

SO, ENCOURAGE EACH OTHER

I attended a funeral recently with my daughter after the grandfather of one of her friends had passed away. The friend actually asked my daughter to attend in order to offer her some encouragement and support through this difficult time. My daughter certainly stepped up in offering encouragement to her friend.

She did the same for me after the reception. At the reception I met the father of Coral's friend for the very first time. During our conversation he shared with me he grew up in Brantford and attended high school at B.C.I. where our two daughters currently attend. I asked him what years he went to B.C.I. because I also attended high school there and wondered if we overlapped in any years. When he shared with me that he went there between 1991-1995, I was really glad that he did not ask me when I attended B.C.I. I would have had to be honest and tell him that I went there from 1978-1983. It is easy to do the math to see that I am much older than this other father.

One of the realities of becoming a dad at the age of 42 is that I am usually a lot older than the fathers of my daughter's friends. It is usually very humbling when I am reminded of this fact. When I told my wife Nadine about this conversation, she laughed about the age gap. Now you understand why it is humbling for me. When I shared the story with my daughter Coral later that day she said, "Dad, that surprises me because you both look about the same age."

Coral's words were a source of encouragement to me. Now some people might be reading this and thinking perhaps the other father looks older than his actual age. I can honestly say this other father still had a full head of hair, just a little bit of greying, and only a few wrinkles. It is because this father still looked this way that I took my daughter's words as a compliment and source of encouragement.

We all need a little bit of encouragement at times, but I think we need this more than ever right now in our lives. One observation I am beginning to see of late is how tired and exhausted people have become after enduring the last two years of this pandemic. The effects these past two years have had on us physically, emotionally, and spiritually have been difficult to say the least.

Another factor causing people to be so tired and exhausted right now is the affect of the winter blahs and blues. This has an impact on so many people at this time of year. I also think seeing what is transpiring in Ukraine is also adding to our emotional fatigue right now. It is so heart breaking and shocking to see the suffering and tragedy going on there these past three weeks. There may be other factors going on in people's lives right now adding to their tiredness and fatigue. I have heard so many people lately say how much they need to get away for a vacation or get a break from what they have been going through. They comment how weakened and beaten down they feel at this time and share how hard it is to keep persevering right now. When feeling this way, we often need some form of encouragement to help us keep going in life.

Some people I know of are trying to find this encouragement by being away for trips during March Break right now. I hope their vacations provide them the encouragement they need. If we cannot get away I think one of the best sources of encouragement for us can be found in what my daughter did for me and her grieving friend. Remember how my daughter showed encouragement to her friend by her presence at the funeral and to me through her words. ***Our words and our actions can be the best source of encouragement*** we can offer to others in order to lift their spirits. The apostle Paul was very good at recognizing the need to do this for others. When you read his letters, he often offered words to encourage other people to keep believing and persevering through difficult and challenging times in their lives. We see one such instance of Paul doing this in 1 Thessalonians 5:11:

So encourage each other and build each other up, just as you are already doing.

In his letters, Paul sometimes used the analogy of running a race to describe how we journey through life. When we watch people running a long race such as a marathon, we begin to see the pain and agony they are enduring as the race continues on. We may begin to see expressions of exhaustion or pain on their faces as their muscles begin to ache. We begin to wonder if they will be able to complete the race and cross the finish line. Many of these athletes have shared that encouragement from supporters and fans along the way provided them with the uplifting they needed in order to push through the pain

and finish the race. These are the emotions many people are feeling right now after running the race these past two years during this pandemic. We have had many hills to climb and a lot of miles to cover to get to this point. Maybe our emotions and spirits are making us question whether we have the energy to keep going.

As we see from the example of runners, encouragement can make the difference in helping others keep going and persevering. Offering words of encouragement to others like my daughter did or encouraging others through our actions can make a huge difference in helping somebody to keep persevering at this time. Let's take Paul's words above to heart right now and try to ***encourage others with the words we speak, or the things that we do***. These simple actions on our part do not cost what a trip or vacation would right now. These actions would achieve the same result however and give somebody the uplifting they need right now to keep going. I was encouraged when my daughter did this for me. Her words have also encouraged me to keep dying my hair and working out so she can keep making these comments when I meet some of her other friends' fathers.

Keep Safe and God Bless

Pastor Dean