

Cd Gv283 Being an Encourager

by George Verwer

The ministry of encouragement is a vital part of our Christian walk, and it requires us to be consistent, loving, and balanced in our approach, while avoiding rigidity, legalism, forgetfulness, extremism, and quitting.

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Philippians 2:3-8, Hebrews 10:24-25

Topics: "Christian Living", "Prayer Life"

Description

In this sermon, Howard Ferguson shares several important lessons for living a life of love and integrity. He emphasizes the need to love and serve others, even when they are illogical, unreasonable, and self-centered. He encourages listeners to do good deeds without expecting recognition or praise, as people may accuse them of having selfish motives. Ferguson also highlights the importance of honesty and vulnerability, acknowledging that being open and transparent can make one susceptible to criticism. Lastly, he emphasizes the significance of prayer in his own life and encourages listeners to prioritize prayer as a vital aspect of their relationship with God.

Transcript

I want you to turn to the book of Hebrews. A little booklet was written years ago by Michael Griffiths, one of my favorite writers. Everybody should read his book, *Take My Life*, and his other book, *Give Up Your Small Ambitions*.

But he wrote a little booklet that's not so widely known, maybe even out of print, called *Encouraging One Another*. And I thank God for that booklet. And it was based on this text, Hebrews 10.

Hebrews chapter 10. Hebrews 10. And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works.

You probably have that in a more modern translation, but it will say basically the same. Let us consider one another to provoke unto love and good works. Our ministry of encouragement is a ministry with a purpose.

The ultimate purpose is always to glorify God. Verse 25. Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together as the manner of some is, but exhorting one another and so much more as ye see the day approaching.

The writer to the Hebrews ties in these two principles together. Then go, please, back to Philippians chapter 2. Philippians chapter 2, one of the greatest chapters in the Bible. Speaks about the deity of Jesus Christ and then speaks about Christ becoming a man, becoming a servant.

But in that same chapter, we have this very important challenge. In verse 3, let nothing be done through strife or vain glory, but in lowliness of mind, let each esteem others better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others, to be concerned about others.

Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus, who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God, made himself of no reputation, took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men. Being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Esteeming one another.

God has called us, I believe, every believer is included, to a ministry of encouraging other people. But some of God's people, supposedly God's chosen people, often God's frozen people, seem to have a high ability for discouraging others. So let's look in the first part of this seminar, or the second part, we've already finished the first, let's just consider some of the ways that we tend to discourage people.

If I discourage any of you through this, please forgive me. I don't think it's possible to speak publicly without someone getting discouraged. Such are the difficulties of communicating to a large number of people.

What encourages one seems to discourage someone else, especially if they misunderstand. And I do not claim to be such a great communicator, though I've overheard some people saying something along that line. Certainly, the mercy of God, I certainly seem to be highly gifted in miscommunicating to my wife.

Last night, again, I average once or twice a day. It's easier when I'm away from her. I mean, it's easier not to miscommunicate.

But I told her I was making a lot of phone calls yesterday. I had a little event in my life that almost blew me off the planet. I suddenly became a grandfather.

I don't know how these things happen. Thank you. Little baby girl, Emily Ann, seven pounds, two ounces, 22 feet long.

I mean, 22 inches. That would be unusual, especially in a Bromley hospital. But I was making a lot of phone calls and I was so motivated.

I talked to my wife and said, I won't be home early. Simple. She thought I said, I will be home early.

Very similar, isn't it? I will, I won't. And over the telephone. And I tend to talk too fast.

And so she's waiting and waiting. Finally, I phoned and she said, I thought you were coming home early. No, that's not what I said.

Anyway, I won't go into the details. So communication is not easy. And encouraging people.

Thank you. I've already got some water, but I could always take a bath. So the ministry of encouraging people is not always so easy.

And I think we need to just say right in the beginning. That we must not get discouraged in our efforts to encourage. I don't think I've ever said that before.

We must not get discouraged in our efforts to encourage. Because definitely some of your efforts will backfire. They will backfire.

Maybe at this point, I could read something I read almost every year at the leaders conference. Maybe I'll avoid it at the main session and give it here at the seminar instead. It's called the contradictions or the, what's the word I want? The paradox of Christian leadership.

And I put that right here in my Bible so that I could refer to it many, many, many times. Now all I have to do is to be able to find it. Do you ever put these kind of things in your Bible and then you're not able to find it? I've read this again and again.

It's called the paradoxical commandments of leadership by a man named Howard Ferguson. Number one, if you write fast, you can put this down. Otherwise, you'll have to get the tape and copy it later.

Number one, people are illogical, unreasonable, and self-centered. Love them anyway. How many have ever heard this before? Only a couple of you.

Good. This is the joy of working with young people. You always got a new group and you can use the same thing again and again.

Number two, if you do good, people will accuse you of selfish, ulterior motives. Do good anyway. That's why I was drawn to this, though it wasn't in my original notes.

Number three, if you are successful, you win false friends and true enemies. Succeed anyway. Four, the good you do today will be forgotten tomorrow.

Do good anyway. Five, how are we doing? Some of you are trying to write this down. You get it all down, you can get a free tape.

Five, honesty and frankness make you vulnerable. Be honest and frank anyway. Six, the biggest men with the biggest ideas can be shot down by the smallest men with the smallest minds.

Think big anyway. Seven, people favor underdogs, but they follow top dogs. Fight for a few underdogs anyway.

You know that expression? I think it's British. Eight, what you spend years building may be destroyed overnight. Build anyway.

Number nine, people really need help. They need encouragement. But may attack you if you try to help them.

Ever had that experience with your little sister? Help them anyway. And number 10, it's great. Give the world the best you have and you will get kicked straight in the teeth.

Give the world the best you have anyway. What a challenge. I've listed six areas where you, if you're not careful, can have a ministry of discouragement.

Discouraging your mother. Some of you are already highly professional at that. You've been working at it since you were two.

Discouraging other family members, discouraging people in the church. Discouraging those around you. First, the first big discourager is inconsistency.

Inconsistency in our life. And I want to say a word about this because it's so important. I'm sure any of you who have your brains on and you've plugged in early this morning feel a little twitch of guilt when you hear of such a challenge.

Because who of us is going to stand up and say, I am totally consistent? The Apostle Paul told people that they should follow him. Even as he followed Christ, that's something rather unusual. We're a little hesitant to do that in our day.

Let me give you something that I wish I had learned to express many years ago. Now, consistent Christian living includes a degree of inconsistency. No one is totally consistent.

No one except our Lord Jesus Christ. So as we live our life, there will be people that get discouraged because they see some inconsistency in us. This is why it is also foolish to say that we shouldn't share, we shouldn't witness, we only live the life.

Because a lot of things are only sorted out when we sit down and speak to people about it. If we walk in the light with one another, so that if we discourage someone, he comes to us and say, you know, I saw you there beating up your dog yesterday morning. And really, I was hurt by that.

I was discouraged. I've been a dog lover for a long time. And especially when you cut off its tail, really, it hurt me.

And I thought I should just share with you. It may be a misunderstanding. Maybe it wasn't his dog.

Maybe it was someone else's dog. Or maybe, no, that would be, that would be, maybe it was just a stuffed animal dog. So, the ministry of encouraging others is not necessarily easy.

It has its pitfalls, miscommunications, our own inconsistencies. And if we get into an extreme, then we end up wearing a mask. We end up pretending we are not someone we really are, because we're afraid if they see what we really are, they will be discouraged and we don't want to discourage anybody, especially after going to a Berwer seminar on encouragement.

So, my plea is for reality and honesty and openness that we will not pretend that we are going to encourage everyone that we speak to or that we give a book to or send a tape to. At the same time, this should be a motivator to cause us to present our bodies as a living sacrifice to God and in the power of the Holy Spirit, live as consistently as possible. Number two, the second discourager, is the lack of love, the lack of friendship.

With some degree of hesitancy, I allowed this old title, Revolution of Love, from a little tiny book of twenty-some years ago, to be used again in this new book, Revolution of Love. Maybe for some it's become a cliché, but I believe that biblical love in our hearts and lives is revolutionary. And the lack of love is the greatest thing that brings discouragement among God's people, especially the young babe in Christ.

You aren't supposed to be here because you are in leadership training. We do not pretend that people who come here are some kind of future apostles. But we believe there needs to be a wider scale of leadership training because we discovered that many people who were in OM in the past and that we did not consider leaders are today pastors and leaders in their churches.

And we are sorry that we didn't have a greater and wider sort of basic leadership training. If you become a father, even though you're not a leader in the church and not a leader in OM, you're a leader because you're a leader in that home. And it's one of the greatest areas where we need leadership.

I was clearly the leader in my home. My wife was more in the submissive type who very much let me get on with the leadership. But we discovered and we made mistakes because of that.

In the early days of our marriage, we still are making mistakes. But I was often away. So she had to take the leadership in the home when I was away with all that that meant.

And very little training, I can assure you. Therefore, I believe this basic, simple seminar we are having on the subject of encouraging people is just so essential for our leadership. And the bottom line is love.

I wish we could speak for seven hours on that. That's why I brought all these cassette tapes. Because we know how important love is and we know how Satan will try to hinder us from developing that life of love.

And there are different extremes. There's the man that feels, well, if you have a deep work of the Holy Spirit, then everything will be automatic. Then the man on the other side, who's just striving in his own energy to be more and more and more loving, and he's not getting very far.

Somehow, it seems to me that the kind of love we need for this ministry of encouragement is a combination. Yes, we need to be converted. We need to be filled with the Spirit.

We need to experience ongoing filling of the Spirit. But I don't believe that's the end. I believe that's the beginning or a new beginning.

Many at our leadership conferences here in the past have had an experience of a fresh filling of the Holy Spirit in their lives. And they discovered it was just a beginning. Because you, when you're filled with God's Spirit, do not suddenly become some kind of evangelical clone.

Jesus said, if any man come after me, let him deny himself, take up the cross daily and follow me. So you need to, by God's grace, by discipline, by learning, by developing godly habits. Billy Graham said the Christian life consists of habits.

This is why we want to get you when you're young. We don't want to just take pastor's conferences, as I often have to, because I know when these pastors are 40 and 50 years of age, they don't change very much after that, though we still try. We want to get people when they're 16, when they're 17, when they're 18.

We want to see them develop godly habits when they're young. And I hope that you will take that as something you should specifically do when you leave here. Lack of love and friendship, acceptance, can be such a discouragement to others.

Thirdly, rigidity. I feel that many Christians, especially who are strong in their doctrinal position, become rigid. It leads to the lay-by of legalism.

If you want to get down the highway, you're not going to park in the lay-by and stay there. And I would encourage you to beware of becoming too rigid. I'm reading a new book called Christians Don't Dance, with an introduction by Tony Compallo.

Oh, what a book. Showing how, as evangelical Christians and biblical Christians, charismatic Christians, different people using different labels, we tend with the basics of the faith to bring a lot of trappings, a lot of rules, a lot of regulations, a lot of no-nos. Now, we know in life there needs to be basic rules, especially for basic situations.

If you join our ship, you're going to have some rules. Don't slam the door on a ship if you're sleeping in this little small cabin and the person next to you slams the door. You think that you clipped the ship.

It's just exploded. And after losing one ship, the whole thing can get a little tense. Beware of rigidness.

Beware of making the narrow road narrower than it is. Praise the Lord. We have been saved.

Jesus said He is the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father but by Him. Jesus said the broad road leads to destruction.

The narrow road leads to eternal life. But some of God's interesting people, the narrow road is not narrow enough. They want to make it narrower.

Only this kind of person really can be on the road. Only those from my denomination or my group or those who think in agreement with me. And how sad it is that so many people are actually deeply hurt by the legalism and the rigidness and the traditionalism that so invades the Church of Jesus Christ.

No movement is without it. OM is not without it. We are all human and we tend to lack discernment between secondary issues and basic biblical issues that every believer needs to practice.

Fourthly, this is going to surprise some of you, forgetfulness. I discourage my wife by my forgetfulness. Often she tells me to get something and I go zooming out with other things on my mind.

I arrive back with the things that I wanted to get but I forget the thing that she asked me to get. For 29 years I've had a ministry of discouragement to my wife. If you in the future think of praying for me, pray for her.

And often it's not big things, little things. I praise God she is so forgiving. But if you can develop a greater ability to organize yourself, that's going to help you.

Not only in your ministry of encouragement, it's going to help you in life in general. Life is more difficult than probably you think at this stage, except the 10% of you who are too negative and you already have life painted too black. But those of you more in the optimist league, the young, innocent, naive, half-educated people, life is tougher, it, as Billy Graham said, is filled with sadness.

You can make one little mistake with your car. First thing that happened to us this morning is we passed a man who just had an accident on the road. Somebody hit him, gave him his license and left.

He was just standing there with his car. I have a phone with me so I phoned the police and was able to help him. And little things in vehicles actually cause death.

Little missed security factors cause airplanes to crash like the Pan Am jet over Lockerbie. Don't think that life is just big things. Life is often little things.

If you don't have a good memory for details, learn to write down. I carry a little tiny computer in my pocket that I can keep memos and things to remember. Nothing is 100% foolproof for a character like me.

Learning to organize your life. Trying to work on areas of forgetfulness. Someone is counting on meeting you at the pizza hut at one.

You forget all about it. Have you ever waited for someone and have them not show up? How many have had that wonderful experience? Of course you had a book and you were reading it and you were so caught up in reading the book that it didn't matter that your friend didn't show up, right? That's called plan B. And I would suggest wherever you go from this leaders conference onward, you carry a book, a Walkman and several cassette tapes. You can get started today.

Number six. No, five. I almost forgot number five.

Extremism. Extremism. Probably those of you who know anything about my burden know that I'm often speaking about balance.

I've even written a book, Revolution of Love and Balance. Which is now going out of print. This is taking its place.

We drop the word balance. It's too, just not a good word, balance. But the fact is we still need balance.

Letting one strong truth bring another strong truth into balance. One of the beautiful things about spiritual balance is that there's plenty of scope for variety. Balance for you will not be balance for me.

Balance for my wife is not balance for me. It's not a narrow thing. It's as broad as your personality in some ways.

Well, not quite that much, but there's plenty of scope. And I believe if you want to be an encourager of people, you have to declare war against extremism. Our extremes hurt people.

Even the extremes that sometimes take place in our churches and fellowships, where people are manipulated, where we try to instantly give people the victory over this and that. Without considering their need, their personality, their bigger picture, their big situation. It'll be a lifelong battle.

And then number six, the biggest discouragement of all, is if you decide to just quit. I call this book, No Turning Back, because one of my greatest burdens is just to encourage people not to quit. Often people think of me as some kind of a missionary speaker, but in many ways I'm a poor missionary speaker because that's not my first burden.

World missions or world evangelism. That is a big burden with me, I can assure you. But my first burden is just to see people going on for God.

Most people are not going to become foreign missionaries. We need more foreign missionaries. We want to pray for that.

We want to work night and day for that. But most people will end up working in a job if they're fortunate enough to get one in their own country. These people must never think that they are second class citizens.

We need senders as much as we need goers. And I think it's just so important to realize that the bottom line is living for God. It's doing God's will where you are.

Then he will lead you into the next plan or into the next step. But whatever you do, no matter how hard, no matter how difficult the way gets, don't quit. Keep on keeping on.

Remember those words in Galatians. Be not weary in well-doing for ye shall reap if ye faint not. I will be very honest.

I have enormous struggle with discouragement. I am too idealistic. Many of my greatest prayers have not been answered.

And that's now 34 years. I was converted to Christ in a Billy Graham meeting at 16 years of age, 34 years ago. And many of my prayers have not been answered.

I'm far more aware of the weaknesses and sins and failures of OM than I am of its great successes. And I just thank God that he can keep a character like me with such a heavy, heavy leaning toward discouragement and even depression, that somehow he can motivate me every day. I've had not one single non-motivated day since my conversion.

Unfortunately, not always at the same motivation. My wife would have left by now if that were the case. She said to me some time ago, just looking at you makes me feel tired.

But I believe that Jesus is on the throne. I know that he lives in me by his Holy Spirit. I know that his word is true.

Life is filled with mysteries. There are many things I don't understand. There are many things that bother me.

But I put my eyes on him and go forward. Great faith is not made in the absence of discouragement or struggles or failures or battles or tears or doubts. Great faith is made as we go through those things, depending upon God, searching his word, keeping our eyes on the Lord Jesus Christ.

And some people give the idea that they are sort of 100% in their faith. No doubts, no questions. Sometimes giving the idea it's wrong even to ask a question.

I don't want to judge those people. There are people with a very seemingly almost 100% non-doubt type of faith. A lot of it depends on how people express themselves.

But I'm a struggler. I'm a doubter. I easily get discouraged, confused and have to battle almost every day.

The battle just to keep going. And I just share this with any of you who at times find the Christian life a struggle. You can't think about encouraging someone else.

You barely encourage yourself. There's great hope for strugglers. There's great hope for characters like me who for a time felt I didn't fit into the church.

I felt God's people were a pain in the neck. I didn't understand what they were going on about. All the divisions, all the confusion.

I developed a little prayer when I thought God's people were a pain in the neck. Thank you, Lord, I'm not a giraffe. My long-standing efforts to be an optimist, they have not all worked.

Now, what are some ways that we can positively encourage others? We've already indirectly touched on many, but let's be more specific. Firstly, of course, our lives, our manner of life. Paul wrote to the Thessalonians and to other churches, and he said, you know my manner of life.

Since we've touched on that strongly, I'll move on to the second point. Under these mega motivators, mega encouragers, if you like that word that's overused these days. Second way to encourage people is through prayer.

Significant amount of my time I give to praying for people. I mix praying with correspondence. When I pray for someone, one out of seven times approximately, I will write them a letter.

A brief letter. Now, I can do more of that than most people, as I have secretaries and I have a little dictaphone. But even if you just write hand notes, you will probably pray for far more people than you would write.

But you can write some of them. As you're praying for people, you can say, Lord, I want to be open, as I'm praying, to drop a line to write to some of these people. So I have a paper, paper handy, or pencil, or word processor, or typewriter, or something.

Prayer for people gives and brings spiritual encouragement. Prayer is linked to the ministry of the miraculous. Don't think, well, praying will encourage them.

If they hear that I'm praying, they'll be encouraged. No. That's not the purpose of prayer, that somebody can hear that you're praying for them, and so they'll be encouraged.

That's a byproduct. There's nothing wrong with that. And I often, when I meet someone that I've been praying for, perhaps almost without thinking, I say, well, it's great to see you.

I've been praying for you. I don't ever mean that as a boast. It's just to say, look, you know, I know you.

There's some relationship here. I remember who you are. And I'm interested in you.

And that will be an encouragement. I have little old ladies come up to me, not so many, and say, I'm praying for you every day. I have many, many who say they're praying, but praying for you every day.

I don't pray for anybody. I don't even pray for myself every day. I don't think I pray for my wife every day.

Lack of discipline in my life. Give me Lord. Someone comes up to me and they say, I'm praying for you every day.

Talk about encouragement. Man, no wonder I'm going despite all my problems. Prayer for people has that indirect encouragement, but it has firstly a powerful, miraculous ministry that God has chosen of helping them.

You're helping them. The Word of God says helping one another through prayer. Don't think of prayer as just some mystical thing where you get nice feelings and you sense the presence of God.

Great. I'm for that. Prayer is practical with a capital P. And we can deliver people from potential suicide through intercession.

We can deliver people from depression through intercession. We can see people healed through intercession. We can touch India and China and Mongolia and South America and Africa and North America and Scotland and the regions beyond all in the same hour through prayer.

How's your prayer life? How's your prayer life? If we take a survey from 1 to 10, 1 to 10. 10 is, you know, high level, everyday powerful prayer, knowing you've seen breakthroughs, seeing breakthroughs, full sense of God's presence as you pray. One is bottom of the scale.

No prayer life, barely an egg. Unbelief, doubt, discouragement, undisciplined. Okay, from 1 to 10, how are you doing? Let's start at 10.

Hands up, all the deceived 10 people. No hands. 9, 8, 7. Come on, some of you are trying to be humble.

6, 5, everybody's at 5, right? 4s, 3s, way too many 3s. 2s, 1, video cameras turn off. Wouldn't it be wonderful if we could go from this weekend with a fresh determination to be men and women of prayer.

This was the biggest decision I made in my life at 17 years of age. I believe it's the reason I was in Mexico as one of God's instruments to begin OM when I was only 19 years of age. And in Spain, pioneering that work when I was 21 or 22 years of age because somehow in God's mercy, I learned how to pray when I was just a teenager.

And I believed it was the most important thing in life. I remember vaguely around that age saying, God, I only want one thing in life. I want to learn to pray.

I never had any plan to start an organization. I had no plan for a couple of ships. I had one or two little ones in the bathtub.

Often, God's working in our life is step by step. It's one step at a time. People come to me with all kinds of ideas.

A man came to me some years ago and he said, I was so inspired when I heard your story about the ships. I'm believing God for a jumbo jet for Jesus. Would you pray with me? A jumbo jet for Jesus.

And I said, well, what have you done up to now? And he hadn't done anything much up to that point. He hadn't laid any foundations in his life. He just had a nice idea.

He had some inspiration because he heard how God worked in somebody else's life. We have to be very careful of trying to copy other people, other movements. We must give far more attention to laying our own foundation.

If you're not praying in five pounds a week for world missions, I doubt if you should jump out of your chair and claim a million pounds for Jesus. So if you have that faith for that, I'd gladly like to meet with you. It's one step at a time.

Prayer, the ministry of prayer, is one of the greatest ways we can encourage people. I hope that that alone will be one of the areas where you take specific steps. And if we can be of any help, some of this literature can be of help.

There are some phenomenal books about prayer. Touch the World Through Prayer by Wesley Duell is one of the most unique books recently published on that subject. If they don't have them at the book table, let me know.

I happen to have an extra supply in the back of the car. Number three, visiting people, giving people of your time. More and more, people are living in their own little world of privacy, the television world with the pulled curtains, where you're hesitant to knock on the door lest you interrupt somebody's watching their favorite program, Dallas or Neighbors or Enemies or one of the other new programs.

Huh. And what a need there is for us to have a ministry of encouragement, it does get more complex. And generally, these days, it is better to phone and find out a convenient time.

We must, if we're going to be in this ministry of encouragement through visitation, be ready for some rejection. We also need sensitivity to know when to have a short visit and when to stay longer. You may go to someone's home.

Generally, you'll be able to tell they want you to stay for a longer time. You'll have to maybe read their hints without feeling rejected. And I want to say something I hope you will not forget.

We have different friendships and different ways of encouraging people, depending on our own weaknesses, personality and ability. Don't feel bad and get depressed because someone doesn't want to be your friend. That is normal.

Part of that is chemistry. Chemistry. That there's something about you that they just maybe find awkward.

Maybe two years later or a year later, you mature in your personality, you drop some of your idiosyncrasies, you get better deodorant, you brush your teeth more, you may get a greater welcome. And I purposely say that because a lot of things that are offensive about us as Christians are practical things. Again, I was just with someone some days ago that had such terrible body odor, I wondered if he went to try to share Jesus Christ, whether they would accept Christ or just pass out.

And that has nothing to do with being slayed in the Spirit. That's called being slayed by the odor. We laugh, but it's interesting that Billy Graham in teaching and in his counselor training programs, generally puts an emphasis on some of these little details.

We live in a day where you can dress quite widely without being much of an offense. Still a problem in some places. If I go to the average evangelical church, generally I don't go like this.

Because for some it is an offense. With young people in a conference like this, probably only an offense for a few. But we need, as Paul said, to be all things to all men to win some, without becoming neurotic on one side or just totally uptight on the other side.

The ministry of encouragement through visits, through giving your time. And if during that visit or giving of your time you can actually help them, I tell you that, big points in heaven. Cup of cold water, look at that.

Reward. In heaven, huh? What do you get for teeth? Learning to serve. We always emphasize in our leadership training programs that our leadership is through servant-ship.

That's why we pushed Chihuahuan's book. Learning to Lead, which is all about servant-leadership. And what a joy to have him with us this weekend.

Number four, and I've already worked into that, love through practical service. We also express love by what we say. Words of encouragement.

There's a lot in the book of Proverbs on that subject. I was selling books door-to-door in the very early days before I ever went overseas or to Mexico. In my own home area, I was selling Christian books and witnessing.

I met a dear woman who told me, she bought a lot of books, really encouraged me. And then she said, she could see I was a young Christian, I want to recommend that you read a proverb every day. And I have been doing that almost my entire Christian life.

There's a neglect of the Proverbs. There's a great emphasis today on praise. There's a new praise chorus every week.

And we're very much into the Psalms. And I'm 100% for it. But in my Bible, after the Psalms, it doesn't end.

It goes right on. Proverbs. And what a message there is.

Because if you get a lot of praise and a lot of worship and a lot of thanksgiving, as important as that is, but you don't get wisdom, you'll end up in one more gospel circus or in a dead-end street of your own making. We need that wisdom of the book of Proverbs. And it speaks about bringing good tidings to people.

It's so easy to always bring bad news. There's always problems. There's always disasters.

There's always people that are being killed on the highways or that are dying of cancer. And if it's a believer, of course, there's the positive element that he's with the Lord. What about when it's not a believer? Difficult, isn't it? Heart-rendering.

We need to know when to speak and when to be silent. Proverbs says, even an idiot is esteemed smart when he keeps his mouth shut. That's a little... That's my own paraphrase.

But it's something like that. Great verse for a character like me. Number four.

That was number four. Number five. Sharing the Word of God.

We encourage people through the Word of God. We might send someone, of course, a portion of Scripture. That's what led to my conversion by going to that Billy Graham meeting because that woman sent me a portion of Scripture through the post.

We can do the same with tracts, books. The number of people that have written me. I always, when I write a letter, put some of these free items in with a letter like what happened to the prayer meeting or that testimony of Eric Little or the thing on the subject of depression.

The number of people, when they write me back, say, thank you for putting in that free leaflet. It was just what I needed on that day. It's not an accident.

My secretaries often pray and give thought to what enclosure. Sometimes I tell them what one to put in. Other times they put it in on their own.

And God uses that. We can encourage people through verbally sharing the Word. And God is going to give some of you the ministry of ministering the Word.

We can also send the Word through the post. Sometimes even a verse on the bottom of your letter under your signature can be an encouragement. The great Bhakt Singh, who founded hundreds of churches in India, I had the privilege of working with him for a number of months over a period of years, would always write a number of verses under his letter.

The ministry of sharing the Word of God. And number six, I just list as little things that often are big. Letters.

How many of you write at least one letter a day? That's nothing. One letter a day. I mean, a chicken could do that blindfolded without a pen.

But how many of you write seven letters a week? You wouldn't write them all on the same day. Seven letters a week. Raise your hand.

Okay, well, I knew this was a beginner's seminar. I would encourage you to change your habits in that area. Especially if you're interested in world missions, because most of us in world missions were here today and were gone tomorrow.

And the way we keep contact is by letters, maybe a postcard. And I would encourage you to write missionaries on the field, to write some of those OMers, and you can get their address. We're actually even offering for sale the little OM address book.

Though it doesn't have everybody's name in it, it may be of some help to you. Other mission societies, friends, relatives, remember birthdays, remember weddings. Keep a list of these things.

If you have a computer, start this kind of information data processing as early in your life as you can. And in a few years, you will have a goldmine of information for prayer, for encouragement. God will lead different people in different ways.

We all have a different amount of time we can give to this. But even with a little bit of time, as you learn to redeem the time, Ephesians chapter 5, you will have time for letter writing, encouraging people through letters. Really, even the authors of some of these books, you think they receive a lot of letters.

They don't. A few do. Gordon MacDonald, very famous man.

He's written many books. But a letter from you after reading that would be an encouragement to him because he's been through something that he'll never forget, or totally, in a sense, recover from. The ministry of letters, and then the telephone.

After six, it's quite inexpensive. I have a cellular phone. It goes with me wherever I go.

I call people from the M1. I call them from the train. I call them from the woods.

I call them from all over places. And I hear from the feedback I get, a lot of it indirect, that it's an encouragement to get a phone call. I called Steve Chilcraft.

British Rail gave him a cell phone. He was in the accident at Pearlie. Steve, the administrator for Love Europe.

This may have already been mentioned. British Rail gave him a cell phone. So I could call into the hospital.

I had visited him, of course. But then a few days later, call in, see how he's doing. He's developed measles in the hospital now.

He needs encouragement. What a motivating ministry. Encouraging people.

Little things. That card that you sent. That little gift, that little token gift.

I love to give gifts to the children. It's a little hard to keep track of it now in OM. We have so many.

I correspond with quite a few children. They often appreciate the letters better than their parents. And it's amazing what a child of seven or eight can write to Uncle George.

Nuggets of truth. It's exciting. And that's the wonderful thing about this ministry.

As you give yourself to others, you will receive so much. Part of the secret of life is to forget yourself a little bit. Except this corn and wheat falling to the ground and die.

It abideth alone. I'm not talking about a masochistic approach to life. I'm not talking about something where you sort of enter into a continual self-denial, which is different from denying self.

But I believe as we get involved with other people, encouraging them, loving them, a lot of our own problems become much smaller. It needs a lot of balance. And one of the things you will have to remember as you go into the ministry of encouragement, perhaps we could list this under the dangers of this ministry, is that you will have to understand your own limitations.

You can only minister and encourage so many people. You can have a large group that you can encourage in a very superficial, very small way. It still may be meaningful.

There's a much smaller group that you can encourage regularly. Some of them will come and go. But I always praise the Lord.

If someone who's getting a lot of encouragement or help from me suddenly gets more help from another OM leader, I say, praise the Lord. There's no jealousy. There's no competition.

We're not building exclusive friendships for our own sake of our own emotional buildup. That factor will be there. We will have to wrestle with that.

But we hold things. How can you say? We hold things with an open hand. If you're playing an important role in someone's life at present and they're getting encouragement, they're getting help from you.

Wonderful. If that changes and they get help from someone else, maybe they'll disagree with you on that on some point. As long as they're going on for God, as long as they love Jesus, as long as they're

functioning somehow by God's power.

That's the main thing. Friendship is not our goal. It's a byproduct.

Knowing God is our goal. Seeing people pressing on for God is our goal. We can be involved through the ministry of encouragement.

Word, little things. Hallelujah. And then number seven.

Encouraging people through giving. This is especially true when we're in missionary work. 50% of all the people in Operation Mobilization are under supported.

The largest single factor I know that discourages people in OM, and it's true in other mission societies, is their failure to see enough support. And many have left over the years because of that. What a blessing you can be in someone's life as you develop a ministry of encouragement through giving.

Even a small token gift, as you may not have much money, can be so meaningful because they know behind that is a thought, a prayer, maybe, hopefully, some love. The ministry of giving, of course, is something you can exercise in your own community, especially when someone is bereaved or going through a great difficulty or trial. We always urge people to have a world vision as well as a local vision because so much of our effort to minister and encourage as British people goes to Britain, where we're trying to find the balance and get people to think of other people in the world.

We have a ministry of sending out books to Christian leaders in various parts of the world, especially in areas where they don't have so much literature, to be an encouragement to them. And of course, at the same time, to help them in their ministry. What are a few other pitfalls? I mentioned, one, the failure to realize your own limitations and therefore get over-committed and get into stressful situations that you will not be able to cope with yourself.

Number two, of course, is linked with your own walk with God, that you get so involved in encouraging people that your own relationship with God himself weakens. Dr. Schaffer shared with me long before he died that his great struggle was to know how much to take in and how much to give out. A period in my life, and I'm still struggling with it, I get involved with so many people, and I do love people because that's the work of grace in my heart by the Holy Spirit and want to just give and give and give and give.

I found that in that kind of commitment, I easily neglected God himself, worshiping him, getting alone with him, getting more time in his word, reading some of these great books that can build me up and help me to make changes in my life that need to be changed. It's easy to read some rather heavy books, like Gordon MacDonald's earlier book, *Ordering Your Private World*, and feel incredibly intimidated. Much depends somewhat on your temperament.

And so that's another pitfall, to beware of intimidation. You will have failure in your ministry to encourage. There's no way you're not going to have failure.

And you need to make sure that you don't go around putting yourself down. Failure can be the backdoor to success. We know it takes eight years to become a surgeon, and it's going to take many years for some of you to develop highly tuned pastoral gifts of encouragement.

In the process of developing and growing, and God doesn't deny your personality, some of you have personalities that more easily encourage people. Fine, you are responsible for that personality. Some of you have personalities that don't easily encourage people.

You are responsible for that personality. We're all different. Don't try to put your Volkswagen engine in a Rolls Royce.

Don't try to be a ten-talent Christian if you're only a two-talent Christian. Probably most of us aren't sure how many talents we have. Whatever you do, on the bottom line, accept yourself, God's forgiveness of you, God's grace toward you, God's love for you, God's mercy.

Don't get down on yourself so that when there's failure in this ministry of encouraging, you get discouraged. Because when you get discouraged, you will drag other people with you. A character named Charlie Tremendous Jones said he wasn't going to tell anybody when he was discouraged.

I learned from him because I tended at times to be a little too free in sharing my discouragements. And I learned from him, he may be the other extreme, I don't agree with him fully, but he said he doesn't share even so much with his wife his discouragements because when he shares his discouragements with his wife, his wife gets discouraged. And there's nothing that discourages him more than when his wife gets discouraged.

So when his wife gets discouraged, it discourages him. And then he shares his discouragement with his wife who gets more discouraged and it discourages him. Where are you going to end up in that syndrome? So I believe often at times, we take our discouragements and we put them at the feet of Jesus.

And we say, Lord, you know my heart, I'm not going to go through this day moaning about this. I'm not going to go through this day just telling people how I'm struggling with discouragement and asking everybody I meet to pray for me because I'm down and I need a spiritual lift up. But I somehow, I'm going to stand on your word.

I'm going to deny self. I'm going to be honest, but I'm going to think on that which is pure and lovely and a good report according to the book Philippians chapter four. I think it's verse eight.

I've had to take that position as someone with a cynical streak, a negative streak. And with a lot of struggles, I've had to take that position as much as possible. Nine times out of ten, by God's grace, what comes out of my mouth, I want it to be positive.

I want it to be encouraging. I want it to be a praise the Lord. Bless God.

Hallelujah. Let's tackle the devil. Run for it.

Go for it. Whatever terminology you want to develop. And our time is up.

So let's pray. We have a question box up here. You can put your questions in.

I think I'm on the panel. We hope that's not too painful. Painful panels.

So you can put your question there. You can listen to these tapes and get some a lot of follow up on what I've shared. And you can feel free to write and ask specific questions.

Let's pray. Father, we thank you that we have had this opportunity to deal with this important subject that is often neglected or considered as secondary. And we believe our God that you are calling us into a ministry of encouragement.

We believe you are calling us into positive action through our lives, through prayer, through visiting and giving of our times, through love and practical service, through the word and sharing and witnessing. For as we lead people to your son, Jesus, that's the greatest encouragement, the greatest thing that can ever happen to them in all their life. And the joy of seeing it happen will encourage us more than almost anything we can ever do.

And also, Lord, through those little things, whether it's a letter, a phone call, a free book, a cassette tape, a gift, a thank you note, some flowers or 101 other things that we can do that may seem small, but can encourage others. Oh, Lord, revolutionize our lives through what we have heard here this morning. And also, Lord, through giving of what we have and of our resources to others, that they may carry out the vision they have or be helped in their own situation.

Lord, keep us from the pitfalls of getting overextended or ending up in confusion and discouragement ourselves. Enable us to bounce back from failure. Keep us from any subtle forms of jealousy or efforts to dominate people's lives.

And help us, oh Father, that we may not get into extremism on one hand or lukewarmness on the other. Deliver us from rigidness, forgetfulness, lack of love, and subtle forms of inconsistency. That, Lord, we may serve you with all of our hearts and that many people may be in heaven ultimately because we have obeyed that which you've given to us this morning.

In Jesus' name, amen. God bless you.

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