

Be an Encourager

Message for Sunday, May 31, 2020
by Bruce Fraser

Scripture: Philippians 4:1

1) The power of encouragement

Terry O'Reilly, on the CBC Radio show *Under the Influence* told about how Stephen King got started as a writer. I'll repeat here what Terry said.

Back in 1973, Stephen King and his wife Tabby were living in a trailer in a town called Hermon, just west of Bangor, Maine. King was earning \$1.60 an hour at a laundry, and his wife was working the second shift at Dunkin' Donuts. But what King really wanted to be was a writer.

So he wrote short stories and sent them off to various magazines. He sold a few, but mostly got a lot of rejections slips. A few months later, Stephen King managed to land a job as a high school English teacher for \$6,400 a year—a big step up from the laundry job. He continued to write at night and on weekends. Through all the rejections, his wife Tabby's support was constant. She believed in King, even if no publisher did.

One night, he started writing a story called *Carrie*. It was about a high school girl who is teased and bullied by her classmates. But *Carrie* has telekinetic powers; she can make things move by just thinking about it. King wrote three single-spaced pages. But then he realized that to tell the story properly would be too long for a magazine article. And he didn't want to spend months writing a novel he wouldn't be able to sell. So he crumpled it up and threw it in the garbage.

The next night, King came home to discover Tabby reading the pages. She had found them in the garbage, had shaken the cigarette ashes off the crumpled balls of paper, and had smoothed them out. She wanted to know the rest of the story. She said, "You have something here." King decided to continue, based solely on his wife's belief. When he was finished, he sent *Carrie* off to some publishers.

One day at school, he got a message to come to the office because his wife was on the phone. King instinctively knew it must be trouble—because they couldn't afford a phone in their trailer, so Tabby would have had to go to a neighbour to make the urgent call.

When he answered the phone, his wife read him a telegram saying Doubleday had taken the book, and was sending a \$2,500 advance.

Later that night, the excited couple lay in bed marvelling at their good fortune. Tabby asked King what he thought the paperback rights might sell for. He said his best guess was between \$10,000 and \$60,000. Tabby said, "Is that much even possible?" King said it wasn't likely, but possible. Even \$10,000 was more than a year's teaching salary. Stephen King and his wife used the \$2,500 advance to fix their car and move into a basement apartment with an actual phone in it.

Many months later, King was alone in the apartment when the phone rang. It was his editor from Doubleday calling. He asked if King was sitting down. King asked why. Then the editor told him the paperback rights to *Carrie* had just sold to Signet Books for four hundred thousand dollars.

King was speechless. He was sure he didn't hear the number correctly. "Did you say \$40,000?"

The editor said, no, four hundred thousand dollars. King asked him to say the figure again slowly and clearly. The editor said the number was a four followed by five zeroes. After that, a decimal point, then two more zeroes. King's legs gave out from under him and he slipped to the floor.

When he hung up, he tried to call his wife at work, but she had already left. When she got home, he took her by the shoulders and told her the news. She didn't appear to understand. He told her again. She stood there speechless, looked over his shoulder at their small, \$90 per month basement apartment, and began to cry. Their lives had just changed forever.

It all happened because Tabby encouraged her husband to keep on writing that story. Encouragement is incredibly powerful. We need more of that in these difficult days of COVID-19. That's why I'm doing this series of messages on encouragement.

2) Be an encourager

Whenever I am out of town overnight, such as for a regional church meeting or a training course, my wife Jane always puts a love note in my suitcase. (She's very thoughtful like that, one of the reasons I

was, and still am, attracted to her). One time the message on the card was something like this:

Bruce, how dear you are to me, and how I miss you! How happy you make me, and how proud I am of you!

Wouldn't you love to get a card like that from someone, saying how much they appreciate you, and how thankful they are for you? Little things like that are not little at all; they are *huge*.

Oh, by the way: the wording that I gave you from Jane's card isn't exactly the way she wrote it. But it *is* an exact quote... from what Paul wrote to the people of the church in Philippi.

Philippians 4:1, Today's English Version:

So then, my friends, how dear you are to me and how I miss you! How happy you make me, and how proud I am of you!—this, dear friends, is how you should stand firm in your life in the Lord.

Paul was a great encourager. At the beginning of his letter, this is what he said to the Philippians:

Philippians 1:3-4, Today's English Version:

I thank my God for you every time I think of you; and every time I pray for you all, I pray with joy.

Again, wouldn't you love to get a letter like that from someone, telling how special you are to them?

Let's remember, my friends, that one of the principles which Jesus teaches us is to treat others the way we would like to be treated. So instead of sitting and wishing for someone to send us a card like that, *we* are going to sit and write a card like that!

Usually I put "next steps" at the end of my message, ways that you can live out the truth of the Bible through the week. But today, we're going to do that step right here, right now. Each of you received a card. Here's what I'm asking you to do:

- Think of someone who has been a positive influence on your life. But someone who doesn't normally get recognized publicly (so I'm *not* on the list; I get lots of appreciation already every week). Write a short note to that person in the card.
- Tell how much you appreciate that person.

- Even better: be specific. Remind the person of an episode. Tell exactly what it was the person did or said, which you still remember today. Tell how it has affected your life.

Sign the card, put it in the envelope. Put on the address and a stamp, and mail it. Getting a card in the mail is a special treat, very different from an email or a text. It tells the person, "You are worth taking the time to do this."

No, don't put this paper down and say, "I'll do that later." Do it *right now*, while the idea is still fresh in your mind.