

Body Life 201: The Gifts of Affirmation and Encouragement— On Serving One another

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Hebrews 10:24-5; John 15:4,12-14; (1 John 3:11,16; 4:7,11,21)

AG: Repeat 3 phrases with me: *“This has been a beautiful day! This has been a wonderful Mother’s Day! This is going to be a great sermon!”*

- Robert Fulghum Q: *“We’re all a little weird. And life is a little weird. And when we find someone whose weirdness is compatible with ours, we join up with them and fall into mutually satisfying weirdness—and call it love—true love.”* (True Love).
- Tonight, I find myself in a new situation—I feel like a Senior in college speaking to the faculty of the Bible Dept. And you may be wondering, *“Yeah, what does this guy have to say to us?”*
- S1: It was Friday, March 5th, 2021. A gathering thunderstorm threatened to strike by mid-afternoon. My wife and I had arrived on the Island on our scheduled day to move into our “final resting place” in Sundial. But the movers I had arranged for had not called by 8 a.m., nor showed up by 9, so I started alone, with my rental truck to empty a 10x20’ storage unit on San Carlos Blvd of 140 boxes in the 8 hours I had to empty the rented space before being charged for another month. As I revved the truck, Ron arrived ready to help. By the time 2 of us had filled the truck for the 1st time and returned to the Island, Carolyn and Bruce appeared at the loading area to help us unload. Within minutes Pete—on his morning bike-ride, dismounted at 10 a.m. and lifted heavy boxes with us the rest of the day. By 5:15 we had every box and belonging stacked in the guest room or on the curb—out of the rain and out of the storage locker. The next day Bill drove through the downpour to transport an oversized item that would not fit in any car—to our bldg, up three flights of stairs, to our 3rd floor apt.

My wife and I have never forgotten what these 5 neighbors, and countless others since, did for us one year ago. It illustrated what our Savior did for his disciples as described in John 13:1-15—when Jesus stripped to his waist, and carrying the servant’s water basin himself, washed his disciples’ feet before the Last Supper. This example from Scripture has helped me understand what it was that prompted our new SP neighbors—to help us as strange newcomers, and not some important visitors. The Scripture we’ll examine this evening clarify some principles that should guide us in our Christian practice.

Need: Someone has said that *“Age is inherently a wounding process”* (Brian Emmet, Res.Trng; 3.7.22). We live in a community of people living in their prime and discovering their Ult. Contribution. We are all in a season of reconstructing a new identity for the final phase of life—to finish well in a completely different place or way than we’ve been or ministered before. God wants to look at any unhealed wounds from our past and help us process them, and heal them! That may include unresolved loss and grief, loss of physical and emotional health, separation, and unexpected change that brings with it fear and anxiety.

- Have you notice how each wk brings news of injury, loss and change. Within the last few weeks I personally know of a person injured while recreating that needed serious eye surgery; a biker injured when he flipped over the handle bars of his bike, residents transitioning into Assisted Living. residents who have experienced the loss of a loved one; assorted falls, sprains and surgeries; a devoted friend dies of a brain injury. And all of us grew a week older! Yet we live together in a world-class community full of challenges and opportunities—to love and serve the people closest to us!

Actress Celeste Holm once said, *“We all live by encouragement, and die without it, slowly, sadly, and angrily.”*

- Our SP cmtty has just survived 2 years of intense change—the chaos of a global pandemic, ambiguity, and now war! We find ourselves alive, and in a God-given space needing an incredible amount of listening, caring and loving on people around us. People who are all needing Body-building affirmation and heart-strengthening encouragement.

- How are you finding God in that wounding that comes with age? A friend just walked a lady friend home to heaven on April 7th. In that role you take on the mantle of honor to help aging friends and family members die with dignity, and see and celebrate all that God has put in their lives, and help them find meaning in the final days as they Finish Well. I am in the 99th year of my Mother Finishing Well. That makes me reflect on the time I am spending with my mother—not stressing about her memory or misunderstanding facts—just helping her “slide into Heaven” with honor and joy in all God has done in her life! 😊
- And I am learning from observing John, and Ken, and Dee, and Wes, and Ruth, and Janet, and Mary, and Charles, and Gordon, and many others that God is really good at taking us deeper so that we have something to offer to people in our closing years. So that we don’t get there “somehow!” but “Victoriously!”

T.S.: In the midst of such challenges and opportunities all around us every day, what should our response be? Surprise, sadness, withdrawal, criticism, giving into frustration and depression?

☒ Key Truth: The “gifts of affirmation and encouragement” are channels of God’s solutions to the challenges of our day—here at SP.

The writer of Hebrews instructs us with these words: “And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near” (10:24-25). **The solution to our challenges is BODY LIFE!**

SDir Joan Chittister writes: *“Life with someone else doesn’t show me nearly as much about his or her shortcomings as it does about my own. In human relationships I learn how to soften my hard spots and how to reconcile and how to care for someone else besides myself. In human relationships I learn that theory is no substitute for love. It is easy to talk about the love of God; it is another thing to practice it. That’s how relationships sanctify me. They show me where holiness is for me. That’s how relationships develop me.”*

“I am what I am, but in community I have the chance to become everything that I can be. And so, stability bonds me to this group of people and to these relationships so that resting in the security of each other we can afford to stumble and search, knowing that we will be caught if we fall, and we will be led where we cannot see, by those who have been there before us.” Joan Chittister. *Wisdom Distilled from the Daily—Living the Rule of St. Benedict Today.* HarperCollins, 1990.

In our few minutes this evening, I’d like to encourage you from scripture and with real-life, eggs of your friends and neighbors who are doing what Jesus did and taught; and doing it in the strength of the Holy Spirit! Many of you already know these stories! 😊 You think of even more stories that could be told! To others, may the examples of your friends encourage you and me to pray for an upgrade in your love, care and consistency in serving one another!

Notice that when the author of Hebrews says “Don’t neglect the meeting of yourselves together”, he is not speaking harshly about legalistic SS or Sunday church attendance! We realize many here are in very different states of health and mobility, and not everyone CAN attend services in the bldg. even if they wanted to. But the reminder is there—if you need and want Body Life—you have to show up—IF YOU CAN! Caring takes place organically and naturally when we are able to be together with one another—where you are! Don’t miss if you can! 😊

In these Post-COVID days, Christ’s family needs to intentionally restore the consistency of Body Life! Don’t neglect meeting together, being together, and eating together! It doesn’t have to be in this building; but it does have to happen regularly!

It’s fascinating that Jesus devoted most of His last message to His disciples in the Upper Room Discourse to the centrality of vital Body Life relationships! Pastor-Poet-Lover John captured J’s words this way:

¹²“Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me!” (Jn 15:4). ¹²This is my commandment, that you love

one another as I have loved you. ¹³Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. ¹⁴You are my friends if you do what I command you” (John 15:12-14).

He writes later in his first letter: ¹³“For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another... ⁴⁶ By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers... ^{4:7}Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and who-ever loves has been born of God and knows God... ¹¹Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another... ²¹So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him” (I John 3:13; 4:7,11,21)

Several observations from Jesus’ last words from the Upper Room:

- ✓ **Ministry** (doing) **flows out of being**. Your actions flow out of who you are inwardly. Intimacy with Abba motivates costly serving and caring. The quality of our life together all begins with our intimacy with the Father. Spend time abiding. Stay close, stay connected to Abba.
- ✓ **All costly love flows from the life-giving model of Jesus**. Our love mimics the Master.
- ✓ **This transforming love is a group activity, the result of the presence and power of the Holy Spirit in us, and on us, and through us**. Rem. Joan Chittister’s words: “*In human relationships I learn how to soften my hard spots, how to reconcile, and how to care for someone else besides myself.*” Transformation takes place best and most often in a BL community together!
- ✓ Dr. Ted Ward taught me a huge lesson about “**Accepting Gifts**”—Diff cultures handle gifts differently. In some cultures, a gift—when given—is uplifted—as in Suisse. In other cultures, gifts are downplayed—Japan. But it is a necessity in every culture and human relationship, when offered a gift—to accept it graciously. An item offered is only an object until it is accepted—then it becomes a gift! Rather than diminishing—“*Oh no, I can’t accept that. That’s too much. You shouldn’t have done that.*” A gift—whether a kind word or loving deed—only accomplishes its intended purpose when it is accepted; it must be received. Remember that.
- ✓ E.g.: In October, my wife Eloise received over 30 BD cards from SP residents—YOU ALL—more than she has ever received before. The same at Christmas. And more after a recent medical procedure. I’ve received TYN’s for making online purchases for neighbors, for praying for a friend, for bringing cookies to a shut-in, for visiting someone in Asstd Lvg. You all are a grateful, thankful, and appreciative fam! 😊 I want to recognize & affirm that!!!

>>Let’s examine the power of Affirmation and Encouragement:

Context: Rem. our VC Motto: “*Building a community of forgiveness, purpose and hope in JX*”

ENCOURAGEMENT

Enc’mt is a Command (Heb 10:24) to every believer! Everyone receives the command! “*And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, (as is the habit of some), but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near*” In this verse we are ALL commanded to be encouragers continually—consistently, as with a brother or sister in the family of God!

Enc’mt is also a Spiritual Gift: Only some pp have the SG! A SG is where the power of God rises up in you, so that when you use it in the Spirit you—and the recipient—exp the Joy, Fruit and Power of the Spirit!

With that command we use the SG God has give us to build the Body. We all have a role to play! But encouragers are not the only Body builders. But Body building is a team sport!

Definition: **Encouragement** is the action of giving someone support, confidence hope or. to **breathes power and courage into the lives of others** by focused, uplifting words, or by your come-alongside, supportive behavior.

Not “atta-boys” or generic encouragement like, “*Way to go! That was great. Good job.*” Nice, but not specific, personal or customized to the person you want to uplift. Try: “*Eloise, yesterday when I got your card... or: Bill, when you showed up with a hot meal, and sat down and talked with me about my fall, and offered to drive me to the Dr., that...*”

That is Spirit-energized encouragement! Remember—we're ALL commanded, while only SOME are gifted! *We ALL can and are to do the work of enc'mt!*

AFFIRMATION is a very close cousin to Enc'mt—different but related! 😊 It is the action or process of affirming some thing or some-one; it is offering emotional support, to speak positive words of apprec or honor, to declare one's support to another; to give a heightened sense of value through words of emotional or spiritual uplift.

Affirmation gives to give. Flattery gives to get. Affirmation is a beautiful, no strings attached process. Just an open, *"I appreciate you for who you are, and I appreciate what you've done for me."* We wildly underestimate the power of the tiniest personal touch or word of kindness! One of the ways God loves us is through affirming who we are and who He has made us. *E.g.: "My beloved son..." "I love My friends..."* Since we love because He first loved us (1 Jn 4:19), and other will know we are his followers by our love (Jn 13:35), then affirmation needs to be a regular practice in our relationships.

Giving affirmation doesn't lead to pride: If a close friend came to you and said, *"You know, I just wanted to let you know how much I appreciate you. Specifically, I've been noticing how incredibly patient you are—with everyone. It's really wonderful to watch."* Receiving that kind of affirmation from someone you trust bolsters us, and encourages us to keep going. Affirmation is a love word, and love never inflames sin in us.

Receiving affirmation requires humility. On the other end, many of us are terrible at receiving affirmations. You'd think someone's trying to douse us in hot oil by the way we respond. We've been taught to deflect and deny. Eg: When we compliment a hostess... >Instead, say, *"Wow, thank you. That means so much to me,"* would mean you actually accept your gift!

Affirmation calls out our true identity: The world is constantly telling us who we are and who we aren't. We need help to remember who God says we are. Affirmation is one of the most powerful ways we do this for each other. We call out the good we see in another. We protect each other by reminding them of what we see in their true selves. By recog'g their gifts...

Affirmation is the antithesis of sarcasm. It should be integrated into our group meetings and our conversations on a regular basis, as an intentional approach to combatting the sarcasm and negative comments to prevalent in our culture.

*"Ron, I affirm your servant's heart, and consistent availability to help me and serve so many others; you are quick to volunteer, generous to provide small items I need, and always have a kind word of encouragement. You have no idea how much that means to me! or
"Mary, I can't even remember how many times you have invited my wife and me into your home at T'giving or X'mas for evening meals and devo's. You were so gracious and hospitable to include us as strangers..."*

Affirmation and Encouragement are to be given in the Fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-23)—i.e. energized by and motivated by the Presence and Power of the Spirit IN us!

@ Practice 1 (3"): Let me share **3 Guidelines for Affirming One Another:** 1) **Speak directly to the person—not about them!** 2) **No sarcasm or back-handed compliments.** E.g. 3) **When receiving affirmation, simply receive the affirmation graciously, with a smile.** Do not argue or try to diffuse the comment with humor. Just smile and say, *"Thank you, that means a lot."*

Accept the gift in the spirit in which it was intended!

@ Turn to the person next to you and affirm them in one sentence. Now switch and repeat the process. Debrief: How did that feel?

Just as the Holy Spirit's Presence releases His Power in us; so, our presence releases the power of the Holy Spirit into the life of others! (HTP, Johnson): Giving the gifts of affirmation and Enc'mt are deep and powerful spiritual acts. They flow out of an "attitude of gratitude" to God!

Notice also that Affirmation and Encouragement have to do with STEWARDSHIP of the SGift you may have, as well as the gift anyone gives you. **Stewardship is about —taking**

care of, managing and caring for relationships. SPV is one of the most caring and positive Xn communities Eloise and I have ever been a part of. But—we all can use an upgrade—in curiosity, consistency and companionship. You all are gifts to one another. Don't overlook stewarding your gift or stewarding your opportunity to affirm and encourage each other! I invite you to consider: **What is your gift to others?**

T.S.: Here are 3 words to keep in mind through the journey of serving, affirming and encouraging one another. We'll come back to them over & over. They help point us toward the connection we seek.

1. **Curiosity**/Caring: In most rel'ps, you don't need to give advice, coach, correct, or mentor. We may learn something that concerns us, or bothers us. But Curiosity is a posture, a stance; to wonder with compassion: What's the story that has brought this person to this place? Curiosity frees us from judgment, and opens the gift of better questions. And much more exciting conversations. You are curious enuf to STOP, pay attn, listen, act in love and stay engaged E.g.: Knocking on the door when you haven't seen them, calling to see how they are doing, following up; dropping by with a homemade treat...
 @ Approach or pursue to hear and share w/o prying; Asking good questions; Leading with vulnerability by sharing your story—w/o stealing their story.
 @ My challenge to my SP family is to allow your curiosity to spur you into loving action . Step into affirming and encouraging one another!
2. **Consistency**/Committed: Some in our community carry a wound of abandonment or aloneness. They've been dropped or forgotten consistently. We can either be a part of the healing of this wound or a deepening of it. Consistency, then, is often more important than the content of your words or calls or visits. It communicates that they are valuable. Not disposable or forgotten. It is caring enough to commit... E.g. D. Howard visiting my father DEH w/ly for sev years in the Memory Unit to read, pray and sing with Dad—like Paul and Silas in their prison! David never quit.
 Bill's acts of love—picking up, delivering Meals on Wheels, bring health and joy to many; Consider Pastor Don...
 Pastor Andy models for us what a prayer warrior and champion is and does week-in and week-out!
 @ Stay involved thru consistent daily, wkly, monthly contact and expressions of care; Long-term E.g. Weekly visits to Asstd Living or Med Ctr; visiting a spouse who is walking toward Jesus, or whose heart is already in Heaven...W/o quitting or walking away w/o an expl—this models discipline and faith's.
3. **Companionship**/Kinship: We belong to each other. We aren't the "helpers," they aren't a "project" to be fixed. Beneath incredibly different life experiences, we find an equality of heart, similar pain, and joys. The joy and fun is discovering this. It is loving enough to companion E.g.; Wes companions a widow; Jack and Karen have blessed friends and members since arriving 15 years ago...through prayer, enc'mt, & music...The vis & min of enc'mt Pastor Don, David, Ken, Sonny, Jim, Pat and Andy—24/7!
 @ Be/come a friend, lead with vulnerability; Include them like family in your normal activities and rhythms; Treat them like family; build a lifelong rel'p at SP with new family members!

⊗ Let me remind you of **3 stories** in the Gospels **that confirm the pattern** of Curiosity, Consistency and Companionship that had life-altering—transformative—consequences in the recipient:

Par: Good Samaritan—Caring Lk 10:33, 25-37	4 Friends: Caring & Acting Mk 2:3-12	Releasing (unbinding) Lazarus John 11:28-38
Q: Who is my neighbor? Who am I to help? A: Anyone you meet in need!	Q: Who shld initiate the intervention? A: Anyone aware of the problem	Q: Who shld initiate the unbinding? A: Anyone who is still bound themselves
Who: 1 victim & 1 outcast-passerby pays attn & cares for the victim's needs	1 lame man & 4 hltly friends create the access; Jesus does the hvy lifting!	1 res'd man & friends: Jesus does the raising; they do the unbinding—
Curious enough to stop	Curious enough to step up & step out	Curious enough to come to watch
Courageous-consistent enuf to act boldly to devise a creative ER strategy	Consistent-Courageous -enuf to act boldly:	Consistent enough to unbind and release him, providing PT!
Companion in crisis	Companionship thru a process	Companion/Kinship thru a process

@ Will you take time to help the Father complete his plans for your neighbor?	@ Will you take people to Jesus?	@ Will you complete the healing in the life of a friend? Removing...rehab, PT
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Each story introduced the prospect of experiencing the supernatural, an opportunity to experience the miraculous—a turning point, a chance to experience transformation—by doing for other people the one thing they could not do for themselves! Look for the opportunities for the SN every day! They remind us of the power of affirmation and encouragement:

SPV Examples and Models: How many of you VOLUNTEER in a month (Hands?)

Here are some other stories I have observed.

- Charles shops, prays for, comforts, picks-up, and visits...
- Dee has served on Committees and Boards to help improve healthcare for the rest of us!
- Carla's numerous acts of service to clean and straighten up after services;
- Jo and Tim minister through their part in choir, JoyBells, etc.

And these are just neighbors I've observed in my first year here at SPV!

This is Body Life at work—expressing the gifts of Affirm'tn and Enc'mt through WORD & DEED!

Still doubting the POWER of Affirmation and Enc'mt? Everybody needs personal encouragement, especially to be effective in living in this season of our lives! When I was a junior in college, I spent the summer back in Japan where I had been raised by messy parents. One afternoon, a senior messy took me out to a sushi lunch and listened to my story and then asked about my future plans. When I explained that I was intending to return to Japan in a few years as a messy myself, his smile and his next words were eternally seared into my brain: "**Steve**, he smiled, **when you arrive at the Tokyo Airport, I'll be there to pick you up!**" I was only 20, and a Sage messy gives me the most powerful words of enc'mt I had ever received in my life—"I'll be there to meet you when you arrive!" Those are prophetic words; words of hope; words of belief, faith and embrace. I have never forgotten them! 185

Closing T.S.: We live in a gorgeous "ecotone" where the river meets the bay, where ecologists—people trained to care for the environment—provide care for the SWFL estuary.

We all have a similar role in fostering a healthy Body Life environment as "relational ecologists."

In any system there are people who have great potential to do harm to one another. It is not "natural" for people from various backgrounds who spend part of their waking hours walking and living together without some form of dysfunctional behavior. But that brings us to us. That's why we're here. We are God's relational thermostats who maintain a healthy climate in this place; ecologists who are all committed to nurture a safe environment for personal growth and collective accomplishment! 186

- When we practice affirmation and encouragement rooted in our integrity and calling as Christians, we are able to be effective "**relational ecologists**"—creating and maintaining the environment of loving BL at SP!!!
- **Stay Curious. Remain Consistent. Be Companions to one another. Our lives depend on it!**

@ Practice 2: A cmtly commitment jumps out at us from Neh 2:18b ...And all of J'm stood and responded: "**Let us arise and build!**" → This evening, I encourage you to embrace the challenge to share the gifts of affirmation and encouragement with one another to reconstruct Spirit-filled Body Life here at SPV! Will you accept the challenge? **Repeat the following 3 phrases:**

"Let us arise and build each other up in love--

Let us arise and affirm each other in love!

Let us arise and encourage each other in love!"