



Hope for Hurting Hearts: The Ministry of Encouragement

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In a world where terrorism, war, violence, and divorce are everyday topics, one of the most vital ministries we can have as women is the ministry of encouragement.

We've all felt the energy-draining effects of the discourager. Discouraging people drag us down instead of inspiring us to hope and take heart in God.

Do you know that a man was once court-martialed and sentenced to a year's imprisonment for being a discourager?

It happened during the Boer War, 1899–1902 in South Africa, at the siege of Ladysmith. The fortunes of the town and garrison were hanging in the balance. This civilian would go along the lines and speak discouraging words to the men on duty. He struck no blow for the enemy, not one. He was just a discourager, and that at a critical time.

The court-martial judged it a crime to speak disheartening words in an hour like that. It may not be illegal to be a discourager today, but it surely is a sin.

One of the most needed ministries in the church today is the ministry of encouragement. We all know people who are in great need of encouragement. Every week I hear about people who are battling hopelessness and despair. They desperately need the gift of encouragement—someone to give them hope, confidence, and comfort.

Being an encourager doesn't come naturally for most of us, but, for a believer, it's not an option. It's a command based in the love of God.

Thirty-two times in the New Testament we are reminded of things we are to do for one another. One of these commands is to encourage "one another" (Heb. 3:13). When we encourage others, we are reflecting the heart of God, who is "the God of . . . encouragement" (Rom. 15:5).

Who Needs It?

Do you need encouragement? Everyone does! But how often do we take the time to ask God to show us people in our lives who need our encouragement? The wonderful blessing is you will reap what you sow; you will be encouraged as you set out to encourage others.

Start with your own family. It's hypocritical for us to try to encourage everyone else in the world while failing to encourage those within the four walls of our own homes.

If you are married, your husband needs you to be his number one cheerleader. Your home should be a refuge for your husband, the one place where he knows he can turn for consistent encouragement.

Moms, your children, no matter how young or old, need your encouragement. When people speak encouraging words to us, we are motivated to live up to their words. Everyone blooms under encouragement, and so will your children.

Others who need our encouragement include:

- Pastors and church staff members, and their spouses
- Other mothers, including expectant moms and single moms
- Those who are lonely, such as single or elderly people
- People who are sick and hospitalized
- New believers
- Those who are struggling with a sin habit
- Those who are grieving

The best way to experience the encouragement that you long for is to be an encourager to others. So ask God to help you see people with His eyes, to love them with His heart, to encourage them with His helping hands. As you do, God will encourage and strengthen your own heart.

Ways to Encourage

I don't know of anything more encouraging that you can do for others than to pray. Pray for them. If someone says, "I'm struggling" or "I have a need," stop and pray with that person right then and there, if possible.

I can't tell you how much it means to me when someone says, "Let me pray for you"—and then does it on the spot! I have one friend who virtually never ends a conversation—whether in person or on the phone—without praying for the person he is talking to. That friend has been a huge source of encouragement to me and to countless others.

Another important way we can encourage one another is with our words. Proverbs 12:25 tells us that “anxiety in a man’s heart weighs him down, but a good word makes him glad.” Your encouraging words can be a tonic in someone else’s life.

I can’t emphasize enough the importance of this to the people we’re closest to. Think of those times when your husband is really discouraged. Do your words further tear him down, or do they strengthen him? Your words, whether spoken or written, can breathe courage and strength into hearts of people who feel hopelessly overwhelmed.

We can encourage one another through giving gifts—and those gifts don’t have to be expensive. I recently received several meaningful gifts—including a Scripture plaque, flowers, notecards, and a CD of praise music—from people who just wanted me to know they were thinking of me. What an encouragement those special reminders have been to my heart!

Acts of service are another way to encourage others: take a meal to someone; offer to babysit so a couple can get out for a date together; visit an elderly person; or clean the house for a sick friend or a mom with several small children.

In a world where so many people are sad, lonely, and hurting, how we need to encourage one another. As we do, God will use our hands, hearts, and words to communicate His heart and minister grace to those around us.

Adapted from the series “Encouraging One Another” by Nancy DeMoss Wolgemuth. © Revive Our Hearts