

## An Encouraging People

**Nehemiah 11:1-2 HCSB** Now the leaders of the people stayed in Jerusalem, and the rest of the people cast lots for one out of ten to come and live in Jerusalem, the holy city, while the other nine-tenths remained in their towns. (2) The people praised all the men who volunteered to live in Jerusalem.

This is one of the few places where the city of Jerusalem is referred to as “holy.” You see the phrase also used in verse 18:

- **Nehemiah 11:18 HCSB** All the Levites in the holy city:

You can also see it in:

- **Isaiah 48:1-2 HCSB** "Listen to this, house of Jacob--those who are called by the name Israel and have descended from Judah, who swear by the name of the LORD and declare the God of Israel, *but* not in truth or righteousness. (2) For they are named after the Holy City, and lean on the God of Israel; His name is Yahweh of Hosts.
- **Isaiah 52:1 HCSB** "Wake up, wake up; put on your strength, Zion! Put on your beautiful garments, Jerusalem, the Holy City! For the uncircumcised and the unclean will no longer enter you.
- **Daniel 9:24 HCSB** Seventy weeks are decreed about your people and your holy city--to bring the rebellion to an end, to put a stop to sin, to wipe away injustice, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most holy place.

Without explicitly calling Jerusalem itself holy, the Bible also describes it as the “holy dwelling place of the Most High” (Psalm 46:4) and the “holy mountain of God” (Psalm 48:1), among other things. Clearly this is a special place. It’s the place where the Beit ha Mikdash, the Temple, was. Out of all the world’s great cities and mountains, it was this place where Yahweh chose to place His name. You’d think EVERYONE would want to live there, but obviously they don’t. Why not?

### Why we need encouragement

**Some are afraid of stepping up.** They’re afraid of the higher standards, the higher level of responsibility that comes with being at the center of the action. They are simply not willing to live up to the expectations that come with leadership.

**Some are afraid of persecution.** Jerusalem was surrounded by enemies and at the time represented a great big slap in the face of the goyish leadership! Perhaps they were afraid that the assassins that had caused them to work with a trowel in one hand and a sword in the other had not all gone home! However, I don’t think that was really the issue here because of the description given to some of them. In verse 14, we see that there were 128 “capable” or “exceptional” men.

**Some are afraid of failing.** There is an old English proverb that says “He who never makes mistakes, never makes anything.” Even James the half-brother of the Messiah admitted “we all stumble in many ways.” (James 3:2) Yet, this fear will cause many to hesitate, to fail to commit themselves fully to the Lord’s service; and not being fully committed – they fail. It becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Regardless, you can see that there are several reasons people would hesitate to take up residence in the Holy City. Similarly, there are many people who hesitate (for these same reasons) to enter into ministry or leadership positions. Others even hesitate to use their gifts at all for the Lord. Obviously it would be nice if they were encouraged as they consider taking these risks. So...

## Who needs to encourage?

Unfortunately, in corporate America, there is very little tolerance for failure. Of course, you can fail abysmally in the area of morals or ethics and that's perfectly all right, but let a person not sing well on stage, or misspell a word on the power-point presentation or not have their congregation grow by double digits every year and watch out! Too many congregations have transferred the standards of corporate America, of the bottom line, into the work of God.

We need to imitate God's people at this point in time who "praised all the men who volunteered to live in Jerusalem." The fact that the people praised those who volunteered confirmed that they understood that the decision entailed some sacrifice. It would have meant having all eyes on them, risking persecution and possibly failing. It also involved a change of environment, a change of neighbors, a change of friends for their children, and a change of life-style! Some people won't volunteer for nursery duty because they might have to deal with a whiny child!

Another problem with living in America is that we are used to living in a service-oriented society. We want our cheeseburgers, we want them just the way we like them, and we want them quickly made! If we don't get what we want when we want how we want, we complain to the management. Some among us who are more uncouth will be rude to the worker who (in our minds at least) failed us. What's amazing is that the same worker, company, or product can give us good service 9 times out of 10 and we don't say thank you. We simply take it for granted. It is, after all, their BUSINESS to keep us happy – right?

Church, listen to me – THIS IS NOT A BUSINESS! It's not about turning out a perfect product. It's not about being the most successful brand name. It's about serving people!

Who needs to encourage? All of us do. First...

## Leadership needs to empower those they serve.

Every team that serves this church needs to remember that its primary goal is to serve Jesus. Its secondary goal is to serve, enable and empower the people of this church. We need to bend over backwards, to get the most people to serve and worship Christ with their gifts, talents, and time as we can. THAT IS OUR JOB! How do I know this? Turn if you would to

- **Luke 14:16-23 HCSB** Then He told him: "A man was giving a large banquet and invited many. (17) At the time of the banquet, he sent his slave to tell those who were invited, 'Come, because everything is now ready.' (18) "But without exception they all began to make excuses. The first one said to him, 'I have bought a field, and I must go out and see it. I ask you to excuse me.' (19) "Another said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I'm going to try them out. I ask you to excuse me.' (20) "And another said, 'I just got married, and therefore I'm unable to come.' (21) "So the slave came back and reported these things to his master. Then in anger, the master of the house told his slave, 'Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the city, and bring in here the poor, maimed, blind, and lame!' (22) "'Master,' the slave said, 'what you ordered has been done, and there's still room.' (23) "Then the master told the slave, 'Go out into the highways and lanes and make them come in, so that my house may be filled.

I once advised Troy that even though the sign on his trucks and buildings says "Riddell Roofing" that his primary purpose was not the building of roofs. Riddell Roofing puts out a good product but no matter how good it is, in a few short decades they will go the way everything else does. Of far greater import are the souls of the men in his employ. Of far greater import are the attitudes toward Christ that his company will induce in the clients for whom he does work. Troy isn't in the business of building roofs. He's in the business of

building souls. He just uses roofs as a ministry medium. The production of high quality roofs is simply the bi-product.

Similarly, it's easy for the teams or the boards or even the council to begin believing that their ministry is an end in and of itself. Never forget that your first job is to build people, to encourage people. In the words of the author of Hebrews:

- **Hebrews 10:24 HCSB** ...let us be concerned about one another in order to promote love and good works,

On the other hand,

**Followers need to show their leadership they're making a difference.**

It is important that those who are being served and led be encouraging as well! It is very difficult to enter into ministry. I'm not just talking about the pulpit. I'm talking ANY kind of ministry. It takes great courage to face the criticism of your best efforts. It takes great humility to submit your desires and needs to the desires and needs of others. It takes self-sacrifice to put others ahead of yourself, week after week, with little to no thanks from those you are serving.

Small wonder that the author of Hebrews advised:

- **Hebrews 13:15-17 HCSB** Therefore, through Him let us continually offer up to God a sacrifice of praise, that is, the fruit of our lips that confess His name. (16) Don't neglect to do good and to share, for God is pleased with such sacrifices. (17) Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account, so that they can do this with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.

I guarantee you that if you

- Are a grateful people.
- Verbally praise the Lord.
- Confess His name publicly.
- Never neglect to do good.
- Share yourself and your goods with each other.
- Are obedient and submissive to the teaching of the Word of God.
- Heed the advice and commentary of your spiritual leaders...

I will be the happiest pastor on God's green earth! You see it's not just about flattery. It's not just about the occasional pat on the back. That's nice, but it's still the token tip to the waiter who got your food to you quickly. True, lasting encouragement is found in the fact that what you are doing is having a lasting, healthy impact.

Let me quickly give you four general tips on encouragement:

**We can be encouraged by the example of others.**

- 1 Thessalonians 3:7-10 HCSB Therefore, brothers, in all our distress and persecution, we were encouraged about you through your faith. 8 For now we live, if you stand firm in the Lord. 9 How can we thank God for you in return for all the joy we experience because of you before our God, 10 as we pray earnestly night and day to see you face to face and to complete what is lacking in your faith?

**We are encouraged through encouraging others.**

- Romans 1:11-12 HCSB For I want very much to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you, 12 that is, to be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine.

**Build each other up by finding something you appreciate. Be especially sure to encourage your leaders who are trying hard to improve your life.**

- 1 Thessalonians 5:11-13 HCSB Therefore encourage one another and build each other up as you are already doing. 12 Now we ask you, brothers, to give recognition to those who labor among you and lead you in the Lord and admonish you, 13 and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves.

**Consistently encourage new believers.**

- Acts 14:21-22 HCSB After they had evangelized that town and made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, to Iconium, and to Antioch, 22 strengthening the hearts of the disciples by encouraging them to continue in the faith, and by telling them, "It is necessary to pass through many troubles on our way into the kingdom of God."

Finally, let's consider what we need to do to be. Let's talk about...

**Encouraging vision**

At CBF, we seek to create an environment that constantly promotes and encourages vision among our people. We need dreamers. Every invention we enjoy, every positive social change has been brought about by dreamers.

Of course for every dream fulfilled, there were thousands that were dashed. However, if there are no visions, no dreams of what might be, all hope is lost and the people will be unrestrained, without purpose and all their efforts will go to waste. As a people, they will perish according to Proverbs 29:18.

**We will either foster change and improvement in our church or we will die.** We should be careful in our progress and be sensitive to the sensibilities of our people. However we must be constantly seeking a way to do things better.

It takes a great amount of courage to live this kind of life. **There are definitely risks involved. However, a church that takes no risk is a dead, stultifying entity.** People can be risk averse; witness the generations of serfs who remained content in their poverty, misery, and squalor, the people who have endured the horrifyingly brutal machinations of despots all over the world rather than rise up and overcome their circumstances.

If we allow our church to settle into the doubtful pleasures of self-satisfaction, we run an even greater risk – that of digging our own grave and worse yet, meeting our Judge and Lord having done nothing with the talents He left us. We will have buried them in ruts of complacency.

What if the early church had used the excuse “we’ve never done it that way before” when God directed them to start reaching out to Gentiles? Where would we be? We have to recognize that sometimes the Spirit will lead us in a new direction. We must be sensitive to that and be willing to flex with the stirrings of the Spirit.

We need to make sure that we listen to our dreamers. Let's make sure that our initial reactions are never:

- We tried that before and it didn't work.
- We've always done it that way.
- We've never done it that way.
- That's impossible.
- We don't do things that way around here.
- That's too radical.
- I wish it were that easy.
- When you've been around a little longer you'll understand.
- Get real! What do you mean, saying we're doing it the wrong way?

What if our people are descending into a stuporous state of complacency? We need to be willing to shake things up so that we can say, as the Scriptures do, “Awake you sleeper!” (Ephesians 5:14).

If the demographics of our community changes, shouldn't we be able to change with it? If we get more elderly, shouldn't we start an outreach to them? If there is an influx of minority groups, shouldn't we start classes to meet their particular needs? If we feel the church is floundering, shouldn't we be able to revisit our goals and see if they need changing? What if a ministry is proving ineffective? Are we supposed to keep pouring resources into a black hole simply because we always have?

Some people interpret loyalty as being careful to never rock the boat. Here at CBF we define loyalty as being willing to rock the boat if something is not working as it should or if there's a better way to do things.

Periodically, we need to get our leadership and other visionary people together in a relaxed social atmosphere to simply bounce ideas around; nothing linear, nothing logical, just random free association. Few of these ideas will make it past the various editing stages, but it allows us to dream and imagine in a non-judgmental or critical atmosphere and come up with plans or scenarios that would never have occurred to us otherwise.

We all know that if a plant stops changing, it stops growing. And if it stops growing it starts dying. We do not want to be so arrogant as to think we have achieved perfection. No matter how well our ministry is doing – there is surely a way to do it better.

We, of all people, should be grateful for the many great blessings Hashem has granted to us. We, of all people should understand that we are inviting people to a great banquet! A party is coming and we want it to be as big a bang as we can make it. After all, it's going to be our Groom's wedding party! If there is anyone on this earth who should be an encouraging folk, it should be us.