

POWER TO INFLUENCE: *Encouragement — the Key to Caring*¹

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Legacy Lecture #1

Recently, I started writing out my presentations as if they were my legacy thoughts which I want to leave behind for others to realize what I consider to be significant. I refer to them as my Legacy Lectures.

“A favorite line of Saint John Paul II, one that he quoted time and time again in his many writings, was, ‘Man cannot fully find himself, except through a sincere gift of himself.’ This was one of his favorite quotes, because it’s taken from the Vatican II document, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*, 24, which he helped to write when he was a young Polish bishop and theologian named Karol Wojtyła.”²

That is worth reading again, *Man cannot fully find himself, except through a sincere gift of himself*. Over time, many have called this principle the “Law of the Gift.”³

Getting out of ourselves and giving of ourselves for the sake of others is the central paradigm to being a power to influence.

Pope Francis at the XXXI World Youth Day in Kraków (30 July 2016), said in the *Prayer Vigil with the Young People*:

God expects something from you, God wants something from you. God hopes in you. God comes to break down all our fences. He comes to open the doors of our lives, our dreams, our ways of seeing things. God comes to break open everything that keeps you closed in. He is encouraging you to dream. He wants to make you see that, with you, the world can be different. For the fact is, unless you offer the best of yourselves, the world will never be different. This is the challenge.⁴

Likewise, in a 2018 daily homily, Pope Francis said:

[T]here are so many Christians who are stopped, who don’t continue on the journey; Christians who have run aground on the concerns of daily life ... but they don’t grow, they remain small. Parked Christians: they’ve parked. Caged Christians who don’t know how to fly with the dream to this beautiful thing to which the Lord calls us.⁵

My goal is to examine how we can *break down all our fences*, and move from being *parked/caged Christians to fully find ourselves, through a sincere gift of oneself to others*. To look at how each of us can influence the world around us through intentional, conscious acts of encouragement. *For the fact is, unless you offer the best of yourselves, the world will never be different. This is the challenge*. These are the keys to caring, the power to influence.

Each day, every one of us is an agent of influence. Influence, however, is not neutral; it is either positive or negative. And your influence has a trickle-down effect from one to another, and so on. The choice is yours.

There's wisdom in the old quip from an unknown author:

*In a roomful of people
They are all smiles a'beaming,
But is it when you enter in,
Or when you are leaving?*

The power verse, that has been so influential in my life and ministry, is from St. Paul's *First Letter to the Thessalonians*, 5:11, 13, 15-18:

Therefore, encourage one another; and build one another up, ...
Be at peace among yourselves. ...
See that none of you repays evil for evil,
but always seek to do good to one another and to all.
Rejoice always, pray constantly, give thanks in all circumstances,
for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.⁶

Every time we pray the Lord's Prayer, we pray for God's will to be done. This is a verse on how God's will is done — when each of us is an agent to influence — *to encourage one another* and to *build one another up*.

The *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* defines *encourage*: “1a. to inspire with courage, spirit, or hope; 1b. to attempt to persuade ... ”⁷

With a computer bible program,⁸ I clicked on 1Thess. 5:11 (RSVCE). “Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.” I noticed on the screen that the Greek word for encourage is *parakaleo*. That sure had a familiar sound to it as in John 14:16, “I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Paraclete to be with you always ...” Other translations use the terms *Advocate/Counselor/Comforter/Intercessor*, as well.⁹

I, then, began to search the Greek text for other verses with the same root of *parak*. I came across *parakleto* and *paraklesis*. When I clicked on the screen these Greek words produced the English terms: *encourage, urge, exhort, implore, counsel, comfort, console, intercessor, and advocate*.

The Holy Spirit as a power to influence becomes, then, a good role model on how to lead our lives. A good way how to affect other people's lives, as well by *encouraging, urging, exhorting, comforting, consoling, comforting, and being an advocate for, or interceding on behalf of*.

William Barclay in his classic book *New Testament Words* writes “that the function of the Holy Spirit was to fill a man with that Spirit of power and courage which would make him able triumphantly to cope with life.”¹⁰ Again, the Holy Spirit is the “... one who puts courage into the faint-hearted, ... one who makes an ordinary man cope gallantly with a perilous and

dangerous situation.”¹¹

Encouragement: The Key to Caring, is an excellent book written by Dr. Larry Crabb, which I highly encourage you to read. It has solid points to begin forming faith communities.

The book’s theme is (p. 20) “encouragement through the careful selection of words that are intended to influence another person meaningfully toward increased godliness.”¹²

Hear that again, *the careful selection of words that are intended to influence another person meaningfully A careful selection of words* is what caught my attention. Words are powerful!

A story is told about the Solomon Islands where some villagers practiced a unique form of logging. If a tree is too large to be felled with an axe, the natives knock it down by yelling at it. You see, woodsmen with special powers creep up on a tree at dawn, surround it, and scream at the top of their lungs. They continue this for 30 days. The tree dies and falls over. The theory is that hollering kills the spirit of the tree. According to the villagers, it always works.

Ah, those poor, innocent natives. Such quaint jungle-lore. Screaming at trees, indeed. How primitive. Too bad they don’t have the advantages of modern society and advanced technology.

Me, yell? Well, I’ve yelled at my family. I’ve yelled at the telephone and the television. And I’ve sure yelled a lot while using the computer.

The lady next door yells a lot. Last week I heard her yell while washing windows. Have you noticed that we modern, urbane sophisticates yell at traffic lights and umpires, bills and bank machines? It seems that machines and relatives bear the brunt of most of our yelling.

I don’t know what good all that yelling does. Machines and things just sit there. Even kicking doesn’t always help. As for people, well, the Solomon Islanders may have a point. Yelling at living things does tend to kill their spirit. Sticks and stones may break our bones, but words will break our hearts.¹³

So, how about your choice of words and maybe, more so, the tone of your voice? Does your choice of words encourage others, or discourage; build others up, or knock others down? Yes, our words do have the power to influence life around us, and they even influence our own life, as well, but is it a positive influence, or negative?

Consider the chorus in the nursery rhyme sung so often to children:

*Home, home on the range,
Where the deer and the antelope play,
Where seldom is heard a discouraging word,
And the skies are not cloudy all day.*¹⁴

Did you hear that one line, *Where seldom is heard a discouraging word?* And we wonder why children want to get away from home; go hang out at the mall, the park, anywhere but home, where all they hear are *discouraging words?* Yes, *yelling at living things does tend to kill their spirit.*

Dr. Crabb refers to Heb. 3:12-14 (NIV), "... encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness. We have come to share in Christ if we hold firmly till the end the confidence we had at first."

Literally, this means: *to stir up, to provoke, to incite people in a given direction toward a greater share in Christ.* This ... "includes the idea of ... joining someone else on a journey and speaking words that encourage each other to keep pressing on despite obstacles and fatigue."¹⁵

Dr. Crabb continues: "Such encouragement *requires a conscious commitment* amid the routine of daily life to promote other people's welfare, be it with family, friends, co-workers, teachers, students or parents. ..."¹⁶

Yes, this sets lofty standards and often we don't measure up ... but, for men and women of faith and character, this standard is still worth striving for — *Man cannot fully find himself, except through a sincere gift of himself.*

Some time ago, I came across a short verse, the "Prayer of Spring," written by Trappist Fr. Charles Cummings, OCSO:

I live with a stronger hope for the possibilities that lie hidden within things,
situations and persons.

To be able to see these hidden possibilities requires an intentional, conscious commitment on our part. Consider how parents, teachers, coaches, and friends attempt to draw out the hidden possibilities of their children, students, or athletes.

An unknown author wrote about two men, both Italian sculptors and contemporaries, named Donatello and Michelangelo. One day Donatello received delivery of a huge block of marble. After examining it carefully, Donatello rejected the marble because it was too flawed and cracked for him to use.

Now, this was long before forklifts and hydraulic lifts, so the workmen moved the heavy load by using a series of log rollers. Rather than struggle back to the quarry, the quick-thinking haulers decided to deliver it down the street to Michelangelo. After all, he was known to be a little absent-minded. He might not realize that he had not ordered a three-ton block of marble.

When Michelangelo inspected the marble, he saw the same cracks and flaws, as did Donatello. But he also saw the block as a challenge to his artistic skills. It became a personal challenge he could not pass up. So Michelangelo accepted the block of marble that Donatello had already rejected as too flawed and too cracked to be of any use.

Michelangelo proceeded to carve from that seemingly, useless block of marble what is considered one of the world's greatest art treasures — the statue 'David'.¹⁷

Always keep in mind, that there is real hunger for encouragement — be point specific, not vague generalities, be sincere without flattery. Encouragement has healing power. It can stir up, provoke, incite, and influence people to keep pressing on. Encouragement can transform “cracks” into works of art.

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, considered the greatest German literary figure of the modern era, once said,

If we treat people as if they were what they ought to be, we help them become what they are capable of becoming.¹⁸

That means we not necessarily treat others how they are presently acting, but that we treat them how they ought to be. Likewise, Ralph Waldo Emerson once said, “Our chief want in life is somebody who shall make us do what we can.”¹⁹

Such is what I propose in “Power to Influence: *Encouragement — Key to Caring*” — to encourage others, to build others up, to nudge and, sometimes, even to push men and women to do what they can.

Charles M. Schwab, first president of U.S. Steel and later president of Bethlehem Steel was the first person to earn one million dollars on salary while working for Andrew Carnegie. What was it that made Charles M. Schwab worth paying a million dollars?

An unknown author answered that question. He said Schwab had a desire to excel.

Charles Schwab, president of US Steel, had a mill manager whose men were not producing their quota of work. “How is it,” Schwab asked, “that a man as capable as you cannot make this shift turn out its quota?”

“I don't know,” the manager replied. “I have coaxed the men, pushed them, but nothing seems to work. They just will not produce.”

It happened to be the end of the shift, just before the night crew came on. “Give me a piece of chalk,” Schwab said. Then, turning to the nearest worker, he inquired, “How many turns of the furnace did your shift produce today?”

“Six,” he said.

Without another word Schwab chalked a big figure 6 on the floor, and he walked away.

When the night shift came on, they saw the big 6 and asked what it meant. “The boss was here today,” the day shift said. “He asked us how many turns we made and chalked it on the floor.”

The night crew grumbled among themselves, “Those lazy louts on the day shift. Six turns of the furnace? We’ll show them!”

The next morning Schwab walked through the mill again and noticed that the night shift had rubbed out the 6 and replaced it with a big 7. The day shift couldn’t believe those buffoons from the night shift could work that much. So, they went about production determined to show the night shift that their work was not that remarkable. When the day shift went home that night they left behind an impressive 10. Shortly, the mill which had been lagging way behind in production was turning out more work than any other company plant.

Without yelling a word or making any threats Schwab had made his point. He said, “The way to get things done is to stimulate competition. I don’t mean in a sordid, money-getting way, but in the desire to excel.”²⁰

Schwab was alert to what workers needed most — the *stimulus of encouragement*. Schwab said:

I consider my ability to arouse enthusiasm among my people the greatest asset I possess, and the way to develop the best that is in a person is by appreciation and encouragement.²¹

Again, Dr. Crabb writes, (p. 79)

I *am* insisting that every encouraging sentence *reflect an awareness* that people are needy and fearful. Encouragers must constantly remind themselves that the people with whom they rub shoulders are facing problems in life which, but for the grace of God, are ultimately overwhelming. It is this conscious awareness that can give encouraging power to even the most trivial conversation.²²

Encouragement is not a technique to be mastered; it is a sensitivity to people and a confidence in God that *must be nourished and demonstrated*.²³

In the bible, Acts 4:36, introduces us to “Joseph who was surnamed by the apostles Barnabas (which means, Son of encouragement) ... ”²⁴ A nickname! Joseph’s actions so filled his life that he was given the nickname, Barnabas; he was so known by his actions. Barnabas didn’t just announce the message, he became the message.

Barnabas had a conscious awareness and sensitivity to peoples’ needs. He was filled with the Paraclete/Spirit of Encouragement to nourish others to live with a stronger hope. Barnabas was a real *power to influence*. Consider, right now, what would be the nickname that most reflects your life? How do you influence life around you?

Frank Gifford, former NY Giants #1 draft pick and member of the Pro Football Hall of Fame, said of the late Coach Vince Lombardi:

It wasn’t his knowledge of football strategy and tactics that made him a great coach. No, it was his ability to motivate each player. Lombardi could get that extra

10% effort out of an individual.

To me, Vince (Lombardi) was the difference between my becoming a good pro player, not just another halfback. He turned my life around. Anything I accomplished in this game, I owe to him.²⁵

“Be constantly on the lookout for what is good in other people.” Dr. Conrad Baars, MD, wrote in *Born Only Once*. “No matter how well hidden it may be, it can be found. Then reveal it — affirmingly!”²⁶

Simply, become a *Good-Finder!* Encouragement is like fertilizer; it enlivens, nurtures, and brings forth growth, whereas, discouragement is hazardous, toxic, waste material — it kills the spirit.

Many have scoffed: “But what can we do with so much darkness around us?” I remind them of that old maxim: “It is better to light one candle than to curse the darkness.”

Over the years, I’ve lit a lot of candles, and I noticed that a candle loses none of its own warmth, brilliance or power when it gives of itself to light another candle. It multiplies itself. So, become Candle-Lighters!

Beware, though, of Candle-Snuffers. They think that if they can blow out your candle, their candle will somehow appear to be brighter. However, in reality, all they do is make this world a little bit darker, and a whole lot colder.

Keep in mind that tearing down someone else will never build you up. Likewise, snuffing out someone else’s light will not make yours burn any brighter.

Such is the “Power to Influence: *Encouragement — the Key to Caring*”. It requires attention, decision and conscious commitment. As Dr. Crabb stated, “Encouragement must be nourished and demonstrated.”²⁷

But like so many things in life ...

There was an important job to be done, and Everybody was sure that Somebody would do it. Anybody could have done it, but Nobody did it. Somebody got angry about that because it was Everybody’s job. Everybody thought Anybody could do it, but Nobody realized that Everybody couldn’t do it. It ended up that Everybody blamed Somebody when Nobody did what Anybody could have.²⁸

Hopefully, this article has provided you with some insights on the “Power to Influence.” *God comes to break down all our fences. He is encouraging you to dream. You can move from being parked/caged Christians and fully find yourself, through a sincere gift of yourself to others.*²⁹

For the fact is, *unless you offer the best of yourselves, the world will never be different. This is the challenge.*³⁰ These are the keys to caring, the power to influence.

In closing, a verse for daily inspiration comes from Hebrews 3:13:

But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called ‘Today’, so that none of you may be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness.³¹



NOTES:

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6. 1 Thessalonians, 5:11, 13, 15-18, *Revised Standard Version; Second Catholic Edition* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2006).
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8. “1 Thessalonians, 5:11”, “Bible Library for Catholics on CD-ROM”, Liguori Publications, July 1, 1995.
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13. Fr. Brian Cavanaugh, TOR, “Yelling Tends to Kill,” *More Sower’s Seeds*, Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, p. 83.
14. Chorus, “Home on the Range”, <https://www.scoutsongs.com/lyrics/home-on-the-range.html#ixzz5DiWoQIem>, accessed on August 8, 2023.
15. *Op. Cit.*, Crabb, p. 20.
16. *Ibid.*

17. *Op. Cit.*, Cavanaugh, “Work with Flaws,” *More Sower’s Seeds*, p. 75.
18. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, (born August 28, 1749, Frankfurt am Main [Germany]—died March 22, 1832, Weimar, Saxe-Weimar) was a German poet, playwright, novelist, scientist, statesman, theatre director, critic, and amateur artist, considered the greatest German literary figure of the modern era.
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23. *Op. Cit.*, Crabb, p. 80.
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