

THE MINISTRY OF ENCOURAGEMENT

Dear Friend,

We are living in a hurting world filled with people who are crying out for encouragement and affirmation. When we provide such we are truly doing the work of God. Calvin Miller in his book The Power of Encouragement writes, “God has committed to us the ministry of rebuilding destroyed people. We cannot do this unless we are sensitive enough to care about what’s going on inside them. Why aren’t we better at this? Because we don’t want to get involved. Because most people are so bent on appearing self-sufficient they all but make it impossible for us to see their hurt. To use the power of affirmation we must get involved. We must learn the art of seeing hidden brokenness.”

We get special insight on how to engage in this divine ministry of encouragement and affirmation from Paul in 1 Cor.12:22-26. There he compares the human body and how we treat it to how we should treat the different members of the body of Christ (our fellow human beings). In these verses in 1 Cor. 12 we see four ways we can be ministers of encouragement. #1. In verse 23 we see how we need to encourage those considered less honorable by treating them with special honor. As Robert Furey in his book, The Art of Affirmation states, “Finding the best in others is an art that can be learned. It begins with a decision to search for treasure in people. Everyone has God—given gifts. Everyone has gold inside him or her. Some gifts are quite conspicuous. Others take a little more digging to find.”

#2. Paul goes on to say in the last part of verse 23 of 1Cor. 12 “And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty.” David Anderson in his book “Gracism” says that, this special modesty is protecting the most vulnerable among us from embarrassment. “This means as you go through your struggles I will do everything I can to cover you with my prayers and words of encouragement.” How I thank God for those who have done this for me at those times in my life when the cloud of discouragement was passing over me. That special person who would call, write or visit me in person and shared that they were praying for me and what I was doing mattered, gave me that lift I needed to go on.

#3. In verses 24 and 25 we read, “but God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other.” This means that I must pray daily and ask for God’s help to show you the same concern and encouragement that I would like to receive. Anselm prayed, “We bring before you, O Lord, the troubles and perils of people and nations, the sighing of prisoners and captives, the sorrows of the bereaved, the necessities of strangers, the helplessness of

the weak, the despondency of the weary, the failing powers of the aged. O Lord, draw near to each; for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord.”

#4. To encourage the other person means to stand in solidarity with them. “If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it”(1 Cor.12:26). When people are suffering whether it is through the death of a love one, the lost of a home, a job, illness, injustice or a host of other ways that hurt and pain is inflicted in this sin stricken world we as believers must be there when people are hurting. To do is less is to deny our ambassadorship for Christ to which we are called. Scriptures points out time again that we are to be God’s instruments of encouragement and affirmation in this world of suffering. At the same time we need to be there to rejoice with those who are honored. Helping the humbled, hurting and homeless celebrate life by rejoicing with each achievement, no matter how minor it may seem to be, encourages individuals to realize that they are honored by a God who loves them and gave His son to die for their sins.

Robert Furey states, “Finding the best in people and effectively expressing your appreciation for their gifts is a talent that improves with practice. With the proper guidance, you will get better at it as you go. At first you may only see the most visible gifts. But if you keep looking, you get better at identifying the blessings that often go unnoticed, the emerging, or yet to emerge abilities that are easily missed. The more you look, the more you find. When you get better at seeing people’s special gifts, the world becomes more scenic when you recognize the beauty in people. Look for the best in people. Take the scenic route through life.”

Do you feel that you are losing touch with your teenage son or daughter, your husband or wife or someone special to you? Then develop your God given ministry of encouragement and affirmation.

The question is how can you encourage someone who is doing everything they can to discourage you. I must confess there have been times when I have felt like saying, “God how can I encourage anyone when I am feeling so discouraged.” It is moments like that when I must do what David did in 1 Sam. 30:6 after the Amalekites had raided his camp and had taken everything including the wives and children. The Scriptures says, David was greatly distressed because the men were talking of stoning him; each one was bitter in spirit because of his sons and daughters. But David found strength in the Lord his God.”

I tell you that if it were not for the strength I have found time and again in the Lord my God I could not carry on. When love ones have died, and people I depended on have let me down I have had to hang on to verses like Romans 8:24, “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him.” Romans 3:26 says,

“(God) justifies those who have faith in Jesus.” Max Lucado in his book, The Gift For All People declares, “For those in Christ, these promises are not only a source of joy, they are also the foundations of true courage. You are guaranteed that your sins will be filtered through, hidden in and screened out by the sacrifice of Jesus. When God looks at you He doesn’t see you. He sees the One who surrounds you. That means that failure is not a concern for you. Your victory is secure. How could you not be courageous?” Max Lucado goes on to tell us how we can through the grace of God courageously encourage those who may not initially respond positively to our encouragement. “Here’s a secret about grace – ten little words that explain all you need to know: ‘If God is for us, who can be against us?’(Romans 8:31). That’s really all you need to know. And while it sounds simple, there is a profound message contained within those ten words. Lets take a look at four words in the verse that deserve your attention. Read slowly the phrase, ‘God is for us.’ Please pause for a minute before you continue. Read it again, aloud. God is for us. Repeat this phrase four times, this time emphasizing each word. (Come on, you’re not in that big of a hurry.) God is for us. God is for us. God is for us. God is for you. Your parents may have forgotten you, your teachers may have neglected you, your siblings may be ashamed of you but within reach of your prayers is the maker of the oceans -- God! God is for you and knowing that, who is against you? Can death harm you now? Can disease rob your life? Can your purpose be taken on your value diminished? No. Though hell may set itself against you, no one can defeat you. You are protected. God is for you.”

If you accept this fact and have found strength and encouragement in the Lord you are now free to encourage others. This encouragement of others actually involves two very important steps. Calvin Miller points this out in his book The Power Of Encouragement. He says, “First, we must live lives of prayer, for our inward devotion hones our outer sensitivity. We will not be able to see the hurt of other people until we have treasured our aloneness with the Healer of all hurts. Second we must commit ourselves to our holy quest -- the sensitive search to participate with God in locating the broken. This quest always ends with healing. I call this step confrontational encouragement. It is point blank, in – your – face, loving affirmation.”

As we are praying and seeking God for the best way to lovingly affirm and encourage the other person, let’s not forget the availability of the Holy Spirit. In John 14:16 Jesus declares, “I will ask the Father and He will give you another Counselor to be with you forever -- the Spirit of Truth.” Then there are angels, which Scripture says, “Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?”

The need to affirm and encourage others is not only a God given mission that we do for the sake of the other person it is also food for our souls. Robert Furey in The Art of Affirmation states, “People who will not affirm often live with the feeling that something is missing. In order to avoid this uneasy feeling, they may try to avoid all

their feelings. Those who will not affirm lack the warmth that is so apparent in affirming people. They may appear to be a little distant or they may present themselves as outright cold and aloof. There are degrees of distance. Unaffirming people experience more loneliness than most, but they may mislabel their condition. They may describe themselves as being frustrated by or disappointed in others. Anger can be a powerful feeling and thus it is often used to mask more vulnerable feelings like hurt, fear and loneliness.”

For our own emotional well-being, we need to actively engage in the ministry of encouragement. That is why 1Thess. 5:11 says, “Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.” Paul wrote to the believers in Rome, “I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong, that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other’s faith”(Romans 1:11). As ministers of encouragement we have been entrusted to do the work of Christ. “My purpose is that they may be encouraged in heart and unified 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”(Col.2:2,3).

God is a very special friend to the broken hearted. “The Lord is close to the brokenhearted; he rescues those who are crushed in spirit”(Ps.34:18). He heals the brokenhearted, binding up their wounds”(Ps. 147:3). “God so loved the world,” John 3:16 says, “that He gave His only begotten Son.” Jesus came to heal, encourage and affirm the brokenhearted. Now He is calling us to carry out His ministry of encouragement. We are to be His channels of blessing. Elizabeth became God’s channel of blessing to Mary in her time of need by declaring, “Blessed art thou.” Jesus in the Beatitudes says, “Blessed art thou” to many that He is now calling to encourage. In Matt 5:3 He declares, “Blessed art thou.. you who realize your need for God.” In Matt 5:4 Jesus says, “Blessed art thou... you who mourn.” Matt 5:5 tells us “Blessed art thou... you gentle and lowly.” In Matt. 5:6 Jesus encourages by declaring, “Blessed art thou... you who are hungry and thirsty for justice.” Then Matt.5:10 states, “Blessed are thou... you who are persecuted.” And finally in Matt.5:11, “Blessed art thou.. you who are mocked and lied about.”

So many people need our encouragement. I encouraged a neighbor who was walking a great distance to the post office by giving him a ride. He was greatly encouraged. Daily Jesus gives all of us the opportunity to engage in His ministry of blessing the poor, the hurting, and the homeless the weeping, the persecuted and a host of others who are brokenhearted and discouraged.

After Elizabeth blessed Mary in her time of need Mary broke out in a song declaring, “Oh, how I praise the Lord. How I rejoice in God my Savior! For He took notice of His lowly servant girl, and now generation after generation will call me blessed. For He, the Mighty One, is holy and He has done great things for me”(Luke 1:46-49).

As you encourage others and affirm them in their God given purpose and calling. you are freeing individuals to exchange their sorrow for rejoicing. As a minister of encouragement you are letting God work through you to “turn their mourning into joy... and exchange their sorrow for rejoicing”(Jer.31:13). Calvin Miller writes, “If it is true that Mary came to Elizabeth in a melancholy mood, one little compliment sent her into a grand hymn of adoration. Then, as she praises God, joy swabs out the dark places of her heart. ‘Blessed art thou’ is the broom for our gloom. God uses it to sweep us clean!”

Now God is calling you forth as a minister of encouragement. Start digging for the gold that exists in each and every person. Instead of focusing on their negative qualities, locate the good and praise them along with the God who created them for it. Not only will you be bringing joy and healing to others but also you will be experiencing it in your own life. Each and every person has been created in the image of God. As we look for that image in them, encourage the one in need with a “blessed art thou” by sharing a kind word and deed with them, and we will be doing the work of God. The Scriptures are filled with words of encouragement along with the sights and sounds of creation. Let us now join in this exciting ministry of encouragement in which a lost and lonely world is crying out for. A kind word, a kind act, a “blessed art thou to someone who is hurting will not only transform his or her life though our ministry of encouragement but ours as well.

Yours in Christ,

Larry Rice

