

A Word of Encouragement

Light on the Rock

by Philip Shields

In world full of negativity, fault-finding and gossip, God has called His children to be Encouragers. Learn about apostle Joseph and how he was renamed. Hear the life-changing and life-giving power behind passing on a compliment, becoming a “Good Finder”, and the power of writing encouragement down. You have the power to change lives. Use it for good.

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Greetings, family of God, heirs of God. This is your brother Philip Shields.

Have you noticed that no matter how hardnosed and tough a person may feel, he or she deep down loves being appreciated, loves encouragement, loves feeling someone cares. Deep down we all respond so deeply when someone out there – anyone – says “You’re the best.” Or, “we appreciate all your hard work”. Or “nobody does it better...”.... Or “I don’t know what I’d do without you. You mean the world to me.” Or, “the joy in your marriage really inspires me. I want what you have.” “You’re the reason the plan is working – you work so hard, and we’ve all noticed.” Someone arrives at their desk at work and it’s covered with a large spray of fresh roses – simply signed: “you’re the best” - anonymous. Watch the response.

A hallmark of every brother and sister in Christ is -- being Encouragers of one another. Children of God who are gracious, kind, uplifting. People who leave others with a sense of having been enriched because of positive encouragement we left them with, as we spend time together.

I’ve fallen way short more often than not, of what I’ve just said. I always preach to myself first and foremost. In fact, as I’ve said before, you will know what I’m working on by what I’m speaking on, in so many cases. I’m flesh and blood, and as my Lord says, “the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak”.

So I’m not here to preach at anyone, but here to share what I’ve been thinking about for a while: to over time become known more as a true child of God, known for his gentleness and encouragement of others. If you know me, you know I’ve got my work cut out for me. So let’s encourage each other to do what the Word says about this subject. Encourage me. Encourage others. Let’s do it. I hope you’ll listen to this, and if this pushes the right buttons for you, please pass it on to others. We all can use a little prod to think of others more often.

Where does right and good encouragement come from? The Bible calls God “the God of all comfort” and He is the source of *all* things good (**James 1:17**) – including love, encouragement, positive thoughts and feelings. He is the Father of Lights in which there is no shadow of turning. Our Father – the only Living God – is called in scripture the God of hope, the God of Peace, the God of all grace, the God of patience and all comfort, and on and on. What a great God we serve and worship! *HE* is the source of all encouragement, love and acceptance! When we see even just a fraction of all the troubles and mess the world is in, you have to wonder how a great God can stay positive, but He does. In fact He admonishes us to focus only on positive things about our surrounds and about people in Philippians 4:8:

Philippians 4:8 “Finally, brethren, whatever things are **true**, whatever things are **noble**, whatever things are **just**, whatever things are **pure**, whatever things are **lovely**, whatever things are **of good report**, if there is **any virtue** and if there is anything **praiseworthy** -- meditate on these things.”

If we only would do that, what a positive world this would be! Instead people tend to focus on gossip, on things not entirely true, certainly not on the love or praiseworthy... and we people of God have got to do what God says: meditate on things that are of good report and praiseworthy.

God helps us by putting His encouraging instructions down in writing for us – so we can go over His words over and over. I’ll say more later about the power of the written word. God’s words were written for our encouragement and admonition (**1 Cor. 10:11**).

Romans 15:4 says “For whatever things were written before *were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.*”

Let’s start off with God’s Word, for the Bible itself tells us in many ways and many places to be encouragers. And I pray this sermon will be a vehicle for encouraging each of us to let God’s spirit flow more mightily in us and help us become encouragers.

“SON OF ENCOURAGEMENT”

One of the great – yet very humble -- apostles was Joseph. You say Joseph (or Joses)? Who was that? You know him by the name the group renamed him with. Because so many people were fed the milk of renewed strength by his words and actions, the other apostles renamed him – “Son of Encouragement”, or “one who encourages”. That’s what **Barnabas** means. What a testimony to God’s spirit being allowed to work in this man. Let’s read it.

Acts 4:36-37 “And Joses, who was also **named Barnabas by the apostles (which is translated Son of Encouragement)**, a Levite of the country of Cyprus, 37 having land, sold it, and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.”

What an honor! Would you – or I – ever be renamed “encourager”?

Let me give you two examples of how Barnabas was so encouraging, and let’s see if we can learn from these examples.

- 1. His support of Paul’s calling.** Remember Saul – also called Paul? He was not reputed as the “son of encouragement”, but reputed as the persecutor of the Christians. He was the one who was cheering people on, as they stoned Stephen. He was the one breathing threats of murder against men, women and children who believed in Jesus.

Then Jesus had His personal one-on-one with Paul on the road to Damascus. We’ve talked about that a lot lately in my previous sermons. Remember he was on the way to jail the Damascus brethren. Fortunately, there were very converted people there who lived and practiced what God’s people should be: a place where the warmth of a family, God’s family, is practiced day by day.

Some people, perhaps because of what they have done or have been, are outcasts from that warmth of the family of God. So-called “people of God” won’t let them meet with them. I say maybe that group

isn't really part of God's family. Even Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians to give repentant sinners a chance, lest they become discouraged and fall into the snares of the devil. Sure, it's easy to play judge and decide someone hasn't repented enough to be worthy of your group. Well, so be it. But that's not what God tells His children.

God's forgiveness is instant. Remember the thief on the cross? Remember the woman about to be stoned because she was caught in the act of adultery? There was no "track record" of a new life yet – but they were each forgiven instantly.

Anyway, the Damascus brethren immediately forgave and accepted Paul – without demanding time to show he was no longer practicing his torturing and jailing and meanness.(**Acts 9:19**).

But the Jerusalem brethren – who had actually experienced his meanness (and Damascus had not yet experienced it) – took longer to accept Paul. Let's read what happened:

Acts 9:26-31

“And when Saul had come to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, and did not believe that he was a disciple.[Translation: they didn't believe he had changed. Now comes the son of encouragement.] **27 But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles.** [Did you get that? Barnabas steps up to the plate!] And he declared to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus. **28** So he was with them at Jerusalem, coming in and going out. **29** And he spoke boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus and disputed against the Hellenists, but they attempted to kill him. **30** When the brethren found out, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him out to Tarsus. **31 Then** the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had *peace and were edified. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied.*”

Paul also alludes to Barnabas' support in Gal. 2:1.

Anyway, God blesses the brethren with growth as they allowed a new convert who had been a murderer to worship alongside them – and eventually to even lead them.

It gets even better with this Barnabas. Had there not been a Barnabas in the life of Paul, I wonder if we'd be reading and hearing exactly what we do read -- or at least I wonder if everything would have happened for Paul as quickly as it did. So, Barnabas not only helps get Paul accepted in Jerusalem among the Christians, now let's see what else he does for Paul:

Acts 11:19-30

“Now those who were scattered after the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to no one but the Jews only. **20** But some of them were men from Cyprus and Cyrene, who, when they had come to Antioch, spoke to the Hellenists, *preaching the Lord Jesus.* **21** And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord. **22** Then news of these things came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, **and they sent out Barnabas to go as far as Antioch.** **23** When he came and had seen the grace of God, he was glad, **and encouraged them all** that with purpose of heart they should continue with the Lord.

24 **For he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith.** And a great many people were added to the Lord.

25 **Then Barnabas departed for Tarsus to seek Saul.** 26 **And when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. So it was that for a whole year they assembled with the church and taught a great many people.** And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch

Then verse 30 states Barnabas and Paul were chosen as emissaries to take food relief to starving saints.

Are you getting the picture about this Barnabas?

He saw the best in people, and helped bring it out. *When we do notice and comment on the best in one another, watch the individuals in that group grow and grow.*

Story of when we had taken some leadership training classes – and upon receiving the award, others in the room were invited to share with the group something special about the person receiving the award. It was very moving, very touching. It was like having a Living Eulogy – the nice things they say about you after you're dead, but in this case, we were all very much alive. It was one of the most inspiring evenings we've ever had. Why don't we do that more often?

Now let's read a couple segue passages to the 2nd point about Barnabas and how he was someone who helped bring the best out in people.

Acts 12:25 “And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had fulfilled their ministry, and they also took with them **John whose surname was Mark.**”

2. BARBABAS WAS WILLING TO GIVE JOHN MARK A 2ND CHANCE.

Acts 13:1-3 “Now in the church that was at Antioch there were certain prophets and teachers: **Barnabas**, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and **Saul**. 2 As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, “**Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.**” 3 Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away.

Acts 13:4-5 “So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus. 5 And when they arrived in Salamis, they preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews. **They also had John [Mark] as their assistant.**”

Acts 13:13 “Now when Paul and his party set sail from Paphos, they came to Perga in Pamphylia; *and John [Mark], departing from them,* returned to Jerusalem”

So Mark was a ministerial assistant who quit on them on this journey. Apparently that really ticked off Paul, who in chapter 13 begins to be the leading apostle of the two. After the ministerial conference in Acts 15 in Jerusalem over the issue of circumcision, John Mark comes to the fore again.

Acts 15:36-41 “Then after some days Paul said to Barnabas, “Let us now go back and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they are doing.” 37 **Now Barnabas was determined to take with them John called Mark.** 38 **But Paul insisted that they should not take with them the one who had departed from them in**

Pamphylia, and had not gone with them to the work. 39 Then the contention became so sharp that they parted from one another. And so Barnabas took Mark and sailed to Cyprus; 40 but Paul chose Silas and departed, being commended by the brethren to the grace of God. 41 And he went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.”

Paul rejected Mark out of hand. Barnabas felt there was still something worth salvaging in Mark, who for one reason or another had been a quitter, had lost heart or something and was less than impressive to Paul. Had Barnabas not chosen to keep encouraging Mark – perhaps that is all we’d read about Mark. But no – Barnabas gives him another crack at ministry.

I think largely because of Barnabas’ encouragement, we *do* see John Mark blossom and become fruitful in the ministry. *How fruitful?*

Well, even Paul sees enough growth and “track record” in John Mark over time that notice this; Paul is now in prison and needs encouragement and support himself, so hear what he says:

Colossians 4:10-11

10 Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you, *with Mark the cousin of Barnabas* (about whom you received instructions: if he comes to you, welcome him), 11 and Jesus who is called Justus. ***These are my only fellow workers for the kingdom*** of God who are of the circumcision; **they have proved to be a comfort to me.”**

So now we see Paul calling John Mark a fellow worker and someone who was a comfort to him. I say largely because of what cousin Barnabas was willing to do. I thank God for faithful cousins!

And now the rest of the story:

2 Timothy 4:9-12

“Be diligent to come to me quickly; 10 for Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world, and has departed for Thessalonica -- Crescens for Galatia, Titus for Dalmatia. 11 Only Luke is with me. ***Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for ministry.”***

WOW, WOW, WOW! What a turnaround, and I think largely because a man named “son of encouragement” didn’t give up on the young John Mark.

Peter calls this same John Mark his “son” (1 Pet. 5:13). Mark was so close and effective with Peter, that it is widely believed that he became the personal assistant to Peter, the apostle. Many also believe that the book we love so much – the Gospel according to Mark – is largely the result of recording what PETER had said to Mark over and over.

So John Mark goes from being rejected by Paul, to being accepted and wanted by Paul, to being Peter’s assistant – to writing one of the great gospel accounts in the Bible: the gospel according to Mark. All because BARNABAS, the Son of Encouragement, believed in what Jesus could yet do with him.

I have on my mantle a little carving of a half-finished statue of a man, a fat man – and it says: “Please be patient. God isn’t finished with me yet.” That’s really what we have to believe with one another,

and learn to accept and believe in what Jesus is yet doing in one another, despite our shortcomings and pitfalls.

STRENGTHENING THE CHAIN: We say “a chain is only as strong as its weakest link”. You and I are the links in the chain that make up the body of Christ. But what if the stronger links above and below a weak link – instead of criticizing the weak link – link up with the weak link – and now there are 3 links, 2 of them very strong, where there was once one weak, abandoned link. Now how strong is that *spot* in the chain? It’s powerful. Those who are strong, need to support those who are weak. And we are all – at times in our lives – weak. Even me, especially me! But instead, we cut out the weak links and abandon them. That’s not what scripture says to do.

Galatians 6:1-2 “Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, *you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted. 2 Bear one another's burdens*, and so fulfill the law of Christ [which is love, of course].”

Ephesians 4:32 “And *be kind to one another, tenderhearted*, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.”

Hebrews 12:12 “Therefore *strengthen the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees...*”

Look around. Who out there is suffering like an abandoned “John MARK” – waiting for someone to believe their spiritual life isn’t over? Who out there can be that Barnabas, for that John Mark – and GIVE HIM or her the hope that GOD has a future and a dream for that person?

Would you be that “Barnabas”? I say again, what an *honor* that the apostles renamed Joses – Barnabas: son of encouragement! Would you – or I – ever be renamed “encourager”?

Going forward, I’d like to make that a dream, a goal, a hope. I know it wouldn’t be true of me to date.

But I’d like that to change in my life, and urge you to make it a goal in your life, that your children will brag about you years from now, about how you were there for them, encouraging them.

I dream that someday our work associates will say that when they were down, there was one person who was never too busy to notice – and to help – and that was you, or I.

I dream the lady at the check-out at the grocery store will beam with delight to see you coming, because she knows you’ll do or say something to brighten her day.

I dream we are missed when we leave a group, because we brought in so much sunshine. I dream people talk about how positive we are. I dream of a time when people are happy to see us arrive in a room because they know they’re going to leave that day feeling enriched, motivated, empowered – by you and me and by God’s spirit flowing strongly in us.

I dream you and I can be a modern day Barnabas – a “child of encouragement”.

What did Barnabas do? He saw something good in John Mark - -and helped bring it out.

BEING A “GOOD FINDER”

On this point, I really preach to myself and am determined to get good at this.

It is so easy, as parents, as employees, to find fault. Finding fault must be part of our sinful nature, for we all do it so easily.

Get a group of people together, and before long, someone is finding fault with something: the food, the boss, the president, their wife, their husband, their son, their daughter, their neighbor, SOMEONE.

After a sermon, and I've done it too, we can have Roast Minister for dinner, where we pick apart the points in his sermon, or how he said something.

When ministers get together, its just as easy for them, to gossip about certain brethren in the church. Oh, don't you believe it doesn't happen. It sure does.

BROTHERS AND SISTERS IN CHRIST: let's stop it! Let's be GOOD FINDERS, instead.

Can you find the good in a *minister* – and talk about IT, or the good in his sermon, and to tell him so? Yes, ministers need encouragement too.

Can you find the good in your *boss*, and talk to others about the good in your boss. Can you thank your boss for some of the good things he/she has done? You might at first think that might be hard – but I know you can find lots of good there.

Can you children find the good in your *parents* – and tell them you appreciate them for doing things with you, or for the good meals your mom cooks, or for taking the time to tuck you in, or for taking time to watch you at the Little league game or soccer match? Children, just as you want to be encouraged, so do your parents.

Can we husbands find the good in our wife? ***We're all so good at finding the little thing that wasn't done just right, and omit mentioning how we appreciate all the good things that it is easy for us – whether we're a husband or a wife for that matter – to feel like we can never do anything right!*** My own wife has made that complaint from time to time and it pains me that I have at times come across to her as someone who can never be completely pleased. That's bad. I've gotta change. And I'll bet you do too.

So we replace the bad with the good. Instead of finding fault – being fault finders– how about we all determine to become “GOOD FINDERS”. What do I mean by that?

- start to find what your child did right and watch what happens.
- Catch your kids doing something right, instead of catching them doing something wrong. As you catch them doing something right, notice it, say something about it. Watch the love.

I know for me if someone says something complimentary about anything I did, it makes we just want to do that “thing” even better the next time. We can, in our vanity I suppose, start to think: “if he is impressed with *that*, when I wasn't even trying that hard, just watch what I can do when I really put my all into it” – and then we do! We want to hear the praise again! And again.

However, when we find fault, it is *so* DIScouraging. It makes us not even want to bother. We're all that way to some degree. And we're all so good at being fault finders. That's negative. It leaves a negative taste. Let's change from being fault finders to being "good finders". Let's change from catching people doing something wrong, to catching them doing something right. What a change you'll see.

One time I was being a fault finder and as I began to say negative things, one of the men in the group abruptly changed the topic. Out of the blue. Suddenly. I perfectly understood what he was doing. He didn't want to be part of the negativity. I was stunned, but had to acknowledge to myself that he was doing the right thing. And I learned from him how important that is. Later on he came by and apologized – as he knew what he was doing too. I was the minister, he was a deacon.

But brethren, I thanked him. And I apologized for being negative, and then thanked him again – and assured him that my respect for him had actually gone up by him doing that.

Ministers, how about looking for ways to *encourage* brethren? Sure, we have to correct from time to time; sure we have to encourage people to do better, to strive harder, to study more, to pray more, to be more this and more that but how about a word of encouragement from time to time if and when you see some progress? I know of some ministers who do that, and what a refreshing change that is.

A case in point: in 1 Corinthians, Paul is very, very tough on the Corinthians. On the point of them allowing the sinner to openly commit sexual sin in their midst, he really lashes out at them and orders that man be put out of the church (**1 Corinthians 5:1-6**).

The Corinthians obey. But Paul hears the man had repented and was sorry for his conduct – and so what does Paul command in the 2nd letter. I'll be quoting from the TEV – Today's English Version:

2 Cor 2:5-11

"Now, if anyone has made somebody sad, he has not done it to me but to all of you--in part, at least. (I say this because I do not want to be too hard on him.) 6 It is enough that this person has been punished in this way by most of you. 7 **Now, however, you should forgive him and encourage him, in order to keep him from becoming so sad as to give up completely.** 8 **And so I beg you to let him know that you really do love him.** 9 I wrote you that letter because I wanted to find out how well you had stood the test and whether you are always ready to obey my instructions. 10 When you forgive someone for what he has done, I forgive him too. For when I forgive--if, indeed, I need to forgive anything--I do it in Christ's presence because of you, 11 in order to keep Satan from getting the upper hand over us; for we know what his plans are."

Paul goes on, in the same book, to be a "GOOD FINDER" this way: he *tells* them what he now sees in them, how they repented after a spiritual sort of repentance and he commends them (**2 Corinthians 7:8-11**). **In fact, as you read Paul's writings to the churches, though there is some correction in some of the letters, he is also generous with his remarks, acknowledgements and praise.** I don't have the time to read them all, but in the transcript I'll give scriptural references of how he mentions folks by name who gave of themselves, and their lives for Paul. He commends entire churches for their generosity.

Ministers, we've got to learn to start doing that – and learning from Paul's example.

Parents, we've got to learn to do this more with our children: find how they've improved. Even just incrementally, even if just in a tiny way here or there.

Married couples, we've got to learn to start doing this with our husband or wife.

Teachers, we've got to learn to start doing this with our students.

Bosses, we've got to learn to start finding the good, and to start *celebrating* the improvements being made by our employees.

It's very important – whether a brother or sister in the church, or your child, or your spouse, or your friend, or anybody who has flubbed up real bad – it's very important that they can perceive others have forgiven them and are acting like God would: putting the past *behind* them. Letting them move on.

Look at what Jesus does when Peter flubs up really badly and denies His Friend and Lord 3x in the presence of His enemies: after Jesus is resurrected, the women were the first to find this out and notice what the angel says to them, and notice how Peter is singled out:

Mark 16:6-7 “But he said to them, "Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He is risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid Him. **7 But go, tell His disciples -- and Peter -- that He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him,** as He said to you.”

Now how do you feel if you're Peter? You're being told by an angel that the risen Christ singles you out and that he *wants* to see you again. Wow. Our carnal nature would have thought He would never want to have anything to do with me again – or that He's mad as... well, and wants to give us a tongue lashing. But no, this is the Son of God, this is Love personified. Of course He wants to see Peter again, and of course Peter is forgiven and Peter is accepted back in. For that matter, the other disciples abandoned Christ too, right – except for John.

And all of God's children prove they are God's children, by doing what their Father does. It isn't just Jesus who forgives. No, ALL God's children are like their older brother Jesus. We all forgive and let people move on – or we can't claim to God's family. ***God's family does what God does.***

In fact, I want you to get this: it is much easier to believe GOD has forgiven you when you see God's children forgiving you. It is much harder to accept God has forgiven you, when you see the so-called family of God not letting you move on. Ponder that one.

Colossians 3:12-16

“Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, **put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; 13 bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do.** 14 But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection. 15 And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful.”

I urge you all to hear my sermon on “Forgiving one another as Christ does”. I believe you’ll find it a far deeper sermon on this subject than you may have heard before. We have GOT TO forgive one another, fully, in our heart – and with that forgiveness, have full reconciliation and fellowship again, or it isn’t full forgiveness and acceptance.

Why am I talking about forgiveness in a sermon on encouragement? Because few things are as encouraging as hearing a brother or sister say they still love you, want you, accept you – when you’ve really, really messed up.

I’ll tell you this: I pray to God that He blesses those who have forgiven me, and who are letting me be their friend, even when I’ve really messed up in the past. Too often, we SAY we forgive someone, but make it clear we sure don’t want them ever coming around again though. That’s not forgiveness. That’s not God’s way.

I think a big part of this Good Finder attitude is accepting one another, those God is calling. God is SO interesting. God made me like I am, God made you like you are. There is NOBODY in the whole universe just like you. Nobody. And God designed every single thing about you.

God made you the height you are, God gave you the kind of hair or teeth or smile that you have. Even if you have no teeth, or a crooked smile. God is interesting. He doesn’t want a bunch of perfect looking people. That’s boring. God wants you, so He made *you*.

Part of what makes you – you, is your personality. Some people will love your personality and for some people, we all grate a little against someone, sooner or later. But that’s what makes God’s family interesting. You have bubbly people and shy people. We see neat people and naturally sloppy people. We have Dr. Spock types who are very analytical – and can’t understand those of us who are emotional. I’m more emotional than some like – well, even than I like at times. But God made me thus. The pot can’t complain how the Potter made him (Romans 9:20-21).

Paul brings up this point:

Romans 9:20-21

“Will the thing formed say to him who formed it, "Why have you made me like this?" 21 Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor?”

My point here is this: though we can’t allow open sin to go on in the church, we can abide each other’s personality quirks and learn to not just abide it, but enjoy the differences. We can smile and realize Joe is being Joe, Greg is being Greg, Sally is being Sally – and accept that person warts and all, and hope they accept you, warts and all. And by warts, I don’t mean open sin.

But this is what is so awesome about our Father: that He is our Maker, and He loves us ALL, and wants us ALL to spend eternity with Him. Wow. He must accept me to want to be with me for forever! So we as His children must learn to be the same to each other.

As we are that way to each other, that in turn encourages each of us.

ACCEPTING ONE ANOTHER

How encouraging it is in a church to have a church body where people accept one another? Paul addresses that a lot in Romans 14 and 15, and I'll read a few of the verses in those 2 chapters.

Romans 14:1-2, 4, 10, 12-13

“**Receive** (accept!) one who is weak in the faith, but not to disputes over doubtful things. . . .

4 **Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls.** Indeed, he will be made to stand, **for God is able to make him stand.** [*do you hear the encouragement in that?*]

v.10

10 “But why do you judge your brother? Or why do you show contempt for your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.

v.12-13

12 “So then each of us shall give account of himself to God. 13 Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather resolve this, not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in our brother's way.

v.19

19 “Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and **the things by which one may edify** – [*means build up*] another.”

Now in Romans 15, from the TEV:

Romans 15:1-8 TEV As you hear this, think of the example of the weak link I gave earlier:

“We who are strong in the faith **ought to help the weak to carry their burdens.** We should not **please ourselves.** 2 Instead, we should all please our brothers for their own good, in order to build them up in the faith. 3 For Christ did not please himself. Instead, as the scripture says, “The insults which are hurled at you have fallen on me.” 4 Everything written in the Scriptures was written to teach us, in order that we might have hope through the patience and encouragement which the Scriptures give us. 5 And **may God, the source of patience and encouragement, enable you to have the same point of view among yourselves by following the example of Christ Jesus,** 6 *so that all of you together may praise with one voice the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.* 7 **Accept one another, then, for the glory of God, as Christ has accepted you.”**

So there we have it.

I want to share a couple more points.

THE POWER OF PASSING ON A COMPLIMENT

Paul was very cognizant of the brethren's need for encouragement. One of the things Paul did so well was to do what I call “passing on a compliment”. When you hear someone say something good about someone, when you pass on to that person “Hey, people were talking the other day and your name came up”.... And we immediately groan inside waiting for the gossip, the bad stuff..... “and they were talking about how nobody they know is so helpful, so positive, so uplifting as you”.

Now wow! *That's* encouraging. Instead of the “he said, that she said, and they said” – that we all get so tired of – how about passing on THIS kind of 2nd hand talk about one another: the GOOD stuff!

There's something almost magical about hearing 2nd hand that good things have been said about you. It feels more sincere, for the person who actually said it originally isn't the one telling you. The one telling you is telling you what he or she heard somewhere else. It definitely is awesome.

So anytime you hear something good being said about someone else, repeat it to that person. Watch their eyes light up. They'll even probably have you repeat it, maybe 2 or 3 times. It's like water to a parched plant.

So I say, when you hear stuff like that – don't delay in passing it on. Paul tells us in **Hebrews 3:13** to encourage one another "while it is still called TODAY". Don't wait for tomorrow.

Now watch how Paul was a master of this:

Romans 1:8 "First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, *that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world.*"

Rom 16:19 "For your obedience has become known to all"

1 Thessalonians 1:6-8

"And you became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit, 7 so **that you became examples** to all in Macedonia and Achaia who believe. 8 For from you *the word of the Lord has sounded forth*, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place. *Your faith toward God has gone out, so that we do not need to say anything.*"

If you were a church member there in Rome or Thessalonica, how would you have felt, after all you'd been through, to realize that your faith is being trumpeted around the Christian world as the way a body of Christ should be? Wow!

And how will they feel when they're resurrected, to realize that millions of people through the millennia of time, continued to receive encouragement by what they went through and by their example?

Now you go do the same thing. Pass on a compliment when you hear it. Get on the phone. Write a letter. Do it now, without delay. Watch how it is received.

"Hey, the girls in the office were talking the other day. And your faith and your devotion to God in spite of having lost your husband in such a horrible way, was being discussed. Mrs so-and-so even said it strengthened her to cope with her own loss of her husband. Thought you'd like to know, your faith is strengthening others".

"Hey, I heard from so-and-so that you have such a way with your family. I'm having a tough time with my son. The guys at church say you're the man to talk to about building positive rapport with teenagers. Can we talk?"

Or how about doing this to preachers and ministers, who so often only hear the negative or the nay-sayers who disagree with a point given in the sermon:

“thought you’d like to know that people everywhere are talking about that article you wrote. It’s so helpful to so many.”

“Your sermon last week. Can I get a copy of it? So-and-so called me up to say it was the most encouraging on the topic of ____ that she’s ever heard.”

Are you a parent? Do you have any idea how discouraged teachers get? How about calling up a teacher and passing on a compliment from one of your kids:

“Hi Mr. teacher: My son says all his friends say you’re one of the most effective teachers they’ve ever had. They really enjoy the way you make math FUN and relevant, and show them how it is going to be useful in day-to-life to know how to figure the value of x. Anyway, you’re doing all the right things – and just thought you’d like to know: the kids appreciate you. And we do too.”

You have your children’s friends over to your home. You ask them how things are. One time I had a Bible study and asked a group of kids: “who is the most important people in their lives, who had inspired them the most and were the most meaningful people in their lives.”

Just me and the kids were talking. Well, several said to the group, that their dad, or their mom, or sometimes both their dad and mom were that person. I asked why, and wrote down what they said. As I did, I remember thinking and wondering if my own children would say the same about me and my wife, but what I was hearing was so encouraging, I couldn’t let it stop there. So I called the parents and repeated to them the good stuff their kids had said about them to the other kids and to.

You could have heard a pin drop. That is, until I heard a snuffle, as the Mom on the other end of the phone was fighting back tears. You see we feel so much like failures so much of the time, that this is what is needed: passing on a compliment. Get good at doing it. It will change lives. It will refresh people. God knows I could sure use some of that. And God knows you sure could.

We’re so good at guilt. We’re world-class at it! And we’re so good at gossip. It’s gotta stop – and if you want to spread what others are saying, let it be the GOOD STUFF! Do you FEEL the encouragement?

What I’m saying is this: Let’s stop the negative gossip and let’s start spreading the positive word that is like fresh water to our parched soul.

You also see Paul writing such encouraging things about the men and women who gave of themselves to further the gospel. He commends openly in his letters, people like Timothy, Epaphroditus, Phoebe, and so many others. (**Phil. 2:19-22, 25-30; 4:2-3**; read all of **Romans 16**)

TAKE IT UP A COUPLE NOTCHES: PUT YOUR ENCOURAGEMENT IN WRITING

O.K. let’s take it up a notch. As you become “a GOOD FINDER” - and as we learn to PASS ON compliments, here’s another big point: From time to time, WRITE ***DOWN your encouragement in a handwritten note or letter.*** Here’s why. I heard a sermon recently from a preacher on the radio, and he was making excellent points about the power of putting it in writing:

When you write a note:

- It is **DELIBERATE**. There's no mistaking that you meant to say it, and planned to say it. When you say "I love you" in a note, there's no mistaking it. A child reading that from his parents, or a Dad reading that from his little girl or boy, will definitely feel it.
- It is **DEFINITE AND SPECIFIC**. You can be careful to say it the way you want to say it.
- It is **DIRECT**. There are times you can say things in writing that you may find hard to say in person. This is especially true when you want to really say how deeply you feel about your love, or something you may find awkward to say in person.

For example, writing a friend, a spouse, a Dad or Mom, a daughter or son, a work associate, a brother or sister in the church - - a note to say THIS, will have a phenomenally powerful impact: "My life is so different, my life is not what it would have been, *because of you*. You gave me hope, you helped me believe in people again. You were there for me when I felt so alone. You encouraged me when I felt no one cared. You were there, always, and often. When I needed a friend, someone to lean on, when I needed someone who believed in me, you showed me God's love by being there for me. When I look at you, I see God shining through your eyes. You have been such an inspiration to me. My life is so much richer because of you. From the bottom of my heart: thank you"

If there is someone out there who deserves a note like that from you, write it. Feel it. Make it your words. Send it. Do it now. You'll never regret it. Someone out there needs a note like that. Feed their soul with this rich living water of encouragement.

- It is **DURABLE**. If a letter is very encouraging, people tend to keep it. I have some cards I've kept for years. I have an email envelope category called "encouraging". When someone says anything encouraging to me, I save the email in that envelope. When I feel down, I read them. I'm reminded that at times someone has a good feeling for me and I feel better.

Don't we all from time to time go back and read the crazy things we all said in each other's yearbook? Or on the back of the photos we exchanged at graduation? Isn't there a boxful of old notes and cards that you just can't throw away? And aren't you bummed that you've lost some of the notes that meant so much to you? Why? Because the power of the written encouragement is incalculable!

Even God writes to us, His children:

Romans 15:4 says "For whatever things were written before *were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.*"

So why don't *we* do it more often?

Even just short notes to our kids in their lunch boxes. A smiley with "you're so special to me" or "you make your Mom (or dad) proud of you" or a supporting note just before their big game at school, or a note in their bathroom about how you know they'll do fine on the big exam – and so on. Don't underestimate the power of a well-thought-out wedding card, anniversary

card, or Father's Day card – I mean the words YOU write, and not the store-bought words. Take the time to do it, and mean it.

- **It is distance-proof.** You don't have to be right there with something in writing. Plus, keep in mind that when we are far apart from people, there's nothing like a warm letter from afar. Troops at war will tell you that their favorite day is mail call day. Missionaries abroad will say the same. I know that was certainly true for my Dad in the Philippines when he was a missionary there.

I recommend you *write* your encouragement once in a while. I remember writing my father to tell him how proud I was of him and all he had done to help thousands of people, including thousands owing their very lives to him by his missionary work and foster home for children. I heard later how my father cried over that letter, not knowing that I had felt that way about him. A couple weeks later he suddenly died. Words cannot convey how happy I was that I had written that to him before he died.

We need to say things more that are praise-worthy, encouraging. Even God wants and asks for praise. Please be sure to hear my sermons on Praise, worship and the Tabernacle of David. In fact, God inhabits our praises (**Ps. 22:3**). And He promises to praise His children – us – when we meet Him. Do you realize that?

1 Corinthians 4:5

“Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts. ***Then each one's praise*** will come from God.” We don't often hear that verse preached from the pulpit, do we?

DO IT NOW

Don't let a day go by without encouraging someone.

Hebrews 3:13

“***Exhort one another daily***, while it is called "Today," lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.”

Hebrews 10:24-25

24 **And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works**, 25 not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but **exhorting one another**, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.”

God's people have to spend time together! Don't let anyone be withering on the vine, unloved, and unaccepted. Let's get together and worship together.

Don't Forget God

One Last thing I've got to say: have you ever thought that - - like any Father – our Abba, our dear Father in Heaven, and like any husband –to-be – JESUS, our Beloved – also appreciate words of encouragement from us?

Have you considered that though we normally think of the greater blessing the lesser—God blessing US, in other words – we also have David’s example of saying over and over and over how HE BLESSED GOD. We have the power to bless God, or perhaps more accurately, BE a blessing to God. God wants to hear from you. When we talk to Him, He lights up. He loves it, just as I do to get an email, letter or phone call from my children!

Why not speak from the heart, in a way you may not have recently, and *tell* Father how much you love Him? *Tell* Jesus how much you appreciate what He did for you on the cross and want to show that appreciation more each day by not taking sin lightly? *Tell* Jesus you sure appreciate the inspiration, the faithfulness, the love, the support He gives you day by day. Be direct, be specific, be detailed about the times, the ways, the events where you know God is directly involved – and how much you appreciate our Father and Jesus our Lord. *Tell* God how much you appreciate Him standing by you when people forsook you. *Tell* God how much you love the way He loves you, forgives you, accepts you and helps you. Assure Him of how you value His faithfulness to you. Encourage Him not to ever feel discouraged and assure Him of your love and gratitude. Be sure to do it.

Many might disagree with me and say God doesn’t “need” it. But in my deepest heart, I think even God likes it, loves it, appreciates it – and I think GOD is the one who put that same desire and appreciation for encouragement into US.

He certainly encourages us. Give it back to Him.

With that, go encourage someone. Right now. Write an email, a note, make a phone call – now, before the moment escapes you. Just call just to say “I love you” and “you mean the world to me”. Do it to someone you haven’t done it to for a long time. We all need it. Joshua needed it, and God even told Moses to go encourage Joshua (**Deut. 1:38; 3:28**). Moses could have sure used more encouragement. You and I can sure use more – and you and I can sure give more. We often get back what we give. If we want more encouragement – let’s give more out.

So become a child of encouragement. Pass on compliments when you hear a good word about someone. Write encouraging notes more often. Express to people when you feel something positive for them. LOOK for the good – become a good finder. Find someone who is a wilting John Mark – someone who goofed up and needs someone to believe that Christ in that person can make him shine again. Be a Barnabas to a John Mark – and who knows what your actions will cause for eternity!

Be the parent your children will think of as the Source of encouragement. Find the good, praise the good. Write an uplifting email, a note now. Call someone up and tell them you were thinking of them. And watch the result. It will melt your heart.

And then watch the good that will come from all this.

God be with you – my brothers and sisters. God hasten the day when the world will be full of encouragement, an encouraging place to live in. That WILL happen when the Kings of the kings arrives and sets up the new way, the way of love, peace, acceptance and encouragement.

Until next time – your brother in encouragement and love, Philip Shields.

