

Encourage In Practical Ways

Text : **Hebrews 10: 23-25 , Ephesians 4: 11-16**

INTRODUCTION :

A. We've been studying encouragement because it's essential to God's church.

1. We Christians live in a warzone. (**Eph. 6: 10ff**)
 - a. Satan is a relentless adversary.
 - b. We're outnumbered and in enemy territory. (**II Cor. 4: 4 ; Eph. 2: 2**)
2. Even the strongest, bravest soldiers sometimes must deal with battle fatigue.
 - a. Unlike our soldiers, Christians don't have a limited deployment.
 - b. For as long as we remain on this earth, the battle IS our life.
3. Consequently, every individual Christian will eventually need encouragement.
 - a. There are no exceptions to this; not even YOU.
 - b. You may not want to admit it, but sometimes YOU need encouragement.
4. Discouragement has very negative consequences. (***Nothing good comes from it.***)
 - a. It may cause some to forsake the faith and return to the world.
 - b. It causes some to develop a negative attitude which also affects others.
 - c. The worst result is that it causes many to become inactive. (**Lk 11: 23 .. *not gather***)

B. Discouragement often infects whole congregations.

1. It happens according to the proverb used by the Apostle Paul.
Gal. 5: 9 – A little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough.
2. If discouragement is not stopped it quietly spreads through the whole congregation.
3. The congregation often does not know why they feel as they do, but they just don't want to do anything except go through the motions.
 - a. They have no joy in their ministries. (***It's difficult to get members involved.***)
 - b. Members don't come to the assembly with a sense of expectancy. (***duty***)
4. Like individuals, discouraged congregations cease from gathering. (***Fire dies down***)
 - a. **Luke 11: 23 – He who is not with Me is against Me;
and he who does not gather with Me, scatters.**
 - b. They become comfortable with inactivity.
 - c. ***When stagnation becomes the norm the congregation resists motivation.***

C. In His eternal wisdom, God designed the church to prevent discouragement.

1. Christians assemble for the purpose of keeping each other motivated.
 - a. **Heb. 10: 23-25** ... motivate each other
 - b. **I Cor. 14: 26b** ... all is done to edify
2. Christians are instructed to motivate each other on a daily basis.
 - a. **Heb. 3: 13** ... Encouraging each other daily requires daily contact.
 - b. Compare ... **Acts 2: 46-47**

Therefore, we don't question our responsibility to keep ourselves built up and in the love of God (**Jude 20-21**) and to encourage each other, but how are we to go about doing that? With this lesson we'll make a few practical suggestions.

I. A few practical ways to keep ourselves individually built up in the most holy faith :

A. Keep in touch with God on a daily basis. (*Walk with God every day in normal life.*)

1. Pray ... **I Thes. 5: 16-18** Rejoice always; 17 pray without ceasing; 18 in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.
("Pray? Has it come to that ?")
 - a. Repeating ritual prayers will do little to encourage us. (*It must be heart to heart.*)
 - b. We share our life with God, our joys as well as our sorrows. (*feel relationship*)
 - c. It must be a part of our daily routine. (*While driving or other menial tasks.*)
2. After studying, meditate on God's word each day. (*Today, meditation is a lost art.*)
Psa. 119: 9-16 How can a young man keep his way pure? By keeping *it* according to Your word. 10 With all my heart I have sought You; Do not let me wander from Your commandments. 11 Your word I have treasured in my heart, That I may not sin against You. 12 Blessed are You, O LORD; Teach me Your statutes. 13 With my lips I have told of All the ordinances of Your mouth. 14 I have rejoiced in the way of Your testimonies, As much as in all riches. 15 I will meditate on Your precepts And regard Your ways. 16 I shall delight in Your statutes; I shall not forget Your word.
 - a. Just reading for the sake of reading profits one little. (*It's not a meritorious work.*)
 - b. Approach the word of God seeking the heart of God. (*Apply yourself to pursue it.*)
 - c. It's only through meditation that one develops discernment, i.e., *spiritual wisdom.*

B. Avoid discouraging people and situations.

1. Some people are so negative they are a dark cloud over your soul.

- a. These are not just people who need encouraging, these people seem to enjoy misery. (*They nurture misery in their heart.*)
- b. They can see a problem in the in the very best of experiences.
- c. You don't have a responsibility to give them an opportunity to drag you down.
- d. When Peter tried to divert Jesus from His mission, Jesus shut him down.

Mark 8: 33 – But turning around and seeing His disciples, He rebuked Peter and said, “Get behind Me, Satan; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's.”

- 2. Unlike a computer, we can't delete what we put in our mind.
 - a. *Thus*, it's very important to guard what we expose ourselves to.
 - b. **ILL.** – *In my youth I found union meetings to be very depressing spiritually.*
 - c. Many TV programs and movies are very much spiritual downers.
- 3. A Christian must not allow political correctness to require him to endure that which is harmful to his spiritual wellbeing.

C. Seek out spiritually uplifting material and experiences.

- 1. No one grows on the basis of the things he eliminates from his life.
 - a. Remember the parable of the man who had 1 evil spirit replaced by 7. **Lk 11: 24-26**
 - b. Evil must be replaced by good. (*sanctification and true holiness ... Eph. 4: 24*)
- 2. How do we establish a spiritual living environment ?
 - a. We read and watch spiritually uplifting things.
 - b. We put décor items in our houses direct our minds toward spiritual things.
- 3. When spiritual events take place, do we attend ?
 - a. Do we support area events such as gospel meetings, seminars, singings, etc. ?
 - b. Several of our ladies have been faithful in supporting area Lady's Days.

* *One's spirit must be nourished as regular as his body.*

D. Go out and do things to encourage other brethren. (*Taking companions multiplies*)

- 1. The best way to encourage yourself is to actively seek to encourage others.
- 2. One who cleans the house of a sister who is sick encourages self as well as the sick.

* ***Discouragement has its roots in one's heart.***

You're the only problem you can change. Circumstances are always evil.

Discouragement is a response one CHOOSES. (It's a decision each person makes.)

We each have the ability to choose what attitude we'll have. We choose every day.

II. There are many practical ways to build each other up in the most holy faith.**A. We must develop eyes for others.**

1. By nature people tend to be more interested in themselves than they are in others.
2. Academically we realize the need to be encouraging to other, but don't practice it.

B. We must train ourselves to be on the lookout for opportunities to encourage.

1. Looking out for the interests of others is a proactive way of life. **Phil. 2: 3-4**
2. Don't wait to be asked .. be observant and ready to serve. **Mark 10: 45**

C. We must discipline ourselves to do for others as we want them to do for us.

1. When we're down, we really appreciate being encouraged ... **others do as well.**
2. We must open our eyes .. God has put someone in our path that we can lift up.

D. Don't wait for the opportunity to do some grand gesture. (Song : Brighten the corner)

1. Wherever you are you're being an influence for good or for ill.
2. Look for simple opportunities (*"Take care of the pennies and the dollars will take care of themselves."* Likewise ... *If we consistently do the little things, the ...*)
 - a. Always say "Thank you." (**Be sincere and be positive.**)
 - b. Smile and give a friendly greeting. (**Momentarily center of your world.**)

E. Follow through with your impulses to encourage.

1. When you think about it, do it. How often do you think "I ought to _____."?
 - a. **"Road to hell is paved with good intentions."**
 - b. When impulses to do good are procrastinated, they are seldom accomplished.
2. When you think "Someone ought to _____." **Remember YOU are someone !!**

F. Be quick to offer words of praise. (**"Good job." ; **"I enjoyed that."** etc.)**

1. People will improve faster when their successes are pointed out than when all their mistakes are corrected. (**You propagate what you reinforce.**)
2. When something is done well, acknowledge it.
 - a. It doesn't have to be a big thing.
 - b. It doesn't have to be done perfectly. (**Reinforce improvement & effort.**)
 - c. **Never use empty flattery.**
3. It is especially important to acknowledge the good and the successes of the young.

G. Just be there for each other. (“*The power of presence.*”)

1. We need to spend enough time with our brethren to develop a comfort zone.
2. A feeling of closeness doesn't happen from a distance ... **or** in the assembly.
 - a. It's hard to feel someone is “there for you” if you don't feel close to them.
 - b. Shared experiences develop closeness. (*Epecially overcoming difficulties*)

** The ability to encourage each other is a learned skill which takes practice to learn. Some take to it more readily than others, but we must all do it to our limit of ability. Encouraging is a two way street, we have to learn to allow other to be there for us.*

III. There are practical ways to keep a congregation from becoming discouraged :**A. Most things that prevent personal discouragement also apply to the group.****B. As a group we must not allow discouragement to exist in our midst.**

1. As we observed in our introduction, discouragement is a contagious heart disease.
Gal. 5: 9 – A little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough.
2. When the proper relationship exists between brethren,
discouragement in one will be apparent to the group. (cf – **John 13: 34-35**)

C. Keep the group growing spiritually. (*Stagnation breeds discouragement.*)

1. The proclamation of the word of God is used to encourage.
Acts 15: 32 – Judas and Silas, also being prophets themselves, encouraged and strengthened the brethren with a lengthy message.
2. The elders feed, nourish, tend, protect and discipline the flock. **I Pet. 5: 1-4**
3. All of the members work together to mature each other. **Eph. 4: 11-16** (*Every joint*)

D. Keep the group actively involved with each other.

1. Collective worship is an important time of mutual encouragement. **Heb. 10: 23-25**
 - a. When one misses the assembly he discourages others.
 - b. However, it is only a small part of the total function of the church
2. Congregations need to spend time together in a variety of spiritual activities.
 - a. Weekly Ladies Class
 - b. Men's prayer breakfast
 - c. Work day at the building
 - d. Evangelism, VBS , Singings , Outings , Senior Trips , etc.
3. Regular fellowships are a part of the work of the church. (*We need to do more.*)

E. A healthy congregation will be active in good works. (*Not just 1 or 2 people*)

1. Our food pantry is a good work, but it doesn't require joint participation.
2. Taking care of the widows and elderly.
 - a. We have some who need help. (*Not just rely on physical family.*)
 - b. Winterize house, do yard work, clean house, whatever needs doing.
3. One example : we all pitched in to help the family that was burned out.

F. The primary function of the church on earth is to evangelize lost people.

1. It's hard for busy Christians to stay spiritually down.
2. When we know we are busy doing what God wants done, other things don't seem to weigh so heavily on our mind.
3. Any army will have morale problems when it has nothing to do.

III. – *The Roman army required its soldiers to build things to keep them busy when they had no battles to fight. That's how Hadrian's Wall was built all across England.*

CONCLUSION :**A. We've looked at self-encouragement, mutual encouragement and encouragement on a congregational basis.**

1. We've seen that encouragement is not rocket science.
2. As discouragement is a condition of heart ... so is encouragement.
3. The key is to develop a heart for the encouragement of others.

B. We all know we should be encouragers and we are often tempted to be so.

1. Our challenge is to obey the impulses of our heart for good.
2. There is some encouraging every Christian can do every single day.
 - a. Start with a friendly smile and warm greeting
 - b. A brief, uplifting phone call or visit.
 - c. A card with a hand written note in it. (*In a computerized era, personal impresses.*)

C. This is an easy and a rewarding part of the law of Christ.

1. **Gal. 6: 2 – Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ.**
2. Encouraging others is both a rewarding and an enjoyable experience.
3. If we are all conscious about encouraging each other, we insure we'll be encouraged when we need it.

INVITATION :

Lesson Texts :

Hebrews 10: 23-25

23 Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful;
24 and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds,
25 not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging *one another*; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.

Ephesians 4: 11-16

11 And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, **12** for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; **13** until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. **14** As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; **15** but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all *aspects* into Him who is the head, *even* Christ, **16** from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.