

Truth and Spirit Ministries

The Power of Encouragement Part I

By Denise Bostic

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

Just recently, God had strongly impressed it upon my heart in a fresh, new way about the importance and power of *encouragement* within the Body of Christ. In today’s hectic and fast-paced world that may place so many demands upon our time, we all need to be reminded to take the time to stop and give encouragement to those who may need it so desperately. Not only will we have others that will cross our paths that need our encouragement, we will also find that there are moments in our lives that each of us may personally need the encouragement of others also. The Bible says that we reap what we sow, **SO** if we sow encouragement into the lives of others, we will most certainly reap it in our own. (*Galatians 6:7-10*)

What is encouragement and why do we as humans need it so much? Encouragement means to support or inspire with courage. [Webster’s Dictionary] At times, all of us can have circumstances in life that might discourage us. When someone comes along with godly encouragement however, it strengthens our faith, lifts our spirits and can give us the courage to carry on in the face of adversities. Encouragement will help us to have a brighter outlook on our future.

When others are in need of encouragement, it is our privilege and opportunity to spread some love, joy and hope to the downhearted. When we are an encourager, we are walking in the footsteps of our Lord and are mirroring His nature and character. Encouragement originally comes from God. The Bible teaches us that He is an encourager and the strength of those who are weak, fearful and discouraged. (*Isaiah 41:13, Matthew 9:2, 14:27, Mark 16:6, Acts 23:11*) God faithfully demonstrates His love and compassion to us by encouraging us in our daily walk through His written and spoken word. As the life of Christ flows out of us, we too can show this same love and compassion to others by giving encouragement to others when they need it most.

Greater Purpose Behind Encouragement

There is a far greater purpose behind encouragement than we may realize. There is something else happening when we encourage others; we are also helping to build them up in the faith.

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

In the KJV this verse reads, **“Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do.”**

The KJV uses the word **comfort** instead of encouragement, which means to speak to each other words of exhortation, comfort or instruction. The KJV uses the word **edify** for “build up”. By studying the original Greek meaning of the word edify we learn some very powerful truths:

1. Edify means in the sense of building up as by giving one strength and courage. [3618, Joseph Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon Of The New Testament]
2. Edify means to be a house-builder, i.e. construct or confirm - to build up, edify, embolden. [3618, Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible]

3. Edify, Edifying, Edification means from the base of 1430; architecture, a structure, confirmation, building, edify (-ication,-ing). [3619, Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible]

When studying the original Greek meaning of these two words - encourage (or comfort) and build up (or edify), we understand that when we encourage, exhort or instruct one another we are helping God to "build up" or construct a house, in other words are a house-builder.

We find in the scriptures that these words and terms are directed towards Christians and define a work that we are to be doing. We are to build up or be house builders. Exactly whose house are we to help build or construct? We are helping to build up the building, house or temple of God and within the pages of the Bible, we can find out how we can do our part in helping to "build up" this magnificent structure.

The Building Of God's Temple

God has said in His Word that He does not dwell in temples made with the hands of men. Many people today put much emphasis on physical buildings such as beautiful, ornate Church buildings, synagogues or even the Jewish Temple being re-built in Jerusalem in these last days but neglect to see and understand the fact that there is a much greater and superior Temple that is being built by the hands of God Himself. (*Acts 7:48, Hebrews 11:10*)

Since the inception of the Church, the Lord has been working on a divine "construction project." Jesus has been building a house or temple for God to dwell in. This house will not be completely finished until His return. This temple is not made with material things such as wood, bricks and mortar, but is made up of a people that have become a habitation or dwelling place for God.

Many times God gives us physical analogies in His Word that can help us have a greater understanding of spiritual truths and He has done this regarding His Church. The Church is clearly identified and compared to a house, building or temple within the pages of the New Testament. The collective body of Christ or the Church is God's temple or dwelling place. He inhabits us through the indwelling of His Spirit. (*Acts 7:48, Ephesians 2:19-22, Hebrews 3:6, I Corinthians 3:16, II Corinthians 6:9,16*)

In the time of Christ, houses or buildings were built with stones instead of wood, bricks or blocks so the Lord Jesus gave analogies of believers as stones (*or those things that make up a house*). God's house is being built with living stones called the saints. If you are a believer in Christ, you are a living stone; you and I have become fellow citizens with the saints and are now of the household of God. (*I Peter 2:5, Ephesians 2:19-22*) We are God's building; we are God's house.

God has placed His very own Son, Jesus, over the entire work of building His temple or house in which He now dwells through His Spirit. Jesus is the Master Carpenter that is building us (*the living stones*) into this spiritual house. (*Hebrews 3:1-6, I Peter 2:4-6*) Jesus is building a triumphant Church and has said, "**I will build my church and the gates of hell will not overcome it.**" (***Matthew 16:18***) He will see to the completion of this great Temple that He began nearly two thousand years ago. As living stones in the house of God, we are to look to Him continually as the author and finisher of our faith. (*Hebrews 12:2*) Now that we have gained a general understanding about this great spiritual temple or edifice that is being built for a habitation for God, we can now go on to understand our part in this great work.

Help Build Up God's Temple

Unknown by some, Jesus is not building this temple alone but has commissioned and called upon the Church to aid His cause. He is the Master Carpenter or Builder, but He also has many co-laborers in His work. (*I Corinthians 3:9*) Remember that when believers are admonished in scripture to edify that this means to be a house-builder. Having some knowledge of the building of God's temple, we can understand now that this is the house that we are helping Jesus to build! We can help "build up" God's house in various ways.

We can help bring living stones to Jesus by obeying His command to proclaim the gospel throughout the world and leading souls to salvation. When we lead them to Christ, He can then place them into the Temple. After He has placed them in the body where it pleases Him, we can then help to build up, confirm, strengthen or embolden new converts and in so doing help build up or strengthen the Church. We can do this when we are gathered together by reading scripture, teachings, tongues and interpretation, prophecy, revelation and most importantly by loving one another and walking in the Spirit. (*I Corinthians 14:26, Ephesians 4:16, Galatians 5:22-23*)

Many in the Body of Christ today do not realize that they have a part in helping to build up the house of God. In some circles, it may be commonly understood and believed in the Church that the leadership helps to build up the house of God but believers have not been taught that they too are to be involved in the building process. (*Ephesians 4:11-12*) This fact can be totally backed up in the scriptures. Let's take a look at some of the scriptures that teach this awesome truth that believers are to help build up the house of God.

*In order to have greater impact with this truth, I will insert the original Greek meaning of edify and its variations in parenthesis. Remember, the words architecture, building or structure are referring to the Church.

“Each of us should please his neighbor for his good, to build him up.” [3619, Build him up through confirmation or edification.] (*Romans 15:2 NIV*)

“He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies (3618, or is a house-builder of, constructs, confirms, emboldens) the church. ...**He who prophesies is greater than one who speaks in tongues, unless he interprets, so that the church may be edified”** (3619, Build up the (entire) Church (architecture, building or structure)

through confirmation or edification.) (*I Corinthians 14:4,5 NIV*)

“Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification” (3619, Build up (each other mutually) in the Church (architecture, building or structure) through confirmation or edification.) (*Romans 14:19 NIV*)

“Therefore encourage one another and build each other up (3618, be a house-builder, construct, confirm, embolden, build up each other), **just as in fact you are doing.”** (*I Thessalonians 5:11 NIV*)

“Since you are eager to have spiritual gifts, try to excel in the gifts that build up (3619, Build up through confirmation or edification) **the church.”** (architecture, building or structure) (*I Corinthians 14:12*)

“What then shall we say, brothers? When you come together everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. All of these must be done for the strengthening (edifying)(3619, Build up through confirmation or edification) **of the church.”** (Architecture, building or structure) (*I Corinthians 14:26 NIV*)

We also edify or build up one another in the body of Christ through exercising godly love.

“Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up.”(3618, love builds up, constructs, confirms, emboldens) (*I Corinthians 8:1 NIV*)

“But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself (3619,

The church (i.e., architecture, building or structure) builds itself up through confirmation or edification) **in love.”** (*Ephesians 4:15-16 KJV*)

As we have opportunity, we are to build up the saints that are within the household of God. How are we to help build up? By supporting, strengthening, serving, encouraging, confirming and giving courage to one another as we have opportunities. This is something that we should do not only when we are gathered together as a local Church, but as we are led by the Spirit and whenever someone is in need of it. All of this of course is to be done out of a spirit of love. Our ministry to others will only have a great impact when we exercise love. (*I Corinthians 13*)

Don't Tear Down

At the opposite end of this beautiful picture that I have been painting so far about encouraging or building others up, is an ugly reality that exists in some Churches. The antonym of building up is tearing down. We have been learning that we have the power to build others up in love and faith but we also need to understand the fact that we have the power to tear others down as well. We wield this power through our words and actions. We can use the power of our words or actions for right or wrong or for good or evil. We should use our words for goodness however.

The Apostle Paul taught that believers should follow after those things that produce goodness. **“Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification.” (Romans 14:19)** We are to help to build up the temple of the living God (our brethren) by promoting an atmosphere of peace and edification so that God can do His work among us and pour out His abundant blessings upon us. (*I Corinthians 3:16-17, 6:19, II Corinthians 6:16, I Corinthians 14:5,12,26*)

Sadly, in some local Churches there are brethren that are not exercising this admonishing word but instead are tearing each other down. When we tear one another down, this always leads to rotten fruit within a body of believers such as unrest, division, strife and a whole host of other ugly works of the sinful nature. (*Galatians 5:19-21*) When we tear others down, we are grieving God’s Spirit as well as bringing harm to the body of Christ.

A good analogy to help us understand a very important spiritual truth concerning the Church is the human body. The Apostle Paul explains:

“The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. ...So that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. Now you are the body of Christ and each one of you is a part of it.” (I Corinthians 12:12-27)

If one part of our body is in pain, the rest of our body knows it and so does the head (in this instance, Christ). If we are truly members of the body of Christ, connected to our Head and sensitive to the Holy Spirit, we will feel the suffering and pain of those within our local Church body as well. Sometimes that hurt, pain or suffering may come from outside sources, i.e. the world or the devil. Sometimes however, the pain will be self-inflicted by the Church within.

If we would think in these terms, none of us would ever pick up a big hammer and smash our thumb or big toe on purpose! Why? Because not only would other people think that we are insane, we would also be self-inflicting intense pain! Most healthy people don’t want to harm their own bodies, but instead protect them. Yet there are those in the body of Christ that inflict harm and pain (knowingly and unknowingly) on other members of the Body of Christ without giving it much thought. We allow our flesh to be ruled by our emotions, our sinful nature and at times, our adversary the devil. If we think in terms of protecting our brothers and sisters in Christ from harm like we do our own bodies, we would most certainly have less tearing down and more building up going on. We must nurture the body of Christ as we would our own to have spiritually healthy, happy and loving Churches.

It is so important that we have mature leadership and brethren that are able to hear from God and spiritually discern the true nature of harmful situations within the Church. Spiritually healthy Churches will confront and deal with situations where there is tearing down instead of building up. Local fellowships that choose not to deal with such problems (thinking that they will just go away by themselves) will only be extending an open invitation for the devil to join them by giving him place. (*Ephesians 4:27*) When the works of the flesh are practiced in a local Church instead of the fruit of the Spirit, much damage will be inflicted upon that fellowship, if it is not corrected.

Paul wrote to the Galatians and warned them of the consequences of following after the works of the flesh.

“You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge in the sinful nature, rather, serve one another in love. The entire law is summed up in a single command: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.” (Galatians 5:13-15) He then proceeded to teach them to live in the Spirit and bear the fruit that comes from God.

God wants us to love, help and encourage one another, not destroy each other. Sadly, I have witnessed the damage that gossip, backbiting, envy, jealousy, discord and strife can do in a local Church. We are servants to whom we obey, whether to our sinful flesh or to the righteousness of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit can only work in the lives of those who are yielded to Him. If you happen to find yourself in this environment I admonish you to do two things. First, do not be a partaker or participant in helping to tear down the house of God. Secondly, pray and seek God for wisdom on how to handle the situation and follow His guidance.

Division Weakens But Unity Strengthens

Christ is not divided and a local Church body should not be either. Division weakens but unity strengthens a fellowship. We must always be aware of Satan's devices and not fall into the trap of the works of the flesh. (*II Corinthians 2:11*) Again, these will provide an open door for our adversary to have place in our lives and Churches and it is up to us to keep the door shut by first submitting to the Lord and then to one another in a spirit of love and humility. (*Ephesians 5:21*)

Brethren that operate in the flesh need to mature in Christ and this takes time. Immature brethren must be taught by the leadership and corrected in love when works of the flesh are gaining the upper hand. The entire Church can be corrected by the Word of God and grow in maturity as they learn and practice the truths of the Bible as one body.

There are no perfect people and no perfect Churches. Local Churches should be a safe place where imperfect people are allowed to make mistakes that they can learn and grow from. It's only human for brethren and leadership to make mistakes but everyone should be transparent with one another, deal with sin and other internal problems within their local fellowship before any harm or damage comes to the Church. The leadership of the Church however, has been given the God-given authority and responsibility to feed the Lord's sheep, protect them from harm and give correction when necessary.

True Leadership Will Build Up, Not Tear Down.

Paul himself set an example for the Churches under his apostolic care. He wrote of his authority as an Apostle of Christ and stated that he used it in a godly way by building the Church up and not tearing it down. He told the Corinthians that although he used this authority to correct, it was only for the purpose of building them up as a body. He wrote, **"This is why I write these things when I am absent, that when I come I may not have to be harsh in the use of my authority- the authority the Lord gave me for building you up, not for tearing you down."** (*II Corinthians 13:10, also 10:8*) So we learn from this passage of scripture that godly correction and truth, when spoken in love can also build up the Church as well.

It is so necessary for the leadership of the Church to emulate Christ. It is so wonderful for those congregations that have true, godly leadership where the saints receive encouragement. Unfortunately though, there are also some leaders in the body of Christ that tear down God's people through condemnation, control, threats, manipulation and discouraging words. These type leaders operate as dictators who only want believers to "shut up and sit down" or don't ever allow others to disagree with them on anything, have a voice or ministry among the congregation.

Such leaders are not helping to build God's Kingdom but are only striving to build their own little kingdoms. May God open the eyes of such leaders! These environments tend to make unhappy, miserable Christians who find it very difficult to find their purpose or ministry within the body of Christ. Some brethren will continue to sit under such leadership thinking that they must suffer in silence while others break free and eventually go elsewhere.

The Lord taught me along time ago that He does not expect believers to sit under such leadership abuse, contrary to what some might believe. Ministers of Christ should be building up the Body of Christ, not tearing her down. Leaders who tear down the Lord's sheep will have to answer to Him.

Leaders that tear down God's people are most often motivated by their flesh instead of the Spirit. They have not yet died to their selfish ambitions and are ruled by their pride. We are not obligated to follow those that are blind or going in the wrong direction. First and foremost, we are followers of Christ and not man. The Lord set us free from such bondages so that we might live in the freedom to which He has called us. Ministers are to lead by godly example. We are only to follow ministers as they follow Christ. (*Galatians 5:1, I Corinthians 11:1*)

Of course the type leadership that I speak of above is not pertaining to leadership who make an occasional mistake, repent and seek reconciliation with the saints under their care but of those who walk in an unrepentant, unchanged spiritual state that will eventually do much harm to the local body that they are responsible for. God gives us time to change, but we should be walking in humility, open to correction and yielded to Christ and His Spirit. Only ministries of this type are the ones that should be submitted to. As a whole, all believers, including the leadership, are to submit to one another in love.

In the New Covenant, all believers are now priests. (I Peter 2:9) We can build each other up through the Spirit by encouraging others in their Christian walk or calling or we can tear others down if we are walking in a wrong attitude or spirit. Of course, we will all make mistakes and will not walk in the Spirit perfectly as long as we are in these fleshly bodies. There are times that we will yield to our flesh instead of the Spirit and say or do something to someone that we shouldn't. What is important is to be able to recognize when we are in the flesh, receive correction and seek the forgiveness of others and God.

Be Careful How We Build

As believers, we have the wonderful privilege of being His co-laborers in this great work and are admonished in God's word to be careful as to what materials we use to build. **“But each one should be careful how he builds... If any mans builds on this foundation (Christ) using gold, silver, costly stone, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work.” (I Corinthians 3:9-17)**

Paul teaches that we will all be held accountable before God as to how we build upon the foundation of Christ. We should only be building with those things that come from God because these are the only things that will be true and last for eternity. The Joseph Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon further cements the fact that each and every believer in the Body of Christ have their part in helping to build the Temple of God.

“Since both a Christian Church and individual Christians are likened to a building or temple in which God or the Holy Spirit dwells (I Corinthians 3:9, II Corinthians 6:16, Ephesians 2:21) the construction of the temple will not be completely finished till the return of Christ from heaven, those who, by action, instruction, exhortation, comfort, promote the Christian wisdom of others and help them to live the correspondent life are regarded as taking part in the construction of that building... [3618-emphasis mine]

Just think! We have been given the privilege and power to help “build up” or construct His house! We can help to embolden our brethren by coming to their aid or defense and to help support them when they feel weak, fearful or discouraged through the power of encouragement and so bring comfort. We have been given the ability to build up our brothers or sisters in the faith! How is this possible? It is possible with the aid of our Helper, the Holy Spirit. As the life of the Spirit flows out of us, He enables us to minister to others in godly fruit and power.

In Part II of The Power Of Encouragement, we will continue with the positive message of the power of encouragement and learn lessons from the life of the “Son of Encouragement”, also known as the Apostle Barnabas.

[Part II Click here](#)