

Words of Encouragement

November 11th 2015

CHANGES: Over the coming weeks there will be a few changes to the weekly 'Encouragement'.

(1) *The font size is being increased to make it easier to read. Anyone requiring an ever larger font size may adjust the size on their computer screen to whatever meets their personal needs.*

(2) *I am attempting to make the layout less 'congested'.*

(3) *The quantity of material each week is being reduced so it doesn't take so much of your time to read. This will occur over some weeks as I compile content some months in advance to avoid last minute rushes. If you ever have feedback do not hesitate to let me know what you think. Thank you for your patience. Billy*

'The movement of faith is unceasing, because no explanation it offers is ever finished.' Jacques Ellul

Greatness Among Christians:

Mark 10:43 reads: ***'But among you it will be different. Whoever wants to be a leader [great] among you must be your servant.'***

People of voting age are frequently faced with choices about who to vote for in a variety of leadership positions. This is a responsibility we need to take seriously. The above scripture quoting the words of Jesus Christ gives us clear guidance for making such decisions. It is very counter cultural as **servant leadership** seldom makes it into real life situations, even among Christians. Yet, what an incredibly significant difference it could make if Christians actually obeyed this radical wisdom from Jesus, in every voting opportunity, be it church, Local Council, State or National Government elections!

A. W. Tozer wrote: *'From the words of Jesus to his disciples, we may properly conclude that there is nothing wrong with the desire to be a leader [great], provided:*

- (1) we seek the right kind of greatness;*
- (2) we allow God to decide what greatness is;*
- (3) we are willing to pay the full price greatness demands, and*
- (4) we are content to wait for the judgement of God to settle the whole matter!*

It is vitally important, however, that we know what Christ meant when he used the word 'great' in relation to men and women, and his meaning cannot be found in the lexicon or dictionary. Only when viewed in its broad theological setting is it understood correctly. No one whose heart has had a vision of God, however brief or imperfect that vision may have been, will ever consent to think of themselves as 'great'

[the leader]. All this is true, yet God Himself applies the word 'great' to men and women, as when the angel tells Zacharias that the son who is to be born '*shall be great in the sight of the Lord.*'

Obviously, there are two kinds of greatness recognised in Scripture: an absolute, uncreated greatness belonging to God alone, and a relative and finite greatness achieved by, or bestowed upon, certain friends of God and sons and daughters of faith, who by obedience and self-denial seek to become as much like God as possible (Christlike!). Yet, far too often, but not always, among Christians, leadership is given on the basis of abilities other than 'Christlike' character/living.

It is obvious that Jesus was not impressed with the idea of greatness inherent in political power and dominion held by '*the rulers of the Gentiles.*' Jesus told his followers: '*But among you it will be different. Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first among you must be the slave of everyone else.*' Not many of us have the 'in Christ' spiritual capacity to fulfil such a leadership role! Hence the poor spiritual state of much of what is leadership right through society. However, the responsibility of everyone considering themselves a 'Christian' is to adhere to the teaching of Jesus Christ.

Based on A. W. Tozer excerpt from 'The Divine Conquest' quoted in 'Renewed Day by Day' reading for Oct. 7, Christian Publications ISBN 0-87509-252-

7

The best criticism of what is bad is the practice of the better. So, go ahead and do better!

If you really believe in the **values** you say you believe in, then put them into practice!

GOOD PLEASURES: John Wesley set very high standards of holiness for his followers. He encouraged them to ask themselves challenging questions, such as: '*Have I prayed with fervour?*' '*Have I contrived ways to avoid self-denial?*' He taught his followers to pray, '*Let me abstain from all pleasures that don't prepare me for taking pleasure in Thee (God).*' That doesn't mean he was a killjoy. When people accused him of being dour, he replied that he was convinced '*true religion (Christianity), or holiness, cannot be without cheerfulness.*' True Christianity has nothing sour, austere, unsociable, or unfriendly in it.

Wesley countered critics with questions: '*Are you for having as much cheerfulness as you can? So am I. Do you try to keep alive your taste for innocent pleasures? So do I.*' He insisted that he enjoyed '*every pleasure that leads to me taking pleasure in [God].*' Wesley denounced the idea that knowledge of our sinfulness makes us miserable. He insisted that dealing head-on with our tendencies toward '*pride, self-will and peevishness*' enables us to experience '*peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.*'

Wesley wrote prayers for daily use, including: '*I know you are the end for which I*

was created, and I expect to know no happiness but in Thee.' 'Let us take pleasure in your service and abound in your work, and in your love and praise evermore.' 'Father and Provider of all blessings, cleanse me and bring your holiness of joy and fulfilment into my life. Help me to seek you fervently and to enjoy all pleasures in your company.'

'You will show me the way of life, granting me the joy of your presence and the pleasures of living with you forever.' Psalm 16:11, NLT

Adapted by Billy A. from 'Encouragement' by Harold Myra, p.134 Tyndale 2010 ISBN 978 1 4143 3428 8

True growth in holiness is a willingness to love and be loved and a surrendering of wilfulness, even holy wilfulness (wilfulness being that which is still 'all about me!').

KNOWLEDGE and PASSION: Proverbs 8:12-14 *'I, Wisdom, live together with good judgement. I know where to discover knowledge and discernment. All who fear the Lord will hate evil. Therefore, I hate pride and arrogance, corruption and perverse speech. Common sense and success belong to me. Insight and strength are mine.'*

It is important to think, and also to act. It is important to feel, and also to reflect. It is important to have light and insight, but also to have passion and purpose. The movement of God in our lives is not simply to bring us knowledge and understanding. It is also to heal us and give us purpose and direction. The Christian life can (ought) to be lived with passion. Thus God's salvific work is multi-faceted and comprehensive. It engages all of who we are, transforms every part of our lives, and energises us to love and service.

A man known as St. Bernard knew something of God's dynamic activity. He wrote, *'The revelation which is made by the Holy Spirit gives light so that we may understand, and fire so that we may love.'* This reflects the wide-ranging action of God. We need to be enlightened so we may know who God is and what God has done for us in Christ. In this light we also need to know ourselves and recognise our need for forgiveness and healing. And we need to understand how we may now live to the glory of God, and for the well-being of others.

But we also need to be empowered to action; to love and to serve and give ourselves for the blessings of others. This empowerment may be needed in the call to 'go the extra mile'. Thus our knowing needs to be full of love and therefore practical and beneficial. And our loving needs to be full of knowledge and therefore must be wise and discerning.

Lord Jesus, may I become knowledgeable and loving at the same time. Amen

'Hear the Ancient Wisdom' by Charles R. Ringma. p.145, Cascade Books ISBN 13:978 1 62032 772 2

When trouble strikes and fear takes root
and dreams are dry and sense unsound
when hope becomes a barren waste,
then doubts like mountains soar around.

Our wandering minds believe the worst
and ask, as faith and fervour fade,
'Has God now turned His back on us,
forsaking those He loved and made?'

God says, 'See how a woman cares,
can she forget the child she bore?
Even if she did, I shan't forget.
Though feeling lost, I love you more.

'My dearest daughter, fondest son,
My weary folk in every land,
your souls are cradled in My heart,
your names are written on My hand.

Then praise the Lord through faith and fear,
in holy and in hopeless place,
for height and depth and heaven and hell
can't keep us far from His embrace.

Can be sung to any of the tunes used for 'When I survey the wondrous cross' and brought to us
by Wild Goose of Iona. Quoted as Jan. 2 Aidan reading in Prayers and Readings from the
Northumbria Community.

Lord Jesus, we know that it
takes humility to acknowledge
that our ways are not your
ways.

Please surround us with your subtle and hidden prophets, that we might have help in overcoming our self-deceptions and in facing the truth that sets us free. Amen

Psalm 96:7-9: *'O nations of the world, recognise the Lord; recognise that the Lord is glorious and strong. Give to the Lord the glory he deserves! Bring your offering and come into his courts. We worship the Lord in all his holy splendour. Let all the earth tremble before him.'*

HUMILITY: While our Christian forebears sought union with God and perfection in virtue, they also confessed their utter dependency on God for life, for prayer, and for service. One of my heroes of the faith known as St. Patrick was aware of all the things he did in the service of Christ, including baptising thousands into the faith, yet his autobiographical writings reflect a great humility. He wrote: *"I have nothing of value that is not His gift."*

This poses a challenge for us in that we seem to have lost both ends of these poles. We neither long for union with God, nor are we marked by humility. Instead of longing to be close to God we simply want God to bless us and fix our problems. And instead of being marked by a surrendered heart to the ways of God, which is the true mark of humility, we insist on wanting to pull God into 'our' projects, 'our' schemes, and 'our' ministries.

As a result, our contemporary spirituality has become too human-centred. We trouble God for the success of our projects. We neglect God when 'we' have no pressing needs. St. Patrick's writings have a very different flavour. He is above all concerned not with what he has accomplished, but with the honour and glory of God.

THINK: What would it look like for you to live to **God's** glory?

(Hear The Ancient Wisdom' by Charles Ringma, Cascade Books, 2013, reading for 7th October. ISBN 1-62032-772-2)

God of peace, dawn reminds us that your mercies are new every morning. You have

been merciful to us despite our sin. Teach us such mercy. Open our eyes to see the violence we condone with our silences, with our consumption and with our cowardice, when we fail to speak out against what your Word makes clear is wrong. Open our eyes to see and acknowledge what is 'unChristlike' about our own behaviours and attitudes and grant us the courage to deal with all such things before you that we may know your healing. We give thanks that repentance is the beginning of true conversion. Amen.

'For God, who said, *'Let there be light in the darkness,'* has made this light shine in our hearts so we could know the glory of God that is seen in the face of Jesus Christ.'²
Corinthians 4:6

Every day look for words you can speak or write to others that will encourage them to think of what really matters in life. In doing so you will find yourself encouraged about your life. Please feel free to forward any, or all, of the above to encourage others. Who could you sent it to as an encouragement? Now please do so. **Bill**
Christians are called to be radical, revolutionary, counter cultural people.