Don’t Wait for the Funeral

(by Ken Weliever)

Did you hear about the man who was on his death-bed? Suddenly the aroma of his favorite chocolate chip cookies filled the air, wafting down the hall into his bedroom. Mustering all the strength he could summons, he pulled himself out of bed, slowly staggered down the hall, and made it to the kitchen.

To his delight hundreds of cookies were spread out on the kitchen table. Ah, he thought, one final act of love and devotion from his caring wife. He would indeed leave this world a happy man! As he staggered toward the table and reached his withered hand for a cookie, suddenly his wife turned and smacked it with a spatula. *“Stay out of those,”* she scolded, *“They’re for the funeral!”*

Now if this story seems a bit silly, or almost irreverent, consider the fact that so many people save their acts of kindness, expressions of love and words of praise until the funeral! Beautiful Flowers. Magnanimous eulogies. Benevolent deeds. Those don’t mean a lot to the person who has passed on! Have you ever heard someone say, *“I wish I had done more when they were alive”*? Or *“I hope she knows how much I loved her”*? Now is the time to express love. Lift spirits. And encourage those who need it most. Don’t wait until the funeral!

**Encouragement is Important:** God places a high value on encouragement. It is important to our Christian walk and to our ability to remain faithful. Christianity was never meant to be a solo act. We need each other. Paul exhorted, ***“Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing”*** (**1 Thessalonians 5:11**).

One of the best definitions of “encouragement” I’ve ever read is *“pouring courage into someone who needs it.”* To encourage is to inspire, embolden, and hearten. Dr. David Jeremiah was right when he wrote, *“The body of Christ is a family whose members are to be mutually involved with one another. One of the one-another ministries God calls us to practice is the ministry of encouragement.”*

Ministry of encouragement? Yes! In **Romans 12**, Paul spoke of the various gifts we have been given and types of ministries in which we are to engage and said, ***“If it is encouraging, let us encourage.”***

**How Are We Encouraged?**

**1. By what we sense.** Job’s three friends came to encourage him in a time of deep despair. In the end, they became a discouragement! But they did do something right in the beginning, they came and sat with him for seven days and said nothing! Job sensed their encouragement. We often speak of *“being there”* for another. When we are, emotionally, as well as physically, they sense our encouragement.

**2. By what we read**. The letters of the New Testament were often written for the purpose of encouragement. Encouragement to remain faithful. To overcome sin. To correct wrongs. To grow in faith. Reading the Word will encourage you.

We may also encourage others by the notes, cards, letters and emails that we send. I am blessed to receive so much encouragement in this fashion. I never, ever take it for granted. I never tire of hearing it. And I am always lifted when I read the encouraging words from my friends and spiritual family.

**3. By what we hear**. ***“Anxiety in the heart of man weighs it down, but a good word makes it glad”*** (**Proverbs 12:25**). A good word lifts. Brings a smile to the face. Clears a tear from the eyes. Encourages the heart that is heavy.

**4. By what we feel.** The touch of another’s hand. A warm embrace. A pat on the back. These non-verbal actions transmit encouragement to others**.** The wise man said, ***“there is a time to embrace”*** (**Ecclesiastes 3:5**). Ever notice how many times it says Jesus touched someone? The Bible even speaks of *“the holy kiss”* among the brethren. The point is we are encouraged by what we feel from others.

Look around and see who is discouraged, disheartened, or demoralized and pour some courage into them. Encourage a friend, family member, or fellow Christian today! Don’t wait until the funeral!

It’s About Me

(by Steve Patton)

Our world constantly emphasizes that life is *“all about me.”* We have it hammered into our brains daily with ad slogans like: *“You are special. You deserve a break today. Have it your way. Because you’re worth it. We do it all for you. It’s everywhere you want to be.”* So life is all about me and my wants and desires. Happiness means getting everything I want.

I believe such an idea can be attributed to two things. One is the battle with our own lusts - lusts of the flesh, lusts of the eye, and the pride of life (**1 John 2:15-16**). Flesh versus spirit is a battle we fight our whole life. God’s Word teaches us that self-denial and sacrifice are fundamental to a meaningful existence (**Luke 9:27**; **Romans 12:1**, etc).

But secondly, we are told that life can be meaningful without a belief in a Creator God who is the source of all existence and to whom we will ultimately answer. Radical evolutionists have been at the heart of this idea, telling us that this world is here without the hand of God, and that its continued successful existence is up to man. In the evolutionist’s mind we’re but one species in a long continuum of beings evolving into higher forms over billions of years. Our responsibility is to do our part to see that this evolutionary march continues throughout the millenniums ahead. I’m not sure why they think we should do this since we each live only one lifetime. Shouldn’t that one brief lifetime be filled with doing whatever I want, not with fulfilling any responsibility to future higher evolved beings? After all they will not care one bit about me and how I lived.

The evolutionist says that to find meaning to life, do not look up. Rather look around you and find something more important than yourself and work for it. Sounds good but I think someone long ago tried that. King Solomon recounted his quest for meaning in *"something more."* With great success he completed grand projects, amassed fortunes, and enjoyed mountaintop experiences, each failing to quell his heart’s deepest pangs. His life lesson: Lasting significance is not found in something, but in Someone (**Ecclesiastes 12:14**). Do not let this world fool you. Life is not just about “me.” It is about both God and others. When your life needs meaning, learn to look up. Have the heart of the Psalmist when he wrote, ***“As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for You, O God”*** (**Psalm 42:1**). There you will find life’s meaning.