

Wednesday Night BIBLE STUDY

Wednesday, February 15, 2012 – First Baptist Church Buda
Midweek Prayer Meeting & Bible Study

DANGEROUS FELLOWSHIP

“Encouragement and Availability”

Numbers 11:1-15, 1 Kings 19:1-21, Hebrews 10:1-25

“Many (today) have become (so) fed up with church (that they) seek fellowship through viewing a worship service on television, but this misses the picture. If you are one of those who gets their religion by watching religious broadcasts on the TV, or listening to the gospel via radio, you might want to step up to the set after a service and ‘Give your TV a great big hug.’ Foolish, isn’t it? The electronic religion of multitudes of people creates an emptiness—interpersonal relationships are so desperately needed to keep our faith glowing and growing. If you drop off your associations with other Christians and disassociate yourself from them in worship and service, you’ll run out of spiritual fervor and dedication in a short time. There is no substitute for “going to church and worshipping with others of like precious faith.”¹ – Joel S. McCraw

- 1. What do you think of this quote? What is he saying? Do you agree or disagree? Why?**
- 2. What do you think this quote reveals about how people may view fellowship?**
- 3. What do you think this quote reveals about the church today? What does it reveal about fellowship within the church?**

The fellowship that welded the early church together was something else! Those persecuted, mistreated saints remained undaunted in their determination and love. A major factor that brought this about was their mutual ministry to one another as members of the same family – God’s family. Previous studies have introduced us to the ingredients that comprised the koinonia (fellowship) of the first century Christians. Here we consider two final ingredients – their encouragement of, and availability to one another, but first let’s briefly review the essential elements of this “dangerous”... risky, sometimes costly fellowship that we have already discussed

Essentials Elements in Koinonia:

- 1. Love and acceptance–** *“I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power,*

together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ.” – Ephesians 3:16-16

Genuine fellowship involved first sharing in something with someone, and second, sharing of something with someone. Abrasiveness, insensitivity, and a judgmental spirit must be replaced by “agape” – “love which seek the highest good of the other person, getting behind them so as to help or direct them to reach God’s goal for their life.” Acceptance is demonstrated by making it safe for another to be themselves.

2. **Honesty and humility** – ***“Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up in him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work. So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking.” – Ephesians 4:14-16***

Love and truth are inseparable, and truth must be the garment in which love is housed. Humility asks a tough question, “How can I be of assistance to another, instead of feeling discouraged because no one else has helped me?”

3. **Concern and restoration** – ***“Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him (or her), gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.” – Galatians 6:1-2***

To fulfill the law of Christ, one Christian must bear the burdens of another, particularly the one of the brother or sister who has fallen spiritually or morally. Beyond prayer, this requires time spent with the one who has failed. While pointed fingers are unacceptable, actions motivated by gentleness and love will restore.

4. **Confession and forgiveness (James 5:16)** – ***“Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.”-James 5:16***

These two cannot operate apart from a prepared atmosphere of freedom and sensitivity, and require frank, courageous willingness to admit personal need.

5. **Encouragements and availability** – ***“Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another – and all the more as you see the Day approaching.”-Hebrews 10:23-25***

Any sense of competition must be broken down, and destructive and cutting comments must be set aside. The tendency to demand and manipulate must be curbed, so that cooperation and encouragement are developed.

“Koinonia (fellowship) is “the expression of genuine Christianity among the member of God’s family.” – Dr. Charles Swindoll

I. BELIEVERS IN NEED OF ENCOURAGEMENT

No one is immune to getting discouraged sometimes, not even the Christian. And sometimes it comes from within the church, and from the words and actions of other Christians. It usually hits us at surprising moments, yet there are times when we can almost predict it. Sometimes our discouragements can be deep and lasting, and can affect our relationship with Christ, His church and other people. for months...even years. Tragically, some result in tragic consequences. Some leave lasting scars on one's life, causing division and damaging deeply the genuine fellowship that ought to be a part of a believers life.

ILLUSTRATION – THE DEVILS TOOL SALE

It was announced that the devil was going out of business and would offer all tools for sale to whoever would pay his price. On the night of the sale they were all Satan's most effective tools were attractively displayed,—and a bad looking lot they were: Malice, Hatred, Envy, Jealousy, Sensuality, Deceit and all the other implements of evil were spread out each marked with its price. Apart from the rest lay a harmless looking small wedge-shaped tool, much worn and priced much much higher than any of the others. Someone asked the devil, "What is that tool?" "That's Discouragement," the devil replied. "Well, why do you have it priced so high?" the one asked. "Because," replied Satan, "it is more useful to me than any of the others. I can pry open and get inside a man's consciousness with that when I could not get near him with any of the other tools. I can divide him from his maker and from others, and once inside I can use him in whatever way suits me best. It is so much worn because I use it with nearly everybody, as very few people yet know it belongs to me."

It hardly need be added that the devil's price for discouragement was so high that it was never sold. He is still using it.

God's Answer for Discouragement:

1. **The encouragement we receive from the Holy Spirit** - Certainly we receive encouragement from the comfort and help God give us through His Holy Spirit.
2. **The encouragement we receive from spending time with Him in prayer** - We receive much encouragement and help when discouraged from spending time with God in prayer.
3. **The encouragement we receive from spending quality time in His Word** - We also receive much encouragement through spending regular and consistent time in God's Word allowing it to speak to our lives.
4. **The encouragement we receive from the fellowship of other believers** – Interesting isn't it, that from the same ones we are to receive encouragement we can also sometime experience great discouragement.

At least a part of God's answer for the discouragements we often experience in this life is the genuine Christian fellowship that we have been discussing in this study. Let's consider three of God's men... I would call them strong believers, who suffered from bouts with

discouragement – the feelings of real discouragement. Though each man suffered very real discouragement, each one’s struggle was different:

1. **THE DISCOURAGEMENT OF MOSES (Numbers 11:1-15) – READ: Num. 11:1-4, 10-11** Moses had been miraculously used by God to lead the Israelites from Egypt. The people knew little else than a life of miracles – safe passage through the Red Sea, steady diet of nourishing manna, ample water, Divine guidance (cloud by day, fire by night) – yet they griped about everything... nothing seemed to suit them. It was neither the Promised Land nor the promising future on which they focused, but Egypt. Weary of their God-given daily diet, they longed only for the leeks, garlic, and onions of the land of their bondage. The text in **verse 10** reports, *“Moses heard the people of every family wailing, each at the entrance of his tent. The Lord became exceedingly angry, and Moses was troubled.”* (NKJV/KJV “displeased,” NLT “very aggravated”) *literally the words translated as “troubled” means “extreme discouragement” and can even mean “depressed.” Interesting! He was so discouraged that in **verse 15** he asked God to kill him says, in speaking to God, *“If this is how you are going to treat me, put me to death right now...”* (v.15). Why was Moses so discouraged, do you think?

What we learn from the discouragement of Moses:

- (1) **We must take care of ourselves in practical ways in order to avoid discouragement** – Moses was physically, emotionally and spiritually spent. He was exhausted and overworked because he had not learned to delegate his work load. He tried to handle it all by himself (see Ex. 18:13-23 where his father-in-law, Jethro, advised him to delegate so that he would “be able to endure.”). He was emotionally drained from dealing first with the hardened heart of Pharaoh, then the stubborn and grumbling heart of the Israelites. Spiritually, Moses felt distant from God. He said to God in **verse 11**, *“... why have you brought this trouble on your servant? What have I done to displease you that you put the burden of all these people on me?”* Do you hear the implication spiritually? What does Moses’ words reveal about how he felt about his relationship with God at this time?
An important note: *When we don’t take care of ourselves physically, emotionally and spiritually we are much more vulnerable to discouragement. How can we be an encouragement to each other in this area?*

- (2) **We must be willing to accept from God the help He has supplied for our encouragement** – (vv.16-25) Moses was instructed by God to spread his work load, to slow down. He was to find a fellowship of seventy men to aid in the work he alone was trying to do and overwhelmed with. Listen, we need each other. You and I don’t have to carry your burdens alone... we don’t have to carry our discouragement alone *“... They will help you carry the burden of the people so that you will not have to carry it alone.”*(v.17) We do not have to carry the burden alone. God, Himself, and others that He provides will help carry the load. When we are discouraged seek the support and encouragement of God and others.
An important note: *Christians are to be a part of that “fellowship of encouragement” for each other. We are not to be a part of the discouragement problem, but rather a part of the encouragement solution.*

2. **THE DISCOURAGEMENT OF ELIJAH (1 Kings 19:1-21)** – A series of events tracked Elijah’s life, including a famine that he himself had prophesied, and a confrontation on Mt. Carmel where he defied 450 prophets of Baal. After seeking out a solitary retreat next to a juniper tree, his reward was a threat on his life – issued by Jezebel. His words were like Moses’ in verse 4, “*While he (Elijah) himself went a day’s journey into the desert. He came to a broom tree, sat down under it and prayed that he might die. ‘I have had enough, Lord,’ he said. ‘Take my life...’*” Again we have a faithful believer and servant of God, extremely discouraged... Why?

What we learn from the discouragement of Elijah:

- (1) **We must guard against feelings of fear, worry and doubt in order to avoid discouragement** –In fear for his life, Elijah ran approximately 30 miles on perhaps noting but sheer adrenaline. Fear can make you do some crazy things. He had missed sleep and meals. Have you ever been so discouraged that you couldn’t eat or sleep? That is Elijah. He was worrying for his life... a life that Jezebel had vowed to end. Not only that, Elijah was suffering from doubt. Note his words in verse 10, “*... I have been very zealous for the Lord God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, broken down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left and now they are trying to kill me too.*” He felt all alone, like there was no one else by him, and he was perhaps doubting everything he had just done and accomplished. Filled with self-doubt and God-doubt, Elijah was discouraged. **An important note:** *Discouragement often sets in when life spins out of control and things don’t work out as we planned. We begin to worry and wring our hands in despair. Fear takes over and doubt set in. How can we be an encouragement to each other in this area?*
- (2) **We must refuse to isolate ourselves from God and the fellowship of other believers that he has provided for our encouragement** – God was at work, behind the scenes even when Elijah didn’t see Him. The 3 phenomena, wind, earthquake, and fire, announced the imminent arrival of the Lord. The Lord’s self-revelation to Elijah came in a faint whispering voice (v.12). The lesson for Elijah was that Almighty God was quietly, sometimes imperceptibly, doing His work in our lives and we can trust and rest in Him. But God also reminded Elijah, who felt all alone and isolated, that there was an entire fellowship of other likeminded believers that would stand with him (v.18), “*Yet I reserve seven thousand (7,000) in Israel – all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal and all whose mouths have not kissed him.*” Elijah needed the encouragement of that fellowship. **An important note:** *Sometimes when Christian get discouraged the temptation is to retreat, to draw back from the fellowship of the church and other believers, but that is precisely why we are here. We need each other.*

II. LESSONS FOR ENCOURAGERS

Four significant lessons emerge from these two quick character studies which, if applied can help us to not only win over discouragement in our own lives, but to also help us to be a vital part of the “fellowship of encouragement.”

4 Lessons for Encouragers:

1. **Keep your eyes open** - Realize that discouragement is not a sin, it is a symptom and everyone gets discouraged sometimes... even the most spiritually mature of believers. We need to be aware of those around us, in our own fellowship who are discouraged. I doubt very seriously if anyone in Moses' circle or Elijah's circle noticed that they were discouraged. Everyone was too busy worrying about themselves.
2. **Encourage practical care** – One of the most caring things you can do in helping someone who is discouraged is to encourage them to maintain a consistent program of relaxation and rest. Encourage them by offering to lighten their load or do something to help.
3. **Help to alleviate fear, worry and doubt** – There are several way you can accomplish this in the life of a person who is discouraged. (1) Pray with the person, (2) Point them to helpful Bible passages that deal with fear, worry and doubt and maybe read them with them, (3) Remind them of God's faithfulness and promises, (4) Invest of your own time and resources to alleviate those fears and worries... stay with them, sit with them, wait with them... be present.
4. **Encourage them to stay connected to church and Christian fellowship** – The natural instinct is to run, to withdraw, to isolate yourself from people when we are hurt or discouraged. We actually need just the opposite. We need those who are willing to stand by us in our discouragement. Be that person and encourage them to stay connected.

III. EXPOSITION OF HEBREWS (Hebrews 10:1-25)

1. The Believer Under the Law (vv.1-4) -

(1) **Explanation of animal sacrifices** – As earthly priest resided among the Jews, animal sacrifices were continuously repeated and general vagueness prevailed concerning the way a man would become rightly related to God. Living in a sin-conscious atmosphere, the worshiper came to the priest with an often fearful attitude and an awareness of his own sin and guilt. He wanted forgiveness.

(2) Two limitations of animal sacrifice –

① **It was never enough to fix the person** – Notice the word "*never*" in verse 1. The word is reminding us that they (animal sacrifices) could not make the repentant one perfect nor complete.

② **It was impossible to adequately remove sin** – Notice the word "*impossible*" in verse 4. The word indicates the idea that they could not remove sin for the guilty one.

2. **The Savior as the Sacrifice (vv.5-9)** – The entrance of Christ on the earthly scene brought immediate relief. His mission in His earthly body was to ultimately go to Calvary to die in order that our sins might be forgiven and we might be made right with God. Two facts bear keeping in mind.

2 Important Facts:

(1) **Christ's body offered** – God gave Him a body to be a sacrifice.

- (2) **God's will satisfied** – God directed Him to die for mankind. The need for human priests was eliminated with His death.
3. **The Christian Because of the Cross (vv.10-25)** – There are three things we have and three things we are to do.

3 Things Christians Have:

- (1) **We have sanctification** – According to verses 10-14 we are “set apart” for God. We to live set apart for His purpose... not our own.
- (2) **We have confidence** – According to verse 19 we can have assurance and confidence because of what Jesus Christ has done for us and the way He has opened for us.
- (3) **We have a great High Priest** – According to verse 21 Jesus, Himself, is our Advocate.

3 Things Christians Are To Do:

- (1) **We are to draw near** – According to verse 22 we are to come close to God without fear and in full assurance.
- (2) **We are to hold fast** – According to verse 23 we are to be un-persuaded to leave the truths of God, regardless.
- (3) **We are to consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds** – According to verse 24 we are to take careful note of each other's spiritual welfare.

IV. IMPLEMENTATION

Koinonia cannot be fully realized if these great truths are not acted out. As **verse 24** of our passage says, **“And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds.”** **Question: How do we stimulate one another to love and good deeds?** The answer is composed of one negative aspect and one positive aspect.

How To Spur One Another On Toward Love and Good Deeds:

1. **A Negative ... availability (v.25a)** – **“Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing... (v.25a)** Isolationism was not in God's thoughts – involvement was. We are not to view the Body of Christ as a congregation of individuals, but as a family. To participate in koinonia, one must be approachable... available.
2. **A Positive... encouragement (v.25b)** – **“... let us encourage one another – and all the more as you see the Day approaching.”(v.25b)** The term indicated the act of “calling another person alongside you.” Perhaps, here is the idea of urging another to pursue some course of godly conduct in a world where such encouragement is rare or nonexistent.