

## **EVERYONE NEEDS A LITTLE ENCOURAGEMENT!**

### ***Philemon 1:1-1:25***

#### **INTRODUCTION:**

After keeping grandchildren for a while, cartoons like this catch your eye: *A cartoon showed a psychologist talking to a mother: "Let's see," he said, "You say you spend 50 percent of your energy on your job, 50 percent on your husband and 50 percent on your children. I think I see your problem."*

Sometimes we feel like slaves to situations, so I want to use a slave to encourage us today.

The author of the book is the Apostle Paul, a dedicated follower of Jesus Christ and mentor to Timothy. The recipients of this letter are Philemon and Apphia (A-fee-uh), and a house church leader named Archippus. Paul was writing from a prison cell—imprisoned for his religious faith, not for a civil or criminal violation.

Paul is writing on behalf of Onesimus, a runaway slave. Onesimus apparently met Paul and was converted to Christianity. Paul sends this letter **with Onesimus** back to Philemon, the slave's master. Paul is **not affirming slavery**, but in fact asks Philemon to return worth and dignity to Onesimus, even as a brother.

Paul writes in verses 15-17, "... that you [Philemon] might have him [Onesimus] back for good -- no longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a dear brother. He is very dear to me but even dearer to you, both as a man and as a brother in the Lord. So if you consider me a partner, welcome him as you would welcome me." The Bible **never** endorses mistreatment of others; rather, the Bible endorses the **equality of human worth under God**.

Let me define an encourager as the Bible would have us understand. A biblical encourager helps others to have the courage to be and to do what God wants them to be and to do.

Everyone needs an encourager. Classmates need encouragers. Co-workers need encouragers. Family members need encouragers. Christians need encouragers, and non-Christians need encouragers. No one ever lived who has not need encouragement.

A group of frogs were traveling through the woods when two of them fell into a deep pit. All the other frogs gathered around the pit and when they saw how deep it was they told the two frogs that they were as good as dead. The two frogs ignored the comments and tried to jump out of the pit with all their might. The other frogs kept telling them: "STOP – it's no use; you're as good as dead." Finally one of the frogs took heed of what the other frogs were saying and gave up. He fell down and died. The other frog however continued to jump as hard as he could. Once again the crowd of frogs yelled at him to stop the pain and just die. "What's the point of going on", they cried out to him. In response the frog in the pit jumped even harder and harder and finally made it out. When he got out of the pit the other frogs said to him "Didn't you hear us? We were shouting at you – Give up – you're as good as dead" In response the frog said to them "Oh is that what you were saying. I'm profoundly deaf. I thought you were rooting me on all the time!"

The good news is that everyone can become an encourager, even at times when you may not intend to be, but it is so much better when it is your intention. This morning, we will learn from the Apostle Paul, how to become a **biblical encourager**. Let's look together.

### **I. FIRST, A BIBLICAL ENCOURAGER AFFIRMS THE PERSON'S WORTH AND USEFULNESS TO GOD.**

We see this in verses 4-7: Paul starts out by affirming Philemon's faith in and service to God, because God is the Greatest Encourager. In fact, God's Spirit is called, "the paraclete—the one who comes alongside." In a world that we've messed up, God encourages us by not abandoning us. He has always showed His acceptance of us as His children—not of our actions.

When Adam and Eve disobeyed God as recorded in Genesis 3, Adam and Eve went into hiding. Because of their disobedience, they felt they lost their acceptance and usefulness to God. BUT God found them and clothed them with animal skin. God shed the blood of animals to cover up mankind's sin and sense of unacceptability before God. But that was only a temporary solution, for animals could never pay the penalty that mankind deserves.

So God sent His own Son, Jesus Christ, in the form of man, to die on the cross to pay the full and final payment for sin. On the cross, God demonstrated His acceptance of us despite our sins. The Bible tells us that by trusting in what God has done through Jesus Christ, our relationship and our usefulness can be restored to God.

God went way out of His way to encourage us to have a relationship with Him.

After President Nixon was removed from the Presidency, he was so disgraced and emotionally disturbed that he wanted to take his own life. He and his wife were in the hospital room with the curtains closed. Then a nurse came in and asked permission to open up the curtains. When the curtains were opened, President Nixon saw an airplane flying back and forth outside his widow, with a banner that read, "God loves you, Mr. Nixon."

When President Nixon saw that word of encouragement, he regained hope. **Who was the biblical encourager behind this?** Ruth Graham, Billy Graham's wife, had given orders to the pilot to keep flying that sign until President Nixon opened the curtains.

A biblical encourager reminds and affirms the discouraged and troubled people in life that God accepts them and can use them.

## **II. SECOND, A BIBLICAL ENCOURAGER APPEALS TO THE PERSON ON THE BASIS OF LOVE.**

We see this in verses 8-14:

Paul understood that the motivation of a true encourager comes from a position of love and not of force. If your desire to change a person is motivated by love for the person, the person will feel encouraged, not rejected by your effort. But if you simply want to change the person to suit your own needs and demands, you will be met with resistance at best or even a broken relationship. Parents are often guilty of this.

Someone took a traditional Native American saying and twisted it a bit. It suggested, "Before you criticize someone, you should walk a mile in their shoes. That way, when you criticize them, you are a mile away from them, and you have their shoes."

Love the person toward worthy, biblical goals. You cannot encourage everything in anyone's life, **but you can encourage ONE thing. Find it.**

Some of you would remember this as I have told it often, but some of the newer ones of you may not have heard it. Grandmother never said anything bad about anyone. The grand children said, "Let's think hard and come up with something that grandmother cannot say anything good about." They thought long and hard and lo and behold, they finally came up with it. They ran to grandmother and said, "Grandmother, you cannot say anything good about the devil." She thought for a few moments and then said, "He sure is a hard worker, isn't he?" We can find something—if only one thing to encourage every person.

### **III. FINALLY, A BIBLICAL ENCOURAGER BREAKS THROUGH FEARS TO BELIEF IN THE PERSON.**

We see this in verses 15-21:

Paul understood that Philemon might be afraid of the pressure from other slave masters, or Philemon might be afraid to absorb the losses, if he should take Onesimus back, not only without subjecting Onesimus to the usual punishment for runaway slaves, but to treat him now as a brother. So Paul addressed Philemon's fears and verbalized his belief in advance that Philemon would do what is right in God's eyes (21).

But Paul had not always been the kind of encourager we find him to be toward Philemon. In Acts 9, it was **Barnabas** who saw potential in Saul after his dramatic conversion on the road to Damascus. Other people wanted to write Saul off because of his violent persecution and cruelty to Christians in the past. They were somewhat suspicious of Saul's conversion experience and questioned whether it was genuine or just a fake conversion so that he could get access to the inside of the church.

To be an encourager is to be willing to go out on a limb for someone in whom you see potential. People have probably done that for us; who are we doing it for today? At work, at home, at school, within the church, are there people of immense potential that we are willing to mentor and believe in and defend in front of others – whose natural inclination might be to write them off? Our God believes broken people can be fixed..., and as we become more like Jesus we begin to see people as God sees them.

If we every person in the church could strive to be an encourager to **one other person**, then we could always be assured that we will be encouraged when we come to church—not discouraged—not put out or put down. LET OUR GOAL BE TODAY THAT WE WILL FIND SOMETHING IN EVERY LIFE TO ENCOURAGE.