

“WHERE DOES MY HOPE COME FROM?” – PART TWO

Sermon - Sunday August 24, 2014

“Where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth.” (Psalm 121:1-2)

I spoke last week of the need for encouragement and the disappointments I encountered while looking for it in fellow believers. And I emphasized that ultimately the best help we can get, the true source of encouragement is the Lord Himself. His is the only well where the waters of true encouragement can be drawn.

But as I mentioned last week, as weak and unreliable as we are, the Scriptures say that we are to “encourage one another daily”. As fellow believers we have a role to play in the encouragement of others. We should be a place where people can come to draw out the waters of encouragement.

So this week I want to talk about how to fill our wells with the sweet water of Christ and keep the bitter waters from contaminating our wells. If Christ lives in us then others should expect to draw Christ from our well and receive the support and encouragement they so desperately seek. Today we’ll take a look at how to meet those expectations.

The first thing I want to mention is that none of us are perfect. We are in the process of being perfected but none of us have yet arrived. And anyone who expects perfection from another human being will routinely be disappointed. Even Jesus disappointed others. But the one thing He did not do is disappoint His Father. And we are instructed to do no less.

So the first thing we want to ask is “what is encouragement?” How do we define encouragement so that we will be able to receive it and to give it.

According to the dictionary, to “encourage” is to inspire with courage or confidence; to stimulate by assistance or approval. The Greek word translated “encourage” is PARAKALEO. It means to admonish, exhort; to console, to comfort; to strengthen; to instruct, teach.

So encouragement can take different forms at different times. Sometimes we may admonish someone. Sometimes we may build them up. At other times encouragement will come through comforting or consoling someone. It may even come through teaching or instruction.

The word “Encouragement” in Scripture is also translated as “Exhortation”. And exhortation is mentioned as one of the gifts of the Spirit in Romans 12:8. The Greek word PARAKALEO (to encourage) is also closely related to the Greek word PARAKLETOS, which means Helper. This is the name Jesus used to describe the Holy Spirit in:

JOHN 14:26

“But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you.”

So whatever help we bring, whatever form encouragement takes, if it’s to be genuine and authentic it should mirror the work of the Holy Spirit.

Since there is no sin in the Holy Spirit, the first thing we must do is to get rid of the sin in our lives. This we have done through our belief and acceptance of Christ. But confession and forgiveness remains an active and necessary part of our life after our initial repentance.

Encouragement is a powerful tool but it cannot break through the hardness of our hearts. We must be an open vessel through whom the Holy Spirit can move if we are to effectively encourage others. This means having attentive ears, softened hearts, and compassionate spirits.

But why does Scripture tell us to “*encourage one another daily*”? Why is encouragement so important? There are two places where the Scripture answers the question of “why”. The first is in Hebrews.

HEBREWS 3:13

“Encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called ‘Today’ so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.”

From this passage we understand that one of the purposes of encouragement is to prevent ourselves and others from being deceived by sin.

Satan is known as the great deceiver and he is constantly whispering lies to us, contradicting and twisting the words of Christ. These words do not bring life. They are meant to steal away our joy and destroy our faith. If we are deceived by them we can quickly lose hope and become discouraged. When we seek after sin for pleasure or relief from the hardships and struggles of life, we may find ourselves temporarily separated from our troubles.

But it is a temporary lull in the storm. Sin brings its own set of troubles because sin is deceitful. It promises pleasure and fulfillment but it brings only death. We need to be on guard against the deceitfulness of sin. And one of the ways we do so is by encouragement. We need to be encouraged to avoid Satan’s traps and we need to encourage others so they too can avoid the snares of the devil.

The second reason we are to encourage one another so that the word of the Lord is not dishonored. We find this in Paul’s letter to Titus.

TITUS 2:1-5

“But as for you, speak the things which are fitting for sound doctrine. Older men are to be temperate, dignified, sensible, sound in faith, in love, in perseverance. Older women likewise are to be reverent in their behavior, not malicious gossips nor enslaved to much wine, teaching what is good, so that they may encourage the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be sensible, pure, workers at home, kind, being subject to their own husbands, so that the word of God will not be dishonored.”

We all should be doing everything we can to participate with God so that His word is never dishonored. We’ve seen enough men and women who dishonor God through their lack of self-control and their self-centered priorities. We do not want to become one of them.

To recap: We need encouragement so that we are not hardened by the deceitfulness of sin and we need encouragement so that we will not dishonor the word of God. It’s helpful to keep these in mind as we consider why we should be encouraging others and why we are in need of it ourselves.

Besides giving us the “why (why we should encourage one another, Scripture also gives us the “who”. Who we should encourage? The Scriptures describe several instances where encouragement is needed.

(1) We are to encourage those who are exhausted and have become feeble; who are anxious, faint of heart, and weak.

ISAIAH 35:3-4a

“Encourage the exhausted, and strengthen the feeble. Say to those with anxious heart, Take courage, fear not...”

1 THESSALONIANS 5:14

“We urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with everyone. See that no one repays another with evil for evil, but always seek after that which is good for one another and for all people.”

(2) We are also to encourage people whom God has set over us as leaders.

DEUTERONOMY 1:38

“Joshua the son of Nun, who stands before you, he shall enter there; encourage him, for he will cause Israel to inherit (the Promised Land).”

(3) We are to encourage fellow believers as to their destiny. This is where the comfort side of encouragement comes in, particularly at the death of loved ones.

1 THESSALONIANS 4:13-18

“But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words.”

So we want to encourage those who are exhausted; those who are anxious, faint of heart, and have grown weak and feeble of spirit. We need not go far in our search before we come across someone who fits into one or more of these categories. Perhaps this even describes someone here today. IF so, ask for encouragement. And if you are asked, freely give it, for it is needed.

For some encouragement comes easy. We’ve all known people who are particularly good at saying the right thing at the right time. But nobody’s perfect and they would probably be the first to agree. For all of us were born into sin. Our well was contaminated the moment we were conceived. And though we have been born again, until we are ushered into heaven we will constantly be battling sin.

All of us recognize that we are self-centered people. That’s why we came to Christ. Being the center of our lives was not satisfying. It did not generate peace, eliminate fear, or chase away the loneliness in our lives. But looking inward did do one thing. It allowed us to see what was wrong. In trying to save our life we lost it. So we chose to lose our life, to give it to Someone else, in order to gain it.

And this is an eternal principle – to give our lives to Christ in order to gain the life he has promised. This is the life others seek after when they come to us for encouragement. And this is the well from which we must draw if we are to have any encouragement to give.

Jesus tells us that *“Out of the abundance of the hearts the mouth speaks”* (Matthew 12:34). And James reminds us how destructive the tongue can be. *“See how great a forest is set aflame by such a small fire.”* (James 3:5). When our heart is full of sin it overflows into our tongues, and is revealed by the words we chose to say or the words we withhold. Our hearts need to be cleansed if we are to have any hope of providing encouragement to others. The process has begun but it is not yet complete.

Water gets contaminated when there is no fresh water flowing through it. So it is with our lives. Without the constant flowing of the Holy Spirit through our lives, the water in our well will become stagnant.

When that happens we have no encouragement to give, only bitter words of rebuke or judgment. That is why the Scriptures so frequently tell us to get rid of these contaminants.

Let's take a look at what the Scriptures say to rid ourselves of:

LAY ASIDE THE DEEDS OF DARKNESS

ROMANS 13:12-13

“The night is almost gone, and the day is near. Therefore let us lay aside the deeds of darkness.... Let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy.”

LAY ASIDE FALSEHOOD AND THE OLD SELF WHICH IS BEING CORRUPTED

EPHESIANS 4:25

“Lay aside falsehood.”

EPHESIANS 4:22

“In reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit,”

BE DEAD TO IMMORALITY, IMPURITY, PASSION, EVIL DESIRES, GREED

COLOSSIANS 3:5

“Consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, passion, evil desires, and greed.”

MAKE NO PROVISION FOR THE FLESH

ROMANS 13:14B

“Make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts.”

PUT ASIDE ALL BITTERNESS, WRATH, ANGER, CLAMOR, SLANDER, MALICE, DECEIT, HYPOCRISY, ENVY, FILTHINESS AND ALL THAT REMAINS OF WICKEDNESS

EPHESIANS 4:31

“Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.”

COLOSSIANS 3:8-9

“Put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth. And do not lie to one another.”

JAMES 1:21

“Put aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness.”

1 PETER 2:1

“Put aside all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander.”

This is a long list and it can be pretty discouraging to see several of these things still active in our lives. But God does not tell us to get rid of something without giving us the power to do so. So be encouraged. God is at work in you to eliminate these contaminants from your life.

PHILIPPIANS 2:13

“It is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.”

Now when Scripture tells us to get rid of something it usually tells us to then add something – to put something on - to fill the empty space with something else. Here is what Scripture tells us to put on:

THE LORD JESUS CHRIST

ROMANS 13:14A

“But put on the Lord Jesus Christ.”

THE NEW SELF

EPHESIANS 4:24

“Put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.”

COLOSSIANS 3:10

“Put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him.”

A HEART OF COMPASSION, KINDNESS, HUMILITY, GENTLENESS, AND PATIENCE AND LOVE

COLOSSIANS 3:12-14

“As those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity.

Love. That’s really the key to this whole thing. Love is what brought encouragement to us in the first place.

JOHN 3:16

“God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him would not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world but that the world through Him might be saved.”

If we did not believe our sin could be forgiven, we would have no encouragement, no reason for hope of eternal life. But we believed and received the comfort of the Scriptures that says God does love us, God does forgive us, and God can transform us. And He has. We are no longer slaves to sin, but alive to God through Christ. And we have the hope of heaven. These words should encourage us.

But all the words in the world could not better explain where encouragement comes from and what prevents it from happening than these few verses from 1 Corinthians 13.

1 CORINTHIANS 13:1-13

“If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I surrender my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing. Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Love never fails; but if there are gifts of prophecy, they will be done away; if there are tongues, they will cease; if there is knowledge, it will be done away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part; but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away. When I was a child, I used to speak like a child, think like a child, reason like a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things. For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known. But now faith, hope, love, abide these three; but the greatest of these is love.”

If our well is to flow freely so that we have the sweet waters of encouragement from which to drink, then we need to get rid of everything that stops the well from flowing. And what clogs up the well of encouragement is lack of patience, jealousy, arrogance, being self-seeking, getting easily provoked, and keeping a list of wrongs we have suffered. All of these make us look inward instead of outward; make us self-centered people instead of God centered people.

As I stated earlier, *“Out of the abundance of the hearts the mouth speaks.”* Our hearts need to be right. Our hearts need to be in alignment with the God of all compassion who loves us with an everlasting love and commands us to love one another just as He has loved us.

If we are to encourage others we must draw from a well that is not contaminated by sin. We are not to draw the waters of encouragement from our flesh. Rather we are to draw the waters of encouragement from the well of the Holy Spirit who resides in us and is *“is at work in (us), both to will and to work for His good pleasure.”*

If we are patient, kind, not jealous, not people who brag or are arrogant; if we do not act unbecomingly; do not seek our own way, do not get provoked, do not take into account a wrong suffered, do not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoice with the truth; if we bear all things, believe all things, hope all things, endure all things; if our love never fails then we will have plenty of fresh, sweet water flowing through us from which to draw out the waters of encouragement.

This is a tall order I know, but not an impossible one. For the Scriptures say that God’s divine power has granted to us all things pertaining to life and godliness (1 Peter 1:3). So when God calls, He equips. We are equipped to do everything that God has called us to do. Not by our own strength or might, but by His power residing within us. We can do all things through Christ because He gives us the strength to do them (Philippians 4:13).

I want to say again that encouragement can take many forms. A simple “thank you” or “you did a good job” can be encouragement enough. I know when I finish delivering my sermon and some of you come up to me afterwards and say “thank you” or “I appreciate what you said”, that is usually sufficient enough of an encouragement to keep me going. It’s when I hear nothing that I wonder if I am making any difference

or if anybody is paying attention. So a few simple words can encourage someone to continue the work God has given them to do.

But at times we need something more than simple words. We need a heartfelt embrace - a shoulder to cry on or an ear to listen attentively. Life has its difficult moments and just knowing someone understands this and comes along side us through the trials of life is can be enough to energize us to make it through one more day.

And then there are the times we need to be rescued and told to rest from our labors while someone else takes over for a while. As I close I want to give an example of this type of encouragement which I received during a difficult time in my life.

In October of 1976 my mother was in the hospital with a brain aneurysm and we did not know if she would live or die. At the same time Wendy was in the hospital getting ready to have our second child through a Cesarean birth. On top of that I was out of work and moving from one rental house to another. I needed lots of encouragement. It was all I could do to take our first-born toddler to his aunts to be watched for the day, go to one hospital to see my wife and second child, go to the next hospital to see my mother, go to the old rental house to finish the cleaning and moving chores, go back to both hospitals at the end of the day, then pick up my son at his aunts and go back home only to start all over again the next day. Fortunately I had Wendy's younger brother and sister and my friends Dan and Kathe Prout helping me clean up the old house in Walnut Creek and move into the new rental in Concord. But I was emotionally, and physically drained each day.

The hardest part, the point where I could not hold myself together any longer, came when the old landlord wanted the key to his house one day. They had come to inspect our cleaning efforts that day. We were about 70 % done at the time so we kept the key in order to finish. But we did not finish until way after dark. I was totally exhausted and not in any shape to see anyone so I drove home, expecting to return the key the following morning on my way to the hospital. Unfortunately that did not sit well with the old landlord. He called and demanded the key immediately. I told him I had just got to my new home and put my son to sleep and could not come back out. Could he wait until tomorrow morning around 9am? He was adamant that he wanted the key that night so I gave him directions to the new house.

I was out of emotional energy and ready to break down in tears. So I called my best friend, Dan Prout and told him what was happening. He told me that he was coming right over and that he would handle everything with the old landlord. If I would let him he would go outside and give the key to the landlord for me. And that is what happened. I never had to face the landlord. Dan told them I was going through some very difficult times with my mother and wife both in the hospital and that as my pastor (he is actually a pastor) he had come to comfort and relieve me of some tasks.

I was never so grateful for help in all my life. To this day I can still recall the relief I felt that I did not have to confront one more event that day. The encouragement I needed that day was someone to take over for me. To encourage me to rest and let someone else handle some of the tasks that needed to be done. I was not alone and did not have to do everything by myself. I had a friend. I had a helper. I had an encourager who came when I called and did something unexpected but desperately needed.

Nothing had changed. My mother and wife were still in the hospital and my mother's surgery was yet to be performed. But I went to bed that night refreshed and relieved. A simple act of kindness from one believer became a life-saving rescue to another.

I wanted to close with an example from my own life for two reasons: to illustrate what I have been talking about but also to encourage you to tell us your own stories of encouragement. Next week is Preparation Sunday and your assignment is to share with the congregation how you were encouraged by others or how you were able to encourage someone else. These stories can come from your past as my example this morning did. But I am hopeful that you will look for opportunities to encourage someone this week so that you will have fresh stories to tell of how God used you to encourage someone else because you desired to be obedient to His command. He told us to “*encourage one another daily.*” All of us could use some encouragement. I know I could and I personally know others who could also. Let’s not be shy in giving it. Let us go out and seek opportunities to encourage someone. And then let’s bring those stories next Sunday so that we might praise the Lord for using us to encourage others and for using others to encourage us. Amen?

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