

# Words of Encouragement, Jan 5<sup>th</sup> 2016

**Example is not the main thing in influencing others - it's the only thing - for better or for worse!**

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Commenting on the activities of the early Christian church, Roman Emperor Julian said, 'The godless Galilean's feed our poor in addition to their own.' *Lord Jesus, starting right now please keep us from trying to distinguish between the deserving and the undeserving. Help us to work to alleviate suffering and injustice wherever we find it, trusting that the rest is up to you. Amen*

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**All glory comes from daring to begin!**

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A story told about a Jewish farmer who, through carelessness, did not get home before sunset one Sabbath and therefore was required to spend the night and day in the field, waiting for sunset the next day before returning home.

On his return he was met by a rather perturbed rabbi who chided him for his carelessness. Finally the rabbi asked him: 'What did you do out there all day in the field? Did you at least pray?' The farmer answered: 'Rabbi, I am not a clever man. I don't know how to pray properly. What I did was simply to recite the alphabet all day and let God form the words for himself.'

When it comes to celebrating in God we bring the alphabet of **our lives**. If our hearts and minds are full of warmth, love, enthusiasm, song and dance, then these are the letters we bring. If they are full of tiredness, despair, blandness, pain and boredom, then those are our letters. So, bring them, spend them, celebrate them. It is God's task to make the words! *Ronald Rolheiser 'The Aidan reading' for 29th Nov. in the Celtic Daily Prayer of the Northumbria Community.*

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**A wise leader inspires, encourages, sacrifices and motivates, rather than intimidating and manipulating!**

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**The Devotional Life is Almost Crowded Out:**

*'Make it your business to live a quiet life, minding your own business and working with your hands, just as we instructed you before. Then people who are not Christians will respect the way you live, and you will not need to depend on others.'*

As Christians we must be simplifying our lives, or lose untold treasures on earth and in

eternity! Modern civilization is so complex as to make the devotional life all but impossible, multiplying distractions and beating us down by destroying our solitude.

*'Commune with your own heart upon your bed and be still'* is a wise and healing counsel, but how can it be followed in this day of print media, mobile phones, radio, tablets, and TV. These playthings, like pet tiger cubs, have grown so large and dangerous that they threaten to devour us all. Nowhere is now safe from their intrusion!

One way the so called civilised world is effectively destroying children, boys and girls, men and women is by preventing them from **thinking their own thoughts**. Our vastly improved methods of communication, of which short-sighted people now boast so loudly, enables a few people in strategic centres to feed into millions of minds, from young children upwards, alien thought stuff, ready-made and predigested. Just the other day I saw a very young child in a pusher engrossed in its 'pad' oblivious to all that was going on around it as Dad wheeled in along the water-front in Wynnum! Even those who regard themselves as 'Christian' are starving themselves of time and opportunity **to think their own thoughts**.

The need for **solitude** and **quietness** was never greater than it is today. The majority of Christians are so completely conforming to this present age that they, too, want things the way they are constantly being **told** they are, and the tellers have little sympathy for 'life in Christ'.

The good news in this tragedy being worked out all around us is that there are a growing number of God's children who have had enough of such mass indoctrination and control. They want to relearn the ways of **solitude** and **simplicity** and gain the infinite **riches of the interior life**. They want to discover, or rediscover, the blessedness of what has been called '**spiritual aloneness**' - a discipline that will go far in making us acquainted with God and our own souls!

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**Nothing so conclusively proves a person's ability to lead others  
as what he or she does from day to day to lead themselves! Yet how many in leadership  
positions would be loath to reveal what they do, or fail to do, to make them worthy of 'in  
Christ' leadership?**

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**Erasmus of Rotterdam**, a sixteenth-century Christian priest who was committed to reforming the Christian Church from within, said *'When faith came to be in writings rather than in hearts, contention grew hot and love grew cold. That which is forced cannot be sincere, and that which is not voluntary cannot please Christ.'*

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**ENCOURAGEMENT** Could it be that the majority of Christians, are already receiving all the spiritual encouragement they think they need? Or, is the bar of our awareness set so low that we are unaware of what is potentially available to us? Is our spiritual impoverishment so advanced that we have little idea of what God wants to give us? From observation and experience I suggest that such widespread 'normality' is in reality serious spiritual impoverishment, not spiritual health!

Many Christians receive so little actual encouragement from fellow Christians, fellow worshippers, even from some 'pastors', that they feel powerless and unable to encourage others 'in Christ'! I suspect that many have no idea of what it is to be an 'in Christ' 'encourager', never mind actually being such a person!

But surely this is a matter of personal responsibility? Yes, it is, but have we permitted ourselves to become so dependent on 'others/leaders' who in reality may be no different to us, that we are all sinking together? Isn't it well past time we stopped making pathetic excuses and blaming others for our personal fragile spiritual condition, and quit accepting such a state as somehow normal and acceptable! It's neither normal nor acceptable!

Pathetic excuses are widespread and yet even more serious are those who have sunk so low spiritually that they no longer make any excuse for their lack of 'Christlikeness'! So, why not assume full responsibility for ourselves and commence a new practice, right now, this New Year, of prayerfully reading these weekly emails with ears tuned to hear whatever **God** (not the human writer) is saying **to us**. Then, share these emails, plus our God given thoughts, with everyone we can think of, even with those who may not share our beliefs. And don't overlook those in retirement establishments! Yes, it will cost us a few moments but our investment is very likely to be a real blessing to many others, including ourselves! Those who may not like what we say will soon let us know and that's easily fixed! But it may also be God's blessing to them **through us**, and we may discover that we are their **only channel** of such encouragement. Please don't exclude anyone from your list of possibilities unless they specifically request you do so!

May each of us discover the joy of being a blessed encourager 'in Christ' of many others this year, and beyond, and being personally blessed by God through the fresh thoughts **he** brings to **our** minds. **This is OUR ministry!**

*A blessed and satisfying New Year to every one of you. Bill & Anne*