

Strength from Encouragement

Americans are a historically tough people. “We will pull ourselves up by our own boot straps, thank you very much!” We planted the seeds of a great nation 244 years ago, and generation after generation we grew America - with God’s help and direction, certainly, but we stepped up to the plate and accomplished amazing things.

This “do or die” attitude is a powerful motivation and has kept us going through many grave challenges, wars, droughts, diseases and terrorist attacks. But not all people have had the blessing of growing up in a family that fosters such positive approaches to life. In fact, God, Himself, addresses the reality that sometimes we need encouragement from outside ourselves. We value and even celebrate inner strength but sometimes tend to look down on those who don’t have it. God’s plan calls us to a better way.

In Romans 15:1-2, God calls us to this better way,

Now we who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of those without strength and not *just* please ourselves. Each of us is to please his neighbor for his good, to his edification.

Edification means “to build up” someone. In our day we are seeing a lot of people who need to be built up through encouragement. As a nation, and often as a church, we underestimate the value, importance and need of encouragement. It is often particularly difficult for very positive and confident people to comprehend the need others have for their personal encouragement.

God’s command is not optional. Sixty-three times in scripture we see examples of the word, “encourage.” In Acts 11:23, Barnabas (this nick-name means “son of encouragement”), went to the Christians in Antioch and, “he rejoiced and *began* to encourage them all with resolute heart to remain *true* to the Lord....” Notice he didn’t just say, “You guys are great, go feel good about yourselves.” His encouragement was quite specific: for them to “remain true to the Lord.”

Paul taught the Thessalonian Christians to, “**encourage one another and build up one another, just as you also are doing.**” The Hebrew writer calls on Christians to be encouraging while at the church assembly, “...**not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging *one another*; and all the more as you see the day drawing near,**” Hebrews 10:25.

Somewhere there are individuals needing encouragement, your encouragement, personally and lovingly. God gives us strength in many ways, but sometimes He gives it through the encouragement of others. There are certainly personal responsibilities to be mature, do the right thing and think the right thoughts. But God gives His church family numerous commands to encourage one another in the process.

Find someone to encourage. Do it with a smile. Do it with love. And do it with a hug - *ok... and a mask!*

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