**Lessons from a Lockdown**

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**Day 22**

**Colossians 2:1-5**

I want you to know how hard I am contending for you and for those at Laodicea, and for all who have not met me personally. My goal is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. I tell you this so that no one may deceive you by fine-sounding arguments. For though I am absent from you in body, I am present with you in spirit and delight to see how disciplined you are and how firm your faith in Christ is.

***Questions for Personal Reflection:***

1. Have I been encouraging? What have I done to encourage people? What can I do to encourage people more?
2. Have I helped unify my group? What more can I do?
3. What is the result of being encouraged in heart and united in love?
4. Do I know Christ more now than before?
5. How disciplined am I? How firm is my faith?

***Insight:***

The phrase “how hard I am contending” is rendered in other translations as “how much I have agonized” (NLT) or “how great a struggle I have” (ESV) or “how hard I have worked for you” (GNT). Paul did this because he wanted them to be encouraged in heart and united in love. This is a good goal also for us in our interaction with our brothers and sisters. First, let us be encouraging. There are many discouraging things happening in the world today. Lately because we are at home we are more exposed to the news on the radio, television and online. The discouragement is further increased by what people post, comment or share on social media. Oftentimes we are also tempted to share our own frustrations, discouragement or stress online. Let’s avoid doing that. If we need to express negative feelings let’s not do it online and further discourage people. Let’s express negative feelings to our brothers and sisters privately. In this way we will not discourage people and we will be able to get the help we need. If we do share things publicly on social media, let’s share encouraging news or things that can help people overcome feelings of discouragement in a godly way. We can share articles and videos on Christian topics. We can share news about godly things that people are doing. We can share music that uplifts the spirit or helps us focus on God. We can share about church events online that people can visit. We can share inspiring passages from the Bible or other books we are reading. We can share lesson in written, video or audio formats. We can share good news about what God is doing in our lives or in our churches. The point is that we can use social media to encourage people in a godly way. We can also try to encourage people using more “traditional” means like talking to them on the phone or sending an encouraging text. Because of the discouraging climate we find ourselves in, we should do our best to be encouraging in every interaction we have.

Let us be clear though that encouragement is not about making people laugh. Some jokes and memes though “funny” may have an underlying ungodly quality. Certainly, laughter elicited by making fun of people is not the encouragement Paul is talking about. Besides, encouragement is not about being funny, it is about putting courage in people’s hearts. Encouragement is not mere entertainment, it is meaningful engagement to help another find strength in God. So be encouraging and not just entertaining.

Second, let us build unity in love. Being united can be a good or bad thing depending on what unites you. Some people today are united in their hatred or in some other ungodly motive. We should not be like that. Let us be united in our love for God, His church and for one another. Let us be united in our love for the Word, the gospel and in our mission to seek and save the lost. Let us be united in helping the poor, strengthening the weak and setting the oppressed free. Simply put, let us be united in Christ. How do we build unity? Meaningful communication is the key. The need for constant godly conversations has never been more important than it is today as we live our quarantined lives. Every disciple has the responsibility to build the unity of the body of Christ. Instead of waiting for other Christians to reach out to us, let us initiate godly conversations with everyone we can reach. Let us grow in our fellowship even if we cannot have actual gatherings. But remember the fellowship is not just talking, it is a “sharing in the common life.” So the topic of our conversations must be about our lives. Let us talk about things we are learning and the things we are struggling with. Let s share about our plans during this time and our frustrations as well. Let’s share the good things we have done and what we have failed to do. If it is easier, we can write down our thoughts and send it in an e-mail or private messaging. Let us remember that unity is built by sharing our lives.

Paul also said that although he was not with them physically he wanted the Colossians to be disciplined and be firm in their faith in Christ. The true test of our convictions is whether we will still do the right thing even if other Christians are not around. The physical absence of our spiritual leaders does not give us an excuse to compromise or weaken in our faith. Physical distancing should not result in spiritual backsliding. We must remain disciplined and be firm in our faith.

Let us find more ways to encourage each other in heart and be united in love during the lockdown.