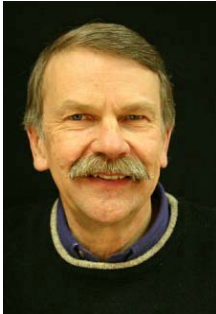


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The Power of Encouragement

“Therefore encourage on another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.” (1 Thessalonians 5:11)

Why are we sometimes hesitant in giving encouragement? Why do we hold back, when we have the power to build someone’s confidence?

Encouragement is not to be confused with the gushing of “Pollyanna” sentiments or the superficial expressions of positive generalities, like so many cheap greeting cards. Rather, encouragement goes deep, it names and validates another.

Encouragement is fuelled by grace. We give because we have been given. We bless because we have been blessed. Out of hearts that have received the encouragement of God’s saving grace, we give affirmation and express appreciation in order “to build each other up.” Intentional, meaningful encouragement is a power for mentoring one another and for building the church.

We associate the Apostle Paul with strong and sometime controversial admonishments, yet the reflex to encourage is found everywhere in his writing and ministry. In letters penned in prison cells he offers generous encouragement to the church and its leaders. On a storm-tossed ship, we hear Paul urging his dispirited shipmates to eat some food and as a result, “they were all encouraged.” (Acts 27:36)

In the above text, not only does Paul coach the Thessalonians to encourage one another in the faith, he also affirms that they are already doing so. Embedded in his admonition is encouragement!

We have at our disposal a great deal of power to encourage and empower one another, but we often choose to be silent in response to a well planned worship service or the first and perhaps tentative offering of service in the church. A spirit of critically sniffing out the quality of another’s contribution too often stifles encouraging feed-back. Aloof critique too often reigns. Picky analysis dampens expressions of appreciation. Consequently, our faith communities are encouragement-challenged.

Where does this reticence to encourage come from?

“When I grew up, we were told that to praise someone or show appreciation was to raise that person to a higher level and to invite a spirit of pride. So we did not give positive feed-back,” explained one person.

How can the power of encouragement be released among us? In giving attention to the givers of gifts being offered; then giving affirmation and expressing appreciation. The result? Affirmation, validation and empowerment; in a word, encouragement.

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