

## HOW TO BE AN ENCOURAGER

One of the first men ever to earn a million dollars a year was a man named Charles Schwab who worked for Andrew Carnegie, the great industrialist who first mass produced steel. Many men working for Andrew Carnegie surpassed him in technical knowledge. Schwab was paid such a huge salary not because of his technical knowledge but because of his ability to deal with people which had a great impact on their production levels. Schwab said the following:

“I consider my ability to arouse enthusiasm among the men the greatest asset I possess and the way to develop the best that is in a man is by appreciation and encouragement. There is nothing else that so kills the ambitions of man as criticisms from his superiors. I believe in giving a man incentive to work. So I am anxious to praise but loath to find fault. If I like anything, I am hearty in my approbation and lavish in my praise.”

In our society, discouragement is often the rule. Spouses and parents find it easier to offer criticism but rarely remember to reinforce a job well done. As well, we can often be our own worst discouragers by comparing ourselves unfavourably with others, setting unrealistic goals or exaggerating our faults.

Discouragement is like a sickness that drains our energy and makes it harder to be productive and better ourselves. Encouragement, on the other hand, gives confidence and courage and it can help us to do things we never thought possible.

In Hebrews 3:13 the apostle Paul tells to exhort or encourage one another daily depending on your translation. How can we do this and be better encouragers? I would like to look at a couple of ways that we can be an encourager and help to better bring out the best in those around us.

The first way is by words of affirmation. The book of Proverbs speaks a lot about using words to help build others up. Let's look at a couple of examples. First of all, let's look at Proverbs 16:24 where we read: “Pleasant words are as a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and health to the bones.” Encouragement is health to the soul and bones. It gives us energy. It helps sharpen us.

Another verse that speaks of words of affirmation is Proverbs 25:11 which reads: "A word aptly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver." Compliments certainly fit this description. They make people feel valued and appreciated.

The famous American writer, Mark Twain, once said “I can live two months on a good compliment.”

Compliments cost nothing, yet there are those around us who would do anything to be praised for something. American psychologist William James said: "The deepest principle in human nature is the craving to be appreciated." Dale Carnegie once wrote of the desire for praise: "The rare individual who honestly satisfies this heart-hunger will hold people in the palm of his hand and even the undertaker will be sorry when he dies."

True encouragement is not blind acceptance of any kind of behaviour or phony compliments such as flattery given with ulterior motives. When we praise others it must be genuine.

What are some practical ways that we can give encouragement and praise others? When was the last time that we complimented each of our closest friends, our husbands or wives, our parents or our children? When was the last time that we complimented someone on a job well done?

We can encourage people that share with us their plans and dreams and give support to accomplish things that are difficult. We can show comfort and sympathy in times of sorrow, send cards to the sick or a thank you card to those who have helped us out.

Some people are more naturally expressive of praise to others while some of us by default are not naturally expressive of praise towards others and we may have regularly prompt ourselves to be more complimentary and express praise to others.

Researchers have found that we are most likely to compliment the performance of others or their appearance. However, the most valued and meaningful compliments are those few which tell us something nice about our character or personality. Encouraging remarks about who we are as individuals are very gratifying because they reassure us that we're OK because of who we are, not what we do.

Alan Loy McGinnis in his book *The Friendship Factor* (p.98) makes these comments on the art of affirmation:

"The art of affirmation is enhanced if we learn to praise when it is not expected...Sir Henry Taylor in his...book 'The Statesman'...[wrote] 'Applaud a man's speech at the moment when he sits down and he will take your compliment as exacted by the demands of common civility; but let some space intervene, and then show him that the merits of his speech have dwelt with you when you might have been expected to have forgotten them, and he will remember your compliment for a much longer time than you have remembered his speech.'"

Probably the most valued compliment for a speaker or a teacher or coach for that matter is when we share how some specific item really made a difference in one's life.

If I asked you whether you were familiar with a person in the Bible called Joseph who was a Levite from the island of Cyprus would you answer yes or no? How about if told you what his nickname was. Let's look at Acts 4:36 where we'll find out what his nickname was. In Acts 4:36 we read: "Joseph, who was also called by the apostles Barnabas (which means son of encouragement), a Levite, a native of Cyprus." We see here that the apostles were so impressed by how positive and encouraging that they called him a name that means "Son of Encouragement". From this point on in the book of Acts he is always called Barnabas.

One book I would highly recommend for any of our young men is Charlie Shedd's book "Letters to Philip – On How To Treat a Woman". For the ladies he also wrote a book called "Letters to Karen – On How to Treat a Man".

On the vital importance of words of affirmation in marriage Charlie Shedd has this to say: "The Bible says, 'As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he.' This also goes for a woman. If

you give her a lovely idea of herself, that's what she will try to become. This is why it makes so much difference what you're telling her. The time finally arrives when she accepts your estimate as her estimate of herself.

"I've seen many an ordinary-looking woman grow into a lovely thing because her husband told her she was lovely. I regret to report that I have also seen some truly gorgeous women gradually fade away because they were no longer inspired from the one source that mattered most to them. All of which leads up to six very important words: If you like it, say so! (p.30-31)

The other means of encouraging others that I would like to look at is that of showing trust to others. Mark Robertson gave an excellent presentation in our local men's club on this topic. I'd like to mention a couple of his points and add some of my own thoughts on this way of encouraging others and building others up.

When someone shows you trust when you weren't expecting or is willing to give you a second chance when you have failed previously how does that make you feel? When someone expresses enough confidence to trust you with something important what they are communicating to you is that they believe in you.

It is encouraging to know that someone believes in you as opposed to not believing that you can be trusted. When they are willing to give you a second chance when you have failed previously you will naturally be more grateful and that much more eager to repay the faith or trust they they have extended to you.

God is trusting. He puts his trust in us when we deserve so little. Trust is a vital ingredient to building relationships. Relationships need trust to flourish. While there are situations where we need to show proper caution, the act of showing trust in others empowers others and helps to bring out the best in people.

There are many biblical examples of this form of encouragement. The apostle Paul before his conversion had literally been responsible for the murder of many of the early christians. It would have been difficult for many in the early church to trust him. It was the son of encouragement, Barnabas, who probably extended the most trust to Paul. It was Barnabas who sought Paul out in Tarsus in Acts 11:25. He effectively became Paul's sponsor as he took Paul with him on his first missionary journey.

Barnabas' willingnessness to extend trust was greater than Paul himself was willing to extend at one particular time. The story is told at the end of Acts chapter 15. Barnabas' cousin John Mark had returned part way into that first missionary journey. When it came to the next missionary journey Barnabas showed trust in John Mark and wanted to take him again. Paul, however, couldn't be convinced. They had such a heated discussion to the point that they parted ways. Barnabas took John Mark and Paul took Silas.

At this point Paul felt John Mark couldn't be trusted. Paul later changed his view and it appears John Mark didn't let Barnabas down when given a second chance. Let's notice that over in 2 Timothy 4:11 where Paul writes: "Luke alone is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is very useful to me for ministry."

When it comes to the story of Peter most people remember that Jesus predicted that Peter would betray him 3 times but what is often missed in the story of Peter is how Jesus showed trust that Peter would repent after his fall. In Luke 22:31-32 we read: " And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, Indeed Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren."

It feels terrible to be corrected when the person giving the correction shows no faith that you can fix the problem being pointed out. It is important when we do have to correct others, especially our children, that we express confidence and trust that they can correct the problem that we have had to point out. That trust we express in our words is another way where we can offer encouragement even when people make mistakes as we all do at times.

In conclusion, we should aim to encourage one another daily as the apostle Paul tells us to do in Hebrews 3:13. We can encourage others by giving words of affirmation such as offering praise and words of support. And a second way we can encourage others is by showing trust by giving others opportunities to grow and at times a second chance and expressing trust that they can succeed even if they have failed in the past.