

## Message Notes October 25<sup>th</sup>, 2020

### The Good and Beautiful Community Week 7: The Encouraging Community

(Ephesians 4:1; 1 Thessalonians 5:14-16; Colossians 3:16; Hebrews 10:23-25)

- **10%**

- Today, we're talking about *encouragement* in the community of Christ-followers called the church. And encouragement in this context means not just "making someone feel good," but it means building-up, motivating, and spurring each other on towards the fullness of Christ. That means that today, I'm not just going to try and make you feel good, but I'm going to *challenge you* as well: because we *challenge* the people we love and believe in, especially when there is an all-important goal in sight. Are you ready? Let's do this.
- Ten percent.
  - Dallas Willard once estimated that in the average church, only about 10% of the members actually want to grow spiritually. Only 10% of the congregation are ready to take action to grow in God's grace as disciples of Jesus. The other 90% are content with the status quo.
- Around the same time, George Barna worked on a massive research project where 15,000 people all over America were interviewed over 6 years to gauge where Americans were at in the process of faith development. Their research revealed that people found themselves in 10 different "transformational stops," in that journey. Here were the numbers they released in 2011:
  - 1% were *unaware of sin*, just completely unaware of it. 16% were *indifferent to sin*, they knew about it, but didn't care. 39% were *worried about sin*, but had no idea what to do with it. 9% were *forgiven for sin*, they had placed their faith in the God of grace. 24% were *involved in faith activities*, they were engaging in a faith community or spiritual practices of some kind. Now that covers 89% of people: they are mostly aware of sin, and some of them know they're forgiven and are willing to show up to some kind of spiritual activity like Sunday worship.
  - Here are the rest: 6% have a *holy discontent*, they know all this stuff but they hunger for more, they want to grow. 3% are *broken by God*, they're ready for surrender, repentance, and reevaluating their whole life to align with God. 1% are in a place of *surrender and submission*, they're not just "doing faith activities," they're willing to submit every part of their life to Christ. .5% are in a place of *profound love for God* and .5% are in a place of *profound love for others*.
- So, Barna research confirmed Dallas Willard's assumption that only about 10% of Christians are not content with the status quo—they know there's something more God has for us and they're willing to wrestle and be humbled and surrender to pursue it.
- How about you? Are you one of those 10%? Or are you more in the 90% who would be content to just show up and kind of coast through?
  - Do these numbers apply to us? Or do we have more than 10% who want to take their faith in Christ seriously, who want to be active disciples of Jesus, who want to learn what it means to *thrive in Christ*? I think it's more than 10%, but how much more?
  - Do you hunger for more of God? Does your heart beat for Christ's mission or do you just want to keep God around to bless your own plans for life? Do you *want* to want more?
- Christians, we are here for one reason: to make disciples who make disciples. A disciple is a *student*, an *apprentice*—someone who is in process.
  - We are here to *encourage each other to grow*. I know one thing for sure: I'm not where I was, thank God, but I'm definitely not where I want to be. I want to be able to say with Paul, "...*one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus,*" (Phil. 3:13).
- You see, what I'm doing right now is trying to encourage and admonish and provoke you, because I love you and you're my family in Christ. We do have a mission. We do have a vision. And it's too important to fall asleep on.
  - Paul said in 1 Thessalonians, "We urge you, beloved, to admonish the idlers, encourage the faint hearted, help the weak, be patient with all of them." *Admonish, encourage, help, be patient*. This is the language of community. We like that word *encourage*, but we're not so comfortable

with *admonish*. But admonishment is a dimension of love: we have to be willing to challenge and be challenged by each other in love. We won't grow without it.

- **No Discipleship Without Relationship**

- Here's what I know: *we need each other in this journey*. There is no discipleship without *relationship*.
- God set this up as a *community* where we meet together to worship, to share life, to build each other up in love, to challenge each other to let go of all that holds us back and take hold of all that God offers us in Christ. *We need each other*.
  - Hebrews 10 says, "...let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching."
  - I love this—when it says "spur one another on," the word is literally "provoke" one another. This is an aggressive word: it means a provocation that jabs or cuts so that they *must* respond.
  - You know when you were a kid and your sibling kept bugging you and poking you until you finally went off? "Ahhh!!!" They *provoked* you.
  - Or better yet, if you've ever seen a gym where people are spurring each other on, "Come on! You got this! One more! Harder! I know you're stronger than that! Let's go!"
  - I picture a football team training, coaxing each other on the field: they've got a coach, they've got a goal, they're pursuing it as a team, spurring each other on, provoking each other to grow.
- As a Church, we've got to be *together*. We've got to meet and encourage one another, provoke one another the same way toward faith in action for Christ: "Come on, you can do this! You were made for this! Take hold of all God has for you, he's giving you power to overcome that sin, to find freedom in that place, to love that difficult person, to share Christ with that neighbor! We can do this, He is with us! Let's go!"
  - So, when I opened with this 10% who actually want to grow and the rest of the 90% who are content with the status quo, I'm trying to provoke you! I'm trying to encourage you, to inspire you, to get after it together.
  - Our vision is *thriving in Christ* base on John 15. We want you to be here because you want to grow, because you want to develop an intimate relationship with the Triune God. We want you to experience the journey of deep, deep inner-healing with Christ, with transformation gradually working into every part of your life. Becoming holy like He is holy.
  - If you're feeling sluggish, stick with it, we'll spur each other on! If you're feeling despair, take heart, we'll encourage each other! If you're feeling weak, rest in God's strength, we'll help each other! All of this, because we are the Good and Beautiful Community of God, where Christ is all and Christ is in all.
- I would not be here, I would not be me, if it wasn't for some brothers and sisters throughout the course of my journey, who encouraged and provoked me, who admonished me and helped me, who were patient with me. I need these people in my life. I've got people I talk to every week: we ask each other questions like, "How is your soul? Where have you failed and need forgiveness? What are your victories? How is God working in your life? What needs to change?" We are free to share vulnerably. We talk, we listen, we love. We pray together.
  - I fill my schedule with this stuff, whether it's a band meeting, or a prayer meeting, or a mentoring meeting, a coaching session—I fill my life with this because frankly, *I would not survive as a pastor or as a disciple in this world without the direct encouragement of other believers*. *I would have perished years ago without their support*.
  - We need each other. Maybe one of the greatest lacks for many Christians today is the opportunity for *direct, personal encouragement and accountability*. They have opportunities for worship, for Bible studies and devotions, even for service—but not to be encouraged personally.
- **John Vs. George**
- Have you ever heard the names John Wesley and George Whitfield? In the 18<sup>th</sup> century when the First Great Awakening was just beginning to swell up in England and America, John Wesley

and George Whitfield were two of the central figures of this era of national revival. They were both ministers in the church of England, but their holy discontent with the “status quo” of the church spurred them to do bold things.

- Rather than standing behind the pulpit every Sunday, they began to travel the countryside and preach out in the fields to the masses. Thousands would gather to hear them preach and their ministries would be a part of literally changing history.
- George was a far better preacher: he was one of *the greatest*. He was incredibly gifted and anointed and saw tens of thousands converted in his lifetime. John was not as good of a preacher, but this is what set his ministry apart:
  - Wherever he went, he not only preached the Gospel, but he organized people into groups of fellowship to continue to grow and encourage each other. He called them societies, classes and bands: they were not to replace the church, but to give people a community of encouragement in the life of Holiness so they would go back into their congregations and affect transformation. This strategy was a key part of Wesley’s ministry and the Methodist Movement that would become one of the largest protestant denominations in the world.
- George Whitfield was a stronger preacher, but he had no strategy once people were converted, he just assumed that was enough. Wesley would preach *and* involve people in these networks of community with a high level of commitment and accountability. Both George and John reflected later in their lives that the key factor was connecting people in fellowship where they would continue to grow: without this, people would accept Christ, but with little long-term change.
- In his journal, Wesley remarked on a region in which he preached extensively, but never established any Methodist societies. He saw a wave of revival, but when he observed the community after 20 years, there was little to no evidence of change. He concluded, *“I was more convinced than ever that the preaching like an apostle, without joining together those that are awakened and training them up in the ways of God, is only begetting children for the murder. How much preaching has there been for these twenty years all over [this region]! But no regular societies, no discipline, no order or connection. And the consequence is that nine in ten of those once awakened are now faster asleep than ever.”* We need each other.
- **Talk to Somebody**
  - I know there are some here who are dealing with major baggage: you’ve got wounds and traumas that still need healing, and it’s a long, arduous process. I know there are some who are dealing with besetting sins: something has caught you in its net, you’re stuck in this love-hate cycle of temptation and shame, and you’re aching for freedom. I know there are some who are just stuck: there’s nothing major, it’s not a deep wound or a secret sin, you’re just in this spiritual “blah” where you’ve lost sight of the vision and the passion of the Kingdom.
    - Here’s my encouragement to you: *let someone in*. Find a friend in Christ who you trust to bear the burden with you. It can take incredible courage, but it might be the first step towards breakthrough, letting the Light in. If it’s something really deep or traumatic, it might take more than just a friend, you might need a counselor or a pastor who is trained. But let someone in.
  - So, I’m giving you this challenge: if this is not already a regular part of your life, find a friend or two this week, fellow Christians who want to grow. Get together to talk and pray. Meet at least one person and ask each other these three questions: *How is your soul? What are your struggles and successes? How is God working in your life?* Then pray for each other.
    - If Dallas Willard and George Barna are right, only about 10% of you will do this—that’s like 20 given our averages online and in person. But I wonder if we can go beyond that? How many of you want to grow?
    - I wonder if we would all make a commitment today that we want to become thriving followers of Jesus, not just isolated consumers of religious activities. That we as a church would not be content to coast in the status quo. That we want the fullness of what Christ has for His people, for this moment and this hour. This is my challenge to you, this is my encouragement to you, because this is God’s call for us. Will you accept?