

The Gift of Encouragement
“Stir up the gift of God that is in you”
II Timothy 1:6

This morning I want us to think about the gift of encouragement. My thoughts will be built upon the words of Paul to his young friend, Timothy, in his second letter, the first chapter, the sixth verse Paul says “stir up the gift of God in you.”

The Greek word we translate “gift” is the word charisma, and gifts are very important because they express how we feel about people. There are many types of gifts.

Some people like unusual gifts.

I heard about a lady who told her husband, I want a mink coat for Christmas.”

He said “my dear I’ll get you a mink, but when I do you’ve got to take care of that little critter, love it, and clean out its cage every day”.

Some people like expensive gifts.

I read about one woman who was wearing a very expensive diamond. Another lady approached her and said, “I hope I’m not being forward or intrusive but I just happened to notice that big beautiful and expensive diamond you are wearing. Is it anything like the famous Hope Diamond?”

The other woman replied, “This is not the Hope diamond. It is the Klopman Diamond, but it is like the Hope diamond in that it carries a curse.” The other lady then asked what the curse is.” The woman answered, “Mr. Klopman!”

Yes, some folks like expensive gifts.

The word “stir” is an interesting word in the Greek. It is built from three Greek words.

The first is the word Ana, and it is a very common prefix in Greek. As a prefix here it means to do by repetition and intensity over and over again. The middle part is taken from a Greek term which means to cause to ferment such as in leaven or wine.

The third part of the word is taken from the Greek root PUROS which means fire. So we understand why some translations such as The New International Version render this part of the verse to read, and “the flame that is within you,” or why The Revised Standard Version renders it, “kindle the flame that is within you.”

But other translations state, “... stir up the gift of God that is within you...” I like the verb “stir” because it reminds me of encouragement.

In the south they make the most delicious breakfast biscuits. To make authentic Southern biscuits they use self rising flour, shortening, a little bit of butter and some buttermilk. The batter is mixed with a big wooden spoon

Then the Baker puts the batter in their hands and begins to shape them into a form of biscuits that are about 3 inches in diameter.

Then you use a biscuit sheet and pour a little bit of buttermilk over the top of each one of the biscuits.

Then you put the biscuit sheet into a hot oven that has been preheated to about 450°

I have had the opportunity to see some beautiful sunrises. I've seen the sun rise over the Gulf of Mexico. I have seen the sun rise and set over both coasts. I have seen the sun rise over the beautiful Smoky Mountains, but I'll tell you one of the most beautiful sights in all of God's creation is having a breakfast of country biscuits served to you.

Now the interesting thing about biscuits is this: it's hard to share them with other people. But country biscuits and country breakfasts are meant to be shared.

In an analogous way this is exactly what we need to do with the gift of encouragement within our lives, we need to stir it up with our hearts; shape it together with our minds; and then share it through our lives with other people.

I believe we need to share this wonderful gift of encouragement for several reasons. We need to share the gift of encouragement because it: Meets a basic need, makes a better world, melts away Impossibilities, marks a true Disciple of Jesus Christ, mends a broken relationship, and manifests itself in different ways. Here are some examples:

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- *A gentle hug
- *A positive note
- *A simple call
- *A kind word
- *A sincere smile
- *A gracious gift

*Always imagine that the encouragement you give might be your last opportunity you have to give it.

Let's look at meeting a basic need we all have, that need to be encouraged.

When William James the great psychologist and philosopher was sick some friends brought him some flowers. It was then that he was reminded that in writing his monumental textbook on psychology, he had omitted two of the basic parts of human nature: one, the desire to be appreciated, and two, the need to be encouraged.

On the evening of April 15, 1865 President Abraham Lincoln was assassinated. You all know the story. During that terrible night a Secret Service agent went through the pockets of Lincoln's clothes, remove the contents, and place them in a box. He sealed the box, and he wrote upon it three words: "Do Not Open".

For several years that box was not opened, and when they did open it, it revealed some interesting items.

First, they found a pair of old Spectacles.
Secondly, they found a little bit of Confederate money.
Thirdly, they found eight articles that Pres. Lincoln had clipped from newspapers. The articles were highly affirming, complementary and encouraging to the president. These items are now on display at the Smithsonian Institute.

Now the simple point I want to make is this-Abraham Lincoln, one of the most beloved Americans to ever live, and one of the greatest presidents to ever hold that high office; if he felt such a need to be encouraged, then how much more do those people with whom you live and associate daily have that same need within their lives?

We need to share the gift of encouragement because it meets a basic need in the lives of people.

The gift of encouragement makes a better home. It makes a better community. It makes a better school. It makes a better church. It makes a better nation. It makes a better world. It makes a better workplace.

An irate boss called one of his employees “on the carpet,” and severely reprimanded him for a poor job performance. As the employee was leaving he saw a man who worked under him. He stopped the man and proceeded to give him a stern lecture. He literally “chewed the poor man out”.

As this man went into his office, he spotted his secretary, and he walked immediately to her desk. He began to curse her out for some minor infraction. The poor secretary was so distraught she was in tears. She could not concentrate on her work, and she went home in the middle of the day.

When she walked into her home, she slammed the door behind her. Lying on the couch was her teenage son watching television. Of course the son didn't know about his mother's anger. The mother put her hands on her hips, and said in a very mean-spirited way, “son, you are one poor excuse of humanity. I demand that right now you go out find a job and get to work.”

The son was so upset; he immediately jumped up from the couch and headed for the back door. As he passed through the kitchen, he saw the old family cat taking a nap. As the son passed the cat he gave the cat a swift kick, and it nearly scared the poor cat to death.

This begs the question: “now wouldn't it have been better if that boss went just go over to the secretary's house and kicked the cat?”

Let me tell you about another boss. This boss has the habit of arriving on the job early. He immediately walks around the place, and he speaks to every employee. He pats them on the back, gives them a gentle hug, and he encourages them in every way.

He tells them, “You are important to this business! You are valuable to this company! This organization could not survive without you!”

Is it any wonder that in this second company the morale is high: the personnel are productive, and the company is very profitable? That is what the gift of encouragement can do.

Yes, the gift of encouragement is needed because it makes this world a better place in which to live, and in doing so makes this world a better place for you to live, to go to school and to work each day.

Encouragement can take away impossibilities.
Last summer Eunice Kennedy Shiver died.
She founded the Special Olympics with her husband Sargent Shiver.

Let me tell you one of the countless stories from the Special Olympics.
One Special Olympian was a dear precious exceptional special child.
At the Special Olympics she was running in the 50 yard dash.
It was her first organized competition of any type.

The referee fired the gun, and the little girl commenced running. It was real interesting the way she ran because she never focused her eyes upon the finish line. As she ran she kept her eyes fixed upon her mother and dad in the stands who were encouraging her. They were cheering her on, yelling "go, go, go!"

During the entire race, the little girl never lost sight of her parents, and she never got outside the range of their encouraging words. She crossed the finish line first, and when she did, she threw her little arms in the air and shouted: "I won, I won".

At the awards ceremony which followed, the chairman of the Special Olympics was placing the winners ribbon around the little girl's neck.

He noticed that the mother and father were standing close by and they were crying. He turned to the mother and said, "I am so sorry. What is wrong."

The mother said, "nothing is wrong. As a matter of fact, nothing could be more right because we just heard our daughter speak for the first time."

Now that is what the gift of encouragement can do and when I speak of encouragement I mean genuine encouragement. This kind of encouragement can move mountains. It can overcome obstacles, it can break down barriers, and it can open up opportunities.

The gift of encouragement makes a true disciple of Jesus Christ. I think of people who influenced my life over the years, and without exception, they were people with the gift of encouragement. They were folks who were encouragers.

Encouragement mends a broken relationship, or permit me to put it in the plural and say encouragement mends broken relationships.

As people live life, it is so easy for them to get their wires crossed.

It is so easy for folks to allow little barriers to emerge, but the problem is that those little barriers become large and looming barriers, and, before you know it, they tend to separate people and prevent people from seeing who others actually are-God's children

One way to bring hope and healing, or if not to bring, one way to begin hope and healing is with the gift of encouragement.

May I ask you a couple of very personal questions? Is there anybody with whom you have a strained or broken relationship? Do you want to mend that relationship? Do you want to bring healing to that strained relationship? If so, I want to challenge you to do two things.

One, pray about that relationship. Pray about that other person.

Pray that God will give you grace to forgive that person. You might need to pray and ask God to give to that person Grace so that person can forgive you. It might even be that you need to ask God to apply forgiveness to both of you. Commit that situation to God in prayer.

Two, share with that person the gift of encouragement in some way. Ask God to show you how you can offer encouragement to that person and how you can share the gift of encouragement with that person. Here are:

Six important words: "I admit I made a mistake."

Five important words: "I am proud of you."

Four important words: "what is your opinion?"

Three important words: "if you please."

Two important words: "thank you."

The least important word: "I".

When you utilize this little brief course on human relations and you use it with the grace of prayer in the gift of encouragement it will help you mend any fragmented and broken relationship.

Encouragement manifests itself in different ways. It can manifest itself through: A gentle hug, A positive note, A simple call, A kind word, A sincere smile, A gracious gift

Now there is nothing deeply profound about these ways to manifest the gifts of encouragement. They are very simple, practical, usable and workable, you can manifest them in your life today.

May I suggest to you a final reason why you need to share the gift of encouragement today? You need to share it today because it: might be your last opportunity.

Tell me, is there anybody towards whom you need to share and manifest the gift of encouragement?

It might be a son or daughter. It might be a mother or father. It might be a brother or sister. It might be a grandparent or grandchild. It might be a friend of or a colleague. Do it today. You might not have another chance. You may not have the opportunity to do it tomorrow.

May I close with this little essay? I do not know the author. It is directed to friends, parents, husbands and wives. It is directed to all of us. Please listen very closely.

... If I knew it would be the last time that I see you fall asleep, I would tuck you in more tightly. If I knew it would be the last time that I'd see you walk out the door, I would give you a hug and a kiss, and I would call you back for more.

...If I knew it would be the last time I could spare a minute or two to stop and say I love you instead of assuming that you know I do. Tomorrow is not promised to anyone, young or old alike, and today may be the last chance you get to hold your loved one tight.

... so if you're waiting for tomorrow, why not do it today? For if tomorrow never comes, you'll surely regret the day, ... That you didn't take the extra time for a smile, a hug, or a kiss, and you were too busy to grant what turned out to be their one last wish.

.... So hold your love ones close today, whisper in their ear, and tell them how much you love them and that you will always hold them dear.

... Take time to offer a word of encouragement or say I'm sorry; please forgive me, or its okay. And if tomorrow never comes, you'll have no regrets about today.

Right now, take the gift of encouragement, stir it up within your heart, shape it together within your mind, and share it with somebody... today?

AMEN!