The Ministry of Encouragement

by J.R. Miller

J.R. Miller's sermon highlights the transformative power of encouragement and the dangers of discouragement in our lives and communities.

Scripture: Numbers 13:31, 1 Thessalonians 5:11, Hebrews 3:13
Topics: "Encouragement", "Community Support"

Description

J.R. Miller emphasizes the vital role of encouragement in the Christian life, contrasting it with the detrimental effects of discouragement. He critiques the notion of a somber, silent spirituality, arguing that true Christian living is about spreading cheer and uplifting others. Miller illustrates the harm caused by discouragers, who sap the strength and hope of those around them, and calls for believers to actively encourage one another. He highlights the power of words to either uplift or dishearten, urging the church to be a community of encouragement rather than one of criticism. Ultimately, he advocates for a life filled with hope and support, reflecting the teachings of Jesus.

Transcript

"Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing." 1 Thessalonians 5:11

"But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness." Hebrews 3:13

Nothing is more worth while in this world--than encouragement. No mission is more divine--than the encourager's. In no other way can we do more good--than by going about, speaking words of encouragement and cheer.

In Westmeal, near Antwerp, there is a convent of Catholic Trappist monks who represent a strangely perverted conception of Christianity. There are thirty-six monks who live there together, under the 'vow of perpetual silence'. They dress in rough sackcloth, with ropes about their waists, their heads shaved, and their beards uncut. They live on bread, sour milk, and vegetables. They sleep on hard boards, and spend their days in frigid and solemn silence. If a visitor speaks to one of these monks, the monk draws his hood closer about his head, and moves away. Each day he walks in the garden and looks into a grave opened, and ready for the one of the company who is first to die. This, it is claimed--is a 'high ideal of Christian living'. This order of monks suppose that they are illustrating in a lofty way the holiness and beauty of

Christianity.

But the New Testament teaches no such living as that! Jesus Christ did not live such a life. He did not walk about in silence. He was the sunniest of men! He was ready to give cheer to all he met. He taught his followers, to let their light shine on the world's darkness. He would have us hide within our hearts--our cares and sufferings; and give out only blessing and gladness.

Yet there always have been those who pervert the teachings of Christ, in this matter of cheerful living, and make their religious life dreary and disheartening. Instead of being helpers of the faith and joy of others--they are hinderers! Instead of making others stronger for struggle, for burden-bearing, and for duty--they make it harder for them to do their part!

It is reported that during the siege of Ladysmith, a civilian was arrested, tried by court-martial, and sentenced to a year's imprisonment for being a discourager! The man would go about, saying disheartening words to the armed men on duty. He struck no blow for the enemy. He was not disloyal to the country. But he was a discourager. It was a critical time. The fortunes of the town and its brave garrison were trembling in the balance. Instead of heartening the men on whom the defense depended, and making them braver and stronger--he put faintness into their hearts, and made them less courageous. The court-martial adjudged it a crime to speak disheartening words at such a time. And the court-martial was right!

There are men in every community, who are continually doing the same thing. They go about everywhere, as discouragers! Happy is that church--which has not one such discouragers on its roll!

Discouragers are often good and upright people, perhaps active in many ways. But they never see the hopeful side of the church's life. If you talk to them of something that is encouraging, growing enthusiastic in your narration, they will come in with their dismal "but", and dampen your ardor with questions or suppositions meant to discount your hopefulness and quench the flame of your enthusiasm. They are never known to say a word of hearty, unqualified approval of anything! There is always "some fly in the ointment". The minister is a faithful man--"BUT if he would only preach more thus and thus--he would do greater good." Then, he is not as faithful a pastor as he might be. The church seems to be prospering. There are many additions to it from time to time. The financial reports are good. BUT--there is something not altogether satisfactory. Such is their outlook on everything in the church life!

These church people never imagine that they are disloyal to their spiritual home. They would not dream of overtly hurting the church. They think they are among its most faithful and useful members! But all the while, they are making it harder for every other member they speak to--to continue loyal and earnest. They are lessening the pastor's influence, and robbing him of power. They are putting discouragement into the heart of everyone they meet! Such members are real enemies of Christ! If an ecclesiastical court-martial could inflict upon them some sort of punishment which would cure them of their grievous fault--it would be a blessing to many people, and the church would have reason to rejoice and thank God!

But not in churches only are discouragers found--they are everywhere! Business men meet them continually. They are always saying disheartening words. They discount all prosperity. They are prophets of evil wherever they go. The 'sweetest happiness' has some alloy for them. If they made only themselves wretched by their miserable pessimism, there would be less need to trouble ourselves. If they persisted in being unhappy themselves, we could not help it; and if that were the end of it--we might accord them the privilege without regret. But they are messengers of discouragement to everyone they meet. They stir up

discontent wherever they move. Like the unhappy civilian above, they go among those who are carrying burdens, cares, and responsibilities, and by their depressing talk--make them less able to endure, less heroic and strong for struggle. Thus their influence works ill to everyone around them!

"But the other men who had explored the land with him answered, 'We can't go up against them! They are stronger than we are!' So they spread discouraging reports about the land among the Israelites: 'The land we explored will swallow up any who go to live there. All the people we saw were huge. We even saw giants there, the descendants of Anak! We felt like grasshoppers next to them, and that's what we looked like to them!' Then all the people began weeping aloud, and they cried all night!" Numbers 13:31-14:1

At some points in the Alps, the guides warn tourists not to talk nor sing, nor even to whisper, lest the reverberation of their words in the air may start an avalanche from its poise on the mountain, and bring it down upon the villages and homes in the valley. There are men and women who are carrying such loads of duty, anxiety, or sorrow--that the slightest addition to the weight would crush them. They are battling bravely against odds. They are holding out under great pressure, sustained by a trembling hope of getting through, at last, successfully. They are bearing up under a burden of difficulty or trouble, comforted by the expectation that in the end--their darkness will turn to light. But everything is "in the balance".

Then along comes one of these gloomy discouragers. He has no perception of the fitness of things. He lacks that delicate, sympathetic feeling which enables men of a finer grain and a nobler quality--to enter into the experience of others and put strength into their hearts. He discovers the trouble through which his friends are passing. But instead of speaking a word of cheer to help them to be victorious, he talks in a pessimistic or disheartening way which makes their difficulties seem greater, their burdens heavier, and their sorrows altogether hopeless!

It is hard to be patient with such people, for they are really enemies of human happiness! They make life immeasurably harder for everyone they meet. They take the brightness out of the sunniest day; the blue out of the clearest sky; and something of the gladness out of the happiest heart. Then they make work harder for every toiler--and pain keener for every sufferer! There ought to be a law making it a crime--for one man to discourage another, and affixing severe penalties to every violation of this law!

How much better it would be--if instead of being discouragers, we would all learn to be encouragers of others! The value of words of cheer is incalculable!

There is an old story of a fireman who was climbing up a ladder amid smoke and flame, trying to reach a high window--to rescue a child from a burning building! The man had almost gained the window--but the heat was so intense, and the smoke so blinding, that he staggered on the ladder and seemed about to turn back. The great crowd below was watching him with breathless interest and, seeing him waver and hesitate, began to "cheer" him! This nerved the fireman anew for his heroic task, and in a moment the brave fellow had entered the house and soon returned, saving the child. It is 'cheer' that people need, not discouragement, when they are fighting a hard battle!

Men who give us only their doubts and fears, are misanthropists. True philanthropy brings us hope and heartening. The truest helpers of others--are those who always have words of exhortation and inspiration to speak, who always are encouragers.

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