

COMMUNITY

Family Counseling Service: The Value of Encouragement

BY LARRY DEAVERS

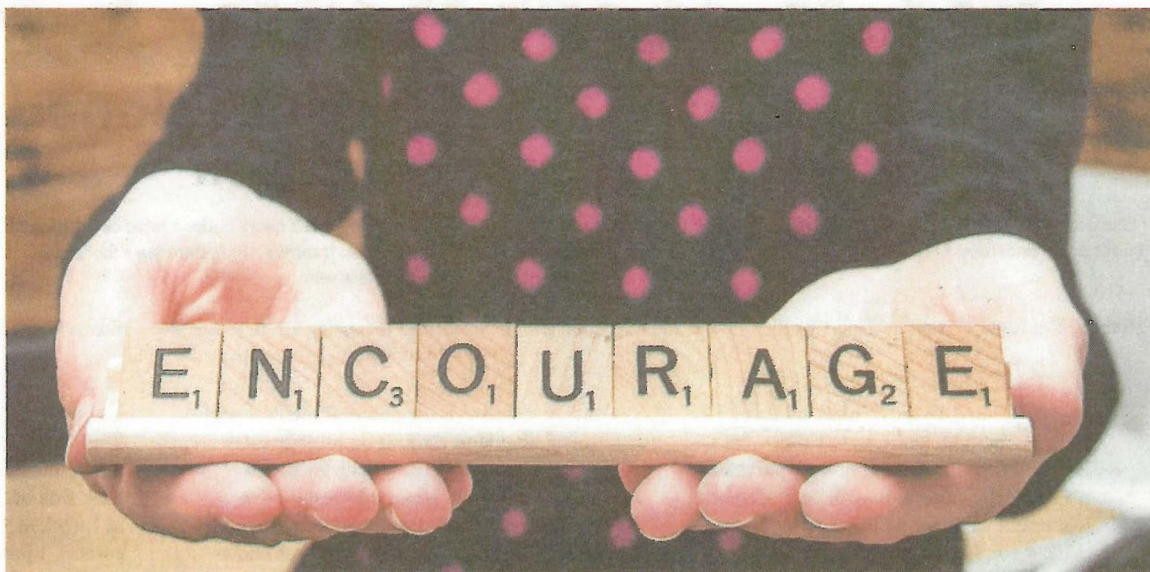
Every human being has a deep-seated need for affirmation. We need to feel that we belong, that we are valuable, and that we contribute something meaningful to the lives of others. That is what makes encouragement such a powerful force in helping bond friendships, marriages, families, and even our relationships with co-workers, neighbors, and others we encounter.

Genuine encouragement and appreciation spring from our own sense of gratitude. Nurturing our own sense of gratitude creates the well spring that produces a recognition that we need other people, that they increase the quality of our lives, and that they deserve recognition for what they contribute, no matter how small. When we allow ourselves to be humble and generous in offering praise and appreciation, it draws other people to us in a way that also reinforces our own sense of belonging, acceptance, and self-worth.

Too often, our own lack of self-worth or pride prevents us from gracefully accepting the praise of others. We need to learn to accept encouragement and appreciation from others, as well as give it. When we deny others the privilege of encouraging us, we rob them of the opportunity to feel the sense of value that they experience by feeding something positive into our lives.

For encouragement to have its biggest impact, it needs to become a consistent part of how you engage other people. When you develop a consistent outlook on life that appreciates all the blessings that come by way of others, you are more generous, gracious, and patient in the way you interact with others. Your relationships will begin to prosper as a result.

Feeling genuinely appreciated increases our sense of security. When there are



strained relationships, one of the most common underlying features is that one or both persons involved feel that their value is at risk. There is an underlying fear that they are not good enough, that they are not needed, or that they have no worth. This nagging question leads us to try to control other people in ways that destroy our relationships because we are trying to force them to recognize our value and give us the approval we seek.

Consistent acts of appreciation and encouragement is like a maintenance plan for your relationships. These acts reinforce the bedrock of your most important relationships by establishing trust and respect between you and those closest to you. If you have not built something into your day-to-day interactions that reaffirms your value, respect and trust in one another, the demands of facing difficult

times can bankrupt a relationship.

Incorporating encouragement into your relationships may involve taking risks on your part, as you face the possibility that your encouragement may be rejected. If you have not had a history of offering encouragement to others, at first your attempts to do so may be met with skepticism. They may question your motives. However, the key is to be genuine and consistent in your efforts. Over time, your attitude of appreciation for what others add to the quality of your life will become a normal way of life for you. They will see your sincerity and will eventually accept your encouragement with the grace it was intended.

