

Hands Together through Encouragement Philippians 4:8



Opening:

Invite women to share their definition of encouragement. Ask, “Can you imagine a life without encouragement?”

Recently I received some motivating encouragement from a co-worker. There has been a transition in our office and we are both taking on some new responsibilities. We’ve been working hard to get a lot accomplished. One day she looked at me and said, “Margie you’re doing a great job.” Those words may seem so simple. But they were just what I needed to hear at that moment. Encouraging words make our lives better.

My husband Kevin has been a great encouragement to me. He’ll see me tired in the evening. He can tell I don’t really feel like folding a load of laundry but am doing it anyway. He’ll say, “Margie you are a great mom.” Or after we have eaten a meal I have fixed, he is always quick to say, “What a great meal, honey. Thank you.” There are others who are great encouragers as well.

Members at church are praying for us, supporting Kevin and I, and serving when needed. These all are encouragers to us as pastors. Laymen and pastors alike need encouragement, because this world can be very discouraging.

Paul took encouragement everywhere he went to non-believers and believers. Acts 20:1-2 says, “When the uproar had ended, Paul sent for the disciples and, after encouraging them, said good-bye and set out for Macedonia. He traveled through that area, speaking many words of encouragement to the people, and finally arrived in Greece.” Paul spent much of his time encouraging those around him who were facing hardship and tragedy.

Encouragement was one of God’s main focuses in the New Testament. In Acts 13:15 God used the priests to help others know that these must be encouragers, “After the reading from the Law and the Prophets, the synagogue rulers sent word to them, saying, “Brothers, if you have a message of encouragement for the people, please speak.”” Speaking is not always easy.

I would venture to say that those who have been through difficult times can say that if it were not for the encouragement of their church friends, they wouldn’t have been able to get through their tough time. God has given us a great example. His son Jesus was the perfect encourager.

Jesus encouraged the woman at the well even though she had faults. Even though Jesus’ disciples were not always perfect, He still said to them, “Come with me;” “Let’s pray together;” “Let me wash your feet;” “Let me die on the cross for YOUR sins.” If we want to know how to be a good encourager, look at Jesus’ hands. They can show us just what it takes to be an encourager.

Sacrifice.....

It is not always easy to encourage someone who you think should have already learned their lesson. I've struggled with encouraging family and friends who continue to make bad choice after bad choice. It seems they don't deserve encouragement. It would be easy to pull away from them, but they probably need encouragement more during their failures than during their successes. At a time in my life when I was making bad choices, I am glad there were people who continued to encourage me even though they may have wanted to pull away.

God said if you want to be great in My kingdom then learn to be the servant of all. Don't learn to be the judge of all. Sacrificing our human tendencies in order to encourage others is God's desire. "Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God." (Ephesians 5: 1-2)

Some Christians are naturally gifted at encouragement. Others have to work hard at it. Sacrificing our own desire to lie on the couch and watch television for the sake of others will be hard, but imagine the difference it will make in people's lives. Some examples of what an encouraging sister might say to you are: "You'll get through this"; "That was a great song or Bible reading"; or "Can I come over and help you make a pie tomorrow?" She may send you a card to say I care. "And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased." (Hebrews 13:16)

The Holy Spirit may ask you at any moment to be an encourager. Do you realize that God *is* going to use you to encourage if you will be obedient to His Holy Spirit? You will be used by God to be His deliverer of peace. "But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid." (John 14:26-27)

The Bible is clear that we are to encourage others. God says that it might be a sacrifice at times. The Holy Spirit is our guide. Why are we waiting? The Bible gives us a test in Philippians 4:8 to judge ourselves.

Philippians 4:8 says, "Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things." The reason we are supposed to think about such things is because our thoughts drive our actions.

Let's do the *P – 48 Test*, as described in Mary A. Kassian's book *Conversation Peace*, to help prepare us to encourage one another and prepare us to encourage the world. The *P – 48* tests the goodness of thoughts, beliefs, and words, so we can determine if they will be encouraging to others.

Pure, Right, Excellent, Praiseworthy, Lovely, Admirable, Noble, True

After being shaken through this filter, the words and thoughts that remain are seeds we want to plant. The others are not from God and should be discarded. Put your thoughts and words to the test below:

Pure	Are my motives pure? Are my thoughts/words holy?
Right	Is this proper and appropriate? Is it in conformity with God's standards and principles? Does it build?
Excellent	Is this of highest quality? Is it the best or just adequate?
Praiseworthy	Is it commendable? Am I proud of the way I am thinking/speaking? Is God proud of me?
Lovely	Does it have a beauty that appeals to the heart? Does it mirror the beauty and gentleness of Jesus?
Admirable	Is it worthy of being respected and admired? Would others commend it?
Noble	Is it of the highest moral character, superior quality, great, and magnificent? Does it demonstrate my position as a child of the King?
True	Is it free of deceit? Does it agree with the Bible's evaluation of the situation? Does it submit to truth?

Ask Each Other

- What are some ways you have encouraged in the past?
- Now that you've taken the *P – 48 Test*, how will your actions be different?
- Do you have some adjusting to do, so you can encourage with pure motives? If so, what?
- Will you go about encouraging in a new way or with a new perspective? If so, how?
- How do you think your encouragement will be received?

Words of encouragement can be powerful. They can take you from sadness to happiness, brokenness to wholeness, and hopelessness to faith. Our acts of encouragement, whether it is through a card, phone call, or a helping hand, can be the most beautiful gift we give. Our acts or words of encouragement should be Pure, Right, Excellent, Praiseworthy, Lovely, Admirable, Noble, and True.

Hand-In-Hand Activities

1. Think of a time in your life when someone has encouraged you and this encouragement was helpful. Write on a note expressing to them how much their encouragement helped you. I know this will take some time. Remember the beginning of the Bible study, Jesus' hands, and the sacrifice He gave? I guarantee you will find fulfillment in this exercise.

The person receiving the letter will probably be encouraged also because you sent the note to them.

2. Look at the person to the right of you and give them some words of encouragement. Tell her she is a good mother, a great cook, or an encouragement by her faithfulness at church, etc. Do this one at a time and listen to each other as you encourage. *Remember, spirit led encouragement is always honest.*

Prayer

Dear heavenly father thank you for your example of pure encouragement through sacrifice. Help us seek to encourage one another in different ways and to be open to your Holy Spirit leading us everyday. Thank you for making us one in Christ through being your hands of encouragement. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Margie Vanderlaan lives in Bethany, IL where her husband, Kevin, serves as pastor of Bethany CP Church. They have served together there for almost three years and, as the song says, "it gets sweeter and sweeter as the days go by." Margie and Kevin have two children, Isaac who is 10 years old and Brianna who is 7. They love to play outside in God's creation whether it's sports or just the park. Margie enjoys singing, playing the piano, drinking a good cup of coffee, and shopping with her mother in her spare time!