

“Journeys and Destinations – Seeking Encouragement”

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“Now Paul and his companions set sail from Paphos and came to Perga in Pamphylia. And John left them and returned to Jerusalem, but they went on from Perga and came to Antioch in Pisidia. And on the Sabbath day they went into the synagogue and sat down. After the reading from the Law and the Prophets, the rulers of the synagogue sent a message to them, saying, “Brothers, if you have any word of encouragement for the people, say it.” So Paul stood up, and motioning with his hand said: “Men of Israel and you who fear God, listen. The God of this people Israel chose our fathers and made the people great during their stay in the land of Egypt, and with uplifted arm he led them out of it. And for about forty years he put up with them in the wilderness. And after destroying seven nations in the land of Canaan, he gave them their land as an inheritance. All this took about 450 years. And after that he gave them judges until Samuel the prophet. Then they asked for a king, and God gave them Saul the son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, for forty years. And when he had removed him, he raised up David to be their king, of whom he testified and said, ‘I have found in David the son of Jesse a man after my heart, who will do all my will.’ Of this man’s offspring God has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus, as he promised. Before his coming, John had proclaimed a baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel. And as John was finishing his course, he said, ‘What do you suppose that I am? I am not he. No, but behold, after me one is coming, the sandals of whose feet I am not worthy to untie.’ “Brothers, sons of the family of Abraham, and those among you who fear God, to us has been sent the message of this salvation. For those who live in Jerusalem and their rulers, because they did not recognize him nor understand the utterances of the prophets, which are read every Sabbath, fulfilled them by condemning him. And though they found in him no guilt worthy of death, they asked Pilate to have him executed. And when they had carried out all that was written of him, they took him down from the tree and laid him in a tomb. But God raised him from the dead, and for many days he appeared to those who had come up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are now his witnesses to the people. And we bring you the good news that what God promised to the fathers, this he has fulfilled to us their children by raising Jesus, as also it is written in the second Psalm, “‘You are my Son, today I have begotten you.’ And as for the fact that he raised him from the dead, no more to return to corruption, he has spoken in this way, “‘I will give you the holy and sure blessings of David.’ Therefore he says also in another psalm, “‘You will not let your Holy One see corruption.’ For David, after he had served the purpose of God in his own generation, fell asleep and was laid with his fathers and saw corruption, but he whom God raised up did not see corruption. Let it be known to you therefore, brothers, that through this man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and by him everyone who believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses. Beware, therefore, lest what is said in the Prophets should come about: “‘Look, you scoffers, be astounded and perish; for I am doing a work in your days, a work that you will not believe, even if one tells it to you.’” As they went out, the people begged that these things might be told them the next Sabbath. And after the meeting of the synagogue broke up, many Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who, as they spoke with them, urged them to continue in the grace of God.” (Acts 13:13-43)

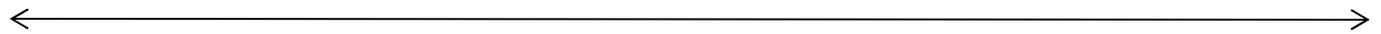
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So, Paul’s “encouragement” began by taking those present on a walk down memory lane of the Old Testament. When’s the last time I took a walk down memory lane to recollect my spiritual walk with God from its beginning to the present?

What benefit, if any, does taking such a walk down memory lane from time to time about my spiritual walk provide me?

To encourage someone means “to inspire with courage, spirit, or strength of mind; to embolden; to animate; to incite; to inspirit.” (Webster, 1828 Dictionary) It speaks to the manner in which the encouragement is to be given (in such a way as to inspire, embolden, or incite someone), not how it is to be received. What are some things I need to consider or do before giving anyone encouragement that “serves to incite, support, promote or advance, as favor, countenance, rewards, profit”? Explain.

If I stop to consider how I’m going to encourage someone and/or the possible ramifications of such encouragement before giving someone a bit of “inspiration”, where does my focus tend to be?



How it is to be offered

The way in which it may be received

“Why do you see the speck that is in your brother’s eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when there is the log in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother’s eye.” (Matthew 7:3-5) Do I ever stop to consider the condition of my own heart...why I feel the need to provide encouragement to someone before moving ahead? If so, why so? If not, why not?

During the opening prayer for the 117th session of Congress, Rep. Emanuel Cleaver, Missouri Democrat and former longtime Methodist minister, ended his prayer “We ask it in the name of the monotheistic God, Brahma, and God known by many names by many different faiths,” Amen and a-woman.” Pastor Wally said that if I try to “cover all my bases” (as Congressman Cleaver apparently tried to do) when I pray, I cover none of them. When it comes to confessing my sin(s), do I make a concerted effort to name those sins individually or do I tend to take a more “generic” approach and why?

Paul told those in the synagogue that day that “through [Jesus] forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and by him everyone who believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses.” Pastor Wally pointed out that God’s pardon says that the crime never happened. Pastor Wally also said that he wanted to “swim in the deep end of the pool” in the same way as people like Charles Spurgeon did...to have a deeper, more personal walk with

Him. Spurgeon when he spoke on the passage from Nehemiah 9:17 and focused only on that portion that promised "But you are a God ready to forgive" said: "I would call your attention to the expression, "a God ready to pardon," not a God who may possibly pardon; neither a God who upon strong persuasion and earnest pleadings may, at length be induced to forgive; not one who, perchance, at some remote period after we have undergone a long purgation may manifest a mercy which is now in the background, but a God "ready to pardon,"—willing and more than willing—ready, standing prepared, or to use another Scriptural expression, "waiting to be gracious." We have a God who stands like a host at a festival, which is all provided and prepared, saying, "My oxen and my fatlings are provided, all things are ready, come ye to the suppers." Not only are all things ready but God himself is ready, his own heart and hand all ready to bestow pardon upon the guilty ones who come before him. There is forgiveness with him that he may be feared." Do I take the time to swim in the deep end when reading Scripture as Spurgeon has, or do I tend to stay in the shallow parts of the scriptural "pool" and why?

Take a moment to swim around the whole of Nehemiah 9:17: "They refused to obey and were not mindful of the wonders that you performed among them, but they stiffened their neck and appointed a leader to return to their slavery in Egypt. But you are a God ready to forgive, gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and did not forsake them." Note any new thoughts you had as a result from reflecting on Nehemiah 9:17:

Does my "Who's Your One" need to be "encouraged" by me that my Lord and Savior is "ready to pardon" them? If so, how will I go about providing them with this encouragement? If not, why not?

Pastor Wally exhorted us to "stop wasting time arguing nonsense". Nonsense is defined to mean an "absurdity; trifles; things of no importance" (Webster's 1828 Dictionary) Are there "things of no importance" that are taking up my time? If so, identify what those "things of no importance are". If not, identify those strategies that I employ to avoid getting trapped by them.

What are some of the advantages of choosing to let some things go...to see continuing such activities as a waste of time?