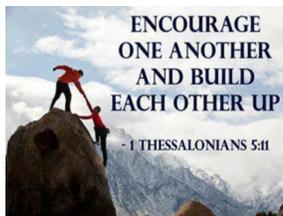


American Decency Association

PO Box 202, Fremont, MI 49412 231-924-4050 www.americandecency.org
Encouraging Christians to guard their hearts July 2019

Encourage One Another

by Dane Ortlund



Our words to one another about one another not only describe reality. They also create reality.

“You idiot!” does not simply assess what is objectively true to the speaker. It also produces, in the one spoken to, death and darkness. Not only do our words reveal what is true of us, they also generate reality for another. Specifically, our words are either death-bringing or life-giving. Either depleting or nourishing, draining or filling.

The gospel is a message of life, of nourishing, of filling. Because of Christ’s work in our behalf, we are set free from sin, adopted into God’s family, welcomed in. The “word of

truth, the gospel of your salvation” (Eph. 1:13) is a word that gives life. And the great privilege we have when we gather with other believers—other obnoxious believers, other theologically imprecise believers, other spiritually sleepy believers, other frustrating believers, other sinning believers—is of passing on horizontally a taste of what we’ve been given vertically. Amid all my sin and messiness, in Jesus, God has given me a word of welcome, a word of love—“the word of life” (Phil. 2:16; 1 John 1:1). Loved with this word of grace, I love others with words of grace.

After all, when Paul says, “Therefore encourage one another and build one another up,” what is the “therefore” referring to? What is fueling such encouragement? One of the greatest exultations in all the New Testament about the hope of the gospel: “God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might

live with him” (1 Thess. 5:9–10).

Having been shown life through the word of the gospel, we give life through the words we use.

That’s easier said than done. All day long, words are flowing out of us. Passing another and saying hello in the hallway at work, chatting over lunch, greeting our spouse at the end of the day, tucking a child in with a good night story, speaking with a salesperson at Best Buy, talking on the phone while driving. We also use words without employing the larynx: emails, tweets, Facebook comments, handwritten notes stuck on the fridge. Even in this article I am using words: Are they bringing life?

In the hurricane of words that make up any given day, how do we walk in wisdom such that our words inject sanity, calm, and life rather than destruction? In two ways.

First, by *saying nothing*.

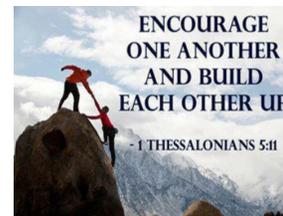
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First, by *saying nothing*.

One major way we give



life to others with our words is by not using any. It feels awkward to sit with someone depressed or overwhelmed with life and to say nothing. But what comes out of our mouth as medicine can, in fact, sicken rather than strengthen another's heart (Prov. 23:8). A sufferer, when the pain is raw, needs warm presence, not fixing words. Paul said, "Weep with those who weep" (Rom. 12:15), not "provide theological answers to those who weep." That Romans 8:28 comes before Romans 12:15 in the canon does not mean it should in our counseling and friendships.

Second, by *saying something*.

All our words tumble out impelled by one of two motives. I am using words either for myself or for you. All my speech is either fueled by self (no matter how smiling it is) or by love (no matter how painful it is).

The question, then, is why

do you speak the words you do? Why do you speak the way you do? What is the aroma of your words? Are you spraying bullets, forgetting God has set down the gun rightly aimed at you? Do you speak to others the way you wish to be spoken to? What kind of speech has given you life as you consider meaningful relationships in your past? Do you ever—ever—look another human being in the face and say to them the following words: "May I tell you something I admire about you?" (It is one of the great secrets to Christian community that speaking a word of grace to another builds up you as much as the other.)

In your short life, you have a million tiny opportunities, including a hundred today, to inject a small but potent dose of life and light into another. As you consider doing this, you will immediately find a good reason presenting itself that seems to clearly mitigate your impulse to build another up. Some weakness, some corresponding fault, will arise in your mind, cancelling out your reason to encourage that person. Indeed, with some people in our lives, we honestly have

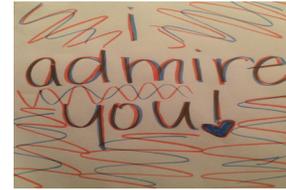
difficulty finding anything encouraging to say.

Once more we remember the gospel. God did not allow our own faults to mitigate His word of gospel life to us. We have given Him every reason to withhold that precious word from us. Instead He lavishes us with assurances of undeserved love. We come alive. We breathe again.

John Owen wrote that God "loves life into us." Will you love life into another?

[Used with permission: Tabletalk, July 2013]

"Do nothing that you would not like God to see. Say nothing you would not like God to hear. Write nothing you would not like God to read. Go no place where you would not like God to find you. Read no book of which you would not like God to say, "Show it to Me." Never spend your time in such a way that you would not like to have God say, "What are you doing?"
~ J.C. Ryle



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