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ENCOURAGEMENT: THE GIFT THAT KEEPS ON GIVING

A saint will often be discovered by his conversation. Charles Spurgeon

I. The Call to Encourage

A. Encouragement is a Command

1. Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing. 1 Thessalonians 5:11
2. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near. Hebrews 10:24-25
3. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love... 29 Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear. Ephesians 4:15-16, 29

B. Definitions and Diagnostics

1. Encouragement: Encouragement celebrates God's grace toward his people and inspires or honors godliness in his people. The intended effect of encouragement is that Christians love God more, trust God more, and serve God more.
2. Flattery: Making people feel good about their lives or about us, regardless of the real state of their relationship with God. Flattery is positivity without objectivity. Encouragement exalts God and honors and motivates godliness; flattery exalts self-esteem and honors and motivates self-adoration and self-deceit.
3. Cynicism: Viewing life through a lens of doubt—doubting God's purposes, doubting people's motives or growth, doubting any hope for the future. Cynicism is negativity

without objectivity; it refuses to see grace and godliness or to exercise love that “hopes all things.” Cynicism exalts avoiding disappointment and self-protection.

C. The Biblical Pattern of Encouragement

1. OT Examples of Encouragement

- Jonathan—“And Jonathan, Saul's son, rose and went to David at Horesh, and strengthened his hand in God...”
- Moses—“But charge Joshua, and encourage and strengthen him, for he shall go over at the head of this people, and he shall put them in possession of the land that you shall see.” Deut. 3:28
- Hezekiah—“And Hezekiah spoke encouragingly to all the Levites who showed good skill in the service of the LORD.” 2 Chronicles 30:22
- Josiah—“He appointed the priests to their offices and encouraged them in the service of the house of the LORD.” 2 Chronicles 35:2
- Psalms—“O Israel, hope in the Lord! For with the Lord there is steadfast love, and with him is plentiful redemption. And he will redeem Israel from all his iniquities.” Psalm 130:7-8
- Proverbs—“The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life, but the mouth of the wicked conceals violence.” Prov. 10:11; “The tongue of the righteous is choice silver; the heart of the wicked is of little worth. The lips of the righteous feed many, but fools died for lack of sense.” Prov 10:20-21

2. Acts--“Strengthen/Encourage”--Act 14:22, 15:32, 15:41, 16:40, 18:23, 18:27, 20:1, 20:2, 27:36.

3. Paul’s Example of Encouragement through Gratefulness

- Romans 1:8 (“I thank my God...because your faith is proclaimed...”)
- 1 Corinthians 1:4-9 (“I give thanks...because of the grace of God...given you...”)

- 2 Corinthians 1:7
 - Ephesians 1:1-23
 - Philippians 1:1-11, 4:3, 4:10-20
 - Colossians 1:3-8
 - 1 Thessalonians 1:2-10, 1 Thessalonians 2:13, 2:19, 3:6-9, 4:9-10
 - 2 Thessalonians 1:3-4, 2:13, 3:4
 - 2 Timothy 1:3-5
 - Philemon 1:4-5, 7
4. Jesus' Messages to the Seven Churches in Revelation 2-3
- 6/7 churches receive specific encouragement alongside exhortations or corrections.

II. The Danger of Discouragement

Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruits.

Proverbs
18:21

- A. Discouragement through legalism—requiring duties that God does not require.
- B. Discouragement through hypocrisy—requiring of others what we will not do ourselves.
- C. Discouragement through self-righteousness—communicating a moral superiority over others, a lack of sympathy with their struggle against sin.
- D. Discouragement through impatience and harshness—not longsuffering or gentle with the long road of change.
- E. Discouragement through pragmatism—focusing on people's change without a corresponding affection and faith for their future.
- F. Discouragement through manipulation—avoiding encouragement in order to motivate people to keep growing.
- G. Discouragement through a critical habit of speech—more aware of people's sins than their growth; quick to correct, slow to encourage.

- H. Discouragement through silence. All one has to do to discourage others is to fail to encourage them.

“A fire not stoked goes out. A refrigerator unplugged rots the eggs, which were perfectly good not too long ago. A garden not tended erupts with weeds, not vegetables. Affirmation is the firestoking, refrigerator-electrifying, garden-tending side of relationships.” Sam Crabtree, Practicing Affirmation

III. The Practice of Encouragement

A. Celebrate God’s Actions

1. Past Actions (Eph. 1:4-7, 1 Thessalonians 2:13)

- a. God’s eternal purpose of salvation
- b. God’s grace in conversion.

2. Present Work (Phil. 2:13, Ephesians 3:20-21)

- God at work in doctrinal steadfastness
- God at work in godly desire
- God at work in small steps of growth
- God at work in small steps of faith
- God at work in servanthood
- God at work in generosity
- God at work in endurance of suffering.

3. Future Promises

[O]ur Lord Jesus Christ, who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. 1 Corinthians

1:7-9

B. Honor Godly Effort

1. Honoring Godliness is Godly

- So receive him in the Lord with all joy, and honor such men, Philippians 2:29

- Outdo one another in showing honor. Romans 12:10
- I rejoice at the coming of Stephanas and Fortunatus and Achaicus, because they have made up for your absence, for they refreshed my spirit as well as yours. Give recognition to such people. 1 Corinthians 16:17-18

2. Honoring Godliness Spurs on More Godliness

It does people good to be told how highly we value them. There is many a Christian man and woman who would do better if now and then someone would speak a kindly word to them, and let them know that they had done well. Charles Spurgeon

- 2 Corinthians 9
- Romans 16

IV. An Encouraging Ambition

Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love... **29** Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear. Ephesians 4:15-16, 29

- A. Jesus' glory will be revealed in his triumphant church.
- B. His church will be sustained and built through the words of his people.
- C. Jesus has staked his final glory, in part, on his own grace flowing through the encouragement of his people.