

WHY Encouragement



*Thirty days of reflecting on the tangible power
of sincere praise and encouraging others*



W. Thomas Smith, Jr.

“Be kind to one another, tender-hearted,
forgiving each other, just as God in Christ
also has forgiven you.”

– *Ephesians 4:32*

WHY Encouragement

By W. Thomas Smith, Jr.

In early May 2019, I began a series on the importance of encouraging others – sincere encouragement as opposed to hollow flattery – as a means of better understanding for myself what God had put on my heart many years earlier, but which I had failed to fully apply in my own life toward others. These brief daily musings enabled me to better process one of the great truths of the nature of God, the attribute of encouragement, and why it is so important for all of us as a constant matter of practice. Ready? Here we go:



DAY 1 of “Why Encouragement” – God exhorts us to encourage others. Why? One reason is that we often don’t. We’ve instead twisted ourselves into believing that willfully ignoring someone or cleverly damning them with faint (or false) praise is easier and safer than it is to sincerely encourage them. I’ve said before, opportunities to encourage others present themselves to us daily. But we forgo the act of encouragement. Why? We’re selfish (yes, I’m guilty too) or we wrongly believe that by encouraging others we demonstrate weakness or perhaps we might give-away too much of ourselves (more of the enemy’s lies). But when we encourage others, even when we don’t want to, it begins to become second nature. And in this practice of actively encouraging (not hollow flattery, but sincere encouragement) something extraordinarily transformative begins to happen. I’ll be sharing more on this in the coming days.

DAY 2 – Encouraging others is not only the right thing to do – and beneficial to all – but we are commanded to do so. Does that mean we’re to fake it? By no means. We are to find a way to lift one-another up. And God provides the way daily. The problem is, when the always obvious opportunity for encouragement presents itself, we reject it. We miss the moment. And what might have been a simple, sincere kind word or gesture (that would have infused inspiring, enlivening, perhaps even healing righteous-energy into the soul of the would-be recipient) is lost. Missing that chance is not how we are supposed to live and relate to one another. It’s certainly not how God relates to us. God is the great Encourager. The enemy is the dark angel of dismissal and discouragement. Which should we choose to be? More in a day or so. Read Ephesians 4:29.

DAY 3 – Scripture tells us much about the power of the tongue (and by extension the pen, today the keyboard). Proverbs says, “A gentle tongue is a tree of life, but perverseness in it breaks the spirit.” James says, “No human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil ... With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse those who are made in the likeness of God.” And that cursing is often subtle. Those wishing to harm others with the tongue will cleverly condemn, often “gaslighting” the recipient to try making them feel flawed, foolish and overreactive. It’s a terrible way of interacting with others. How much easier and more refreshing would it be for us to always consider our words, always refusing the condemning subtleties. Instead encouraging, always lifting-up.



DAY 4 – Easily a favorite verse is one I committed to memory on the birth of my grandniece. It’s James 1:17, which says, “Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow.” To me this is very encouraging. Why? Because it tells us that all good things we receive – from the ability to taste that first sip of coffee in the morning; to an uplifting encounter with a friend; to clean sheets in a warm, dry, safe house; to a good medical report; to a business success; to a loving marriage; to the birth of a child; to the providential experience of a “God thing;” to hope – ARE FROM GOD. Moreover, God does not change. These truths should be ever-encouraging. Remind others.

DAY 5 – The Bible speaks much about encouragement and encouraging others, but few online Bible word calculators seem to provide accurate numbers of how many times the word “encourage” is found in Scripture. Easy to see why. Many words in the Bible are synonymous with encourage. And varying versions and translations, which speak of encouragement, often use different words, clauses, and sentences to describe and demonstrate acts of encouragement. Truth be known, the Bible – Genesis through Revelation – speaks of encouragement: God’s for us, and ours for our fellow man. Encouragement is somehow demonstrated in man’s redeemed nature I believe. Encouragement is part of the nature of God (Remember, the Holy Spirit is “the Comforter”). And we’re to become men and women of encouragement to others.

DAY 6 – Romans 15:2 tells us, “Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to build him up.” Ok, so who are our neighbors? Everyone sharing life with us in some way: our family, friends, co-workers, clients, students, leaders, subordinates, the mailman, the cashier at the store, the awkward teenager who may not feel good about himself or herself, the elderly person who complains about how bad they feel (because they truly don’t feel good). Our neighbors are our fellow men and women. And what are we to do for our neighbors? We’re to please them for their good. WHY? To build them up (yes, encourage). God doesn’t ask us to do these things. He commands us time-and-again. Again, why? For our good and the good of others! It all fits. There’s life in this.

DAY 7 – When God sent Joshua into the land of Canaan at the head of His armies, He did so with encouragement. You’ll remember from the story, God said, “no man” would ever “be able to stand before” Joshua. God also promised that just as He had been with Moses, He would also be with Joshua. God added, “I will not leave you or forsake you.” Several times God also said for Joshua to “Be strong and courageous.” Then when Joshua’s men approached Jericho, God sent an angel (some scholars believe to be a manifestation of God Himself). Point being, God always encourages His people, and He exhorts us to do the same. No, we can’t send angels, but we can *remind others* of both the presence of angels and all of the aforementioned promises of God.



DAY 8 – This morning I had a conversation about God with a dear friend struggling in a dark place. I was hoping to lift her up, but as it turns out her words about God greatly encouraged me. That’s how encouragement often works. No wonder God tells us to encourage one another. Then at church we had a guest pastor, a man from the Middle

East whose country and name I cannot mention for security reasons. He was the first pastor I heard at my church when I first attended many years ago. He was the reason I returned to church then, though I'd only heard him preach that one time, until today. His words were encouraging years ago. They were today. And the encouraging things he talked about today were the same things my suffering friend and I spoke about an hour earlier.

DAY 9 – We previously discussed covert condemnation, subliminal criticism and gas-lighting: All dismal means of interacting with others. What about overt (as opposed to covert) condemnation. It's every bit as base, though perhaps less clever, more brutish. But why either when it's far easier to lift up? Because we're broken. We have wrongly been conditioned to believe it's easier – even better – to find fault. And some of us have condemned and criticized for so long, we don't know how to do otherwise. Here's a thought: Start tonight: find the "good" in one you've so easily condemned. Make a list. Think of a family member or co-worker you've for years found fault with. List 10 good things about them. Where are we going with this? Will tell you next time.

DAY 10 – Yesterday, we discussed listing "10 good things" about family-members or co-workers whom for years we've perhaps criticized or rejected (thus condemning). I didn't say "friends" because friends wouldn't be friends if we condemned them. Right? So to the list: If you came up with even five good things, that's huge. And you'll notice when you began to list the five or 10, you began to feel better about the person. You began to see the value in them. That's how God, who is infinitely righteous (and we are not), sees them. You may say, "Well, I'm not God." Of course you're not. But aren't we to strive to be beacons of His Light? So remind yourself of the tremendous value of the other person. Better yet, remind them. See what happens however slowly. Yes, this goes against the enemy's designs.

DAY 11A – God wants us to encourage. The enemy wants us to discourage. Yes, it is really that simple. We know that God wants us to EN-courage because He tells us to and He gives us countless examples throughout Scripture. The enemy wants us to DIS-courage because he is "the accuser" and "the father of lies." The enemy is always trying to convince us that the discouragement which we both deliver and receive is somehow deserved. Nothing could be further from the truth. Truth is, we are to strive – even beyond our corrupted inclinations – to encourage others, not hollowly, but sincerely. God says, "I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you." He also tells us to "encourage one another and build one another up."

DAY 11B – We have all heard the phrase, "No man is an island." In other words, men and women cannot survive isolated and alone. Same for encouragement. It dies if marooned. Encouragement can't exist in a vacuum. It cannot be one man or woman encouraging the world. It has to become contagious, and it will, if only we allow the Spirit of encouragement – the divine "Comforter" – to fill our hearts. In other words, when you choose to encourage, you encourage others to encourage; and they others. You're committing yourself and others to beating back the forces of discouragement (and boy-oh-boy has discouragement gained a foothold in this

world). Think of it this way; when you sincerely encourage – not hollow flattery, but sincere praise and encouragement – you are advancing God’s Kingdom from the position of your own piece of spiritually contested ground.

DAY 12 – Sometimes the ones who are the greatest **ENC**ouragers can become the ones who are the most **DIS**couraged. That is what the enemy desires. That is also when the *discouraged*–encourager needs to remind himself or herself of the promises of God. Encouraging others isn’t always easy. We’ve spoken at length as to why since DAY ONE, and we will share more reasons later. Sometimes well-meaning but wrong thinking people will say, “Well, you can’t save the world.” And that’s true. But you can and must – for many of the reasons same we’ve previously discussed – be a light shining in your immediate world. After all, you may well-be the **ONLY** light seen by the unknown person who is in the deepest despair. So never quit encouraging; not hollowly, but honestly.



DAY 13 – Encouragement must never be forced or fake. We’ve said it before. Take for example the words of one who always says, “You’re the smartest guy (or gal) who ever lived.” That’s not encouragement. That’s flattery. And it falls flat, because it’s hollow and it is often obvious the flatterer is somehow trying to earn favor. Though most flattery is harmless, insincerity sometimes has the effect of discouraging a sensitive or wounded soul. It’s almost as if the flatterer is looking past the person. Sincere encouragement, on the other hand, comes from the heart where the Holy Spirit dwells. Nothing hollow about that. Don’t be silent when you truly recognize and appreciate something good in another. And if someone’s struggling and unable to see the blue sky, lead them to it, but always in truth, always reassuring and building up.

DAY 14 – Encouragement is a necessary fuel. Just like we need water, food, air to breath, sleep, and protection from the elements, we need encouragement, real attaboys to keep us going. Sure, you can ‘survive’ without another person’s encouraging words. But existing is essentially all that you will be doing. Even a man lost in the woods needs encouragement. He needs it desperately. He finds it from within himself, by keeping his eye on the objective or sub-objectives, and from God. And there is no sweeter, more uplifting, more inspiring encouragement than what we find in God. Again, there is tremendous power in encouragement. Think for a moment about that one sincere compliment that someone once paid you that not only made your day, but your week, that you literally clung to for months, that even began to define you.

DAY 15 – No, I did not read “The Five Love Languages.” But I did read a review of Gary Chapman’s bestseller that summarized his BIG FIVE – affirmation, quality time, gifts, acts of service, and physical touch. Of course, these five are primarily geared toward husbands and wives, but wouldn’t this model be equally effective if adapted for anyone seeking to better encourage anyone in their world? Make sincere encouragement a habit (note, again, I said sincere encouragement, not hollow flattery). We need to discipline ourselves to do so every day. In fact, Hebrews 3 tells us to “encourage one another daily,” and to do so “that none of you may be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness.” Don’t be lured into the enemy’s lie that it’s better, even safer to say nothing at all.

DAY 16A – Encouragement must be honest, kind, and hearty; else it’s better left unexpressed. False encouragement, if we can call it that, is often faint, corrupted with sarcasm (sidestepping any lifting-up by poking fun) or cleverly crafted to condemn. Take for example the at-risk kid who just graduated from high school. The faint-praise encourager would simply say, “congrats.” That’s it. The sarcastic, condescending encourager would say, “Good for you. Now you can go to work.” The clever condemner would say, “Wow! Congrats! I never dreamed YOU would finish high school.” That’s not encouraging anyone. Encouragement should always rally and inspire. Don’t say, “happy FOR you” (suggesting you won’t or don’t benefit from their success) when you can say, “I’m proud OF you.” It’s not difficult, though we sometimes make it so.

DAY 16B – So what are these “Why encouragement” posts, and why are we posting them? First, WHAT? They are simple 150-word musings about encouragement (not hollow flattery). Second, WHY? Many reasons beyond the 150 words we’re allowing for each post. But perhaps most importantly are (a) God tells us to encourage, (b) we all benefit from encouraging others and in ways that transcend what we’re able to see and experience, (c) encouragement saves lives, (d) we have somehow forgotten how to encourage, and (e) encouragement is an important means of advancing God’s Kingdom on earth. There’s more, and we’ll talk about it later. Oh, I almost forgot, we will finish this up at Day 30, whatever that day will be. We don’t post these everyday, but we do most everyday. God Bless.

DAY 17 – As a young Marine rifleman learning the finer points of leading other young Marine riflemen, I remember the words of an older gunnery sergeant who said, “Whenever the men are demoralized or if the situation you are all in becomes desperate

– even if it seems hopeless – you as the leader must be able to dig deep and find that little smile to put on your face." Point being; that little smile and perhaps an encouraging word or two has the power to change the dynamics of everything. Don't sell them a lie, but **SHOW THEM A WAY**, he said. And this key lesson on the value of encouragement applies to so many things in life: Doesn't it?



DAY 18 – When you encourage, do so with **NO EXPECTATION** of return. To do otherwise would be for the wrong reason, and you will be disappointed time-and-again. If you give someone \$100, do you expect it back? Not unless it's a loan. Same with encouragement. Encouraging should strictly be for the recipient – with the recipient solely in mind – and ultimately for God. That should be your motivation, always. So condition yourself to encourage for the sake of encouragement. Do it for the absolute value of the other person being lifted up, and for no other reason. In time, the transcendent value of the very encouragement you are offering another will begin to wash over and refresh you, **NOT** because you wanted or expected it to. But because that's how sincere encouragement works. Think this is all nonsense? Give it a try.

DAY 19 – There are many ways to encourage others. The simplest is sincere praise, a compliment or an attaboy (I cannot reiterate enough the importance of sincerity). Then there are the honest things we say to inspire another to action or to enable them to continue their struggle whatever that struggle may be. There are also the uplifting or reassuring things we might say to protect others – or to bind the wounds – from the pain of the world; everything from true forgiveness to communicating the truths of the sunshine and blue sky in front of the other person. Which brings me to Scripture. Perhaps the

greatest encouragement we will ever be able to offer another are the promises of God. There is nothing more straightforward, honest, heartening and freely given than God's promises to us.

DAY 20 – The Bible is full of encouragement from Genesis through Revelation. Many of our go-to books are the Psalms, also those of the great prophets like Isaiah and Jeremiah, then Jesus' words in the four Gospels and Paul's letters to the various churches and others. But what about some of the books we may deem to be the more obscure (or less read) where we find the words of the minor prophets like Zephaniah. You might ask, "Who reads Zephaniah?" But Zephaniah (in chapter 3, verse 17) gives us this gem – "The Lord your God is with you. He is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, He will quiet you with His love, He will rejoice over you with singing." How encouraging is that?! Read it again. Memorize it, and take heart.

The **LORD** your **God** is with you,
He is mighty to save.
He will take great delight in you,
He will quiet you with His love,
He will rejoice over you with singing.
– *Zephaniah 3: 17*

DAY 21 – Remind people of how they've encouraged you (from a simple compliment they may have paid you in passing to an inspirational speech they may have delivered that lifted you up). This will not only lift them up, but it will encourage them to encourage even others. Now we are spreading encouragement – and experiencing its power – just like we're to spread the Gospel and experience its power. What else? Whenever you introduce someone to another, do so by describing them with a bit of praise. Nothing excessive or fawning. Don't reel-off a list of their accomplishments. Just offer something singularly laudable about the one being introduced to the one to whom the introduction is being made. Get into a habit of doing this. You may have to in order to get out of the ditch of deriding others. Encourage daily! Didn't we mention Hebrews 3:13?

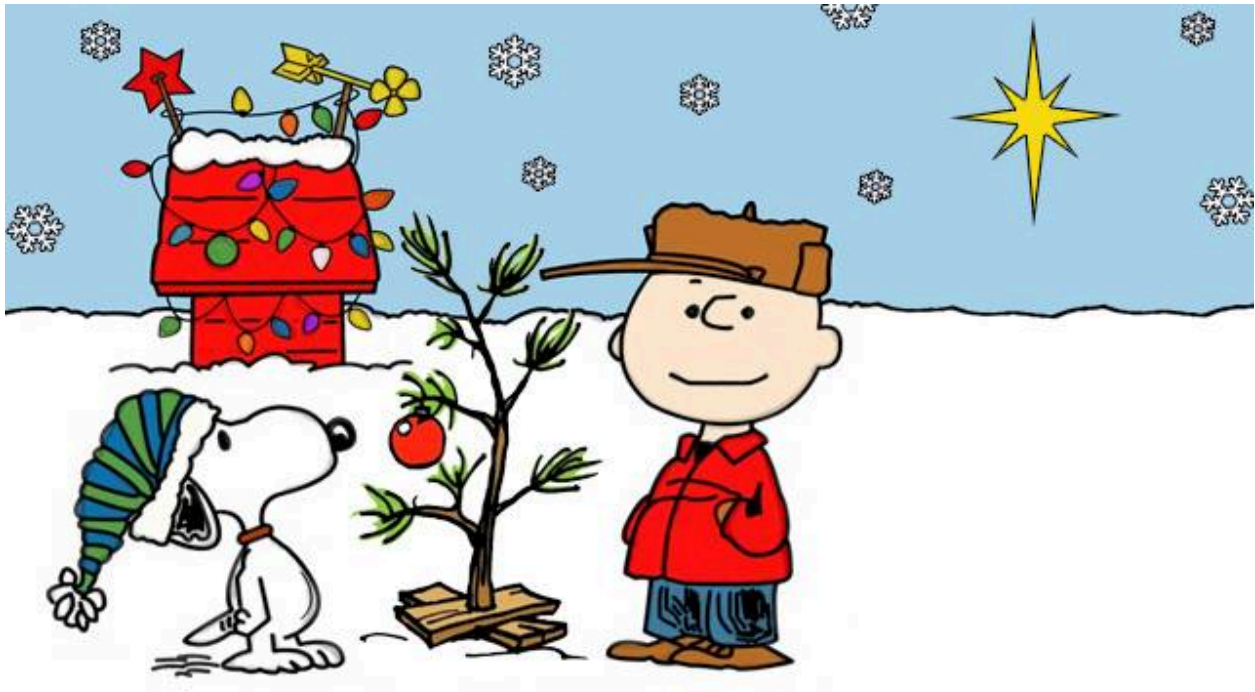
DAY 22 – Think about the people you have looked through while walking past them. Maybe you're not guilty of this, but I know I am. Sure, it may be awkward – sometimes it's not safe – to strike up a conversation with everyone you pass on the street. But how hard is it to make eye contact and smile? Even if you don't feel like smiling. Speaking of smiling, I try to make it a point – even if alone – to make myself physically smile when under stress. Yes, it feels strange at first, but try it. Next time you're upset after an unhappy encounter with someone, upon hearing disheartening news, or when danger lies ahead; force yourself to smile. No one will see you, and it's strange how that very act will physiologically lift you up. Not sure why, but it does.

DAY 23 – Tomorrow is the 75th anniversary of the Invasion of Normandy, June 6, 1944. And on the eve of this anniversary, this old U.S. Marine rifleman is reminded of the beautiful two-word motto of the U.S. Army Infantry: “Follow me!” When I first heard that as a boy, I thought “Follow me” was too simple. Of course, I was too spiritually and intellectually immature to appreciate the perfection in those two words. Jesus Himself spoke them often. “Follow me,” He said. (Perhaps equal in magnificence were the words spoken to the Lord by Isaiah who said, “Here am I. Send me.”) But since we’re talking about encouragement, imagine for a moment being mired in some seemingly inescapable hell on earth when suddenly a good man rises up – or an angel or even God – and says, “Follow me!”



DAY 24 – Pain is perplexingly subjective, and so what one feels physically, mentally, or emotionally in terms of pain is not the same as what another person experiences. This makes it tough on the encourager looking to lift-up the sufferer. You well-know that when it comes to your own pain, everyone else is an outsider. So understanding another’s pain takes a bit of work. How can you effectively encourage if you have not made a concerted effort to at least gain a surface-understanding of what another is suffering? You can’t. What to do? Listen attentively. Let’s take PTSD for example: If the PTSD sufferer says that what he is dealing with is endless, remember **IT IS ENDLESS**, even when he is smiling. Listen, learn the nuances, care, and pray always for guidance in your encouraging efforts.

DAY 25 – The second half of John 14:27 reads, “Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.” Easier said than done, right? But this is not mere man telling us this. These are the very words of Christ. And He not only ENCOURAGES us with these words, but more than 1,400 years before these words were spoken by Jesus, God also commanded Joshua: “Be strong and courageous! Do not tremble or be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.” (Yes, we talked about this on Day 7) Still, it is not always easy because we’re broken vessels and struggling with trust. Maybe that’s why God tells us again-and-again to “fear not” and “I will never leave you nor forsake you.” Remind others of these truths; and remind them again-and-again if necessary.



DAY 26 – Don't go it alone. In other words, don't try to encourage others in your own strength. Ask the Holy Spirit to give you the strength. Better yet, pray that He "be" your strength. Rely solely on Him. And give Him to the discouraged soul you're lifting up (or give Him to those who aren't necessarily discouraged, but who need to be encouraged as a matter of surviving and thriving like everyone else). God's strength is available to all – at least I believe it is – and it is mind-bogglingly endless, unlike our own power which is often limited by our emotions, our mental capacity and physical well-being (which plays into our emotions). God, however, is all powerful. And as we read in Philippians 4:13, "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me."

DAY 27 – As much as we are exhorted in Scripture to encourage one another and as much as both the recipient of encouragement and the encourager (himself or herself) benefit from the act and the overall dynamics of encouragement: Make no mistake; the enemy – the great discourager – will unleash everything in his limited power to quash any light from the encouragement we may attempt to bring about. Don't let THIS discourage you from encouraging. Instead, recognize this as the work of the evil one; knowing he'll always try to thwart any encouraging efforts. Remember this is a war "against the rulers of the darkness of this world." And know that in the end, the Holy Spirit will lift you up and keep you engaged. Remember, as we read in Psalm 121, "He will not allow your foot to slip."

DAY 28 – Tired yet of seeing these "Why encouragement" posts? Me too :) But I've learned that a few people have been encouraged by them, so we'll press on for two more days beyond this. That will be 30 posts total, and that will be enough. What about today? Let someone know you'll pray for them regularly. Better yet, actually PRAY FOR THEM regularly. In fact, include the people you're committed to praying for on a written list of others you've committed to praying for. Pray for every single person on that list

by name every single day without fail. Pray that they be healed (physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually), delivered from evil, protected, provided for and blessed in every way. Remind them that they are being lifted up to God daily. What could be more encouraging?

DAY 29 – When we began these posts on DAY ONE we said we would explain the transformation that takes place when regularly striving to encourage (sincerely, not hollowly). Here’s how it works: We not only brighten someone’s day, maybe we spur them to greater things or lift them from the mire of despair; but we empty ourselves of the corrupting nature of SELF. There’s a spiritually cleansing aspect to encouragement. For the moment (or for however long we are involved in the act of encouragement) the world isn’t about us. We’re no longer concerning ourselves with the worldly selfish stuff – the me, me, look at me, I’m so great nonsense – which slowly destroys from within. We’re pouring ourselves into another FOR THEIR SAKE and for God’s. And for no other reason. This is how God designed us to be.

FINAL DAY – For 30 days we have talked about the importance of encouragement (sincere encouragement, not hollow flattery). Not because I am some great encourager: But because I AM NOT. So, for me, this has been an exercise in renewed understanding. I want to be able to encourage because I recognize the deep labyrinthian value in it. Too many things have prevented me from being the type of encouraging soul I want to be. Years ago, I prayed often that God would make me a beacon of His Light; that His Light (not mine) would shine through me to others. And for the time I was praying for that very blessing, God granted me “the desires of [my] heart.” So it’s pretty simple; I need to start praying for that again. Maybe you too? Anyway, go back and re-read the previous 29 posts on this. And God Bless you all.

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