

### **A Little Encouragement Goes a Long Way**

*"Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing." – Bible*

*"Correction does much, but encouragement does more." – Johann Wolfgang von Goethe*

George and Mary were an ordinary couple. They lived an ordinary life with ordinary jobs. They struggled to deal with all the challenges of life, just like any other ordinary couple.

They were ordinary in another way as well – they argued and criticized each other. So their marriage was surviving, but not really happy. Then George did an extraordinary thing

"You know, Mary, I've got a magic chest full of socks and underclothes. I want to thank you for keeping the drawers full all these years."

Mary was baffled! "What do you want, George?"

"Nothing. I just want you to know I appreciate you."

George's strange behavior didn't stop. A few days later he made another extraordinary comment to Mary.

"Mary, thank you for recording so many correct entries in the check book. I know it's hard to keep everything straight with all you've got going."

Now Mary was really puzzled. George had always complained in the past when she made one incorrect entry.

I could continue this scenario, which by the way is based on a true story and has a happy ending. See Jo Ann Larsen's article in "Night Light" by James Dobson for more details.

The point is clear. As the Bible says, "Like apples of gold in settings of silver is a word spoken in right circumstances."

Dr. Greg Smalley tells of running his first marathon. He began having severe cramping in his legs as he neared the end. He wasn't sure he could finish. Then his wife Erin, who had been watching on the sidelines, came over and joined him as they walked and ran together across the finish line. Quoting Dr. Smalley, "Erin said something I'll never forget: 'I believe in you!'"

Again quoting Dr. Smalley, "One of the greatest gifts you can give your mate is to believe in his or her dreams. As the pressures of life intensify, sometimes the difference between going after a

dream and remaining passive is having someone say, ‘I believe in you!’”

The positive impact of encouragement on a marriage is nothing short of miraculous, whether we are talking about the daily routine or finishing a marathon.

Marriage Moment.org has the following suggestions for encouraging one another.

First of all, accept one another. We all know we aren’t perfect and sometimes we feel like we need a major overhaul. But we do want our spouse to love us even with all of our mistakes and character flaws. Unconditional love says we are accepted where we are as we are. The relationship is not performance-oriented. This unconditional love has the tendency to move us forward in the direction we know we should go.

Secondly, we must communicate confidence in our spouse. They must know that we believe in them. This doesn’t mean we are blind to all their faults. It means that we trust them. This may be challenging at times, but trust is kind of like faith – you have to exercise it to see the results. And that may mean walking through some valleys on the way to the mountain top.

Next, we must recognize effort. We must look for the good and not the bad. There is an adage that says “you can expect what you inspect.” Each day take the time to look for and recognize the good things your spouse has done. Not necessarily just to make you happy – that isn’t really the goal. The goal is to encourage your spouse on the journey to their dreams – daily and for a lifetime.

Finally, focus on strengths. We need to be aware of weaknesses so they don’t become barriers. However, God has given each of us certain strengths that He expects us to develop and use. The weaknesses will become less important as we move forward in our strengths.

*The Family and Marriage Coalition of Aiken, Inc. (FAMCO) provides resources for you to succeed in your marriage and families. Roger Rollins, Executive Director, FAMCO, 640-4689, rogerrollins@aikenfamco.com, www.aikenfamco.com.*