

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

Sermon - Sunday November 3, 2019

“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 disappointments we all encounter when looking for encouragement from friends and family. None of us are perfect. And anyone who expects perfection from another human being will routinely be disappointed. That is why 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 consistently drawn.

Yet Hebrews 3:13 tells us that as fellow believers we are to “*encourage one another daily*”. So, as weak and unreliable as we are, we do have a role to play in the encouragement of others. 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. So today we’ll look at how to meet those expectations; how to keep the wells of our hearts full of the sweet water of Christ and prevent the bitter waters from contaminating it.

The first thing we should ask ourselves 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.

Encouragement then 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. Through our belief and acceptance of Christ we have taken the initial steps and are no longer contaminated with sin; but as we journey through life we are sometimes stained with sin.

That is why confession and forgiveness remain an active and necessary part of life after our initial repentance. 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.

We have looked at what encouragement is. Let’s look now at why encouragement is so important. There are two places where the Scripture answers the question of “why”. The first reason is found 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 us from being hardened by the deceitfulness of 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 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 so we can avoid Satan’s traps as we struggle to persevere while suffering hardships. But we also need to encourage others so they too can avoid the snares of the devil.

The second reason we are to encourage one another is 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.”

Philippians 2:13 tells us that God is at work within us both to will and to work for His good pleasure. Therefore, we all should be doing everything we can to participate with God in this process so that His word is never dishonored. We’ve seen enough men and women, including leaders in the church, 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 35:3-4; 1 Thessalonians 5:14).
- (2) We are also to encourage people whom God has set over us as leaders (Deuteronomy 1:38).
- (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 (encourage) one another with these words.”

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.

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. We then looked for a solution to our pain, our emptiness, and our inability to stop sinning. In so doing we found new life in Christ. In trying to save our life we willingly lost it because we chose to give it to Someone else.

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.

Water gets contaminated when there is no fresh water flowing through it and so it is with our lives. Without the constant flow of the Holy Spirit in our lives, the life-giving water in our well becomes stagnant. When that happens we have no encouragement to give, only bitter words of accusation and judgment. That’s why we need to rid ourselves of the things that stop the movement of the Spirit in our life. Here are the things which the Scriptures tell us to rid ourselves of.

- (1) Lay aside the deeds of darkness (Romans 13:12-13)
- (2) Lay aside falsehood and the old self which is being corrupted (Ephesians 4:22, 25)
- (3) Be dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desires, greed (Colossians 3:5)
- (4) Make no provision for the flesh (Romans 13:14)
- (5) Put aside all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, slander, malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy, filthiness and all that remains of wickedness (Colossians 3:8-9; James 1:21; 1 Peter 2:1)

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 will and to want to eliminate these contaminants from your life (Philippians 2:13).

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 13:14)

The new self (Ephesians 4:24; Colossians 3:10)

A heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience and love (Colossians 3:12-14)

Love is 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 to share, then we need to get rid of everything that stops that water from flowing. And what clogs up the well of

encouragement is jealousy, arrogance, lack of patience, 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 heart 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 not draw from the well of our flesh. Rather we are to draw 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. 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 beside us through the trials of life can be enough to energize us to make it through one more day.

There are also 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. I have shared this story before in other settings, but it seems appropriate to share it again here today.

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 my wife 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 our closest friends 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, was the day when the old landlord came to inspect our cleaning efforts and pick up his key. We were only about 70% done at the time so the landlord agreed to allow us to keep the key a while longer 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. When I called him to explain he 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. Feeling I had no option I gave him directions to my new house.

I was out of emotional energy and ready to break down in tears. I called my best friend Dan 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 inspire you to encourage others. As I just said, the encouragement of a simple act of kindness can become a life-saving rescue when it is most needed. Encouragement can be a one-time thing like my friend giving the keys to my former landlord. But it can also be a frequent thing like making sure someone who is ill has something to eat for several days while they recover; or showing compassion and sympathy over a longer period of time while someone who has recently lost a loved one finds their bearings again.

Acts of kindness can reassure others to keep forging ahead during the difficult times in life; but acts of kindness are not the only way to encourage others. In fact, encouragement is most often found in words. Some people have lots of words to say while others have only a few. But that's okay. It doesn't take a lot of words to make a difference. An encouragement can be as simple as saying "Thank you for what you do" to someone who has touched your life. You never know how these simple words of encouragement can impact someone's life.

We can also look to Jesus to see what encouragement looks like. Jesus spoke uplifting words; words of hope, comfort, and solace, as well as words of instruction to teach others how to live the life God required of them. But He also spoke words of rebuke because He wanted to encourage others to stop sinning and start obeying. But no matter what words Jesus used they were words of truth spilling forth from a heart full of love. If we were to have a vision, a sense of direction on how to encourage others, it would be the vision of Jesus using words of love truth springing forth from a heart full of love.

God tells us to "*encourage one another daily*". Let's not be shy in giving it. In obedience to His command let's not wait for opportunities to come to us. Let's take the initiative and seek for opportunities to encourage others. God will be pleased with us when we do, for it is what He Himself does for us.

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