

Encouragement – Not Just the “Nice Thing” to Do

“May our Lord Jesus Christ Himself and God our Father, who loved us and by His grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word.”

–2 Thessalonians 2:16

Recall the smile that passed your lips as you read a cheery note from a friend? How about the surprise gift that appeared for no apparent reason? The efforts may have been small, but just knowing that someone was thinking of you put a huge lift in your step and a bright spot in your day.

Extending words of encouragement seemed to be an important part of the apostle Paul’s ministry. Just read his letter to the Ephesians. It’s filled with words of support and hope to build up his readers, words like: “grace and peace to you...” and “I have not stopped giving thanks for you.” Wouldn’t you feel good about receiving a letter like that? In addition, he made the Ephesians aware that he was praying for them, “...I pray that out of His glorious riches He may strengthen you with power through His Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.” Which one of us doesn’t need prayer like that? In fact, is there any greater desire we can have for a friend than what Paul prayed?

As is often the case, some recent difficult experiences in my own life led to powerful lessons about the wonderful resource of encouragement and prayer from friends. Both of my grandmothers died within six months of one another. Until then, I had not experienced death so close to me. Out of the sadness, I gained a whole new perspective on the valuable power that prayer and encouragement play in times of loss. Over those months, I received many unexpected notes and calls from friends and even acquaintances, all letting me know they were praying for me and my family. It seems so simple, but in the midst of deep sadness each act of encouragement became a precious gift.

I often marvel at the acts of servitude offered by friends as they display their care for me—the leaves that were unexpectedly raked when I dreaded the task, the friends who showed up at my grandmother’s memorial and funeral service, the phone message of praise from an unexpected new friend. These are all lovely illustrations of the Lord’s love and care for me—a bright ray of hope shining through to a sometimes dreary world.

As I recognize the power of encouragement in my own life, I find myself increasingly grateful for acts of kindness by others. I am also moved to open my eyes for ways I can offer encouragement to those around me. More than ever, I’m led to express my gratitude to the Lord who is the ultimate model of kindness.

One of my favorite Psalms reads, “...I will meditate on your wonderful works...The Lord is good to all; He has compassion on all He has made...The Lord is faithful to all His promises and loving toward all He has made” (Psalm 145). Doing acts of kindness and encouragement isn’t just doing the “nice thing,” it’s at the very heart and character of God. Moreover, He calls us to follow His lead. Take a moment to contemplate His encouragement in your own life and the privilege we’re each given to be used by Him in the same way!

How can you extend a heart of encouragement this week? Ask the Lord to reveal how He wants to use you to bring a smile to someone’s face. As you do, think of Paul’s words to the Ephesians and remember to pray for that person. I guarantee you’ll see the Lord do some amazing work all around you.

How is the Lord leading you to encourage those around you? The simple acts can often mean the most. In addition to praying, here are a few ideas:

- offer to make dinner (and do the dishes!)
- leave a hand-picked bouquet of flowers at a co-worker’s desk
- send a note to a friend, telling them nothing more than how they are a gift to you
- wrap up a small gift like a candle, notepad, fishing lure, bookmarker, or nail polish, along with a note
- secretly leave a favorite treat or beverage
- commit to pray for someone every day for a week, and perhaps send them a note to let them know
- leave some chocolate and a special verse for the day for a new acquaintance
- cut out a comic strip you know someone would find amusing and leave it for them
- put a note of encouragement for the day in a family member’s lunch
- offer to spend an hour or two helping with yard work
- fill a candy jar on someone’s desk
- leave a message on a friend’s answering machine, telling them how wonderful they are
- stop by a friend’s house with fresh-baked cookies
- tell someone specifically how you appreciate even the little things they do
- anonymously leave a gift certificate for Caribou, DQ or some other favorite spot
- offer to watch a friend’s kids for a few hours to provide a busy parent with some time to relax