

An Encouraging Word

When Peter stepped out of the boat in that raging storm to walk on water, he was fine. But then he looked at the wind and waves, and began to sink. If anyone was in need of encouragement, even salvation, it was he. And we are all there at one time or another.

In moments of discouragement, and that was a big one for Peter the apostle, Jesus is the ultimate encourager. Friends, if you can't take the word of the one in charge of the wind and the waves, you had better find a different boat!

If there is any one thing that we as Christians should aim to do every single day, it would be to speak encouragement which comes from Christ himself. Saving, lifting up, being a friend to others is a big calling of Jesus. In fact, Jesus says we must be willing to lay down our life for our friends. Now that's big!

So when do we need encouragement? Usually right after a difficult moment. Right after the storm has happened, and we feel like last year's Christmas tree lights which don't work when someone gets ready to decorate the tree.

Timing is everything. So the moment to encourage is whenever we see another person in difficulty. A word of "A word of encouragement during a failure is worth more than an hour of praise after success." ~unknown but very smart!

Where is the good news in the Christian? It comes from God, and is waiting to get out. We can either be the one people hate to see coming, or the one people are glad to see walk up. The difference is how we choose to speak and be.

"Everyone," writes Anne Frank, "has inside them a piece of good news. The good news is you don't know how great you can be! How much you can love! What you can accomplish! And what your potential is."

Encouragement is what our world desperately needs. And we must always be on the lookout for sharing that good news with precisely the one who needs it at exactly the right moment.

I have heard many people say, and I agree because I have seen it as well, that the things that hit them hardest are the ones we don't see coming. I have been on both ends of that story, and the pain caused even when we think we are doing the right thing is something that is never forgotten.

But we will all face pain and darkness at times. Parents and children, military and civilian, bosses and employees, men and women, pastors and laity, young and old, white or black, it is a fact of life.

That is why God calls us to lift one another up. Because he knows that at any given time someone is in need of lifting up.

So a word of encouragement, a hand reaching out when we are sinking at the moment just as Jesus reached out to Peter, is what God demands of all his people.

What God really seeks for all people is that Godly friendship that Jesus mentions and practices again and again. It has the qualities of love described in I Corinthians 13, being always forgiving, never seeking our own way, does not dishonor others. We can have faith which moves mountains, but if we have not love, we gain nothing.

Ulysses Grant, one of the most feared and ruthless generals of the Civil War, and later a president of these United States, had many enemies, and many dark moments. So when he says something about friendship, he has plenty of experience. "The friend in my adversity," he writes, "I shall always cherish most. I can better trust those who helped to relieve the gloom of my dark hours than those who are so ready to enjoy with me the sunshine of my prosperity

Charles Shultz, the writer of the Peanuts cartoons, thought a lot about friendship. Here is part of his advice to help us focus.

- 1. List a few teachers who aided your journey through school.*
- 2. Name three friends who have helped you through a difficult time.*
- 3. Name five people who have taught you something worthwhile.*
- 4. Think of a few people who have made you feel appreciated and special.*
- 5. Think of five people you enjoy spending time with.*

The lesson: The people who make a difference in your life are not the ones with the most credentials, the most money, or the most awards. They are the ones that care.

Remember, you don't need a certain number of friends, just a number of friends you can be certain of. This is God's gift. The next time you are sinking, look for that encouraging word. Jesus will always be there.