

*The Power
of an
Encouraging
Word*



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Ken Sutterfield



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To the
diamond of my life

my wife,
Jan,

my biggest fan for over
twenty years.



Thank you for . . .
loving me
sharing with me
giving to me
honoring me

and
most of all . . .
for always encouraging me.







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*Pleasant words to others can
have a permanent, even eternal
impact for good.*

— *Kenneth Parlin*



Introduction

The Case for Encouragement

Encouragement . . . 1. To give courage, hope, or confidence 2. To help, give support; to be favorable; to foster: things that encourage.



The above definition from Webster's Dictionary rings true in my heart and soul. As I reflect on my life, turning points of encouragement mark my path. Parents, teachers, friends, co-workers, and family mark my life with words of encouragement.



As we consider the word “encouragement,” we should heed the apostle Paul’s words to the Hebrews. **“Encouraging one another; and all the more, as you see the day drawing near”** (Heb. 10:25). When we realize the value of mutual encouragement, consider the power unleashed and what could be accomplished. It is exciting to think that God has challenged us to encourage one another. The power of your encouraging words, spoken or written, could be the difference in the outcome of a single event or even one’s life.

The great thing about encouragement is that anybody can do it. You don’t need a lot of

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time, money, or things. You don't even have to be a certain age to reach out and come alongside someone and elevate them to greater heights. However, what you do need is a willingness to put someone else's value above your own to give them hope and encouragement.

A good place to start is in our homes. That is where "actions are caught not taught." Children are like little sponges, waiting to soak up from their parents delight and encouragement. Let me challenge you to have a family that is different. Develop in your home a spirit of encouragement. You and your family will be forever grateful, and the encouragement modeled will continue for generations to come.

Dennis and Barbara Rainey, in their book *Building Your Mate's Self Esteem*, share a great lesson. "Words are powerful seeds. Once planted, words will bring forth flowers or weeds, health or disease, healing or poison. You carry a great responsibility for their use."¹ There is no denying that the words we speak do make a difference. The words we write will be remembered. As we look at the powerful partnership of words and encouragement, consider planting your own seeds of kindness to reap a world in bloom. "Therefore encourage each other with these words" (1 Thess. 4:18).

Few of us realize how much we need encouragement. Yet we must bask in the warmth

of approval now and then or lose our self-confidence. All of us need to feel needed and admired. But unless we hear words of praise from someone else, how can we know that we are valued as a friend or co-worker?

A miracle happens to the person whose self-esteem has been raised. Praise is the polish that helps keep his self-image bright and sparkling. What does this have to do with giving a word of praise (encouragement)? You have the ability to perform that kind of miracle in another's life.

In a classic bit of advice, Lord Chesterfield suggested to his son that he follow the example of Duke de Nivernois: "You will perceive that he makes people pleased with him by making them first pleased with themselves."²

The effects of praise can be of great encouragement. A new pastor called to a church jokingly referred to as "the refrigerator" decided against criticizing his congregation for its coolness toward strangers. Instead, he began welcoming visitors from the pulpit and telling his congregation how friendly they were. Week after week he created the atmosphere of a friendly church, creating a picture of the church as he wanted it to be, giving his people a reputation to live up to. In time the congregation thawed. By encouraging and praising the ice-cube members they became warm-hearted human beings.

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Encouragement helps rub off the sharp edges of daily contact. Nowhere is this more true than in marriage. Yet, it is in the home that the value of praise and encouragement is less practiced and appreciated. Children are especially hungry for praise, reassurance, appreciation, and encouragement. Take the time to find something positive to commend your child for and you will discover that both their ability and attitude improve. Words of encouragement are the most effective method of getting people to do their best.

As artists find the joy in giving beauty to others, so anyone who masters the art of encouragement through praising will find that it blesses the giver as much as the receiver. There are people everywhere in need of a good word, an uplifting compliment. The encouragement of others helps us move from fear to belief and action. Encouragement is the word, the note, the look that says, “I care about you. Yes, you can do it.”

Encouragement is God-like. Scripture is full of promises about God’s provision for us in times of difficulty. God reassures His people, “So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you: I will uphold you with my righteous right hand” (Isa. 41:10).

Encouragement can make living in the midst of troubles easier. We need encouragement not just in crisis but in the midst of everyday life.

Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work: If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up! (Eccles. 4:9–10).

If you have ever been lifted up when you were suffering, you know the power of encouragement.

— Dr. Sinclair Ferguson

I'm convinced God uses encouraging words to strengthen our resolve to succeed. Dr. William Mayo of the Mayo Clinic used praise and encouragement with young doctors training at the clinic. One young doctor said, "You'd read a paper at a staff meeting and afterwards he'd see you in the elevator or the hall and would shake your hand or put his hand on your shoulder with a quiet 'Good work' and a straight warm look that made you know he meant it or perhaps a day or two later you'd get a note from him, saying, 'Dear _____, I learned more about _____ from that paper of yours the other night than I ever knew before. It was a good job.' Believe me, I prized those notes."³

Realizing that encouragement is of such great importance, William Barclay writes, "One of the highest human duties is the duty of encouragement. . . . It is easy to pour cold water

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on their enthusiasm; it is easy to discourage others. The world is full of discouragers. We have a Christian duty to encourage one another. Many a time, a word of praise or thanks or appreciation or cheer has kept a man on his feet.”⁴

My hope and prayer for you as you read and reflect on these stories and encouraging words, is that they will become common place for you and in turn those you elevate, whether at home, in the work place, or with neighbors. There is truth in the saying, “Flowers leave part of their fragrance in the hand that bestows them.” Won’t you consider the power of your encouraging words and begin planting the seeds of kindness to reap a world in bloom?



Endnotes

1. Dennis and Barbara Rainey, *Building Your Mate's Self-Esteem* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1993), p. 104.
2. Gottfried R. von Kronenberger, *Signs of the Times* (Boise, ID: Southern Pub. Assoc., 1989).
3. Helen Clapesatte, *The Doctors at Mayo* (Minnesota University Press), p. 384.
4. William Barclay, *The Letters to the Hebrews, the Daily Study Bible* (Edinburgh: The Saint Andrews Press, 1955), p. 137–138.



Part I



*The
Healing Power
of Words*





*Encouragement —
creating hope for the future.*

— Ken Sutterfield



I Like It — It's Kinda Cute



Haven't you longed for someone you care deeply for to encourage you? To tell you "You're great," to tell you "You're the best," "You're okay!" We need each other to encourage us, to give us hope in who we are. We want and we need to be accepted without a mask or veneer. We want to be loved apart from our performance or appearance. We deeply desire to be accepted, just as we are. Maurice Wagner writes "At the heart of personality is the need to feel a sense of being lovable without having to qualify for that acceptance."¹ We must choose our will . . . to accept unconditionally, just as Christ accepts us. Being an encourager requires intentionality. It may not come naturally. We need to recognize that we are all called to be encouragers, to build each other up, to bear each other's burdens, to sacrifice for others. God commands us to be encouragers. "But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called today, so none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness" (Heb. 3:13).

Lois Moyday Rabey, who has personally experienced difficulty in her own life, writes, “Encouragement is not doing for someone what they can do for themselves. It is not removing pain from their lives. It is noticing them, feeling with them, and reminding them of the hope we have in Christ as we persevere in our walk with Him.”²

We may think that because of our faith, difficulties, doubts, and discouragement should be easily overcome. But that isn’t the case. Encouragement, however, can make living in the midst of those troubles easier.

For example, according to 1 Samuel 23:16-17, Jonathan, Saul’s son, arose and went to David at Horesh and encouraged him in God. Thus, he said to him, “Do not be afraid, because the hand of Saul my father shall not find you, and you will be king over Israel and I will be next to you: and Saul my father knows this.” Surely the anxiety and fear that David was experiencing was greatly relieved through the kind words of encouragement of his friend Jonathan.

In marriage, there is nothing so ugly as a husband and wife that attack each other with fierce barbs of discouragement. But . . . nothing is as beautiful as when words of encouragement are shared to lift the spirit and express love from a sacrificial heart. Many broken marriages have been restored through the healing power of words.

We each have a mental picture of those we love and care for. But . . . what happens when that picture is broken and forever changed. When tragedy strikes, will you reflect love and acceptance or will you choose to be selfish and reject the one you once claimed to love? The following story illustrates how encouraging words and unconditional acceptance mirror a love so deep and pure.

Dr. Richard Selzer, in his book *Mortal Lessons: Notes in the Art of Surgery*, shares this beautiful story of how a loving relationship conforms to God's magnificent design. This is his story of seeing divinely inspired love up close:

I stand by the bed where a young woman lies, her face post-operative, her mouth twisted in palsy clownish. A tiny twig of the facial nerve, the one to the muscles of her mouth, has been severed. She will be thus from now on. The surgeon had followed with religious fervor the curve of her flesh: I promise you that. Nevertheless, to remove the tumor in her cheek, I had cut the little nerve.

Her young husband is in the room. He stands on the opposite side of the bed, and together they seem to dwell in the evening lamplight, isolated from me, private. *Who are they, I ask myself, he and this wry-mouth I have made, who gaze at and touch each other so generously, greedily?* The young woman speaks.

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“Will my mouth always be like this?” she asks.

“Yes,” I say, “it will. It is because the nerve was cut.”

She nods, and is silent. But the young man smiles. “I like it,” he says. “It is kinda cute.”

All at once I know who he is. I understand, and I lower my gaze. One is not so bold in an encounter with a god. Unmindful, he bends down to kiss her crooked mouth, and I so close can see how he twists his own lips to accommodate hers, to show her that their kiss still works. I remember that the gods appeared in ancient Greece as mortals, and I hold my breath and let the wonder in.³



Endnotes

1. Maurice Wagner, *The Sensation of Being Somebody* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1975), p. 67.
2. Lois Mowdray, *Discipleship Journal*, Vol. 17, No. 1, 1997.
3. Dr. Richard Selzer, *Moral Lessons: Notes in the Art of Surgery* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 1976), p. 45–46.





*Appreciation is thanking,
recognition is seeing, and
encouragement is bringing hope
for the future.*

She Became My Mirror

Dr. Paul Brand writes of his experience as a surgeon in London, England, during World War II. He shares this story of how love casts out fear for a young pilot who received words that created hope, healing, and encouragement:

Peter Foster was a Royal Air Force pilot. These men [pilots] were the cream of the crop of England — the brightest, healthiest, most confident and dedicated, and often the most handsome men in the country. When they walked the streets in their decorated uniforms, the population treated them as gods. All eyes turned their way. Girls envied those who were fortunate enough to walk beside a man in Air Force blue.

However, the scene in London was far from romantic, for the Germans were attacking relentlessly. Fifty-seven consecutive nights they bombed London. In waves of 250, some 1,500 bombers would come each evening and pound the city.

The RAF Hurricanes and Spitfires that pilots like Foster flew looked like mosquitoes pestering the huge German bombers. The Hurricane was agile and effective, yet it had one fatal design flaw. The single propeller was mounted in front a scant foot or so from the cockpit, and the fuel lines snaked alongside the cockpit toward the engine. In a direct hit, the cockpit would melt off every feature of his face: his nose, his eyelids, his lips, often his cheeks.

These RAF heroes many times would undergo a series of 20 to 40 surgeries to re-fashion what once was their face. Plastic surgeons worked miracles, yet what remained of the face was essentially a scar.

Peter Foster became one of those “downed pilots.” After numerous surgical procedures, what remained of his face was indescribable. The mirror he peered into daily couldn’t hide the facts. As the day for his release from the hospital grew closer, so did Peter’s anxiety about being accepted by his family and friends.

He knew that one group of airmen with similar injuries had returned home only to be rejected by their wives, who were unable to accept this new outer image of their husbands. Some men became recluses, refusing to leave their houses.

In contrast, there was another group who returned home to families who gave loving

assurance of acceptance and continued worth. Many became executives and professionals, leaders in their communities.

Peter Foster was in that second group. His girlfriend assured him that nothing had changed except a few millimeters' thickness of skin. She loved *him*, not his facial membrane, she assured him. The two were married just before Peter left the hospital.

“She became my mirror,” Peter said of his wife. “She gave me a new image of myself. Even now, regardless of how I feel, when I look at her she gives me a warm, loving smile that tells me I am okay,” he tells confidently.¹



Endnotes

1. Dr. Paul Brand and Philip Yancey, *In His Image* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), p. 25–29.