

Encourage One Another

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Sermon Series: One Anothering

Hebrews 10:19-25

News of recent attempted mining rescues took me back to July 2002; to the successful rescue of miners trapped 240 feet underground in a collapsed mine shaft. Nine miners survived three days in a water-logged mine shaft by huddling together to share body heat. Otherwise, they would have died from hypothermia in 55-degree water. When one miner became cold, the other eight huddled around him for warmth. One of the miners, Harry Mayhugh, told reporters, “Everybody had their moments. One guy would get down and the rest of us pulled together for him. Then that guy would get back up and another would feel weaker. It was a team effort. It’s the only way we survived.”

The image of huddled together miners exhibits what God intends for the church; we band together to keep each other warm with the things of God. When logs are separated in a fire, they lose heat and burn out. The same thing happens when we separate from each other. Like logs in a fire, we need one another in the church.

We are presently engaged in a series of “one another” sermons from the New Testament. Thus far, we have examined mutual love, mutual forgiveness and mutual confession. Today, we

come to mutual encouragement. The writer of Hebrews implores us “to encourage one another.”

Hebrews divides neatly into two sections. The first section, extending all the way to 10:18, provides a theological panorama for the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. Beginning at 10:19 and continuing through the remainder of the letter, the author offers a series of practical applications. Our Scripture lesson, in Hebrews 10:19-25, serves as a transitional passage in the movement from the theoretical to the practical. Verses 19-21 summarize the first ten chapters and verses 22-25 initiate a list of practical exhortations. Each directive begins with the transitive word “let.” “Let us approach” in verse 22, “let us hold fast” in verse 23 and “let us encourage one another in verse 24.

The reference to faith, hope and love in verses 22-24 recall another well-known passage from 1 Corinthians 13: “Now faith, hope, love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love” (13:13).

The first directive in verse 22 reads, “Let us approach with a true heart in full assurance of faith.” Only the high priest in the Old Testament was permitted to enter a temple’s most holy place each year as a representative of the people to offer sacrifices for sin. Our high priest Jesus Christ enters the most

holy place to offer his life as a sacrifice for our sins. We can approach God (verse 22) and have confidence (verse 19) because Jesus Christ provides access to God. There is no longer any barrier of sin. We have access to God on account of “a new and living way” Jesus opens for us (verse 20). His way is new because He replaces the old way. His way is living because He gives life.

If God has provided the means of access, why not take it? Take every advantage coming to you! Why would you blaze your own trail when God has provided a port of entry?

The second directive in verse 23 reads, “Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.” The author of Hebrews encourages his readers to hold fast to the end (3:6, 14).

Hebrews is written to people whose enthusiasm has waned and who are becoming weary in well-doing. They are discouraged by the struggle to maintain faith in a hostile environment. They are about ready to give up on God.

Hope is predicated on the ending of verse 23, “...for he who promised is faithful.” Your enthusiasm for God may be waning. You may be ready to throw in the towel. Hold fast, beloved, “He who promised is faithful.”

The third directive in verses 24-25 tells us, “Let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not

neglecting to meet together, as some are the in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another and all the more as you see the Day approaching.” Evidently the danger of Christians trying to go it alone was as much a problem in the 1st century as it is in the 21st century.

Scholars are unsure why some believers were in the habit of neglecting to meet together. Perhaps it was indifference or the dislike of other people in their church or the threat of persecution.

You may be in the habit of neglecting to meet together. The preacher rambles on too long. The pace of the service can sometimes drag. Television and the video store offer more drama. The Sunday paper holds more interest. The beach and mountains offer a more breathtaking view. Sleeping-in provides a more tranquil Sabbath rest. Nobody at a tailgate party or backyard barbeque will hand you a pledge card or ask you to teach junior highs.

We worship together to encourage one another in faithful living and provoke one another to love and good works. We aspire to keep one another from becoming discouraged. Your presence today in worship encourages someone else. What would happen if everyone in this fellowship decided to forego worship? You would say to yourself, if everyone else decides to blow off worship, why shouldn't I?

The word “encourage” has an interesting etymology. The prefix “en” means “to put into,” so literally the word means to put

courage into someone. It's antonym "discourage" means to take courage from someone. We put courage into each other when we worship and serve together. Our secular culture encourages us in the opposite direction. The church is the one place in society where you and I are encouraged to live the Christian life.

One of our church's seven covenants "Worship Continually" urges us to make worship your highest priority. Worship every Sunday you're in town or find another church when you're out of town. Skipping worship constitutes a sin in the Catholic Church. Protestants don't necessarily regard your absence from worship as a sin, but it is a violation against the body of Christ. Make it a priority to be in worship every Sunday, whether or not you feel like it. We come to worship not only for us, we come for each other.

When I think of the ministry of encouragement, Barnabas comes to mind. Barnabas's name means "son of encouragement." He's not a major figure in the New Testament, yet every time his name appears he is encouraging someone else. When Paul was converted and no one would believe what had happened to him, Barnabas stood up for him (Acts 9:26-27). When Paul was unwilling to forgive John Mark for deserting him on an earlier mission, Barnabas supports him (Acts 15:37-39). Barnabas' legacy is the ministry of encouragement.

We urge everyone in this church to be engaged in the ministry of encouragement. Offer words of encouragement to one another. Find something to compliment in another person. Write an encouraging note or email to someone. Mark Twain said, "I can live for two weeks on a good compliment."

Accentuate the positive, not the negative. Business consultants tell us employees who feel appreciated in their jobs work harder and produce better results. Child psychologists speak about the critical importance of positive feedback for children. Whether it is parenting, coaching, teaching or supervising employees, accentuate the positive, not the negative.

Bruce Larson writes about basement and balcony people in his book *The Passionate People*. Basement people accentuate the negative rather than the positive. They constantly point out what is wrong rather than what is right with us. Balcony people offer encouragement. They're the ones who tell us, "You can do it!" Who are the balcony people in your life? Can you become a balcony person for someone else?

William Wilberforce labored for years as a member of the British Parliament to abolish slavery in England. He became discouraged in the fight and was about to give up, when his elderly friend John Wesley wrote a letter to Wilberforce from his death bed: "Unless God has raised you up for this very thing, you will be worn out by the opposition of men and devils. But if God be for you, who

can be against you? Are all of them stronger than God? Oh, be not weary of well-doing! Go on, in the name of God and in the power of his might, till even American slavery shall vanish away before it.”

Wesley died six days later, but Wilberforce persevered for 45 more years to abolish slavery. Three days before his own death, slavery was abolished in Britain. Wilberforce often cited Wesley’s letter as the encouragement he needed to keep the fight going!

I’ve preached thousands of sermons in this church. Some are altogether forgettable, but one sermon preached years ago is still referenced by some of you. It was a sermon in which I referred to the migratory habits of Canada geese which travel thousands of miles each year in search of wetlands and suitable climate. I said geese travel together in formation, rotate leadership and care for one another. But I had the most reaction to why geese honk. They honk encouragement to the lead geese to keep their speed, since they experience the most turbulence. Our ministry entails honking encouragement to each other. To this day some of you will occasionally mutter under your breath, “Honk, honk!”

Paul writes in Thessalonians, “Therefore encourage one another with these words and build each other up” (1 Thessalonians 4:18; 5.11). Paul employs this construction metaphor for building each other in faith. Our words have power to build up or tear

down. Paul writes in Ephesians, “Do not let unwholesome talk come out of your mouth but only what is helpful for building others up” (4:29).

It’s so much easier to tear down than to build up. It took us about a month to tear down our former buildings, but a year and a half to rebuild them. It’s so much easier to tear down than to build up. What a blessed place this new Ministry Center will become if we honk encouragement to one another.

