

7 Ways to Find and Share Encouragement



Sarah Geringer

Table of Contents

1. Introduction
2. Teachers Plant Seeds
3. Strange Kindness
4. Moms Encouraging Moms
5. Speak Life
6. The Value of Peer Encouragement
7. Precious Jewels of Encouragement
8. Praying a Blessing
9. About The Author
10. Thank You

Introduction

In our daily struggles, all of us are thirsty for encouragement. This short book will quench your thirst with practical ways to find encouragement.

Women often feel run down, depleted, and discouraged. We all need an encouraging word.

You can find encouragement in your faith walk with Jesus and other Jesus-followers.

When your heart is full of encouragement, it will overflow in your home, workplace, and community. I'll show you ways it can happen in your life.

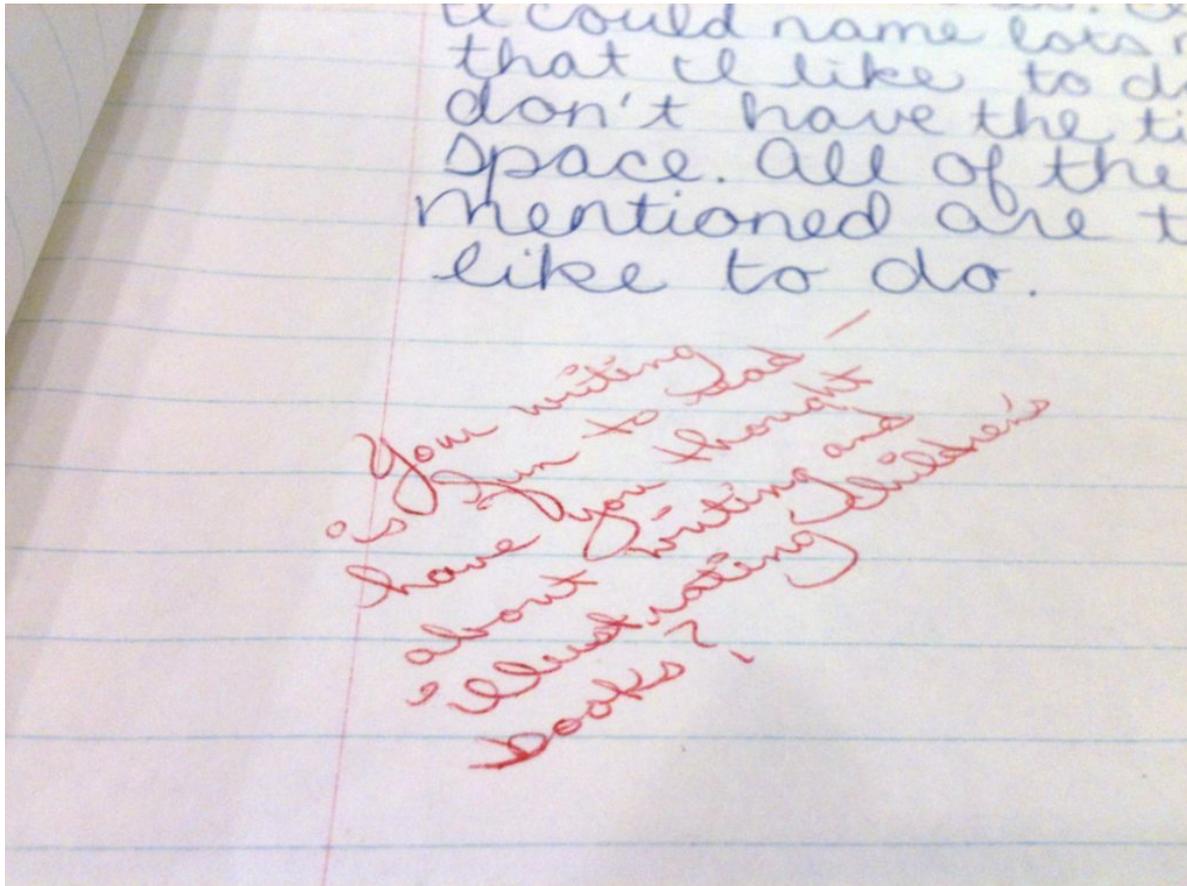
7 Ways

Here are seven ways encouragement has touched me:

- Teacher's affirmations
- Kind words
- Encouraging strangers
- Speaking life
- Peer encouragement
- Encouragement in crisis
- Praying a blessing

Read on to discover how encouraged, and how encouraging, you can be!

Teachers Plant Seeds



Did you ever receive a word of encouragement that shaped your future? As a child, I received **words of encouragement from my teachers** that helped shape my future as a writer.

I was required to keep a journal for my seventh grade English class. We were given an assignment to write about our upcoming holiday plans. I wrote that most kids were probably looking forward to sleeping in, playing games, and opening presents on our break. But I was looking forward to the feast of delicious food. I described the upcoming savory suppers and special sweets in great detail.

I wasn't trying to write an outstanding essay—I was simply fulfilling the assignment. When we returned from break and received our composition books back from the teacher, **I felt a jolt of pleasure as I read my teacher's handwritten comment: "Your writing is fun to read."**

For the first time, I thought maybe I was good at writing if other people enjoyed reading it. I caught the writing bug as a seventh-grader and it has never left me.

Teachers possess a special power to affect students with their words My seventh-grade English teacher probably didn't realize how much impact her positive comment made on me. But her simple encouragement planted a seed of my dream to write.

Two of my high school English teachers continue to water my dream seeds with their words of encouragement. I graduated over 20 years ago, yet when I see these two teachers who share the name Chris, they continue to bless me with encouraging words.

One Chris keeps telling me every time we see each other, "You should teach." I remember when I was a junior or senior, she wrote on one of my assignments, "*You should teach this class.*" **She was so generous**—saying the 16-year-old me was so good at writing I could take her place as teacher! Perhaps my writing will enable a teaching/speaking ministry to develop.

I remember bumping into the other Chris at the grocery store a few years ago, on a not-so-good day. I felt overwhelmed by squeezed finances, energy drains, and shelved dreams. She encouraged me, affirming the difficulties in this stage of life, and shared a memory that eased my feelings of isolation. Then she asked about my writing. She said of all the students she ever taught, I am the only one who has what it takes to be successful as a writer. **In my day of discouragement, her words were life-giving water to my dormant seeds.**

Proverbs 16:24 says, "Pleasant words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones." My teachers' words were definitely ones that fit these descriptions. **As a writer and perhaps a future teacher or speaker, I want my words to have such pleasant healing power for my listeners.** I hope you, dear reader, have found such blessings in the words I have written.

Questions for reflection:

Which teachers encouraged you? What did they do or say that helped you feel encouraged?

Who has spoken words to you that were like water to dormant seeds? How can you thank them now?

Strange Kindness

Do not forget
to entertain strangers,
for by so doing
some people have entertained
angels without knowing it.

Hebrews 13:2 NIV

sarahgeringer.com

Has God sent a stranger's kindness to you at just the right time?

God sent me a mysterious person at a critical moment when I was a depressed teen in the fall of 1994.

I stood on the football field with hundreds of other marching band students. It was Band Festival Day, when many area schools sent their bands to my hometown for a parade and special field performance. That evening each school took a turn performing a routine on the football field. At the end, all bands gathered on the field together for a final performance.

In the chaos of gathering for the mass performance, I stood near the sideline. People rushed all around me, but in my depression and loneliness, **I felt utterly alone and remote.** Crowds often affect me that way. That night, I was close to

despair.

Suddenly a red-headed girl in a royal blue, sparkling leotard squeezed my arm in a friendly hello and said, "Good job, Jackson." She rushed by so quickly I couldn't get a good look at her face, though I noticed her winsome smile.

The rest of the night I searched the field for royal blue-clad band members, but didn't find anyone fitting her description, no one wearing an outfit anything like hers. I wondered whether she was real or imagined, but then I remembered the tangible warmth of her touch. I couldn't have imagined that.

Maybe she was a real person; maybe she was an angel. Hebrews 13:2 says sometimes we entertain angels when we assume they are strangers.

I don't know which, and it doesn't really matter. **What matters is God used her to encourage me when I felt so cut off.** He sent me her kind words at a critical moment. He doesn't want me to feel isolated. He wants me to feel included in a body of believers.

Now I try to be a stranger with kind words. This seems easiest when I interact with clerks, waiters and waitresses, and others in the retail or service industries. I want to be the customer who stands out. The customer who is willing to listen rather than be served. The customer with a smile and kind comment.

I want to bless their day as a stranger, just like the redhead did for me so many years ago. **Who knows, my kindness may be the word of encouragement which leads them out of despair.**

Friends, the need to share words of encouragement is so needed in these chaotic, confusing times. So many people feel isolated and cut off like I did as a depressed teen. **Let's band together to speak encouragement to others,** even total strangers.

Questions for reflection:

Have you ever received words of encouragement from a stranger at just the right time?

Do you also dole out words of encouragement to strangers?

What is the best group of strangers to whom you might share words of encouragement in these days when the need is so desperate?

Moms Encouraging Moms



Every mom's dreaded moment—your child is having a meltdown in a store.

Except this time, it was **all three of my children at once**.

And I was at the checkout, with **nowhere to hide**.

My baby was screaming, my three-year-old was crying, and my five-year-old was whining with tears. An epic meltdown. **An out-of-control spectacle**.

I was in shutdown mode. Breathing deeply, I tried to pay quickly and get going. Embarrassed, ashamed, averting my eyes. **The red Target atmosphere seemed to heighten my internal anger**. I was ready to boil over. *Not here*, I thought. *Just get to the van. Get to the van!*

Out of the corner of my eye, **someone was approaching**. *Oh no*, I thought, /

can't handle any harsh words right now! I will burst into tears myself. I cringed as the stranger approached me.

This woman, perhaps ten years older than me, placed her hand on my arm and said, **"Good job, Mom!"** She smiled and walked away.

I couldn't process her actions in that moment, still in the store with three upset children. But later, once we were all settled for afternoon quiet time, I reflected on her kindness.

I feared an attack but received encouragement from another mom who understood.

I feared criticism but received affirmation from a perfect stranger.

I feared failure but received a lesson in grace.

Her words of encouragement transformed a moment of chaos into a moment of peace.

Peace with my children—they were hungry, tired, and overwhelmed, past their limits.

Peace with myself—I was doing the best I could in an unexpected situation. I didn't lash out; I didn't lose my cool.

Peace with God—he didn't condemn me for failure to keep them under control. He spoke to me through a stranger: Good job, Mom.

To be very honest, most times when I see or hear a child's meltdown in public, my first thoughts aren't kind or encouraging. Usually I think, *Take him outside where he's not disrupting everyone's meal.* Or this one, *Why can't she get that baby under control?* **In my heart run undercurrents of criticism: Bad job, Mom.** I turn the same criticism of my own actions onto others.

But the Bible tells us to encourage one another and build each other up. I want to be that stranger who encourages another mom in a struggle. The stranger who builds her up in her time of need.

I want to send this message: *I've been there. We all have bad days. You can do this. You're not alone. God loves you!*

This plan will require my listening to the Holy Spirit's prompts to action. It will

require me to step out of my comfort zone and step into a stranger's world for a moment. **It will require me to be bold, selfless, and kind.**

Questions for reflection:

Have you experienced a stranger's encouragement in a similar situation?

Have you offered a stranger a word of encouragement?

What steps can you take to offer words of encouragement to strangers today?

Speak Life



As I prepared to write today, Toby Mac's "Speak Life" played on the radio.

His bright song reminds me to **use my words to uplift others from negativity.**

I speak life most often within my home. Four of the five of us are "glass half-empty" people, and I thank God for giving us one naturally optimistic child! **As a wife and mom, I work hard against my natural propensity to set a positive tone in our home.**

When my husband complains after a hard day of work, as we all do sometimes, I first affirm his frustrations. Then I try to pull out any positives. Sometimes the only positive I can offer is, "The weekend is almost here." Most days my words are the few positive ones that he hears. **I want to build him up as an encouraging wife.**

When my oldest son is negative and critical, I urge him to name one item of thankfulness on the spot. This sets his mind on a different track. I think he received a half-empty perspective from both his mom and dad, plus negativity seems to arrive with adolescence. So the odds are stacked against him right now.

But this summer my son decided on a change in perspective. He asked me one day, "Mom, have you noticed anything different about me?" Other than the fact that he seems to grow taller and hungrier by the day, I said no. He said he had tried to complain less after I had confronted him the week before on his negativity. Yes, I noticed the change once he pointed it out. I praised him for his new perspective. **I'm glad he sees the value in speaking life or at least in keeping quiet when he doesn't have anything positive to share.**

Last year we started the "high-low" exercise at our supper table after I read about it in a Focus on the Family magazine. First we go mention our lows of the day. I don't want our children to feel like they can't be real with us; the lows are meaningful. But the highs are worth more. Some days are mundane and there isn't much of a high, except maybe dessert (smile!). The best days are the days when we can say "I don't have a low today!" **The high-low exercise helps us stay connected and speak life to one another.**

Speaking life is a conscious effort. Our family's natural progression is to complain, gripe, and whine about troubles. **It is so easy for my husband and I to speak carelessly, setting up a terrible example for our children to follow.**

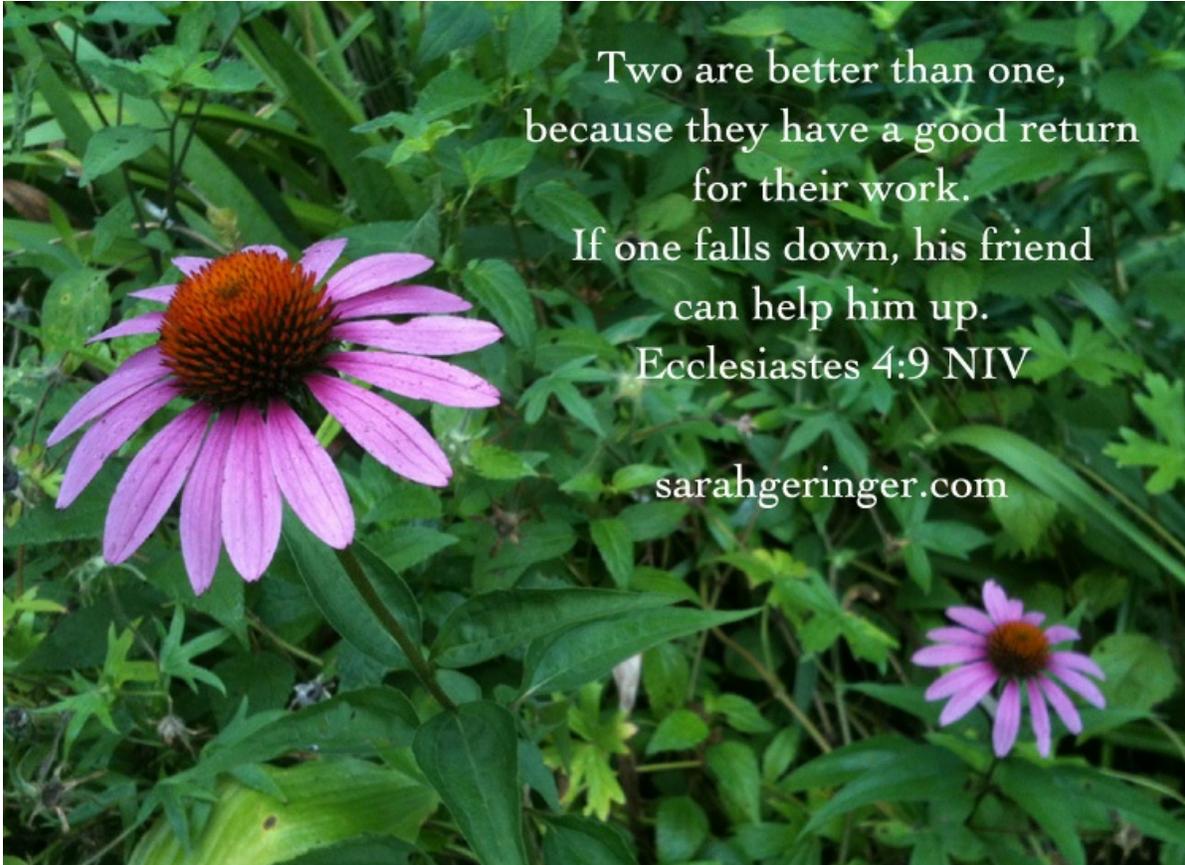
Proverbs 18:21 states, "The tongue has the power of life and death." I want to bring life, not death, to my family with my words. I want my words to encourage, lift up, bless, and exhort. **I want my words to plant seeds of life for future generations.**

Questions for reflection:

How do you speak life in your home?

When do you feel most tempted to speak destructive words, rather than life-giving words? How can you address the triggers and speak life instead?

The Value of Peer Encouragement



Motherhood can be a lonely journey, but it's a joy in the company of other moms.

You could say the same about writing. It is a lonely process, but it's much better with other writers.

In my days as a stay-at-home mom, I remember feeling lonely sometimes, cut off from the real world. I adored every moment with my precious little ones, yet I felt a hunger for fellowship.

I found that in my weekly Bible study groups. The spiritual discussion satisfied and challenged me, as did the discussions about parenting, household

management, and shopping tips. I felt stronger as a mom when I met with other moms. A morning of peer interaction powered me through another week of diapers, messes, and tears. **A word of encouragement from another mom gave me hope and wider perspective.**

The work of writing is lonely, as any writer will tell you. In the past few years of blogging, I often felt alone. I struggled with doubt, asking myself over and over if anything I wrote really mattered. Most of my writing is spent in total silence, rushing to get finished while my children are sleeping or otherwise occupied.

Writing is a solitary sacrifice, but it's easier in the company of my peers.

In 2013 I attended a writing workshop in St. Louis. This was the first time I met formally with other writers wanting to hone their craft. I hadn't enjoyed such fellowship with other writers since my college years. We exchanged ideas, read our pieces aloud, and offered helpful critiques. **Their words of encouragement were invaluable.**

Back at home I joined a local writing guild. Each month we report on our writing progress. This simple exercise created an accountability factor. I didn't want to say the same thing over and over—"I'm blogging." So I began new projects and kept working on my memoir. Thanks to the guild, I learned about contest opportunities and conferences. **Taking part in a writing guild opened new doors and held me accountable.**

In July 2015 I attended the local writing conference and networked with other writers. I felt energized and ready to double-down on my blogging efforts. This July I attended the local conference again. I gained new ideas there which I will use to expand my skills and reach.

I would not be the writer I am today without help from other writers. I would not be the mom I am today without help from other moms.

My peers mentor me, encourage me, spur me on, and give me great examples to follow. **Even though we come from different backgrounds and face different situations, we encourage one another on our shared journeys.**

If you are a writer but have yet to join a guild, I highly recommend it. You will be blessed!

If you are a mom who needs encouragement, I recommend you call a mom friend, or join a Bible study for moms or a Mothers of Preschoolers group. You will be blessed!

Questions for reflection:

How has your peer group encouraged you?

How can you encourage someone in your peer group?

If you don't have a peer group yet, where can you look for one? What friend might be able to recommend a peer group for you?

Precious Jewels of Encouragement



In my time of crisis, words of encouragement from close friends were precious jewels I hid in my heart's treasure chest.

After years of marriage struggles, my husband and I endured a brief separation in the spring of 2015. The day after he left, I spent hours on the phone with people on my support team.

Their words—affirming, validating, uplifting—were exactly what I needed when I didn't know what would happen next.

My friends listened; they allowed a vent for my feelings. They affirmed how hard this must be for me, living out my own worst fears as a child of divorce. They

validated the severity of the situation. Then they offered words of encouragement.

I worried our children would face the same lifelong struggles we'd faced as children of divorce. I touched a jewel from one friend: *But you not only survived, you thrived due to your faith.*

I worried a divided financial situation would lead to years of poverty. I held a jewel from another friend: *God will provide.*

I worried I would fall captive to a lifelong pattern of depression. I turned another jewel over and over in my hand: *Be still and know that I am God.*

A bright jewel I fingered every day in my crisis: *We are praying for you. You are not alone.*

I could not have faced our marriage crisis without words of encouragement from trusted friends. They cried with me, prayed over me, and challenged me. **Their support helped me feel confident I could make it through, no matter the outcome.**

Proverbs 12:25 states, "An anxious heart weighs a man down, but a kind word cheers him up." My friends' words lifted me up out of anxiety and pointed me toward faith and peace.

God wants me to encourage others during their times of suffering and crisis. I need to be a good listener. I need to validate their pain. I need to offer uplifting words. I need to be faithful in prayer.

I need to be brave and share my hardest struggles with people struggling in the same way. It's so tempting to feel alone in struggles. I felt that way as a depressed teen, as a lonely wife, and as a separated mother of three. What carried me through those times is finding words of encouragement from others who understood, or from those who didn't understand but were willing to pray.

It's hard to find people willing to share their hardest stories. But those hard stories make for deep connection and validation. **We must be brave for the sake of others.**

It's hard to find true friends who will faithfully pray and stick with you in the hardest times. Once you find those friends, they are precious jewels you will always treasure.

I will never forget what those people did for me in my time of crisis.

Questions for reflection:

Have you endured a time of crisis when friends' words gave you the strength to hang on?

Do your friends encourage you to exercise faith in hard circumstances?

How do you feel when someone says, "I'm praying for you"?

Who do you know that needs your words of encouragement today?

Praying a Blessing



May the Lord bless you and keep you;
May the Lord make his face shine upon you
and be gracious to you;
May the Lord turn his face toward you
and give you peace.

Numbers 6:24-26 NIV

sarahgeringer.com

Have you received blessing from someone praying over you?

The first time I remember feeling blessed by someone's prayers over me, I was a college senior, presenting my Senior Integration Project. I wrote and illustrated a children's book and sat at a meeting with two professors I held in high esteem. They offered a helpful critique, and at the end, they asked if they could pray for me. **I remember my art professor's deep voice as he prayed over my future.**

I felt as if he was speaking on God's behalf, that God wanted to bless me, guide me, and encourage me on my career path. I felt encouraged and blessed by his prayer. More than anything else in that review meeting, **my professor's prayer over me stands out in my mind, decades later.**

When I facilitated small Bible study groups, I noticed that **many people seem**

reluctant to pray aloud. Many are afraid to make a mistake, fearing they will sound stupid or shallow.

I know the power of praying aloud, so I tried to ease the group into this method. I introduced the main body of the prayer, then encouraged group members to say one word or phrase as we went around in a circle. This became easier with practice.

In the group we talked about **praying blessings over our children.** One woman in the group said her husband had a praying grandmother, apparently the only explanation for his success in escaping a dysfunctional background. We all desired our children to experience encouragement and blessing from audible prayers that may shape their futures. So we practiced and exchanged ideas, using the book *The Blessing* as our guide.

For the past several years, I have prayed a simple blessing over each of my children at bedtime. Now they refuse to go to bed until they receive their blessing. Even my almost-teenage son still wants his blessing.

I place my hand on their head and call them by name, saying, "God bless you _____. I pray blessings on you in Jesus' name, Amen."

Sometimes I add a phrase which relates to their current situation. Before the Amen, I will add, "May he heal you from your sickness" or "May he help you with your test tomorrow."

Many different Bible verses can serve as inspiration for blessing your children. I like the common benediction in Numbers 6:24-26, and greetings in Paul's letters, such as the one in Romans 15:13.

I want my children to have vivid memories of prayers spoken over them. I want them to feel confident in praying aloud and in speaking words of blessing to their children someday. I want them to know the power of words of encouragement, spoken through prayer.

Questions for reflection:

Has anyone ever prayed over you? If so, how did that make you feel?

On a scale of 1 (low) to 10 (high), how comfortable are you praying aloud in front of others? What might you be willing to try to become more comfortable?

Have you ever prayed aloud over someone else?

Have you spoken blessings over your children?

If you have children in your home, what action can you take today to bless them with audible prayers?

About The Author

Thank you for reading this book and for visiting my webpage! I pray this is the beginning of a new friendship for both of us.

Sarah Geringer



I am a devoted follower of Jesus, wife, and working mother of three. Writing is my passion, and I want my writing to minister to women. I enjoy writing Bible studies, essays, poetry, and memoir.

My books

My first self-published e-book *Christmas Peace for Busy Moms: 25 Days of Bible Study* published in October 2016. It is now on sale at major online retailers. I have plans to publish seven more Bible study e-books in 2017.

My memoir *Heart in a Drawer: My Story as a Child of Divorce* is currently being reviewed by a small press publisher.

A little more about me

I begin every day at 4:45 a.m. with a cup of Earl Grey with honey and my One Year Bible. I love to garden, bake, read, and walk outside in God's glorious creation. My dream is to work as a full-time writer and artist someday.

Thank You

Thank you for reading this e-book today!

I hope it has given your heart some much-needed encouragement and inspired you to encourage others.

I would love to hear from you!

Contact Sarah

made with
Beacon