Virtual Christian Magazine
Hope And Encouragement For The Real World

"For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven."—Matthew 5:18-19

Volume 11 Number 2 February 2009

First Impressions: They Count

By Robert Berendt *Page 3*



You never get a second chance to make a first impression. So consider now how to make your first meeting a good one.

Lessons From the Prophets on Preaching the Gospel

By Graemme Marshall *Page 6*



Do we tend to sit back and expect others to do God's work? Or are we eagerly involved?

The Wonderful World Beyond Today!
Part 5, The End of Hunger and Disease: Return to Eden

By Mike Bennett *Page 10*



The plight of the sick, poor and hungry makes us long for the day when a real utopia spreads around the earth!

10 Things You Can Say to Make Someone's Day

By Becky Sweat *Page 14*



What do you say when a friend is really hurting? Finding the perfect words is never easy, but here are a few possibilities to get you started.

Your Job and the "Joseph Effect"

By Graemme Marshall *Page 18*



God gives us a wonderful promise about security. We are promised that regardless of our circumstances, God has not abandoned us.

Letters to the Editor

Page 20

***Virtual Christian Magazine* Staff**

Lorelei Nettles - Managing Editor
Lorelei Nettles - Issue Editor
Mike Bennett - Editors
Gayle Hoefker - Editors
Jada Howell - Editors
Patrick Kansa - Editors
Jeremy Lallier - Editors
David Meidinger - Editors
Suzanne Morgan - Editors
Amy Stephens - Editors
Debbie Werner - Editors
Eric Evans - Reviewers
Don Henson - Reviewers
Don Hooser - Reviewers
Skip Miller - Reviewers
David Witt - Reviewers
Becky Bennett - Proofreader
Chris Rowland - Web Design

Copyright 2009 United Church of God, an International Association

First Impressions: They Count

By Robert Berendt

You never get a second chance to make a first impression. So consider now how to make your first meeting a good one.



OUR FIRST MEETING WITH A PERSON may not have much meaning at all. If it's likely we won't see the person again or if the meeting is fleeting, we usually are not concerned about first impressions. However, if we are meeting a potential business partner, investor, possible romantic partner, friend or relative, we are likely to meet this person again and again. Involvement that carries on into the future is often set in motion by the first impression we give. Since we do not always know what the future holds, it is good advice to treat each meeting as though it could have an impact on our future.

Within the first 30 seconds of meeting a person, we already have an inner reaction to that person.

I watched a truly gifted salesman friend of mine, Grover, in action once. He "bumped into" a young man coming out of a restaurant (while I was gladly paying the bill) and complimented him and talked to him for a bit; and before I knew it, he had sold the young man some Slick 50 (oil additive for engines).

This salesman was gifted, and one of his most important talents was his ability to leave a positive first impression with people. I asked him about his approach, and his comment was that everyone he spoke with was a potential customer—either then and there or in the future, so he treated each one as though he or she was a customer.

First impressions really counted, and Grover was an expert at meeting people. He always left a very good impression of himself. We could all take lessons from him. Grover has since died, but the impression he left on me is indelible. We should treat everyone as a potential and future son or daughter of God.

Please understand that trying to make a good impression is not the same as "putting on a good front" in a hypocritical way. Our goal should be to be truly good people and then not make mistakes to make people think otherwise.

Here are some tips from Grover.

Grover's tips

Make consistent eye contact without staring. There is something about a person whose eyes shift a lot that makes us feel they do not really care about us or that they are somehow nervous. Eyes have a lot to do with communication and can convey unspoken messages. Obviously, we need to be careful about what we interpret "eye-talk" to be saying, but there is no denying that we gain something through the eyes.



Be careful both about ignoring your ringing phone and about constantly interrupting a conversation to answer phone calls. I feel uncomfortable when someone looks at the exposed caller ID as his or her phone rings—and then decides not to answer it. I can't help but wonder whether I would get the same treatment if I should call. There may be very good reasons a person would not pick up the phone; but since I do not know that, I am left with the impression that this person lacks deep concern and sense of value towards others. There are some unwanted calls we get (such as from telemarketers) that we are justified in not answering. It would be wise to mention that to a first-time guest.

Since people can also feel like they're being ignored if you continually answer calls, the best solution may be to set your answering machine to answer after fewer rings when you have guests.

When you are eating a meal, chew with your mouth closed. If you are not sharing a meal, do not be chewing things. When I see a person who is continuously chewing gum or chewing food with his mouth open or closed—I notice it. It seems especially unladylike for women to be chewing something in an ongoing and conspicuous manner. Men can come across as crude and unsophisticated when they wolf down food or are constantly working their jaws.

There is something about a person whose eyes shift a lot that makes us feel they do not really care about us.

Baseball seems to be one sport that presents a fascinating need for a player or coach to be chewing something—something big. In the "old days" it was chewing tobacco, and that resulted in huge streams of spittle being directed with more or with less accuracy at something. Chewing tobacco seems to have been banned, but it has been replaced with a huge wad of something. I cannot imagine it being gum, but then I cannot imagine anyone chewing huge wads of stuff for two hours straight. In order to talk, they need to deposit the object in one cheek—and that leaves a whole different impression.

Be on time for appointments. We all understand delays and circumstances that interfere with us being on time. When the reason is clear, nobody really minds. But when you are trying to make a good impression, the need to be punctual is more important. There are many situations in Scripture that demand an eye towards punctuality. People feel that you respect them when you are on time.

Do not be checking your watch unless you really do have another appointment; and if you do have one, make it clear to the person with whom you are talking. I visit a lot of people, and I often have another appointment that follows. I need to know the time, but I am careful about when I glance at my watch. It helps to make it clear that you do have a schedule to keep, but checking your watch regularly leaves the impression that you are more interested in going than you are in completing the conversation. When I check my watch in the sight of the person I am speaking with, the conversation pretty well ends.

Do not be checking your watch unless you really do have another appointment.

Complaints about government, the price of gas or anything or anybody else do not belong in first impressions. Nobody likes a grouch, complainer or whiner. Jude 16 explains that grumblers and complainers walk in their own lusts. They point fingers at others, but usually they have major needs themselves that should be addressed.

Clothing is important—be presentable and neat. Appearance does leave an impression of the inner person. True, appearances can be deceiving. And there may be times you may not be able to help your appearance. But generally speaking, when we go out in public, we should reflect self-respect, as well as respect for others, by paying attention to our dress. Of course, hair, shoes and all other parts of our appearance are included. See 1 Timothy 2:9-10. Although this scripture is addressed to women, the general idea applies to all of us.

Nobody likes a grouch, complainer or whiner.

Avoid speaking too much about yourself, your example or the bigger fish you caught. I agree, it is very difficult for a fisherman not to relate the story of his "bigger" fish (and, oh, how they can grow!). We have our own examples of almost anything and everything that we like to relate. Often we tell the tale because we think we are leaving a better impression. The truth is that sometimes we turn people off when our story outshines theirs. Listening can speak louder than words.

Refrain from inviting a new contact into a cluttered and untidy workspace. Some believe a cluttered office reveals a cluttered mind.

Your impression

All of these are nonverbal communication points that shout a loud message about who and what you are as a person. We joke a little when we say, "It is better to be thought a fool, than to open your mouth and remove all doubt." But Proverbs 17:28 agrees: "Even a fool is counted wise when he holds his peace."



First impressions are usually formed quickly. Within the first 30 seconds of meeting a person, we already have an inner reaction to that person. That is why a smiling face, steady eyes, warm handshake and all of these nonverbal points are so important.

Once an impression is formed, it is hard to dislodge. We would not want to dislodge a good impression, but a bad one sticks like glue. There is a huge advantage when we give a good impression of ourselves to others. But it is a big mistake if we carelessly give a poor one. If a good impression is the one you want to leave, make sure it is good—it does count.

Jesus advised us not to judge by appearances (John 7:24). And we should do our best to follow His instruction, since we do not know someone else's heart. Understanding the impact of first impressions can start things on a positive note. Be aware of these points, so you can avoid making a bad impression.

For more tips on how to be successful in life, request our free booklet *Making Life Work*.

Lessons From the Prophets on Preaching the Gospel

By Graemme Marshall

Do we tend to sit back and expect others to do God's work? Or are we eagerly involved?



FOR 1,000 YEARS Constantinople was the Byzantine capital of the Eastern Roman Empire with Christianity as the dominant religion from the fourth century onward. Beginning in 1453, all that changed for the next 500 years.

Mehmed II laid siege to the city in order to make it the capital of the Ottoman Empire, which at its height stretched from the Danube to the Euphrates Rivers. (The Ottoman Empire lasted until World War I.) Mehmed II ended the siege by taking his navy and enormous bronze cannons overland to bypass chains across the mouth of the city's harbor. He then bombarded the city from the inner harbor. On May 29, 1453, the walls were breached and Ottoman soldiers poured into Constantinople, subjugating the local Christian and Jewish populations.

With the fabric of society tearing apart many seem occupied with myopic debates.

A story from that time tells how Christian scholars in the besieged city (within days of becoming Muslim) were preoccupied with the following theological questions:

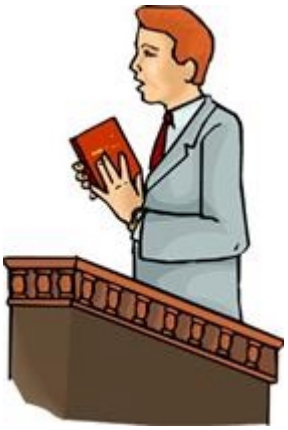
- What color were the virgin Mary's eyes?
- If a fly falls into holy water, is the water defiled or the fly sanctified?

Whether the story is apocryphal or not, it's an unsettling parallel to our times. With the fabric of society tearing apart, many seem occupied with similarly myopic debates.

Jeremiah's and Ezekiel's common problems are ours too

Jeremiah was called to preach God's message in Jerusalem, while Ezekiel, 700 miles away in Babylon, did likewise. Jeremiah was told of the problems he'd encounter and that *no matter what,* he was to fulfill his calling. His immediate response quite lacked enthusiasm. Like Moses, he pleaded inadequacy, saying he was too young (Jeremiah 1:6-9). He may have meant he was too young of a priest and felt inexperienced. Or it could have reflected his introspective nature and his feeling of personal inadequacy by temperament. God's reply might be paraphrased, "Don't you think I know what I'm doing in calling you? Don't be afraid of the looks on their faces because I will give you the right words to say" (verses 7-8).

Although we are not called to be prophets, God does want us to be involved in and support His work. The main task Jesus has given His Church as a collective body is to proclaim to all nations that He will return as King of Kings and Lord of Lords to establish the literal Kingdom of God on earth and to explain how we may have a part in that Kingdom (Revelation 11:15; 17:14; 19:16).



And in that way, we, too, can feel overwhelmed by God's calling and feel inadequate for the task of preaching the gospel. God anticipated negative reactions to preaching His truth. He told Jeremiah not to be dismayed about it. When we as a Church speak on God's behalf, we can get discouraged at the lack of seriousness from others. Like Jeremiah, we, too, encounter people who say that the Church's prophetic preaching has never yet come to pass (Jeremiah 20:10; 2 Peter 3:4).

Jeremiah experienced a personal warning too—if he allowed unresponsive attitudes to deter him from doing the job, God would trouble Jeremiah before his detractors. God knew people would "fight against you" but He assured Jeremiah they would not succeed because God would be with him (Jeremiah 1:19).

Ezekiel seemed to have a different personality, but he faced the same problems. In graphic language, God described his audience as a "rebellious nation…impudent and stubborn" (Ezekiel 2:3-4). Whether they would listen, or whether they wouldn't (because, after all, they were a rebellious people), Ezekiel was still to take God's message to them (verse 5). God's goal is that people who hear the Church's message will in the future come to know we were delivering God's message. Much of our effort may not bear fruit until later.

Thorns prick our skin and make us bleed. Scorpions sting with burning pain. In the same way, people's words and looks can demoralize us psychologically and weaken our resolve.

Understanding how His human instruments can become discouraged, God sympathetically outlined to Ezekiel the people's attitudes. This encouraged him, and it encourages us that though we may be hurt by resistance, and words and looks can make us afraid, we are not to be deterred from supporting the Church. We are told the general reaction to truth will be as from "briers, thorns…[and] scorpions" (verse 6) Thorns prick our skin and make us bleed. Scorpions sting with burning pain. In the same way, people's words and looks can demoralize us psychologically and weaken our resolve.

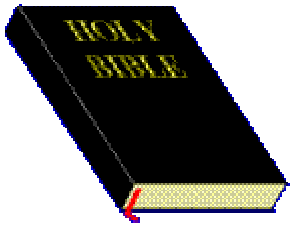
God emphasizes that whether they hear or refuse, we as His Church are still

to do the job and make sure we aren't rebellious like them (Ezekiel 2:6-8). In comforting Ezekiel, God further explains the reason they won't listen to us is because they will not listen to Him. They are unreceptive because their nature is "impudent and stubborn" (Ezekiel 3:4). While preaching God's truth, we must remember that many others will not listen because of insolent, hard hearts. As with Jeremiah and Ezekiel, a lack of response shouldn't put us off. Dirty looks and hurtful words are to be expected from a rebellious nation whose attitude is likened to "briers, thorns and scorpions."

Sadly, even family may at times hinder our support of the Church as it preaches the gospel message. In Jeremiah's case, close family, probably embarrassed before friends by what he was saying, enlisted others to deter his public preaching (Jeremiah 12:6). Today we can have similar difficulty with unbelieving relatives. Perhaps we err in fulfilling our mission by a desire to placate others when we should step out in faith and stand for truth.

Yet amidst a rebellious people there is *hope*

God explains to Ezekiel that many have eyes that can't see and ears that won't hear. Nevertheless, God tells him, he should go ahead and preach, as "it *may* be that they will consider" (Ezekiel 12:2-3, emphasis added). This is very comforting. It makes our efforts worthwhile when just one person responds to God's calling. Ezekiel would become a "sign" later in captivity when they realized the words he had spoken had come to pass (verse 6). Only at a later time would they come to know a prophet of God had been among them (Ezekiel 33:31-33).



God says that a lack of response has to do with complacent attitudes and people thinking there is no urgency. They say, "The vision that he sees is for many days from now, and he prophesies of times far off" (verses 25-27). The task of the prophets was to be accomplished whether people listened or not. We as well, as God's people, have a collective responsibility to take God's message to the world even if most ignore it.

Yet despite our knowing these things, a lack of growth in the Church can make us feel we aren't achieving much. Elijah felt this, which puts us in great company! It seems strange that after spectacular miracles from God and the execution of the priests of Baal, Elijah would run away in fear after a death threat the next day from Jezebel (1 Kings 18-19). She had been trying to kill him for years. But stress can become the last straw that emotionally breaks our backs, and Elijah fled.

Perhaps we err in fulfilling our mission by a desire to placate others when we should step out in faith and stand for truth.

God then fed and strengthened him and informed him of something he didn't realize. There were 7,000 others who had not bowed to Baal nor kissed the idol. Elijah probably didn't know of these people. When the paganism of Ahab and Jezebel reigned supreme, God-fearing people quietly hid themselves from Baal worship. This expansive illustration of people who remain faithful to God's covenant was used by Paul about a remnant in Israel in Romans 11:1-5. The lesson for us is that God is working in the lives of many more people than we are aware of.

What of New Testament times?

Although Justus, Crispus and many others believed and were baptized through Paul's preaching in Corinth, Paul became discouraged at stubborn attitudes against him. It deterred him enough to plan to leave Corinth and go elsewhere (Acts 18:6-11). Paul concluded his work there was over. God knew better. Because Paul was determined to leave, God gave him a vision one night, essentially saying: "I have many people in this city. So don't be afraid, no one will attack you, and I will be with you." Paul obediently stayed another 18 months. We can likewise be shortsighted and demoralized by resistance to our efforts.

Society forever rots around us. Can we afford to idly sit back and let darkness overtake us?

As John the Baptist prepared the way for Christ's first coming, so, too, Christ's Church prepares the way for His second coming (Mark 1:2-4). We have a commission and obligation to preach the gospel. Paul expressed his role this way: "Yet when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, for I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! If I preach voluntarily, I have a reward; if not voluntarily, I am simply discharging the trust committed to me" (1 Corinthians 9:16-17, New International Version). Paul knew it was essential that the gospel be made available, and he was wholeheartedly committed to that task. He asked how anyone could hear the truth unless there are those who make it known (Romans 10:14-17).

If we sit back uninvolved, how will the people who could be reached through our efforts ever hear? Christ was busy with His Father's work when He was on earth. He said, "I must work the works of Him who sent Me *while it is day; the night is coming when no one can work"* (John 9:4). Society forever rots around us. Can we afford to idly sit back and let darkness overtake us? Obey God's laws and practice God's way of life as a light to your neighbors, friends and family. Pray for the work of the Church. Have the courage and heart for the gospel. Be involved in sowing the seed!

If you want to learn more about the message that must be preached to all mankind, request our free booklet *The Gospel of the Kingdom*.

The Wonderful World Beyond Today!
Part 5, The End of Hunger and Disease: Return to Eden

By Mike Bennett

The plight of the sick, poor and hungry makes us long for the day when a real utopia spreads around the earth!



"THE POSTER CHILDREN THAT TUG at our heartstrings are all there, wide-eyed and ribbed with pain, their skulls grotesquely out of proportion to their withered bodies," wrote World Food Program executive director James Morris about a drought- and locust-caused famine in Niger in 2005.

"Their skin hangs loose on feeble bones and many feed through tubes taped to their faces. They are gathered to play out their final days on a well-worn set that many may never leave."



The UN Food and Agriculture Organization estimates that more than 840 million people go hungry every day, including one in three people in sub-Saharan Africa. As a result, 25,000 people die every day from malnutrition and hunger-related disease—three quarters of them children under 5 (http://www.just1world.org/food-and-hunger.htm).

Children make up about half of the approximately 50 million refugees in the world. Luise Druke of the office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees estimated that more than 2 million children were killed in conflicts in the 1990s. Another 6 million were wounded and 1 million orphaned.

Millions more children (and adults) are stricken with disease, maimed or disabled each year.

"Your kingdom come"!

Such heartrending stories and statistics make us cry out to God for His Kingdom to come to bring a time when hunger and disease will be halted. They also cause a desire within us to do what we can to help today.

The prophet Ezekiel records some of God's fantastic promises for the world beyond today:

"I will raise up for them a garden of renown, and they shall no longer be consumed with hunger" (Ezekiel 34:29).

"I will deliver you from all your uncleanness. I will call for the grain and multiply it, and bring no famine upon you. And I will multiply the fruit of your trees and the increase of your fields, so that you need never again bear the reproach of famine among the nations"
(Ezekiel 36:29-30).

More than 840 million people go hungry every day, including one in three people in sub-Saharan Africa.

Famine has afflicted mankind throughout history. Every effort to eradicate hunger by greater agricultural production and massive relief programs has failed to end the scourge. Wars, droughts, pests and government inefficiency and corruption have combined to thwart even the great gains of the green and biotech revolutions.

But God promises agricultural abundance that will bring an end to hunger and starvation.

"'Behold, the days are coming,' says the LORD, 'When the plowman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him who sows seed; the mountains shall drip with sweet wine, and all the hills shall flow with it... They shall also make gardens and eat fruit from them" (Amos 9:13-14).

The Nelson Study Bible explains the significance of Amos's statement: "Israelite farmers plowed... from mid-October. They harvested the grain crop... from late March to early June. For the plowman to overtake the reaper would mean such an abundant harvest that it would last all summer and would not be gathered until the plowing had started again."

God wants to win and change hearts and minds so that we will not repeat the tragedies of this age.

With the fear of war and hunger removed, each elderly person, adult and child will feel secure and content. "Everyone shall sit under his vine and under his fig tree, and no one shall make them afraid; for the mouth of the LORD of hosts has spoken" (Micah 4:4).

Isaiah painted word pictures of the barren land being transformed into productive and beautiful fields "like Eden...the garden of the LORD; joy and gladness will be found in it, thanksgiving and the voice of melody" (Isaiah 51:3).

For thousands of years man's activities have reduced the amount of productive farmland in the world and increased the size of the deserts. But all that will change in the world beyond today. Isaiah pictured it this way:

"The wilderness and the wasteland shall be glad for them, and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose; it shall blossom abundantly and rejoice, even with joy and singing... For waters shall burst forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert. The parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water" (Isaiah 35:1-2, 6-7).

Disease and disability to disappear!

This beautiful chapter also describes the healing of the disabilities that have plagued mankind for millennia.

God's healing power will do what medical science has only dreamed of, repairing the intricate systems that allow us to see and hear, run and speak.

"Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the dumb sing" (Isaiah 35:5-6).

God's healing power will do what medical science has only dreamed of, repairing the intricate systems that allow us to see and hear, run and speak.

After describing the sin and the incurable sickness so prevalent in today's world, Jeremiah records God's promise of restoration: "'For I will restore health to you and heal your wounds,' says the LORD" (Jeremiah 30:17).



God, as our Creator, knows how our bodies should work, and has the power to repair the effects of mankind's abuse of the human body over thousands of years. Peter reminds us of the incredible love of Jesus Christ, "who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed" (1 Peter 2:24). Matthew tells us, "He Himself took our infirmities and bore our sicknesses" (Matthew 8:17).

Disease, sickness and all the sorrow that accompanies them will finally be conquered. People will be taught the causes of diseases and how to prevent them. The huge drain on individuals, families and society caused by the suffering, medical expenses and lost productivity will be a thing of the past.

An economic system that works

Exactly how the economy of the future will run and the nature of future technology might be matters for speculation. But we do know that with agricultural abundance and without the drain of military and medical expenses and without governmental corruption and wastefulness, there will be plenty for all to share.

Everyone will be taught to be a contributing, productive member of society. God will hold accountable those who try to oppress the poor or who seek to sponge off others (James 5:1-6; 2 Thessalonians 3:10-12).

A just and reasonable taxation system will contribute to a fair and prosperous future. In fact, God promises incredible blessings to those who no longer rob from Him, as mankind has throughout history, but who pay the tenth He requires.

"'Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house, and try Me now in this,' says the LORD of hosts, 'If I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it'" (Malachi 3:10). This promise included preventing pests from attacking the crops and providing productivity (verse 11).

Where it all leads



The bountiful harvests, the beautifully restored environment, the vibrant health of the people, the productive economy—all these are wonderful in themselves. But men have enjoyed some of these things before, yet eventually ruined them. What is to prevent that from happening again?

God shows that He intends these physical blessings to lead to something even more incredible. After describing the abundance that will replace the famines of today, Ezekiel writes:

"Then you will remember your evil ways and your deeds that were not good [the causes of the suffering of this present age], and you will loathe yourselves in your own sight, for your iniquities and your abominations" (Ezekiel 36:31).

God intends these blessings to lead to repentance—the vehement desire to change from within. God wants to win and change hearts and minds so that we will not repeat the tragedies of this age. Identifying the problems in our hearts and coming to deeply desire to change ourselves are the first step to becoming citizens who will not befoul or destroy the beautiful world God is bringing.

For more about the process of repentance and change that can begin now, download or request a free copy of *Transforming Your Life: The Process of Conversion*. Allowing God to transform you won't change the whole world now, but it will dramatically change your corner of it. And it will prepare you to serve God in helping others and bringing His utopian Kingdom soon to this earth.

10 Things You Can Say to Make Someone's Day

By Becky Sweat

What do you say when a friend is really hurting? Finding the perfect words is never easy, but here are a few possibilities to get you started.



FLOWERS IN HAND, I RANG THE DOORBELL of my friend's apartment. After three weeks on a new job, her boss had called her into his office this morning and informed her that things weren't working out and he was going to have to let her go. I knew my friend was taking it hard; it had taken her several months to find this job, and now she was going to have to start searching again.

My heart raced as I waited at the door. What should I say? Should I try to make her laugh and get her mind off her situation? Should I ask her how she is doing, or will she think I am prying? If I don't bring up what happened today, will she think I'm being insensitive to what she is going through?



When the door opened, I handed my friend the flowers and nervously blurted out that I cared about her, and I wanted to help in any way she needed. I could tell she had been through a lot that day, so I stayed only a few minutes and then hugged her good-bye and went home. A few days later she sent a card, thanking me for the flowers, but especially for the encouraging words.

For most people, life has its share of disappointments. Fatigue from a demanding schedule, financial difficulties, a failed endeavor at work or school, health problems, difficulty getting along with a family member or friend—these are times when a person can feel frustrated and discouraged.

My heart raced as I waited at the door. What should I say? Should I try to make her laugh and get her mind off her situation?

Our words can be a valuable tool to cheer up and encourage a person who is down. Proverbs 25:11 tells us, "Like apples of gold in settings of silver, is a word spoken in right circumstances" (New American Standard Bible). By offering some words of encouragement, we can help discouraged people face their present and future with courage and a positive outlook.

Yet often that's easier said than done. Sometimes we want to help, but we've never been in a situation similar to what the discouraged person is facing and we are at a total loss of words. Maybe we don't know the person's circumstances well enough to comment on specifics, but we still want to show our concern.

When you want to give someone a word of encouragement and don't know what to say, here are 10 phrases to help bring new perspective to a discouraged person's life:

1. "Let me know if you ever need to talk."

One way to help is by letting the other person know you're available to listen if he or she ever wants to talk about the problem. You may not be able to give advice from your own experiences or background, but just listening and trying to understand the suffering person's perspective can be a big comfort. Often, being able to talk about the particular problem is just what a discouraged person needs to sort through his or her concerns and gain the insight needed to deal with the situation.

2. "You've made progress."

People who are discouraged may rarely see their own achievements—in their personal lives, in their careers or educational goals, or in their lives as Christians. You can cheer on those who are down by helping them see their personal growth and accomplishments. Acknowledge any new habits or achievements. You might say: "A few months ago, you rarely exercised. I'm really impressed that you've stuck with your Jazzercise class," or "You used to tell me you thought you'd never be able to figure out how to use that computer. Now, you're an old pro!"

Point out trends you've seen in your friend over and months and years, such as improvements in how he or she relates to others. If you know it's a struggle for your friend to keep her cool under deadlines at work, you could tell her, "I've noticed how patient you are with your office coworkers lately." Help the discouraged person focus on her or his progress rather than failures.

3. "You're not alone."



You can remind a person who is discouraged that he or she is not alone. You are choosing to face her problems with her and certainly others are also rallying behind her. Reassure your friend you want the best for her and you are praying about the situation. Help your friend see she is not the only person to face that particular problem. If you know of other people who've been in such a situation, suggest your friend talk to that person. Your friend will feel less isolated and will gain constructive information to help work through the problem.

4. "I really admire you for…"

A person who is depressed often has lost sight of his or her good qualities. You can encourage the person by pointing out his good qualities. What are your friend's natural talents and abilities? What personal traits do you appreciate in him? But go beyond appearance or personality. Point out your friend's personal strengths such as dependability, friendliness, trustworthiness, patience, sincerity and other character traits you value in him. Talk about the positive differences your friend has made in other people's lives. Statements such as, "Your smile really cheers me up," or "The way you're always ready to help others has been a wonderful example for me to follow," can be encouraging.

5. "The present is not the future."

Those who are discouraged tend to see their present problems as overwhelming and can't envision their future as being any better. You can help them see that one day they will be able to function better than they can at present. Ask such questions as, "What would you like to be doing next month that you can't do now?" or "How do you hope to be living this time next year?" Encourage your friend to write down a few goals for future reference. While your friend is talking, listen for statements such as, "I always wanted to…" or "I wish I had…" And then urge your friend to make those undertakings her or his goals. Get the discouraged person excited about something positive and constructive. Focusing on a brighter future helps a person get past a gloomy present.

6. "You're not a failure."

Another way to get a handle on discouragement is to remind others they're not a failure just because they're at a low point and experiencing negative feelings. If you've been frustrated over a similar situation in the past, be willing to talk about how you were feeling at the time. Knowing you were able to stick it out may give them the motivation to go on. Remind your friend it is normal to feel frustration, discouragement and disappointment now and then. However, as Christians we should not let depression destroy us.

Another way to get a handle on discouragement is to remind others they're not a failure just because they're at a low point and experiencing negative feelings.

7. "I want to help in any way I can."

Offer to help your friend and provide practical assistance. Doing so will take some burdens off your friend so he or she can focus on solving the problem at hand. Realize the other person may feel uncomfortable asking for help, so offering to help in specific ways may take a big load off the other person. Offer to take your friend's children to the park or to babysit. Ask if she would like you to go grocery shopping for her or if she needs clothes taken to the laundry or dry cleaners. Volunteer to cook and deliver a complete meal to her family or do some housework for her. Put yourself in the other person's shoes and try to anticipate what might be genuine needs.

8. "There are solutions."

Discouraged people often feel they are in a hopeless situation and cannot see what resources are available to solve their problems. Help your friend see there's at least one way to improve the situation, and maybe more. Together with your friend, brainstorm as many solutions to the

situation as possible. Even silly, far-fetched ideas are okay if they make your friend laugh and get his or her mind off the problem. Talk about each option and help your friend figure out what plan is best.

9. "You did really well."

A discouraged person is often preoccupied with a specific failure or mistake. One way to help is by finding something about the person you can sincerely applaud: "You did a great job!" "I really appreciate all your hard work." "I think you've got some wonderful ideas!" Sincerely compliment your friend's initiative, ideas, efforts, achievements or choices. Don't overlook the routine, everyday things: "Those cookies you made were really delicious!" "You were a tremendous help with the church picnic." "I heard you did a wonderful job organizing the senior citizens' banquet." Everybody enjoys feeling needed and appreciated.

10. "You are a special person."

Keep in mind that encouragement should be truthful.

No other person has your friend's unique opportunities in life or thinks the same way your friend does. Nobody else can duplicate his or her personality, childhood, family background and experiences. No other person has that particular combination of talents, insights and personality traits. Point out the ways your friend is truly special. Tell your friend, "There has never been and never will be another person exactly like you, and I'm grateful for knowing you," or "You are very special, someone I will never forget." Let your friend know exactly how much you care for him or her and enjoy spending time together.

Keep in mind that encouragement should be truthful. It is only blind reassurance, for example, to say "Your situation's not that bad," or "Things will get better really soon," when the facts may be saying just the opposite. If we tell other people things are all right when they're not, this tends to confuse sufferers and makes them feel guilty since they see the situation differently. If we try to predict the future and tell a suffering person, "Everything is going to be better soon," when, in fact, the situation gets a lot worse before it gets better, this tends to disillusion the discouraged person.

Focus on what you know to be true: You care about your friend and are pulling for her or him. To know there are others who are concerned about them and who are by their sides even during the low points can give those who are discouraged the strength they need to face setbacks and challenges with a positive mindset.

For more positive reading, ask for our free booklets *You Can Have Living Faith* and *Making Life Work*.

Your Job and the "Joseph Effect"

By Graemme Marshall

God gives us a wonderful promise about security. We are promised that regardless of our circumstances, God has not abandoned us.



GOD TELLS US, "Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, 'Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.' So we say with confidence, 'The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?'" (Hebrews 13:5-6, New International Version throughout).

This promise becomes evident in what could be called the "Joseph Effect." It's an extremely encouraging event in life when it happens.

God brings success

Joseph—sold as a slave and bought by Potiphar—clearly had few employment options. Yet we are told, 'When his master saw that the LORD was with him and that the LORD gave him success in everything he did, Joseph found favor in his eyes and became his attendant. Potiphar put him in charge of his household, and he entrusted to his care everything he owned. From the time he put him in charge of his household and of all that he owned, *the LORD blessed the household of the Egyptian because of Joseph*. The blessing of the LORD was on everything Potiphar had, both in the house and in the field. So he left in Joseph's care everything he had; with Joseph in charge, he did not concern himself with anything except the food he ate" (Genesis 39:3-6, emphasis added).

From this we can conclude that Joseph applied himself diligently to whatever small task he was given until his competence and positive attitude for service was noticed. He was then promoted. When it was evident that success came to all that he did, he was delegated unilateral trust. Quite an amazing blessing, considering that he was a Hebrew slave in an Egyptian household.

This is the Joseph Effect—a Christian working and depending on God's provision for economic survival.

This is the Joseph Effect—a Christian working and depending on God's provision for economic survival. It shows how God provides, even if employment prospects are restricted. Although Joseph was being directed to fulfill God's purpose—the establishing of the nation of Israel—we should learn to be diligent and trust God in lean times.

Obstacles become opportunities

The story also illustrates that promotion one time does not mean everything will always be rosy thereafter. Because of his physical attractiveness and moral integrity Joseph encountered difficulties with Potiphar's wife. Her false accusations were enough to have him "fired" and thrown into jail!



Yet here again, the Joseph Effect came into play under even more precarious employment conditions. He was now a Hebrew slave with a prison record. From behind prison walls, he again diligently applied himself to whatever task he was given and came into "favor in the eyes of the prison warden" (Genesis 39:21). This was not just a matter of Joseph's competence; but rather "the LORD was with him; He showed him kindness and granted him favor" (same verse).

In Joseph's story, we read, "The warden paid no attention to anything under Joseph's care, because the LORD was with Joseph and gave him success in whatever he did" (verse 23).

Although he was a prison slave with hopeless career prospects, Joseph did his best with each small task.

Although he was a prison slave with hopeless career prospects, Joseph did his best with each small task. God's favor—along with a positive attitude—caused his efforts to be noticed and rewarded. Ideally, every workplace could possibly be blessed by having a genuine Christian on their staff.

We cannot obligate God to provide such benefits; God had a unique plan and purpose for Joseph. But when He does bless us in such a way, it is a positive reinforcement of living His way of life.

Further reading

You can learn more about this young man and his fine example, by reading "Joseph…Faithfulness Brings Blessing." It's available online at http://www.gnmagazine.org/issues/gn13/profilesfaithjoseph.htm.

Letters to the Editor

"You're Not Wearing That…!"



I really enjoyed the "You're Not Wearing That!" article. As the mother of a teenage son in the Church, I can assure you it DOES affect boys, even in the Church, when girls dress provocatively, and it's hard for them not to "look."

It is NOT, however, "impossible" to find modest clothing. Just type "modest clothing" into a Google search and you'd be surprised at what comes up: Over 40 pages of sites. Some are blogs, some petitions, but most are clothing or sewing pattern sites.

Let's not forget also that part of Proverbs 31 includes sewing! Thanks again for the great article.

Warm regards,

— Mom/grandma in Wisconsin



Hi, as a grandmother and now great-grandmother of a preteen girl, I really lament the latest "fashions" for girls. I would probably be labeled an antique prude when I say far too many women as well as young girls dress more like hookers than respectable ladies. But that's just me.

My son and his wife and I have tried as Christian parents to give the right advice to their two lovely girls about how to dress, which happily has been well taken. However, we have tried to add one more thing to think about as young girls who are trying to live a Christian life. We have told them that they not only need to dress modestly for their own sake, but for the young men as well. We have explained to them that given how quickly the male's thoughts go to sexual ones, a girl has a certain responsibility toward the boys not to dress in a way that may entice them to sinful thoughts and endanger their Christian walk. Today's fashions are dangerous to both boys and girls and we should be looking at the possible consequences for them all.

Sincerely,

— Rachel Johnston

Some feedback messages are edited for space and/or clarity