

The Duty of Encouragement

by J.R. Miller

The duty of encouragement is to watch for opportunities to put cheer into others' lives and to never utter a discouraging word.

Scripture: Proverbs 12:25, Romans 15:5, Ephesians 4:29, 1 Thessalonians 5:11, Hebrews 3:13

Topics: "Encouragement", "Hope"

Description

J.R. Miller emphasizes the vital duty of encouragement in his sermon, highlighting that many people face hidden struggles and despair in their lives. He urges listeners to cultivate the habit of offering cheer and support, as discouraging words can have devastating effects on those already burdened by life's challenges. Miller warns against the tendency of leaders to focus on hardships rather than inspiring hope, advocating for a more uplifting approach in all interactions. He illustrates the transformative power of encouragement through various examples, stressing that a single word of cheer can change the course of someone's day or even life. Ultimately, he calls on everyone to be a source of light and hope, fostering an environment where individuals can thrive despite their struggles.

Transcript

There are few things to which we need to train ourselves more diligently and conscientiously than to the habit of giving cheer and encouragement. To many people life is hard. It is full of struggles. It has more of shadow than of sunshine. Its duties are stern and severe. Its burdens press heavily. We know not how many of those whom we meet have been overcome in the struggle of today or of yesterday, and are cast down or almost in despair. We know not behind what smiling faces are sore hearts.

We see not the secret sorrows that weigh like mountains upon many a gentle spirit. We do not understand with what difficulties the paths of many pilgrim feet are beset. There is not a heart without its bitterness. Work is hard. Burdens press heavily. Battles are fierce, and are often lost. Hopes fade like summer roses, leaving disappointment and dead ashes. The constant and invariable gravitation of human hearts is toward discouragement and depression. An honest watching of our own inner experiences for a week will verify all this, and our personal experience is but a reflection of what is going on all about us.

A few lives may be more sunny than ours, while in most the shadows are deeper, the struggles hotter and the path steeper and harder. While, then, there is so much that is disheartening, it becomes our duty to watch for every opportunity to put a little bit of brightness or better cheer into the lives of those we meet. It would seem to be clear that we should never needlessly utter a discouraging word. The guides caution

travelers at certain points on the Alps not to speak even in a whisper, lest the reverberations of their tones should start an avalanche from its perfect poise and send it crashing down.

There are hearts so poised on the edge of despair that one dispiriting word will cast them down. It is, therefore, disloyalty to humanity to speak a word whose influence tends to quench hope, to cool life's ardor or to cast a shadow over any sunny heart. And yet there are many who do not remember this. There are preachers who utter discouraging messages. If a commander, leading his army in battle, were to issue woeful proclamations, dwelling upon the difficulties and dangers of the hour, the power of the enemy and the uncertainty of the issue, he would ensure the defeat of his army and the failure of his cause.

And yet there are men set to lead in the army of Christ who ever dwell mournfully on the hardships and discouragements of the conflict, with scarcely a brave, heroic, hopeful word. Should it not be the office of all who occupy responsible places as leaders, where their every word or tone has a mighty influence over other lives, carefully and conscientiously to refrain from ever uttering one sentence which would check the enthusiasm of any hopeful heart or add to the fear and depression of one who is already downcast?

There is enough in life's sorrows and trials to dishearten without this. Men and women need incitement, encouragement, inspiration. Many a church is kept from aggressive work and earnest progress by the discouraging utterances of a timid leader. One of the essential qualifications of leadership is large hopefulness. Then, in all life's relations, there are many people who are always saying disheartening things. Meet them when you may, speak to them on whatever theme you choose, they will leave a depressing influence upon you.

They take gloomy views of everything. They are always dominated by discouragements. They see the difficulties first of all in any enterprise or scheme. They regard the present time as the worst for the undertaking of any new work. This is the most corrupt age the world has ever seen; men never were so depraved; the Church never was so worldly, so shorn of power; there never was so little true piety. Then touch upon their own personal affairs, and they grow still more gloomy.

They air all their griefs. They have a volume of lamentations to pour into your ears. Ask their counsel in any matter of your own or speak to them of any plan of yours, and they will shake their heads and point out to you every unfavorable aspect of it. They seem to live to discourage others, to quench hope, to repress ardor and enthusiasm, to pour darkness into bright lives, and to spread demoralization and panic wherever they move. The chilling influence of such lives it is impossible to estimate.

To meet them in the morning is to have a day of depression. On the other hand, there are those who live to give cheer and encouragement. They may have burdens, or even sore griefs, of their own, but they hide them away deep in their own hearts, not carrying them so as to cast their shadows on any other life. When you meet them, it is as when you go out on a June morning under a cloudless sky, with dewy fragrance breathing all around and bird songs filling the air. There is a loving radiance in their countenances.

Even if you do not know them personally, and merely meet them without salutation on the street, there is something in their expression that leaves a benediction on you whose holy influence follows you all day like the memory of a lovely picture or the refrain of a sweet song. If you have only a greeting as you hurry by, it is so cordial, so hearty, so sincere, that its inspiration tingles all day in your veins. When you talk with them, you do not hear one gloomy word. They take hopeful views of everything.

They always find some favorable light in which to view every discouraging event or circumstance. No ardor is quenched, no hope is dimmed, no enthusiasm is repressed in your heart, as you take counsel with them. They seek to remove difficulties, to open paths, to inspire fresh courage, to make you stronger, and to add to your determination to succeed. You always go out from a few minutes talk with them with new impulses stirring in your breast, with lighter step, brighter face, deeper joy, and with the assurance of victory thrilling in your soul.

The ministry of such lives is a most blessed one. What men need most in this world's struggle and strife is not usually direct help, but cheer. A child was seen at a high window in a burning building. A brave fireman started up a ladder to try to rescue it. He had almost gained the window, when the terrible heat appeared too much for him. He seemed to stagger and was about to turn back, when some one in the throng below cried, "Cheer him!" A loud cheer went up, and in a moment more he had the imperilled child in his arm, snatched from an awful death.

Many men have fainted and succumbed in great struggles whom one word of cheer would have made strong to overcome. We should never, then, lose an opportunity to say an inspiring word. We do not know how much it is needed or how great and far-reaching its consequences may be. One night long ago, during a terrible storm on the coast of England, a clergyman left his own cosy home, hurried away to the headland and lighted the beacon. Months afterwards he learned that that light had saved a great ship with its freight of human life.

We know not to what imperilled interests and hopes our one word or act of encouragement may carry rescue and safety. Nor do we know what destinies may be wrecked and lost by our failure to speak cheer. In the training and education of the young there is a great call for encouragement. Parents are too apt to criticize their children and find fault with them for the imperfect manner in which they do their work. In too many homes the prevalent temper is that of fault-finding and censure.

Is it any wonder that the children sometimes grow discouraged and feel that there is no use in trying to do anything right? They never receive a word of commendation. Nothing that they do is approved. The defects and mistakes in their work are always pointed out, oftentimes impatiently, and no kindly notice is ever taken of any improvement or progress made. Their little plans and ambitions are laughed at. Their daydreams and childish fancies are ridiculed. No interest is taken in their studies.

They are not merely left to struggle along without encouragement or appreciation, but every budding aspiration is met by the chilling frost of criticism. If we adults had to make headway in life against such repressing influences as many children meet, we should soon faint by the way and give up in despair. There is a better way. "A kiss from my mother," said Benjamin West, "made me a painter." Had it not been for her approving love and the cheer and encouragement which she gave to him when he showed her his first rude effort, he would never have gone on.

A frown, a rebuke, a cold, indifferent criticism or a look or word of ridicule would have so discouraged him that he would never have tried again. No doubt many a grand destiny has been blighted in early youth by discouragement, by disapproval or by a sneer; and, on the other hand, proper encouragement and appreciation woo out the modest and shrinking powers of genius and start men on grand careers. Wise parents and teachers understand this. They notice every improvement, every mark of progress, and speak approvingly of it.

They commend whatever is well done. They never chide for faults or mistakes when the child has done its best. They point out the defects in such a way as not to give pain or to discourage, but rather to stimulate to new effort. They never laugh at a child's visions or fancies or ridicule its plans, but regard them as the earliest germs of a beautiful life which they must try to woo out. They do not ridicule a child's answers or rebuke its questions. They treat every manifestation of its young life as tenderly as the skillful gardener treats his most delicate plants and flowers.

They seek to make it summer about the budding life, so as never to stunt any nascent growth, but to warm and cheer and to call out every lovely possibility of strength and beauty. A naval officer who rose to high honor relates his first experience under fire. The conflict was very fierce, and at the beginning his terror was very great. He was almost utterly unmanned. The commander of the ship noticed his terror, and, coming to him in the gentlest manner, stood beside him for a few moments and told him of his experience when first called into danger.

He assured the young officer that he understood his feelings perfectly and sympathized with him. He then encouraged him with the further assurance that the feeling of dread would soon pass off and his courage would return. Had the commander approached him with stern reproach and rebuke, he might have become utterly panic-stricken. As it was, his words of sympathy made him brave as a lion. Thus I read the duty of giving encouragement. It is the sunshine most lives need. Childhood, youth, struggling genius, fainting energy, wearied hope, tempted virtue, breaking hearts,--all are waiting for sympathy and cheer.

Those who would do good must learn this secret--pastor, teacher, editor, parent. Disheartening words anywhere are treasonable words. They cause fear, anxiety, panic, loss of courage, rout, disaster. There are discouragements enough in most lives already. Let us never add to life's burdens, but let us rather at every possible opportunity breathe cheer, fresh incitement, new courage. He that lives thus, even in the lowliest walk, will make brightness and song wherever he goes, and will have a choral entrance into joy at the end.

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