with Bazille were Auguste Renoir and Claude Monet. They would become well-known artists as the fathers of Impressionism.

In fact, Monet was accidentally responsible for the name "Impressionists". It came from a title of his painting *Impression, Sunrise*. When he submitted the painting to a major art exhibit, the organizers said it "lacked detail" and asked Monet for a title of the painting, Monet wrote, "They asked me for a title for the catalogue, it couldn't be taken for a view, and I said: 'Put Impression.' They turned it into Impressionism."



It was the inspirational brush strokes of Delacroix that would lead these three young men to form a community of artists that would give the world a new genre of art: "Impressionism". Although their journey as a community of artists was not an easy one—they faced challenges with finances from breaking away from the traditional Salon "Jury"—they found their place, thanks to financing from Bazille who came from an affluent family.

Together, they created a community for artists called the Anonymous Society. Members who joined Bazille, Monet, and Renoir in their newly formed community included many artists we have all become familiar with throughout the years: Degas, Manet, Pissarro and Morisot, to list a few.



Unfortunately, Bazille did not have the chance to see the growth of the community he started with his two friends. His life was lost as he chose to fight in the Franco-Prussian war. Yet, some believe that it was his encouragement and support for his friends that helped to launch the Impressionism art movement. He was giving in friendship, provided space, shared supplies and hosted gatherings. He would even purchase art from friends to provide them with some income. This was all done out of goodness, truth and beauty.

I was reminded from this story that we all live and work *in a community*. We all have a role to play in encouraging one another to light the embers of each other's souls to walk in faith with God and to live our dreams.

I do wonder about one thing, though. Was it Delacroix's painting of the biblical story of Daniel in the Lion's Den that inspired Bazille and his friends to start a new artistic movement?

Or, were their hearts touched by God to have the faith to overcome challenges and create their unique interpretation of beauty for all walks of life for generations into the future?

I was not familiar with Delacroix's art before reading the story by Russ Ramsey entitled "Creating a Community" from the book entitled, *Rembrandt is in the Wind*. I was fascinated with the title as I have always believed in the importance of creating a community that is reflective of God's love and kindness in our homes, our neighborhoods, our schools, our churches, synagogues and our workplaces.

Like Bazille and his friends, I found myself taken by the richness of Delacroix's painting, *Daniel in the Lion's Den*. The piece spoke to me so loudly as I had just finished a bible study of the book of Daniel with my Goddaughter.

Though there is a great difference between Daniel and his friends and the challenges that came in the form of criticism from the art community for the Impressionists, both groups of friendships collectively came together to have faith in what they were doing.

Daniel and his friends Shadrach, Meshac, Abednego, were being held in captivity in a region not familiar to their cultural upbringing. They united together so as not to lose faith during times of tough decisions. In fact, on several occasions, they displayed their integrity to stand for Godliness instead of the culture of their time. They never lost site of faith in God.

The painting of Daniel in the Lion's Den reflects the story of Daniel's friend, Darius, who was convinced by others to turn against Daniel. One commentary is that the story of Daniel in the Lion's Den teaches us about the promises and faithfulness of God, even if we feel like everything has been lost. Daniel refused to bow to man. In turn, God used Daniel to save a nation. In chapter 6 of the Book of Daniel, Daniel is saved from lions by the God of Israel "because I was found blameless before him." (Daniel 6:22).

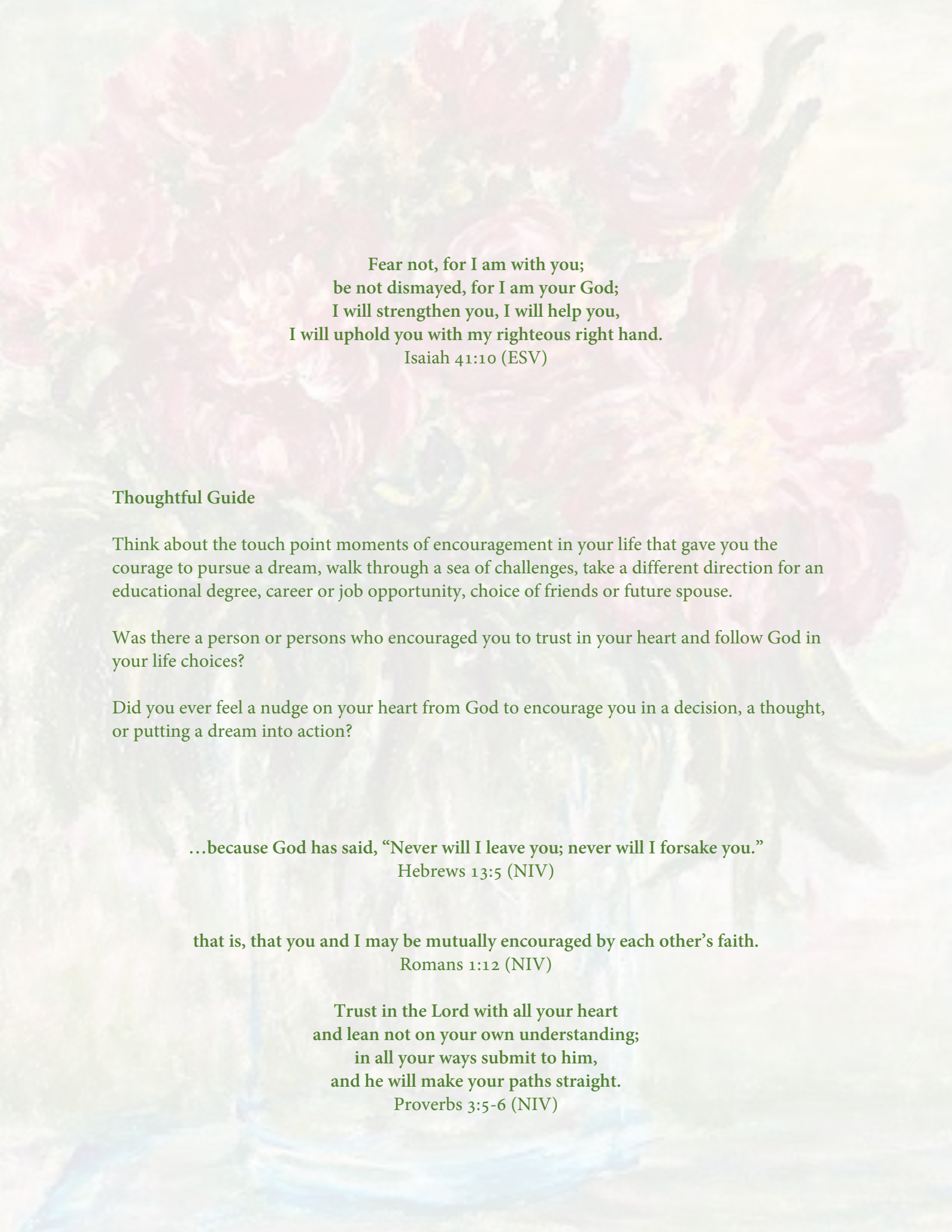
As I closed my Bible and journal, I had a realization. Perhaps God had me read this story about Delacroix's painting of Daniel in the Lions Den and its influence on a group of young boys to launch a new genre of art *after* my study of the book of Daniel with my Goddaughter to remind me that we are never alone and that our Heavenly Father is always with us as the greater encourager to inspire us throughout all seasons of our heart's life journeys.

I also believe that our God had his hand on Daniel and his friends and the Impressionists to encourage them to know that He is always present. I believe he has that hand on all of us.

I just finished a painting in my studio and I am so thankful for the influence of Impressionism on my creative heart. May I encourage all of us to walk together in God's Love, to have the faith to receive His encouragement and to pass it on to others.



Paintings by Ssusan Forte O'Neill



**Fear not, for I am with you;
be not dismayed, for I am your God;
I will strengthen you, I will help you,
I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.**
Isaiah 41:10 (ESV)

Thoughtful Guide

Think about the touch point moments of encouragement in your life that gave you the courage to pursue a dream, walk through a sea of challenges, take a different direction for an educational degree, career or job opportunity, choice of friends or future spouse.

Was there a person or persons who encouraged you to trust in your heart and follow God in your life choices?

Did you ever feel a nudge on your heart from God to encourage you in a decision, a thought, or putting a dream into action?

**...because God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you."
Hebrews 13:5 (NIV)**

**that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith.
Romans 1:12 (NIV)**

**Trust in the Lord with all your heart
and lean not on your own understanding;
in all your ways submit to him,
and he will make your paths straight.**
Proverbs 3:5-6 (NIV)