

The Power of Encouragement

Encouragement is a very effective tool in the healing process. It has the power to give hope and motivate people to change. Ministers in the church are not the only ones required to give encouragement to others. Every Christian, regardless of training, is called upon to encourage his brothers and sisters. We are commanded in the New Testament to encourage each other. Each person's individual ministry of encouragement can help someone in a different way.

2Tim. 1:16 – “The Lord give mercy unto the house of Onesiphorus; for he oft refreshed me...”

I WHAT IS ENCOURAGEMENT?

Webster defines it this way:

To encourage –

- to inspire with courage, spirit or hope; to spur on, stimulate; to give help or patronage to.
- to encourage, whether others or ourselves; to make courageous, not in a passive way, but as an action verb.
- to stir up, to provoke, to move forward in a given direction such as running and finishing a race or journey.

Encouragement – “the act of encouraging, giving hope or promise”.

- Encouragement is touching people right where they are, inspiring them to hang in there and persevere in the midst of problems.
- It is communicating the language of acceptance of who they really are – at their deepest level.

Encouragement is not just a technique to be mastered. It also involves a sensitivity to people. The ministry of encouragement requires that the encourager have some awareness of what is happening inside people and that he speak words which reflect a genuine regard for others ensuring them that they are valuable. The effect of encouragement is to stimulate the hope that solutions exist for every problem and that, seen from an eternal perspective, life does make sense.

II REASONS FOR GIVING ENCOURAGEMENT:

- It is an urgent priority in today's world because there is so much doubt, disappointment, despair and hopelessness. We need to come alongside people and dialogue with them so that they can have a renewed hope and faith and be energized with new power.
- Parents need to be cheerleaders for their children showing supportive love and encouragement.
- Encouragement is the unique ministry of the triune God i.e. the Holy Spirit. We appreciate how good it feels to be encouraged in the spirit. However, we should not forget to do it to others.
- The hearts of all saints need to be refreshed at times.

Phil. 1:7 – “For we have great joy and consolation in thy love, because the bowels of the saints are refreshed by thee, brother.”

- Encouragement is the opportunity to start something that may never end because of its ripple effect. It is a gift that keeps on giving and giving and may some day come back to you.

III WHY WE ALL NEED ENCOURAGEMENT:

Our sinful state:

Before Adam sinned, he enjoyed open and intimate fellowship with God. But sin immediately brought terrible consequences. Among them was a presence of a new emotion: fear. Before he sinned there was nothing to fear. However, when sin entered paradise disorder, uncertainty, emotional stress, broken relationships and death were introduced. All were prompted by fear.

For the first time in his life Adam had to wrestle with a sense of unacceptability. The final source of our fear is an awareness of our profoundly unacceptable condition. We know something is wrong with us. We are not as we should be. Therefore it is natural to fear rejection. Rejection is so terribly painful that we want above all else to avoid it. So we come to fear exposure. Although our ultimate fear has to do with rejection by God, we learn to attach the fear to someone more tangibly present. **The root of our fear is an understanding that we are not acceptable and that exposure of who we really are will bring rejection.**

People ever since Adam have been searching desperately for ways to cover their unworthiness, to feel good about themselves despite the fact that they are worthy of rejection. Fearful people committed to avoiding the terror of exposure will look for places to hide.

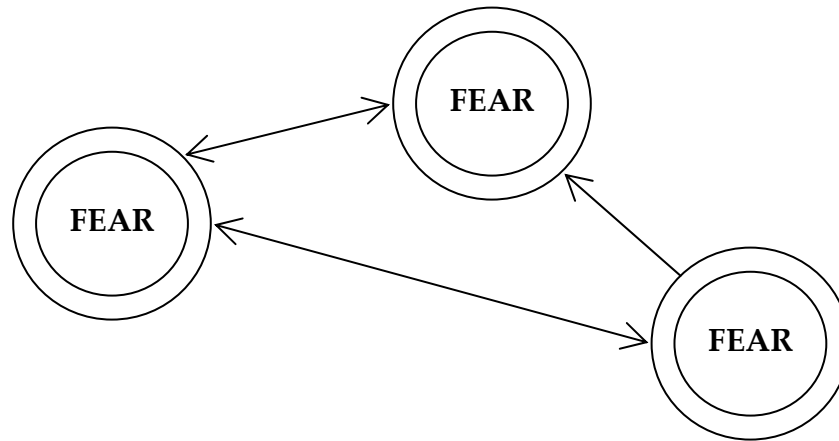


DEFENSIVE LAYER

We protect ourselves in defensive layers. We have an endless variety of protective strategies: jokes, silliness, a cocky attitude, boasting, silence, manipulative tears, feigned repentance and humility. A defensive layer is whatever we do or don't do that is intended to protect us from exposure and help us avoid whatever we fear. People can spend their entire lives behind their layers.

We meet at the level of our layers, determined to remain safely hidden behind our protective masks. Our primary commitment is to avoid exposure, to appear acceptable, to deal from a position of strength. When Christians interact from behind defensive masks, they experience layer-to-layer fellowship. After chatting from behind our layers, we feel unsatisfied, distant, untouched, superficial – and safe. This produces shallow surface community.

SHALLOW SURFACE COMMUNITY



Encouragement will not develop in surface community. Words spoken from a layer are sinful; they do not reflect a concern for others' needs as greater than our own. When "layered Christians" meet together, their purpose is to protect themselves from each other and to enhance their own self esteem. Layer-to-layer fellowship produces surface community, a relational structure in which people do not really touch each other. No encouragement can take place in surface community. We must replace surface community with biblical fellowship if we are to encourage one another when we gather together.

Creating a safe and loving atmosphere:

We must create a relational atmosphere in which words can reach deeply enough to encourage. This requires breaking down the protective walls between people that sustain surface community. Words have little chance of encouraging powerfully when spoken from one layer to another. If layers exist to protect people from the exposure they fear, it follows that the remedy for layered fellowship primarily involves finding a solution to fear. People describe their safest times as those spent with someone they could trust to accept them.

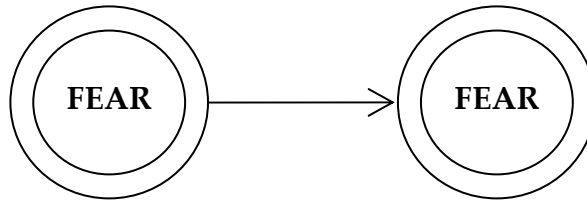
We feel least fearful when we are with people who love us. In an atmosphere of love, we feel freedom to be real, to shed our layers without fear of rejection. In this atmosphere, feelings of intimacy and closeness can grow naturally. Only words of love can encourage.

Encouragement depends less on which words we use than on the motivation behind them. Words that encourage are inspired by love, not by fear. The words spoken must never function as a layer for the speaker. They must not be aimed at another's layers but rather at another's hidden fear with the intent of reducing it. Real encouragement occurs when words are spoken from a heart of love to another's recognized fear.

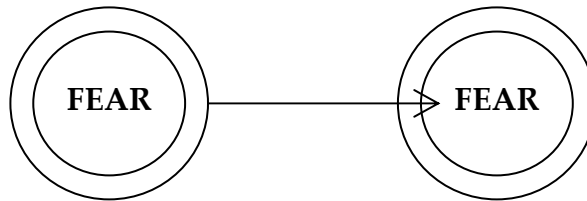
Encouragement depends on loving motivation in the encourager as well as wisdom to discern the needs of the other person accurately. The actual words may be admonishing, rebuking, correcting, reproving, instructing, explaining, sympathizing, affirming or self-disclosing. If the motive is love and the target is fear, the words will be encouraging. Words aimed at fear do not necessarily speak openly about fear, but they always are

spoken by someone who is conscious of the other's fear. Every encouraging sentence should reflect an awareness that people are needy and fearful. The ministry of encouragement requires that the encourager have some awareness of what is happening inside people and that he speak words which reflect a genuine regard for others as valuable.

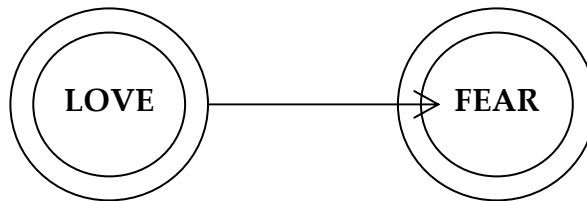
ARE YOU AN EFFECTIVE ENCOURAGER?



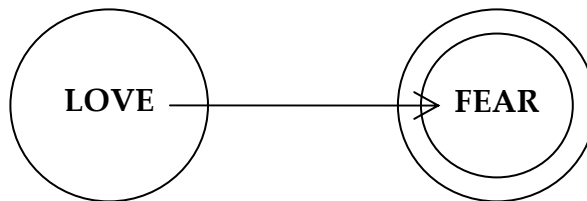
NO ENCOURAGEMENT



LIMITED ENCOURAGEMENT



LIMITED ENCOURAGEMENT



TRUE ENCOURAGEMENT

IV WHEN TO ENCOURAGE:

There are countless opportunities to encourage one another, but they often go unrecognized. To recognize an opportunity to encourage someone, people must meet two conditions:

1. Encouragers must consciously remind themselves, as they interact with others, that their goal is to encourage.
2. Encouragers must learn the fine art of using “**door openers**”. They must realize that people don’t normally reveal their concerns openly. More often they drop hints that things are not as they should be. When an encourager suspects that a brother or sister is sharing a disguised need, he must respond with sensitivity by being that “door opener”. Door openers convey an accepting interest in whatever the other person wants to say and will begin by gently questioning and giving empathy; door closers, on the other hand, convey a bored or critical indifference to whatever may be troubling the other person.

V TRAITS AND SKILLS OF AN ENCOURAGER:

Good encouragers must be selfless, and genuine or real people. They must be assertive and not afraid to take aggressive action if need be (seize an opportunity). They must have a spirit of humility.

1. **An encourager knows the power of his words** and uses that force to build up his Christian brothers and sisters. **The church should be a place where we get built up, not beat up!** Our words should be like building blocks. We should keep adding positive words to each other’s pile of blocks until the pile gets higher and higher. We shouldn’t go around and knock each other’s blocks down by our use of negative or hurting words.
2. **He is aware of the great potential his words have to heal or destroy.**
Prov. 18:21 – Death and life are in the power of the tongue...
Prov. 12:25 –Heaviness in the heart of man maketh it stoop: but a good word maketh it glad.
Prov. 16:24 – Pleasant words are as an honeycomb, sweet to the soul and health to the bones.
Prov. 25:11 – A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver
Prov. 15:23 – A man hath joy by the answer of his mouth: and a word spoken in due season, how good it is!
Eph. 4:29 – Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers.

Words can encourage, discourage, or do nothing. Shallow words accomplish little, death words discourage, and life words encourage.

“Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words can never hurt me” is not true. The wounds in the body made by stones may heal, but the hurt in the heart made by an insult may endure for a lifetime. Parents, teachers and peers have the greatest impact upon a person.

Think about your own life...unless you have experienced some form of violence, probably the worst suffering has come from words used cruelly. Criticism,

sarcasm, humiliation, and rumors which cause us word wounds. Every time we open our mouths we have a choice to make – to encourage, uplift and give hope or to undermine, discourage and judge.

Parents – children really need positive affirmation (7- 10 positives for 1 negative)

3. **He is a good listener, always slow to speak.** We don't have to produce great words of wisdom, just a few simple syllables of sympathy and an arm around the shoulder can often provide much needed comfort in a bad situation. He actively listens beneath the layers to understand what is really being said. He respects others' feelings and listens before answering them.
4. **He is sensitive in his speech** – the encourager's response must be well-tuned and suited both to the circumstances and the personality of the one speaking. **People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care.** He genuinely cares about others and speaks from a loving concern.
5. **He is gentle in his speech.** – Gentle words are seasoned with grace. They may convince the person that there is no need to hide behind his layers. He knows how to build relationships and is good at conversation.
6. **He is able to use good verbal skills that include:**
 - a. **Reflection** – an encourager sometimes needs to serve as a mirror, reflecting back to the speaker what he is really feeling, doing, and pursuing. Reflection uncovers problems which require attention but which our selective memory system tends to ignore.
 - b. **Clarification** – ask what the speaker meant, or repeat back what you think he meant, and ask if you've got the meaning. It encourages the speaker to state more clearly what is happening.
 - c. **Exploration** – reflection and clarification open conversational doors. Open ended questions rather than yes-no questions can often move the exploration forward. Exploring is an effort to further uncover hidden problems that are hindering spiritual growth. The interaction has now reached beneath the layers to the core. The encourager can now speak from his love to the other's fear.
7. **He consciously looks for ways to recognize people's fear and speaks to it** – He understands that having a heart of love and a goal of speaking to others' fears is the key to learning the power of encouragement. He is willing to go out of his circle of comfort and look for others' needs.

VI HOW TO ENCOURAGE OURSELVES:

What do we do when we become discouraged? How do we encourage ourselves when no one is available or if we are isolated from others or when others are unsympathetic to our problems?

I Sam. 30:14 – “...David encouraged himself in the Lord his God.

We can encourage ourselves through:

- **Solitude or Silence** so that we can talk with God and listen to Him. We will not be valuable to anyone if we don't spend time alone. We need to separate ourselves from the noisy, busy world just as Jesus often did.
Psalms 46:10 – “Be still and know that I am God...”
Isaiah 30:15 – “...in quietness and confidence shall be your strength...”
- **Scriptures** – We need to spend time daily in His Word so that we are strengthened and able to resist temptations.
- **Song and Music** – Music can encourage our souls like nothing else. Choose songs that are meaningful to you.

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