

STANDING FIRM

IX. “Encourage One Another!”

8-12-07
Ken Peterson

I Thess. 5:11-15

*TEXT: Therefore encourage one another
and build each other up,*

INTRODUCTION

Dr. David Livingstone, the great Scottish 19th century missionary, medical doctor, and explorer of Africa, almost gave up on ever being a missionary. He had heard Robert Moffatt, a missionary to Africa, say he had, “sometimes seen in the morning sun the smoke of a thousand villages where no missionary had ever been.” David’s heart was stirred and felt God calling him to go to Africa. But, when he was asked to give his first sermon in a little church in Edinburgh, it was a disaster. In spite of his careful preparation, he froze when he got in the pulpit and forgot everything he intended to say. He was almost hyperventilating. After a long awkward pause, he managed to gasp out that he had forgotten his sermon. He walked away from the pulpit in shame and embarrassment.

Fortunately, Robert Moffatt was there that day. He came up to Livingstone after the service and said, “You can be a great and wonderful servant of God. Why don’t you go to medical school?” And, that is what David Livingstone did. His medical training became an essential part of his missionary work and exploration in parts of Africa where no Christians had ever ventured. What if Robert Moffatt hadn’t been there with a perceptive, encouraging word?

Think about your life for a moment and the people who have helped you the most. Has it been those who have pointed out your flaws, put you down, criticized your failings, and reminded you of your short-comings? Or has it been someone who became an encourager to you when you were down and about to give up? I expect most of us have been helped more by encouragement than by criticism. Dr. Jean Houston, author and popular motivational speaker says, “Perhaps encouragement is the greatest and single most powerful gift that God has ever given us. Nothing seems to impact our lives as much as encouragement.”

Our text this morning is one of those transitional verses in Paul that begins with “therefore.” It comes at the conclusion of a fairly extensive teaching about the second coming of Jesus. And, while Paul has used the word “encourage” quite a bit so far in this letter (four times), he now gives us an extensive development of how it looks in the life of the church in these five verses.

READ 1 Thess. 5:11-15

ENCOURAGE AND BUILD UP

Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are

doing. (1 Thess 5:11)

Here we have two imperatives in the Greek: “encourage” and “build up.” Paul’s “therefore” links this section to all he’s been saying about the return of Christ and the necessity of living alert, self-controlled lives that are pleasing and honoring to the Lord. He is commanding us to be looking for ways to encourage each other and build each other up. Paul is writing to the church and telling them that when they come together, their gatherings should be marked by this.

The Greek word for “encourage” here is *parakaleite*. Even if you don’t know Greek, many of you will recognize the root word, *paraclete*, as a synonym Jesus uses for the Holy Spirit in his extensive teaching on the Spirit in John 14-16. There it is variously translated as “counselor,” “comforter,” “helper.” It literally means one who is called along side to help. Certainly, the role of the Holy Spirit in providing comfort, help, and counsel when we need it is an awesome experience I trust you have often enjoyed. But, there is more than a hint in this word that we too can become instruments of the Spirit to one another in coming alongside of each other in this role of providing encouragement.

I’m afraid that the church is sometimes seen as opposing things and lecturing people upon what is wrong with their lives and what they need to do to change. That is not what Christ has called the church to be. We need to be looking for ways to creatively come alongside of people to support them in a way that they can be the people God wants them to be. Truett Cathey, the Christian businessman who founded the Chic Filet fast-food chain says, “How do you identify someone who needs encouragement? Answer: that person is breathing.” Is there anyone here who doesn’t need encouragement?

I’ve heard encouragement referred to as the oxygen of the church. Most of us do a pretty good job of beating ourselves up for our failures and inadequacies. We don’t need help from others in that. But, what we desperately need is an encouraging word, words that will build us up, motivate us, renew us, and inspire us to be better than we have been. May we all become experts at noticing people who are a bit down or are slipping and prayerfully ask God how we can build them up— and then put into action what God puts in our hearts to do. This includes words spoken, notes written, gifts given, actions taken. A New Testament study of encouragement reveals it is far more than just saying nice things. It suggests calling out something deeper in that person. There you need God’s help in touching that life as Moffatt did with Livingstone.

The word Paul uses here translated as “build up” is actually a verb used to describe building a house. Here, and elsewhere, Paul adapts it to Christians edifying one another. It forms a good word picture for us as we think of a person’s life like a house being built. Add to people’s lives, contribute toward their completed house.

Now, Paul moves on to specific applications of this general message of encouragement.

RESPECT THOSE OVER YOU

Now we ask you, brothers, to respect those who work hard among you, who are over you in the Lord and who admonish you. Hold them in the highest regard in love because of

their work.

(1 Thess 5:12-13a)

For this, I'll just let the Scripture speak for itself regarding pastors, lest I be self-serving. Personally, I feel blessed to be your pastor and I think you do quite well in this regard. However, let me include here the elders, deacons, teachers, and other spiritual leaders in the church. Spiritual authority is God-ordained. Certainly, at times, it has been misused in the church. But in general, it is for our own benefit that God has set-up lines of authority in the church. And I appreciate the fact that I am under the authority of the session in some matters and the presbytery in all matters of ministry.

PEACEMAKING

Live in peace with each other. 1 Thess 5:13b

Here is another command. Often times we think peace is just something that happens. This suggests it is something we choose to do and we need to work at it. In any community, including the faith community, there are going to be differences, misunderstandings, and things that make us angry.

PEOPLE NEEDING SPECIAL HELP

Paul goes on to mention three categories of people we need to especially reach out to:

*And we urge you, brothers, warn those who are **idle**, encourage the **timid**, help the **weak**...* (1 Thess 5:14).

Here I am indebted to Dr. Allan Meyer who came to Yakima from Australia in May presenting the CareForce program at Yakima First. I used to think of these three categories– the idle, the timid, and the weak– as almost synonyms with slight variations. But Dr. Meyer gave a wonderful word study on each of these Greek words which opens our eyes to important categories of ministry we need to be engaged in as outreach and within the church.

1. **The idle**– Dr. Meyers in his study understands the Greek word, *ataktous*, translated, “idle,” as those whose lives are out of order. The KJV uses the word, “unruly.” Our lives can be out of order in a thousand ways: our finances, our marriages, our homes, our schedules, etc. Some people are rage-aholics, or shop-aholics, or addicted to porn, or alcohol or other drugs. We can all think of lots of people whose lives are out of order in some way. And, some of you here also have things out of control in your lives, and you know your life doesn't reflect the order and peace Jesus came to give.

These people, Paul says, need “warning” or “admonition” as the KJV puts it. The Greek word, *noutheteo*, literally means “to put in mind, instruct about behavior that is wrong, and persist until the behavior changes.” This is a process, not just a one-time warning. It involves staying with them, working with them. Many people know their lives are out of order but they feel powerless to change. They commit their lives to Christ, but are still in bondage to sinful patterns of behavior. Then they get frustrated and give up because it doesn't seem to be working for them. Here is our call to enter a process of careful instruction, grounded in God's Word, and leading them into a walk that is empowered by the Holy Spirit, bringing order out of the chaos of their lives.

2. **The timid**– or “faint-hearted.” Dr. Meyer says the Greek word here, *oligopsuchous*,

literally means, “small souled.” Sometimes people’s souls are damaged in childhood through sexual abuse, or other kinds of abuse. In alcoholic homes, often the inner person’s development in learning to trust is arrested. They don’t have the capacity to receive unconditional love. These are people who don’t have the normal strength or courage needed to face life and its problems. Their lives are dogged by fear and mistrust.

They need someone to come alongside and provide tenderness and comfort. While the NIV translates this “encourage” the Greek, *paramuthia*, is a different word than was used in vs. 11. The KJV, “console” maybe comes closer. It literally means to “speak closely with a person in words of comfort.” They need one-on-one support so their souls can open up to breathe the air of God’s grace and experience the joy of the Lord.

3. **The weak**– These are people who lack the strength needed for life. Broken people need lots of help. A literal translation of the Greek word here, *antecho*, is “hold on to.” This means staying close, paying close attention, giving them firm support until they are able to do it on their own.

Now, that’s a little more Greek than we usually cover, but I want you to get a feel for how incredibly deep and rich God’s Word is. Encouraging others is an essential ministry for all of us, but it takes different forms, depending upon the need. If their lives are out of control, disordered, they need admonition, exhortation, and Biblical teaching. If their souls are damaged, hardened by disappointment and hurt, they need tender comfort and consolation. And the weak need someone to lean on until they get on their feet. These are all manifestations of encouragement and building each other up. We need to prayerfully approach this ministry letting God reveal to us whether support is needed or a strong wake-up call. One approach doesn’t fit every situation.

Then, Paul ends this list with the catch-all phrase, *Be patient with everyone* (14). Anytime we are trying to help others, big doses of patience are needed. But, when we find our patience running thin with others, it is good to review our own lives– our failings, inconsistencies, lack of motivation, and all the other things that we keep failing in– and reflect on how patient God is with us.

And, of course, kindness is always called for in all our dealings with people. This last sentence puts it:

Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always try to be kind to each other and to everyone else. (15)

CONCLUSION

Jamie Scott tried out for the play at his elementary school. He had his heart set on being one of the main characters, but his mother feared he would not be chosen and wondered how he would handle the disappointment. On the day the parts were awarded, she picked up her son at school. When Jamie saw his mother, he rushed up to her with eyes shining with excitement and said, “Guess what, Mom. I’ve been chosen to clap and cheer!”

Yes, clapping and cheering others on is a high calling and it is for all of us to do. It is an essential function of the Body of Christ in releasing people into their giftedness and potential in God's kingdom. There is way too much tearing down going on. Let's be among those who build others up, in the Lord.