

"The Power of Encouragement"

Allan Pole on Sunday morning, November 25th, 2018



Theme: Words have tremendous potential to touch others.

Texts: Hebrews 10:24-25 and 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

Here's a thought: Charles M. Schwab observed, "I have yet to find the man, however exalted his station, who did not do better work and put forth greater effort under a spirit of approval than under a spirit of criticism."

Elizabeth Silance Ballard wrote this story in 1974 and it was printed in HomeLife magazine, a Baptist family publication (www.snopes.com/fact-check/teddy-bared). Although Ballard based some of the details on elements of her own life, this fictional account demonstrates the power of encouragement.

As she stood in front of her fifth-grade class on the very first day of school, she told the children an untruth. Like most teachers, she looked at her students and said that she loved them all the same. However, that was impossible, because there in the front row, slumped in his seat, was a little boy named Teddy Stoddard.

Mrs. Thompson had watched Teddy the year before and noticed that he did not play well with the other children, that his clothes were messy and that he constantly needed a bath. In addition, Teddy could be unpleasant. It got to the point where Mrs. Thompson would actually take delight in marking his papers with a broad red pen, making bold X's and then putting a big "F" at the top of his papers.

At the school where Mrs. Thompson taught, she was required to review each child's past records and she put Teddy's off until last. However, when she reviewed his file, she was in for a surprise.

Teddy's first grade teacher wrote, "Teddy is a bright child with a ready laugh. He does his work neatly and has good manners... he is a joy to be around."

His second-grade teacher wrote, "Teddy is an excellent student, well-liked by his classmates, but he is troubled because his mother has a terminal illness

and life at home must be a struggle."

His third-grade teacher wrote, "His mother's death has been hard on him. He tries to do his best, but his father doesn't show much interest, and his home life will soon affect him if some steps aren't taken."

Teddy's fourth-grade teacher wrote, "Teddy is withdrawn and doesn't show much interest in school. He doesn't have many friends and he sometimes sleeps in class."

By now, Mrs. Thompson realized the problem and she was ashamed of herself. She felt even worse when her students brought her Christmas presents, wrapped in beautiful ribbons and bright paper, except for Teddy's. His present was clumsily wrapped in the heavy, brown paper that he got from a grocery bag. Mrs. Thompson took pains to open it in the middle of the other presents. Some of the children started to laugh when she found a rhinestone bracelet with some of the stones missing, and a bottle that was one-quarter full of perfume. But she stifled the children's laughter when she exclaimed how pretty the bracelet was, putting it on, and dabbing some of the perfume on her wrist. Teddy Stoddard stayed after school that day just long enough to say, "Mrs. Thompson, today you smelled just like my Mom used to."

After the children left, she cried for at least an hour. On that very day, she quit teaching reading, writing and arithmetic. Instead, she began to teach children. Mrs. Thompson paid particular attention to Teddy. As she worked with him, his mind seemed to come alive. The more she encouraged him, the faster he responded. By the end of the year, Teddy had become one of the smartest children in the class and, despite her lie that she would love all the children the same, Teddy became one of her "teacher's pets".

A year later, she found a note under her door, from Teddy, telling her that she was the best teacher he ever had in his whole life.

Six years went by before she got another note from Teddy. He then wrote that he had finished high school, third in his class, and she was still the best teacher he ever had in life.

Four years after that, she got another letter, saying that while things had been tough at times, he'd stayed in school, had stuck with it, and would soon graduate from college with the highest of honors. He assured Mrs. Thompson that she was still the best and favorite teacher he had ever had in his whole life.

Then four more years passed and yet another letter came. This time he explained that after he got his bachelor's degree, he decided to go a little further. The letter explained that she was still the best and favorite teacher he

ever had. But now his name was a little longer. The letter was signed, Theodore F. Stoddard, MD.

The story does not end there. You see, there was yet another letter that spring. Teddy said he had met this girl and was going to be married. He explained that his father had died a couple of years ago and he was wondering if Mrs. Thompson might agree to sit at the wedding in the place that was usually reserved for the mother of the groom. Of course, Mrs. Thompson did. And guess what? She wore that bracelet, the one with several rhinestones missing. Moreover, she made sure she was wearing the perfume that Teddy remembered his mother wearing on their last Christmas together.

They hugged each other, and Dr. Stoddard whispered in Mrs. Thompson's ear, "Thank you Mrs. Thompson for believing in me. Thank you so much for making me feel important and showing me that I could make a difference."

Mrs. Thompson, with tears in her eyes, whispered back. She said, "Teddy, you have it all wrong. You were the one who taught me that I could make a difference. I didn't know how to teach until I met you."

When we encourage we:

Invite Others



At a time when many people are giving up on the church Hebrews 10:24-25 could have been written this morning:

24 And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. 25 Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another — and all the more as you see the Day approaching. NIV

The word “encourage” is translated from the Greek word “parakaleo”. This is a compound word made up of two smaller words. “Para” means to “come alongside” or to “come near”. From this we get such English words as “paramedics” or “parachurch”. “Kaleo” means to “call for” or “invite”. When you put these words “para” and “kaleo” together you get a word that means “to invite alongside”.

When I think of “parakaleo” a picture like this comes to mind ...



When I was a teenager we would occasionally have hayrides on our farm. Our church youth group would head out to the field where my dad or my brother had prepared a flat wagon with a stack of hay bales, some of which were broken and some were still bound together with baler twine. We would hop on to the wagon and the tractor would pull us around the pasture. There was quite a variety of participants on the hay wagon, with some being quite rowdy and others quiet and passive. The rowdy ones would proceed to stuff loose hay down the necks of some and to push others off the wagon. It became clear who you could trust and who you knew were up to no good (I won't say which category I was in). If you found yourself pushed off the wagon you had a choice – walk behind the wagon or climb back on beside someone that would let you. The passive, trusting ones would sometimes call out to those walking beside or behind the wagon, “Hop on and get a ride!” Could you trust the invitation or was it a trick?

You and I encountered people that were following Jesus Christ and they invited us, they called out to us, to come along beside them and follow the Lord with them. We watched their lives and listened to their words. If they put on too much pressure we would get suspicious of the invitation and pull back. When we saw their invitation as attractive and non-threatening we would move in closer. Eventually we decided we could trust them enough to accept their invitation.

An inviting person has influenced us and made an eternal impact. Who in your life will you invite to come along beside you in following Christ?

William W. Purkey explained, “Human potential, though not always apparent, is there waiting to be discovered and invited forth.”

The process of invitation is not a one-time incident. We know people that are following Jesus and we are given the opportunity to come along beside them or to avoid them. There is a double-mindedness that arises within, as one part of us wants to accept the invitation and another part of us wants to run away.

In her book, "Dance of Intimacy," Harriet Lerner describes in great detail this struggle that we all go through in relationships. Shall we embrace or shall we withdraw?

The opposite of *encouragement* is *discouragement*. Where there has been the choice to withdraw from the Lord and from other people there is typically discouragement. This is no coincidence, as the Lord created us for community. Adam soon discovered there was companionship missing in his life and God created Eve out of his side to help him and to encourage him (Genesis 2:18-22).

A man was sailing at sea and his ship was sinking. He prayed, "Help me Lord, come rescue me". A short while later a ship appeared on the horizon and found the man.

"Come, let us rescue you", the captain called out.

"No thanks, I'm waiting for God to come and rescue me", the drowning man called back.

The captain looked at him like he's crazy and sailed off.

The drowning man prayed again, "God come rescue me, I'm drowning!"

A short while later another ship came and tried to rescue the drowning man but got the same response. Eventually the man drowned and found himself in front of God.

"Lord why didn't you come to rescue me?" the drowned man asked.

"What do you mean?" replied God, "I sent two ships!"

Are you feeling discouraged? Look and listen for the one that the Lord sends to encourage you. Choose not to isolate yourself and to tap into the community that the Lord is offering to you.

When we encourage we:
Invite Others

Build Others



The first letter of Paul to the Thessalonians is also the first letter the apostle wrote. It was written to a struggling, yet vigorous church that was only a few months old, made up of believers who had just come to Christ through Paul's ministry. This letter shows the heart of the apostle toward these new followers of Jesus and the struggles of the early church.

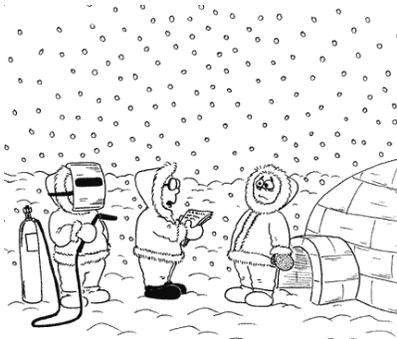
From the account in Acts 17 we learn that Paul had only been there about three weeks when persecution began and he had to leave the city for his own safety. He went down to Athens and from there he sent Timothy back to Thessalonica to see how the church was doing. He was very disturbed about them; he wondered if persecution would drive them from their faith.

In the midst of the opposition and persecution these followers of Christ yearned for His return as He had promised. Various ideas of the timing of Christ's second coming brought a lot of confusion into the church. In light of this Paul wrote in 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11:

5 Now, brothers, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, 2 for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. 3 While people are saying, "Peace and safety," destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. 4 But you, brothers, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief. 5 You are all sons of the light and sons of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. 6 So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be alert and self-controlled. 7 For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night. 8 But since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet. 9 For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. 10 He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him. 11 Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing. NIV

The King James Version uses the word "edify" instead of "encourage" in verse 11. This Greek word that is translated as "encourage" in the New International Version or "edify" in the King James Version is a significant word that should not be overlooked. It is also a compound word made up of two smaller words: "oikos" which means "house" and "domeo" which means "to build". When you put these two words together into "oikodomeo" it means "to build a house".

Your life and my life are like houses being built. Imagine your house melting away ...



You are 3 months behind with your mortgage payments.
I'm afraid we'll have to melt your igloo.

Charles M. Schwab (1862-1939) observed:

I have yet to find the man, however exalted his station, who did not do better work and put forth greater effort under a spirit of approval than under a spirit of criticism.

The Lord is building into us His character and His purpose. Amazingly, He calls each of us to be co-labourers with Him, working with Him in building others up to become more like Him and to fulfill His will here on earth.

Take a look at the people around you. They might be sitting next to you right now, they might be people with whom you live, work, study or play. The Holy Spirit is at work around you building into people the character and purposes of God. Each person is at a different place in their relationship with Him. Some are aware of the Holy Spirit's work in them and many are not. Are you aware of what the Holy Spirit is doing in the lives of those around you? Do you care enough to observe the people around you? Do you care enough to pray for them? Will you choose to build them up with your attitudes, words and actions toward them or will you tear down what is being built into them?

Brenda was going through our keepsakes and she came across this card I received from my dad (who died in July 2007):

For a Wonderful Son

ON HIS BIRTHDAY

"The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord: and he delighteth in his way." Psalm 37:23

With much love and pride in the kind and caring man you are and the good and faithful Son you've always been.

Happy Birthday

Al from Dad

I thought this card sure describes you. I'm proud of you.

Dad

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