

Family Therapist: 8 Ways We Can Get Encouragement All Wrong

One weekend, I was feeling the stress of trying to please both my husband and my children. I was very focused on my husband's moods and what he wasn't doing right.

I felt like my husband was particularly crabby. He was barking about needing to do things in the garage and clean some other things up. At this time, I was also motivated to bring the Lord into our life and be encouraging to change him.

I remember going up to my husband, hoping to remedy his mood with my suggestion – here's what I said: "You know, I remember that weekend when you were in such a good mood. We had so much fun as a family. It would be awesome if you could be that way right now."

Not only is this the wrong approach, but it's also the wrong time, the wrong attitude, and it could potentially lead to an argument. It's unintentional, and it's not my desire, but my eyes and heart are only seeing from *my* perspective. It's not the lens to lead into encouragement.

There are many unintentional encouragement misses. The problem isn't that we aren't trying but that we aren't accurately listening before we speak.

When I tried to encourage my husband, I did not first think through how he would receive it. I was thinking factually and from my point of view. *I would like him to "be happy" for me. Maybe he's in a bad mood because of me. Did I do something wrong?* Many of us go down this road because of our own insecurities and lack of boundaries. I am looking at him and focusing on his "mood" and allowing his mood to influence me.

I am interpreting that he isn't happy based on what I think, when he could actually be content or intently focused on something. I think that what's best for him is for me to tell him what I think. It's not that he doesn't want my influence or to hear me, but my interpretation isn't seeing him the way Jesus does.

It would have been better if I hadn't said anything. Or if I would have focused on my own joyful mood. I can bring the presence of joy; I can shift the environment (if it needs shifting) with joy. That is encouraging. I am not in control of his life. What I do have control over is me. What I can do is give him unconditional love and encouragement consistently, without any hooks that benefit me. Our hearts may mean well but they don't always speak encouragement. With most of us, this is innocent. However, if it gets worse, it can turn into emotional abuse, manipulation, control and gaslighting.

Here are eight things that encouragement is *not*:

1. **It's *not* pointing out what others aren't doing right.** If your spouse continues to leave their dirty dishes out, telling them the obvious isn't encouraging. Telling them how amazing they are is.
2. **It's *not* gossip.** When you are concerned about someone and find yourself wanting to talk about them with someone else, identify where your heart is at. Make sure you are aligned with God and what you are saying is fruitful, or don't say anything at all.
3. **It's *not* positive thinking.** Authentic encouragement is when we partner with God and the Holy Spirit breathes life into the word. Positive thinking is focusing on the good in a situation. They are very different.
4. **It's *not* being in fear for others' well-being.** This is very common with parents wanting to protect their children. It absolutely makes sense to warn them to make healthy choices. When we communicate, we need to make sure we do it from the heart of God and not our own

fear.

5. **It's *not* the past dictating the future.** It can be hard for us to not speak what we clearly see in front of our eyes. However, people can change, and God is in the business of bringing transformation. We need to partner with God and speak what He says about ourselves and others. Then watch the miracles unfold.
6. **It's *not* what we feel.** Emotions come and go. When they are big, it can be really difficult to use skills and access God's truth in the moment. We also can believe that we need to "say it how it is" or speak our feelings no matter what. This can often be very damaging and hurtful to others. Proverbs 18:21 says, "Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruit" (NKJV). We need to use wisdom when emotions show up before speaking out how we feel.
7. **It's *not* being weak or passive.** When we speak life into others, we are releasing God's power with words. This is not passive at all. It may appear that way if we don't engage in an aggressive conversation, but it's often wise to be silent or speak encouragement.
8. **It's *not* a side gift.** The gift of encouragement can often be overlooked and seen as a side gift. If we allow ourselves to focus on that lie, we can get drained and exhausted. It is not a second-rate gift.

Encouragement can be the single thing that moves someone into his or her destiny or out of a really bad decision. It can literally change lives and the world. We need to stay encouraged so that we can give out the love that naturally flows from us to others. First Thessalonians 5:11 says we are to "encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing" (NIV).

If your heart was good but you were speaking from your own perspective instead of God's, don't get discouraged. Simply forgive yourself, because your heart desires to uplift others

and bring them life. Focus on where your heart was at, even if you missed. Don't give up. Keep trying. Helen Keller said, "The best and most beautiful things in the world cannot be seen or even touched – they must be felt with the heart."

God loves a genuine and repentant heart. Here are some questions to ask yourself to better position yourself to encourage: Where is your heart? What is your intent? Are you more concerned about how you feel? What do you think motivates them? What is their heart? How is your relationship with the other person?

It's important that you are truly connected with them, have spent quality time in their life, that the relationship is strong, and that there is trust. You were made to bravely encourage yourself and others. {eoa}

Heidi Mortenson is a licensed marriage and family therapist and owner of a mental health clinic in Minnesota. She is host of the Strong Tower Mental Health podcast produced with Charisma Media and the author of the book *The Brave Encourager*. Heidi is ordained through Patricia King's Women In Ministry Network and is a first-year graduate of Bethel School of Supernatural Ministry online. Please visit her website at .

Read articles like this one and other Spirit-led content in our new platform, CHARISMA PLUS.