



Summer Playlist

Part 2 – The Power of Encouraging Words

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Today, the title of our message is *The Power of Encouraging Words*. We are going to talk about what it looks like to be a body of Christ that lifts each other up in such a way that it causes us to grow, and it draws others into the fold.

As you guys know, we've had 75-degree weather for the last week. How great has that been? Thank you, Lord. Three years ago, it was like living in Phoenix. Then two weeks ago, it was like living in Seattle. This week, it's like Denver. And probably next week, it will be like the armpit of Florida. It's the blessing of living in the Ozarks. We get it all, do we not?

I was just at our farm this morning, and everything is super lush and green; it looks absolutely beautiful. I'm reminded this is the season to get out there and cut some grass and plant some flowers. You guys might not know this, but my wife, Ashley, happens to be the green thumb in our family. She has all kinds of plants growing inside, and green is a part of her color palette. I almost don't care. I enjoy it, but I just don't apply myself to it. The funny thing about that is that I have a degree in environmental horticulture. I don't know how this happened. About all I do with it now is just ride the mower and cut the grass.

How many of you have the touch of death with plants out there? There are a bunch of them. Well, from all my experience, I recommend you try out succulents. There are only three things you need to do with a succulent, those of you who are like slayers of plants. Number one, you give it a name, like Steve or Rhonda. Number two, you water it once a month. Can you do that? And then number three, you just give it some affirming, encouraging words on the way out the door each morning. "You're doing great, Steven." And you too can have a happy house plant.

To open up, I've got kind of a fun video. It's a green thumb video. The reason I want to share it with you is... Actually, why don't you go ahead and play it, Katie. This is a video of seeds that are germinating and as they grow up, the light source is coming from one angle. As you guys know, the sun is the source of energy and, through photosynthesis, plants create food and then they can grow up to be strong and healthy. In this video, you see what's called phototropism, which means that the light source is coming from one specific angle and the plant is adapting by growing its cells larger on one side of the plant in order to come toward the sun, it's source of life and energy.

As we talk about encouragement here today, encouragement is a very similar force. Your encouragement is like the sunlight. When you share encouragement with people, they will draw near to you and it will cause them to grow. What we want to do this morning is number one, I want to give you the why. Why should you equip yourself as an encourager? I want to give you the what. What does God's Word say about it? And then the how. How do we go about it? What are just some practical ways to become great encouragers in our life.

In the context of the church, God does some really amazing things through encouragement. I want to start with the text from Ephesians 4. Paul is writing Ephesians and he says, **14 Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. 15 Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. 16 From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.**

So, even greater than what we saw in phototropism... Phototropism actually is not the optimal way to grow a plant. The optimal way to grow a plant is for it to receive sunshine from all angles so it will grow up strong and proper, having a strong stem and strong structure. And the church is set up, in this context, to be more like a greenhouse. A greenhouse is a controlled environment where plants receive the optimal amount of light, nutrients, and water. In that setting they grow and flourish. And so it is with the people of God in the context of a church. In this local community, this body of believers we each work together, taking our gifts as we shine light from all these different angles. If we do that in a healthy way, it causes the optimal amount of growth. Isn't that cool?

Now, specifically, Paul was writing about spiritual gifts before this. Each one of us, after receiving the Christ to come into our life as our Lord and Savior, we receive the Holy Spirit. And with the Holy Spirit, comes a spiritual gift or a set of gifts that are very specific. There are a couple of different places in scripture where we can create these lists and find out what all these gifts are, but one of them happens to be encouragement. So, there may be people in your life who are just super skilled encouragers.

In fact, there are some people in this church that I benefit from their gifts. One of them is Rex Childress, one of our care pastors. Whenever I am around Rex, he is building me up. He is just such a gifted encourager that when I'm around him, I feel like I'm floating on clouds.

Another person is Leah Johnson. If you don't know Leah Johnson, she works over with our elementary kids over here. She's the one who is dressed up like a candy cane or a unicorn, or a snowman. She's just out there on the front deck in some crazy costume. If you have an interaction with Leah, you can't help but be filled with joy. She's like sunshine; she brightens your day.

Another one I thought of is Doug Gabriel. Whether it's in the church or going around and rubbing elbows in the community, whenever I'm around Doug, I can't even get words out of my mouth before he's building me up. He's just a skilled encourager.

What I want you guys to hear this morning is that yes, those people have a very specific encouragement gifting. But encouragement, just like a lot of the other gifts of teaching or service or administration... These are all things that every Christian can do, and they can put them in their toolbox. It can be a tool that they pull out and they use skillfully to help build up the body of Christ.

As you read throughout scripture, there is one person in particular who is known for being encouraging. His name is Barnabas. It's really kind of interesting because if you look at all of the text throughout scripture that was about Barnabas, you're going to find out about that much about his life; just probably a collection of verses that talk about Barnabas, and yet, he was such a magnificent encourager that he was known for it. In fact, Barnabas isn't even his real name. His name is Joseph, but Barnabas was a nickname which means "son of encouragement."

I want to read you a scripture about Barnabas from the Book of Acts. What I want you to know about this scripture is you and I can actually personalize it. The description that Luke gives Barnabas is a description that you and, as we mature in our faith, can live towards. It can be a description that can be applied to anybody's life who is sitting in here today.

Acts 11: 23 When he came and saw the grace of God... So, Barnabas is showing up on the scene where a bunch of believers are growing in their faith. **...he was glad, and he exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose...** Here's the description: **24 for he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord.** Barnabas is really just an example of what it looks like to be encouraging.

On the first missionary journey that Paul took, he brought Barnabas and a guy named John Mark. They were on this journey together and, at some point, John Mark decided that he was going to stop traveling with Paul, and it really upset Paul. Right before they set out the second missionary journey, Saul and Barnabas had a disagreement about bringing John Mark with them. In fact, their disagreement was so strong that they decided to depart and go two different paths.

Barnabas went and he took John Mark, and they went on their own missionary journey. What's so cool about that is that as John Mark's faith grew... I just picture Barnabas being who he was, breathing life into a guy. He believed in a guy, enough to stand up for him and then to go out and breath life and encouragement out on the road as they ministered to people.

Guess what happened? The next time their paths crossed, John Mark regained his favor with Paul. He actually ended up writing the Book of Mark, one of our gospels. We have way more information from the life of Mark than we do from Barnabas and yet we know that Barnabas was a catalyst for his growth. He was sunshine, shining in as a source of energy and encouragement in the life of Mark.

Before we go any further, I want to just throw out a handful of reasons why we fail to encourage. I was just processing this, like what are the reasons why I miss these opportunities to be an encouragement to people. Here's a handful. It's not an exhaustive list, but something to think about.

1. We are unaware of or underestimate the power of encouragement. It is my goal this morning to firmly establish how powerful the gift is and what a blessing it can be in your life.

2. The second one is insecurity. I think this is a really big one because what the enemy wants to do is he wants to quiet you in your spirit. He wants to say that your words don't matter. Or he or she wouldn't care what you think anyway. Or what you have to say is not that big of a deal. Sometimes, being an encourager requires courage.

3. The spiritual muscle hasn't been exercised. So, like I said, if every believer has a tool box of gifts that they can use to build up the body of believers, you've got to practice with those gifts. Early on in marriage, I was not very handy. I think I owned one power drill, a flat head screwdriver, and a Philips head screwdriver. Because of a tight budget, one by one, I added to my tool list, and I learned how to be handy and how to work with wood and how to fix drywall. One thing after another, my tool box got bigger, and I became more skilled with the set of tools that were in it. Now, I'm no Byron Joplin, but I'm a work in progress.

4. Our personal desire for glory and accolades overpower our willingness to encourage others. This one, just to boil it down, this is just our sinful nature. As I reflect on my life, I see this playing out in teams that I was on, where I would see other people have success that made me jealous in my heart, wanting to have that same success. I see it playing out in the academic field or in the professional field or on a band that you might be in. And when we see others who are thriving and doing well, and we feel that sour feeling in our heart of jealousy, for us who are believers, that should actually act as a reminder. "Lord, forgive me for this crummy flesh." And then spring into action. Isn't that great. What Satan intends for evil in your life, God can use for good. Let it be a reminder that it's time to go encourage.

5. I'm not an encourager when I'm unhealthy. I thought of this one as I was driving here, and I think it has been a big issue in my life. When I'm tired, stressed out, anxious, angry... But when we are unhealthy, we don't have any fuel in the tank to give to anybody else. So, a big part of being a great encourager is living a healthy lifestyle and making adjustments as you need to in order to be able to give people uplifting care.

Now, let's go to the scriptures. I want to build out the biblical foundation or theological stance of why. Why are we encouragers. What's God's purpose in encouragement and how can it play out. We're going to look at a handful of scriptures to build that foundation.

1 Thessalonians 5: 11 – ***Therefore, encourage one another and build one another up, just as you also are doing.*** Paul is charging the church at Thessalonica. He's saying, "As you encourage each other, you are actually building each other up in your faith. Every time you whisper an encouragement into somebody's life, it's a bolstering of their faith. So, what this results in is spiritual growth.

Hebrew 10: 24 -25 – ***And let's consider how to encourage one another in love and good deeds.*** In other translations, this word encourage says spur on. I love that word – to spur on. What that means is that the people that the author of Hebrews is writing to have some spiritual momentum, but what he's charging us is to come behind them and put some wind in their sails, to help them build spiritual

momentum in their lives. ... ***not abandoning our own meeting together, as is the habit of some people, but encouraging one another and all the more as you see the day drawing near.*** This is the passage I always think about Ted using at the end of the pandemic. “Hey, it’s time to get back together. We need to draw together and build each other up in the context of community, so we gain spiritual momentum.”

Proverbs 18: 21 – ***Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruit.*** This is referring to the spiritual power that encouragement has. As you study the book of James, you’ll see James talks about the tongue quite a bit. In fact, in a good part of that five-chapter book, he talks a lot about the tongue. He uses a handful of analogies to help us understand the power of the tongue.

One of the ones I love is he says the tongue is like the rudder that steers a giant ship. In other words your words have so much power that they can change the trajectory of somebody’s life. A sentence, a paragraph, a fifteen-minute conversation can steer an entire ship in a different direction. Another analogy he uses is that of a flame, a flame at the end of a light or at the end of a match seems somewhat inconsequential, but you know that a flame can start a fire, and it can be both healthy and unhealthy. Regardless, we need to know that the words of our mouth are powerful and potent, they have spiritual power.

Romans 15: 1-2 – ***We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not please ourselves. Each of us should please our neighbors for their good, to build them up.*** I love this passage because those of us who have hope, an eternal hope that is fixed on Christ... In the midst of hardship and trials and tribulations and all the difficulty happening in our world today, you can stand on the solid foundation of your hope in Christ. And that gives you strength. And in that strength, you’re interacting with a world that doesn’t have such a firm stance. Without any faith, there is no hope in a better future.

What you get to do is offer up, through encouragement, strength to those who are weak. That offers spiritual influence. That’s where I go back to that idea of phototropism. You get to be the sunlight in your neighbor’s life or in the life of your server or in the life of the guy who changed your tires or the people just in the aisles at Walmart, you get to be a source of encouragement. And when you are, people will draw near to you, they’ll come to the sunshine, and that gives you spiritual influence.

Proverbs 11: 25 – ***A generous person will prosper, and whoever refreshes others will be refreshed.*** I love this one. Really, this Proverb give you an affirmation for your encouragement. He’s saying when you speak encouragement into somebody’s life, it will be refreshing to them. They’ll have like a physical, emotional response, but in that interaction, you too will gain blessing from it.

About a week ago, I had an interaction with a young guy who I work with. My eyes have been on him. He’s been doing an amazing job. I was driving on my four-wheeler as I rode by him. I was thinking in my head, *What an awesome job he’s been doing.* His name is Jack. The day before, my daughter, Lulu, had grabbed me and said, “Jack Hardcastle is a great leader.” I said, “Why do you think that?” She’s 12 years old. She says, “Because he’s always doing the right thing.” I thought that in my head, and I slammed on my brakes. I turned around and rode back and sat next to Jack and said, “Jack, I need to tell you a story. You know what my daughter thinks about you? She thinks you are a great leader. I asked her why and she said it’s because you are always doing the right thing. And you know what, Jack? I

think the same thing. I agree with her.” He’s a big, strapping guy, but his face flushed with blood and his grin turned up and his chest opened up. I could see his countenance lifted. It blessed him so much that it blessed me in return. I drove away thinking, *God, thank you so much for not allowing me to miss that blessing.* I drove 50 yards past it. But when we refresh others, we receive refreshment in return.

There is our biblical foundation. You can see these really build on each other. Spiritual growth, spiritual momentum, spiritual power, spiritual influence, and spiritual refreshment. I want to just give you some practical ways that you can be an encouragement. This is not an exhaustive list, but I’m going to rattle through these as an example. What I want you to do while I do this is I want you to think about your context. How can I play this out in my marriage relationship or within my home? How do I play it out in the locker room with my team or in the hallways at school? How do I play it out in my professional life or on the golf course when I meet the guys on Monday mornings? We’ll go through these and I want you to personalize each one of them.

1. A person’s first name is the most beautiful word in the English language. Isn’t that great? Y’all know the feeling when somebody who you admire walks up and calls you by name. In particular when you think they don’t know your name. When they call you by name, there is just something about it that’s powerful. I’ve got an Uncle Steve. He happens to share the name with my succulent. We have a lot of Steves in our life. We have a goat named Steve and now we’re on our third cat named Steve, two uncles and a succulent. The name Steve is a big part of our life. My Uncle Steve is a humble, small-town guy in Aledo, Illinois, population 3,000, and he worked at John Deere his whole career.

I see Uncle Steve about once a year, typically for Christmas. We’re standing in his kitchen and when Uncle Steve talks to you, he says your name over and over again in the conversation. I’ll ask him a question and he’ll be like, “Well, Shay...” and then he’ll go on and give his answer. “And you know what else, Shay...?” There is something about when Uncle Steve says my name... I’m a 40-year-old man, and my heart is swelling. I’m like, *He knows my name.* Well, yeah, he’s known you since you were one. But there is just power in that, and I don’t even know what it is. I think as a body of Christ, this is an easy one that we can work on. A lot of times, people say “Well I’m bad at names.” Don’t let that be an excuse. Yeah, we all are, but don’t let that be an excuse to not create opportunities to be a blessing and an encouragement.

2. What is celebrated will be repeated. This is a great one. I worked at a landscaping nursery in high school. So, during the year, I would work part-time, and all summer long, I was full-time, and I’d do landscaping projects. One Saturday, I had watered all the plants in the nursery, and I really didn’t have anything else to do. All my co-workers were in the back smoking cigarettes and talking. I was just kind of wondering around, trying to be productive. I just started pulling the deadheads off of the flowers in the annual section, and some of the dead leaves. I really was kind of insecure. I didn’t know if I was doing the right thing or if I was just wasting time. My boss, Mike, he was also the owner. He comes up to me and he puts his arm on my shoulder. He begins to affirm me and thank me for what I was doing. He goes on to tell a story of how when he was a young guy, he had the same thing happen. The owner/manager of the nursery came alongside him and encouraged him and showed him that when you pluck those deadheads, new growth comes, and it looks better and customers buy them up. I just got a lot of encouragement from that random act.

Guess what I did for the rest of my career when I ran out of things to do at that nursery? I went back to the well of encouragement, right? It's just so true. What was celebrated was repeated and in me he built a great lesson, and he produced a better worker and teammate.

2. Encouragement is like rain – it brings things to life. This is the way I think about it. God makes us unique. Everybody has these little gifts and I just kind of see them as seeds that have been planted in your heart. A lot of times, we have a hard time seeing our own gifting. It's kind of like that plant that is growing crooked, only getting one source of sunlight. But when you're operating in the context of a community, you can catch sunlight coming from all angles. Then when you come into an interaction with someone and you have some perspective and you see something in them, you can water that seed and God will produce fruit out of it.

A couple of days ago, I was sitting with a young guy who is studying finance. His explanation of what he is studying was belabored. It was like I could see the life being sucked out of him as he's talking through it. But I've been around this young guy long enough to know I really think he's got a future in youth ministry. I'm thinking this the whole time he's talking about finance. He gets to the end of that conversation and he kind of says, "But, recently, I've really been thinking a lot about ministry." I said, "You know what? I have too." God gave me a little window in his life to speak that encouragement and puts some water on that seed. I'd be willing to bet that he'll be doing youth ministry here in a couple of years. He might even change his major.

3. Encouragement celebrates God's design. I want to show you a video of one of my very special children, then we'll talk about it. [video plays] That is Piper June Robbins, and she's a real piece of work. I can look at a lot of my kids and kind of have a sense of where they're going, what their gifts are, what they might do professionally, but Piper, I look at and I'm like, "What is God going to do with you?" She's incredible. One of the sayings at the Robbins' house is "God, had a great idea when he thought of you." Unfortunately, in junior high and high school, there is an all-out assault on God's creation and being an individual. Everybody is trying to conform and to fit into this box or that box. I really think the church has a big role in our community to speak life and encouragement in God's design, the uniqueness of the way kids are made in this community. And you all need to know... I think especially the older generation in here. Your words and experience and you seeing something in a kiddo and just celebrating how unique and creative they are, it's going to nothing but help them bloom. There is just a ton of power in that.

4. Encouragement brings joy. This one is easy. It really doesn't need much explanation. When someone comes to you and they speak life into you, it fills your cup. We're in desperate need of positivity in our world today. You can be that.

5. Encouragement motivates and criticism kills. This is another one I'm really passionate about. As a result of coming out of two-year pandemic, in so many ways, our society has been immobilized. In particular, I think the young people have been hold up and had every reason not to take chances. As a result, we're coming out of a pandemic and everybody foot is kind of on the break. Now, more than ever in our lifetime, we need to be a voice of encouragement, the kind of encouragement that motivates people to go climb mountains, to try new things, to get out there and make a difference.

The church in this community... as big as this body of Christ is, as many people who come on a Sunday morning, we can reach our whole community in a week. And the influence that we have on all of the tourist that are coming to our town, we can influence them and then launch them back in their world. This church can affect the world this week. That's not hyperbole, that's real life. We have that capacity.

6. Encouragement paves the way for gospel conversations. I just want to share a story to illustrate this last point. Sometime this year Ashley and I were on a date night, and we were Getting Basted. That's barbeque, people. We love Getting Basted, we wish we could more. Anyway, we were Getting Basted and our server... They were pretty busy. The server was coming up and with every interaction we had with her, she was apologizing to us. We kept telling her, "Oh, don't be sorry. We don't have any kids; we're in no rush. Let's milk this thing for all it's worth." She just kept apologizing.

I've been around enough hurting people to know that if somebody is apologizing over and over again, falling all over themselves, it's because somebody in their life has beat them up and told them that they were not good enough and that there is nothing that they can do to be good enough. We finished our meal and Ashley and I both felt the Spirit guiding us to have a conversation with her.

We just grabbed her and said, "Listen, you owed us no apology. I kind of wonder if you were apologizing because somebody had hurt you in your life." Tears pour out and then feeling pour out, just like that. Ashley and I got to sit there with this gal and in the middle of Getting Basted, the things that she shared with us were from the most intimate place in her heart. You just can't even describe feeling more raw than what she shared with perfect strangers. It was encouragement that paved a way for that gospel conversation.

I am among you who feel the burden to share the gospel but feel awkward in getting into it. And I can tell you that this gospel conversation was as natural as you can imagine. It took just a little bit of courage to care about somebody and speak up and then God took care of the rest. He just did.

I want to leave you with that encouragement that your role, number one in, our church body that you'd take it seriously. You have a role to build up this body. There are all kinds of ways to do that, but encouragement is one that we all can band together and wield this tool and become skilled in it. This church is influential enough in this community to saturate the Tri-Lakes area with sunshine. This world needs some sunshine, and we get to be it.

Father, we just come to you, thankful that we get to be a team, that you brought these people together and this is not just a place to come on Sunday morning and check a box, but it's a body of believers that are growing together. I ask that you would help us to do that even more so. I want to pray that we would be commissioned this morning to go out and be encouragers. There might be some words on our heart that we've been meaning to speak for a long time and we just haven't taken the time to sit down and write in a note or put it in the mail or pick up the phone and make a call or even shoot a simple text message. Our words matter and I just pray we wield them well.

It's in Jesus' name we pray, amen.

