

Women's Emphasis Day June 9, 2001

Resource Packet

“A Woman With a Vision of the Mission”

**Written by Waveney Martinborough
Women's Ministries Director
Inter-American Division**

Worship Service Suggestions

- Opening Hymn:** #4 or #12 (Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal) or any hymn of praise to God.
Worship is all about praising God.
- Scripture:** Psalm 95:1-6. "A Song of Praise"
- Closing Hymn:** #359 "Hark the voice of Jesus calling."

A Song of Praise (Psalm 95:1-6, Today's English Version)

- Leader:** Come, let us praise the Lord!
- Women:** Let us sing for joy to God, who protects us!
Let us come before Him with thanksgiving
And sing joyful songs of praise.
- Men:** For the Lord is a mighty God,
A mighty King over all the gods
He rules over the whole earth,
From the deepest caves to the highest hills.
- Youth:** He rules over the sea, which He made;
The land also, which he Himself formed.
- Leader & Children:** Come, let us bow down and worship Him;
Let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker!
- All:** He is our God;
We are the people He cares for,
The flock for which He provides.
- Leader:** Come, let us praise the Lord! Listen today to what He says!

*(Note to Women's Ministries Coordinator: Remember to include
the children's story time)*

May God bless you all!

OUTLINE OF SERMON

“A Woman With a Vision of the Mission”

I Attention

- * Story of the shoe salesman
- * Introduction of topic—A Woman with a Vision of the Mission
- * Areas of topic—The Mission, The Response, The Vision, The Result

II The Mission (Esther 4:1-4, 10; Matthew 28:19,20)

- * Mordecai’s grief
- * Esther’s concern
- * Mordecai shares Haman’s plan to destroy all the Jews in the Persian Empire. (Esther 4:10). This empire consisted of 127 provinces stretching from India to Ethiopia (Esther 1:1). The map shows that it included the whole of Palestine, including Jerusalem. (SDA Bible Commentary Vol 3, p 481). *(This is important because it shows the great controversy at work—the plan of the devil to prevent God’s plan of salvation. No need to mention at this point, reference will be made of it later in the sermon)*

A Mordecai defines Esther’s mission— you need to go to the King and plead for your people.

B The church has a mission.

C Women’s Ministries mission is to all women in the home, church, and community. It is:

- to the illiterate—women who are denied the joy of reading scripture.
- to those in poverty—one of the causes of prostitution.
- to the abused—women who are victims of domestic violence, incest, rape and battering.
- to the talented and educated—theirs is the challenge to share their knowledge with others.

D Commission of Jesus found in Matthew 28:19, 20.

- commission not gender biased.
- “going in the world” does not necessarily mean leaving home, but making oneself available to do the will of God.
- like the parts of the body each member has a part in this mission. The challenge is to discover what that part is and do it to glorify God.

III The “Not Enough” Response (Esther 4:11; 2Corinthians 12:9,10)

A Esther’s negative response. “I can’t do it. The king will chop off my head if I approach him uninvited. Had not seen the king in 30 days. Maybe I am not good enough.”

B We women can sympathize with Esther.

- We are reluctant to leave the comforts of our homes, we feel insecure, and think that the mission is impossible.

- We suffer from the “not enough” syndrome. We think we are not good enough, etc. In essence we do not have what it takes.
- C** Take courage from a statement made by a coach to losing team—“Do not let what you cannot do prevent you from doing what you can do.”
- 2 Corinthians 12:9, 10 tells us that “it is when I am weak then am I strong.”
 - It is in the strength of Jesus that our weakness can be made strong.
 - God uses ordinary people to do extraordinary things.
 - We might not be able to do the big things, but we can do the little things.
- D** Reasons for “not enough” response:
- We base our esteem on comparing ourselves with others.
 - What do you look at when you meet another woman for the first time? We look at the face, dress, ask about their work, the children, and the work they do. And think we do not measure up.
- E** When we accept Jesus into our lives, it is who we are and our relationship with Him that counts. We are complete in Him; He defines our worth.
- God accepts us just as we are. When we realize He accepts us, we are ready to accept ourselves and accept others.

IV The Vision (Esther 4:13, 14)

- A** Mordecai’s response to Esther’s “I can’t do it” message:
- did not rebuke—you need to be more committed.
 - did not make her feel guilty—remember how I cared for you as an orphan.
 - did not focus on her abilities—you are intelligent and loved by the people.
- Mordecai’s wise response focused on the person and promises of God. This is what he said in essence. (*Esther 4:13,14*)
- My child, do not imagine that you in the king’s palace will escape any more than all the Jews. For if you keep silent and do nothing, the Jews will be delivered by some other way, but you would not be a part of it. So Esther you could seize the opportunity to be used by God, or miss the glorious chance altogether. And yet, who knows that it is for this very purpose you were made queen instead of Vashti.*
- B** Esther realizes the eternal implications as she read the message. She caught a vision of the mission.
- The promised Messiah was to come through the Jews. Haman, spurred on by the archenemy, was trying to destroy not only God’s people, but also God’s plan of salvation.
- She caught a vision of God’s plan for her life.
- C** When she looked at her life in the context of God’s purposes she was transformed.
- The softness of the palace was not longer comfortable.
 - When we look at our lives in the context of God’s purposes, we too will be transformed from fear to faith.

- D** Personal experience of God's working His plan for my life (personalize or refer to author).
- I asked God to reveal His plan for my life after hearing that He has a plan for everyone's life.
 - His plan was seen in His provision for my college and university education.
 - He directed me to my husband.
 - He took me through the vicissitudes—the ups and downs—of life.
 - His plan includes difficult experiences with the assurance that He will uphold with His strong right hand.
- E** Blessings of Women's Ministries in the lives of women:
- *Women pray for victory over besetting sins.*
 - *Are happy, enthusiastic and encouraged by attending spiritual retreats.*
 - *Value themselves, discover and use their gifts to benefit others and glorify God.*
 - *Visit female prisons and lead prisoners to accepting Jesus.*
 - *Benefit from literacy program by being able to read the Bible. (In one Conference 25 women had broad smiles on their faces as they received their certificate of completion for the first level).*
 - *Involvement in giving Bible studies, conducting evangelistic programs with good results.*
 - *Operate skills training and family renewal centers.*
 - *Husbands praise Women's Ministries for changes in their wives.*

I believe that this ministry is here for "such a time as this."

Ellen White agrees when she says:

"God has a work for women as well as for men. They (women) may take their places in His work at this crisis, and He will work through them... they can do in families a work that men cannot do...they can come close to the hearts of those whom men cannot reach. Their labor is needed."
(*Evangelism* pp 464-465)

As we see Women's Ministry as a ministry and not as a movement, and look at it in the context of God's purposes, we will see the potential of this beautiful ministry.

- F** Esther's resolution after understanding God's purpose. In essence she said

"Enough of this easy life; it is time for me to put my name on the line. I believe in the living God and I am ready to stand for my people, and if I perish, I perish" (Esther 4:16 last part)

As I read those words I said to myself, "What courage! What self-sacrifice!"

I also think of Jesus. I see the Son of God struggling with a decision in the Garden of Gethsemane. I hear Him pray, "O my Father, if it be possible let this cup pass from Me." I see Him clutching the ground for support as your destiny and mine hung in the balance. I hear the devil whisper in His ear, "You do not have to die. Go back to heaven where the angels adore You; these people here do not care about You." I see Him looking down the corridors of time and seeing you and me and the redeemed of all the ages needing salvation, I hear Him say as He finished His prayer

“nevertheless not my will, but Your will be done.” (Desire of Ages p 687)

Then I want to embrace Him and say, “My Jesus I love You, because You first loved me.”

- G** Esther’s request to Mordecai to have all the Jews fast 3 days and 3 nights with her. She needed the support of all the Jews—men, women and children alike.

This tells me that *“The work of God needs the combined effort of both male and female, of every age, of every race, of every color, of every language for the finishing of His work.”*

Esther 4 closes with these words, “And Mordecai went and did according to all that Esther commanded him.” (Esther 4:17)

Won’t it be a wonderful day when we will not be paralyzed by the “who did what or who would get the recognition ”disease? Yes it would be wonderful when we, like Mordecai, Esther, Hatach and the maids— everyone in our churches— work together with the Holy Spirit to accomplish the one goal, the speedy return of our King Jesus! That’s the vision of the mission!

V Mission Accomplished (Esther 5, 6, 7)

- A** Esther puts faith into action after three days of fasting.
- She walks with total God-confidence dressed in her royal robes and sets out to go before the king.
 - The king sees her and holds out the golden scepter.
 - We do not have to wait to enter the throne room of the King of the universe. He invites us to “come boldly unto the throne of grace—and obtain mercy.”
 - Great and wonderful things happen when we women pray.
 - King invited Esther to state her request with the promise “I will give you whatever you want, even to half of my kingdom.” (Esther 5:3)
 - She could have told about Haman, but she had a plan. God had given her a plan.

God will give you a plan for this ministry when you first wait upon Him.

- B** God’s invisible sovereignty is evident in the events of the drama even though His name is not mentioned in the entire book of Esther.
- The events of the drama in quick succession:
 - ✓ The banquet invitations to the king and Haman.
 - ✓ *Haman’s anger at meeting Mordecai*
 - ✓ *Advice of his wife to build the gallows and return to the palace that night.*
 - ✓ *The king’s insomnia and reading of the history of his reign.*
 - ✓ *Mordecai’s exaltation.*
 - ✓ *Haman’s humiliation.*
 - ✓ *Second banquet.*
 - ✓ Esther’s passionate plea for her life and that of her people
 - ✓ *Haman’s death.*
 - ✓ *Celebration of the Jews.*

When the situation seemed hopeless, God showed that He was not helpless.

When Esther accomplished her mission, God accomplished His purpose.

C *I do not know where you are on your own journey. You might be sighing instead of singing. You might be wondering what good can come from all that you have to live with in your home. You can't handle the children, your marriage lacks harmony, the pressures seem to have no purpose, and your situation seems hopeless. Take courage my sister/brother and be assured that whether you see God or not, He is at work in your life at this very moment.*

I do not know where this ministry is in your church. Whether it exists or not, I pray that you will understand God's purpose for your lives and for this ministry. Ask Him to help you catch a vision of your mission. And as He reveals that plan for your life and for this ministry, He will work with you to accomplish His purpose. Is that what you want? If that is your desire and prayer, would you raise your hands with me? And if you are not yet baptized and would like to work with God to accomplish His purpose in your life, would you raise your hands with me? May God bless you to this end.

Prayer of commitment

(Note to presenter: As the Spirit spoke to your heart in the presentation of this sermon, as it did to mine in the preparation, I invite you to offer your sincere prayer of commitment for yourself and those in the congregation. Remember to pray for those not yet baptized. Try to find a way to get their names, addresses etc. for follow up). God bless you!

I pray that we will all learn to wait upon God and allow Him to work with you in accomplishing His purpose. Is that your prayer also? (If you like you can raise your hand to heaven and ask the congregation to raise their hands with you)

May God bless each one of you to this end.

A WOMAN WITH A VISION OF THE MISSION

Attention

You probably heard the story of the young shoe salesman who went to a certain country and soon after sent this message to the manufacturers, "I want to come home. No one here wears shoes." After he returned home they sent another salesman. This time they had to ship order after order. Then he wrote the home office "Everybody here needs shoes." What made the difference? That's right, the vision made the difference.

The Bible is full of stories of great men and women. For our meditation we want to look at the story of a young girl for whom the vision made the difference. The topic "A Woman with a Vision of the Mission". We will examine this topic under four areas—the mission, the "not enough" response, the vision, mission accomplished.

The Mission

Queen Esther was alarmed and distressed. Her adopted father Mordecai was parading in front of the palace in sackcloth and ashes, crying loudly and bitterly. He had refused the new clothes she sent him. (Esther 4:1-4). When she sent her trusted servant to Mordecai, he told him the sad news. All the Jews of the Persian Empire—127 provinces from India to Ethiopia including Jerusalem and the whole of Palestine—were to be killed—yea, annihilated in one day! Haman had promised to pay the king's treasuries 10,000 talents or 2 tons of silver for their destruction. The decree was issued, sealed with the king's ring. (Esther 1:1; 3:10, 13).

Your mission, Esther, is to go in to the king to plead for mercy for your people. (Esther 4:8)

Esther had a God-appointed mission; the church has a mission, Women's ministries has a mission to all women in the home, church, and community. Our mission is to the illiterate. Female illiteracy is linked with infant mortality. So many women are denied the joy and privilege of reading the Word of God. Our mission is to the poor. Poverty is a feminine social disease. One half to one third of women head households. In some countries poverty drives women to prostitution, and in others twelve-year-old girls are sold into prostitution. As a matter of fact, "sex trafficking" is now a lucrative business. Our mission is to the abused. So many women are victims of domestic violence, incest, rape, and battering. Our mission is to the educated and talented, challenging them to share their knowledge and expertise with others. The mission is the same—that is to spread the truth in Jesus name. Our mission is to share the gospel story by our preaching and living, our praying and encouraging, as together we go hand in hand to the kingdom of God.

Jesus gave the commission Himself in Matthew 28:19, 20. "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." Notice that Christ's commission was not gender specific but gender inclusive—that means everybody: men and women. Notice too, that the "going" does not mean leaving home and family; it does mean making us totally available to serve wherever, whenever, and however God directs. Like the parts of a body, each member has a part in this mission. The challenge to each of us is to discover what "our mission" is and do it to the glory of God.

The “*Not Enough*” Response

When Mordecai defined the mission to Esther she replied, “Mordecai, you can’t mean that. This is an impossible mission! You know like everyone else that the king would chop off my head if I go in to him uninvited, unless he holds out the golden scepter. And something else you must know, Cousin Mordecai, I have not seen the king for 30 days. I do not even know if I am still his queen. Maybe I am not ‘good enough’ for the king and he has chosen someone else.” Esther felt insecure. She was afraid. After all, she was only a poor orphan girl. The situation seemed hopeless.

You know we can sympathize with Esther. We want to have friends. We want everyone to like us. We want to feel good about ourselves. Like Esther, our mission seems impossible. Like Esther we all want to feel secure, even though we know that security in this life carries no guarantees. Beauty fades, possessions can be lost, relationships can be broken, and death is always waiting.

Like Esther we are afraid to get involved. Like Esther we exhibit the “not enough” syndrome. I don’t know enough, I am not smart enough, I am not good enough, I am not old enough, I am not young enough, I am not beautiful enough, I don’t have enough time—not enough is the cry. Usually our response is based on the weaknesses we think we have rather than our actual strengths. A famous football coach once told his losing team “Do not let what you cannot do interfere/prevent you from doing what you can do.” Yes, we have our weaknesses, but we also have our strengths. And it is when we are weak then are we strong! (2 Corinthians 12:9,10) Because it is in the strength of Jesus that our weakness can be made strong. God is not looking for your ability, but your availability. God uses ordinary people to do extraordinary things.

So, dear sister, you might not be able to sing, but you can pray. You might not be able to preach a sermon, but you can tell what Jesus did for you. You might not be able to speak in public, but you can lead out in a small group. You might not be the best cook in town, but you can put your arm of love around that lonely, hurting soul and speak a word of encouragement.

Too often we gain our esteem by comparing ourselves with others. What is the first thing you look at when you are introduced to another woman for the first time? You look at the face, the dress, ask about the children and the work they do, and ask what work she does. And you begin to compare. Then conclude that she is better than you. It is wonderful to know that our God accepts us just as we are. He does not look at our faces, the clothes we wear, the jobs we have, where we were born, nor the homes in which we live. He looks at kindness, our response to His love, our willingness to do His will. He has also given gifts and resources to each one of us so that we can make a contribution to our families, to our church, and communities.

When we accept Him into our lives as we have done, it is who we are and our relationship with Him that count. We are complete in Him. He defines our worth. God loves us right now the way we are. And when we know that He accepts us we are able to accept ourselves and accept others.

The Vision

When Esther sent her “I can’t do it” message, wise cousin Mordecai did not rebuke her. He did not say, “You ought to be more committed than that. If you were committed you would not hesitate to take the responsibility. He did not make her feel guilty—remember how I took you in as an orphan. He did not focus on her abilities—you are the one fitted for this mission—you are intelligent, you are loved by the people, you can do it.

Instead, Mordecai focused on the person and promises of God. And I like that, don't you? This is what he said to Esther in essence. (Esther 4:13,14). "My child, do not imagine that you in the king's palace can escape any more than all the Jews. For if you keep silent and do nothing, the Jews will be delivered by some other way, but you would not be a part of it. So, Esther, you could seize the opportunity to be used by God, or miss the glorious chance altogether. And yet who knows that it is for this very purpose you were made queen in place of Vashti."

As Esther read the message from Mordecai, she realized the eternal implications. The promised Messiah was to come through the Jews. Haman, spurred on by our archenemy, was trying to destroy not only God's people, but also God's plan of salvation. It was all part of the great controversy in which we are all players. She caught a vision of the mission and God's plan for her life.

God had a plan for Esther, and when she looked at her life in the context of God's purposes she was transformed. The softness of the palace was no longer comfortable. God also has a plan for your life. And when like Esther we look at our lives in the context of God's purposes we too will be transformed from fear to faith.

I was still very young when I asked God to reveal to me His plan for my life after hearing that God has a plan for each life. That plan took me to college and university with tuition paid. It directed me to my husband. It took me through the various twists and turns, the hills and the valleys of life. Even now as I pass through a very difficult experience of my life I accept it as part of His plan, and am assured that He will hold me with His strong right hand.

The more I work in Women's Ministries, the more I see the positive effects of this ministry in the lives of the women. At retreats I hear women praying for victory over besetting sins. They confess how happy and encouraged they are after attending spiritually enriching programs. They value themselves and are discovering and using their gifts to the benefit of others and the glory of God. They are visiting female prisons and leading prisoners to accept Jesus. They are able to read the Bible after attending literacy programs. In one of our Conferences tears came to my eyes as I saw the expressions of joy on the faces of 25 women as they received their certificates after completing the first level of the literacy program. Many more women are involved in giving Bible studies, even conducting their own evangelistic programs and are blessed with good results. They operate skills training and family renewal centers. I hear of husbands who praise this ministry for the changes they have seen in their wives. Time does not permit me to tell you more except to say that I believe that God has placed this ministry and all the other ministries for "such a time as this." Ellen White endorses it.

"The Lord has a work for women as well as for men. They may take their places in His work at this crisis, and He will work through them....They can do in families a work that men cannot do....They can come close to the hearts of those whom men cannot reach. Their labor is needed." (Evangelism p 464-465)

As we see Women's Ministry as a ministry and not as a movement, and look at it in the context of God's purposes, we will see the potential of this beautiful ministry.

With this new understanding of God's purpose Esther thinks, "Enough of this easy life; it is time for me to put my name on the line. I believe in the living God and I am ready to stand for my people, and if I perish I perish!" (Esther 4:16 last part paraphrase). This was Esther's finest hour. As I read those words I said to myself, "What courage! What self-sacrifice!"

Then I think about Jesus. I see Him in the Garden of Gethsemane. I see the Son of God struggling with a decision. I hear Him pray, "Oh My Father, if it be possible let this cup pass from Me." I see Him clutching the ground for support as your destiny and mine hung in the balance. I

hear the devil whisper in His ear, “You do not have to die. Go back to Your Father; these people here do not care about You.” But then as He looked down the corridors of time and saw you and me and the redeemed of all the ages, I hear Him say as He finished His prayer, “Nevertheless not my will, but Your will be done.” Then I want to embrace Him and say, “My Jesus, I love You because You first loved me.”

Not only did Esther make up her mind, she requested Mordecai to have all the Jews fast with her and her maids for 3 days and 3 nights. She realized that she could not operate alone. She needed to wait on the Lord! She needed the support of all the Jews—men, women and children alike. This tells me that *the work of God needs the combined effort of both male and female of every age, of every race, of every color, of every language for the finishing of His work.*

Esther 4 closes with these words, “And Mordecai did according to all that Esther commanded him.” (Esther 4:17). Won’t it be wonderful if we can unite our efforts without being paralyzed with the “who did what or who would get the recognition” disease? Yes, it will be wonderful when we like Mordecai, Esther, Hatach, and the maids—everyone in all our churches work together with the Holy Spirit for the one goal, the speedy return of our King Jesus! *That’s the vision of the mission!*

Mission Accomplished

The 3 days of fasting were over. It was now time for Esther to put her faith into action. Faith without works is dead. There is a time to pray and a time to work. It was with confidence that Esther dressed in her royal robes, set out to go before the king. She was not afraid because she was walking in total God confidence. As she waited in the inner court looking more beautiful than ever, the king saw her and at once held out the golden scepter.

You know, I am so glad that we do not have to wait for God to hold out His scepter. We can enter the throne room of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords at any time. We can talk to God in prayer at any time. He invites us my dear sisters/brothers to “enter boldly unto the throne of grace...and obtain mercy.” Great things happen when we women pray.

You know the story. At the king’s invitation Esther approached, and bowing the knee, touched the golden scepter. “What is your request, Queen Esther?” the king asked. “I would give you whatever you want, even to half of my kingdom.” (Esther 4:) Think of it. With such an invitation Esther could have told the king about Haman and his decree to destroy the Jews. But she did not. She had a plan. God will give you a plan for this ministry in your church when first you wait on Him. He will reveal His plan for your life if you ask Him.

It is true that in this story God’s name is not mentioned, but you can see His invisible sovereignty as this drama unfolds. Don’t you get excited as you remember the chain of events? The banquet invitations to the king and Haman; Haman’s anger at meeting Mordecai; the advice of Haman’s wife to build the gallows and return to the palace that night; the king’s insomnia and reading of the history of his reign; Mordecai’s exaltation and Haman’s humiliation; the second banquet and Esther’s passionate plea for her life and that of her people. And then it is all over with Haman’s death and celebration of the Jews.

When the situation looked hopeless, God showed that He was not helpless. When Esther accomplished her mission, God accomplished His purpose.

I do not know where are you on your own journey. You might be sighing rather than singing. You might be wondering what good can come from all that you have to live with in your home. You can’t handle the children, your marriage lacks harmony, the pressures seem to have no

purpose, and your situation seems hopeless. Take courage my sister and be assured that whether you see God or not, He is at work in your life at this very moment.

I do not know where this ministry is in your church. Whether it exists or not, I pray that you will understand God's purpose for your lives and for this ministry. Ask Him to help you catch a vision of your mission. And as He reveals that plan for your life and this ministry, He will work with you in accomplishing His purpose. Is that what you want? If that is your desire and prayer would you raise your hands with me? If you are not yet baptized and would like to work with God to accomplish His purpose in your life, would you raise your hands with me? May God bless you to this end.

Prayer of commitment

(Note to the presenter: As the Spirit spoke to your heart in the presentation of this sermon as it did to me in the preparation, I invite you to offer your sincere prayer of commitment for yourself and the congregation. Remember to mention in your prayer those not yet baptized. Try to find a way to get their names and addresses etc). God bless you!

Mini-Seminar: How to Be an Encourager

Leader

Have you ever had the experience of feeling down emotionally, and then someone sent or said something to make you feel better? And you said something like “You made my day”, or “God sent you at the right time!” Then because you felt better, you greeted everyone cheerfully and walked with a spring in your step? We all get down sometimes. Some people are able to shake it off quickly while others cannot. And so we need an encourager.

According to a legend, the devil advertised his tools for sale. When the buyers assembled, there was a “Not for Sale” sign on an odd shaped tool. When they asked about that tool, the devil replied, “I can spare any other tool, but not this one. It is the most useful one that I have. It is called discouragement. With it I can work my way into hearts that I cannot gain access by any other means. When I get this tool into a woman’s or man’s heart, the way is open for me to plant anything there I want.”

Are you thinking what I am thinking? If the devil can use his tool of discouragement so effectively, we can use encouragement to help others. My thoughts exactly. To encourage someone is so simple. It can be included as one of the branches of this ministry.

What does the word encouragement mean? It means to “inspire with courage, spirit, and hope.” (Webster’s Dictionary).

Read Malachi 3:16. What does the Bible have to say about encouragement? Ellen White’s comments on this text reads:

To the Christian is given the joy of gathering rays of eternal light from the throne of glory, and of reflecting these rays ...on the paths of those with whom he/she associates. By speaking words of encouragement, of grateful praise and kindly cheer, s/he may strive to make those around her/him better, to elevate them, to point them to heaven and glory.... (SDA Commentary, Vol. 4, p 1183)

Other E. G. White comments:

Parents should be much at home. By precept and example they should teach their children the love and fear of God; teach them to be intelligent, social, affectionate...By giving their children love, sympathy, and encouragement at home, parents may provide for them a safe and welcome retreat from many of the world’s temptations.
(Adventist Home, p 185)

Kind, cheerful, and encouraging words will prove more effective than the most healing medicines. These will bring courage to the heart of the desponding and discouraged, and the happiness and sunshine brought into the family by kind acts and encouraging words will repay the effort tenfold.
(Adventist Home, p. 217)
We should give encouragement to one another. (Counsels on Health, p 242-4)

It costs nothing to give encouragement, by little attentions (My Life Today, p 152)

Who was the encourager in the Bible? Whom did he encourage?
(Acts 4:36; 9:26 - 27; 11:22-26; 12:25; 13:5-6,13; 15:37-39.)

(Divide into groups of ten to engage in two activities. Each group will need to choose a group leader, and maybe a scribe to write the answers to the questions.)

Activity 1: Questionnaire

Give one set of questions to each group to discuss. Allow 10 minutes for group discussion and 5 minutes for sharing the answers. (Let them stay in their groups for the other activity)

Activity 2: Encouragement notes

(Leader. This is fun. Let's start encouraging one another right now.)

Stick a half-sheet of paper or card on the back of each person in the group. Provide each one with a pen or pencil. Each one in the group is to write one-sentence encouragement notes, words of appreciation, or something you admire about the individual on the back of as many as they can in the group. The leader of the group is to make sure that each person has at least six encouraging statements/messages. Allow time for each person to read his or her encouragement card.

Questions for Group Discussion

Group 1

Read to group:

“And now, friends, we ask you to honor those leaders who work so hard for you, who have been given the responsibility of urging and guiding you in your obedience. Overwhelm them with appreciation and love.” (1 Thessalonians 5:12-13 first part. Message)

Questions

1. How can we encourage the pastor of our church?
2. What can we do to make her/his work easier and more satisfying?
3. How can we extend these ideas to encourage the elders of our church and the other lay leaders?
4. Whom else can we add to this list? (Look below for some suggestions)

(Spouses, children of the pastors, elders, and other lay leaders).

Questions for Group Discussion

Group 3.

Read the following text:

“Be patient with each person, attentive to individual needs. And be careful that when you get on each other’s nerves you don’t snap at each other.” (1 Thessalonians 5:14 last part, 15. Message)

Questions

1. How can we as wives, and mothers find balance between our own needs, the needs of our families, and finding time to help others?

2. What can we do to form deeper bonds of friendship with one another, to build one another up instead of destroying each other with criticism?

Questions for Group Discussion

Group 4

Read the following:

“Look for the best in each other, and always do your best to bring it out. Be cheerful no matter what; pray all the time; thank God no matter what happens. This is the way God wants you who belong to Christ Jesus to live.” (Thessalonians 5:15-18. Message)

Questions

1. Think about people in your church with whom you find it hardest to build friendships. Think about their best features, and then think how you can show personal appreciation for these qualities. Share some of your ideas.

2. What do you think it means to be cheerful no matter what?

3. What can you do to show your thanks more freely to those around you and encourage others as they have encouraged you?

4. Share any experience of encouragement you have received from others.

Closing Moments

The story is told of a young woman who rode the bus daily. At one place where the bus moved slowly, she could see into a room where an elderly woman was convalescing. For several weeks she saw the lady in the same position, so one day she learned the woman's name and sent her a get-well card, signing it, "Just a young woman who rides the bus."

A week later as she rode the bus on the way home through the dusk she noted that the bed was empty and in the window was a sign that was illuminated by a table lamp. The sign read, "Bless you."

Are you thinking what I am thinking? Yes there are many people in our church and in our communities who seem to be imprisoned by the dark fog of broken hearts. Many things happen to cause this dark cloud—loss of spouse, or job; betrayal by a friend; sickness in the family, financial challenges, etc. As we spread the sunshine of encouragement some of the rays will linger with us.

A Word of Encouragement from Thessalonica

And now friends, we ask you to honor those leaders who work so hard for you, who have been given the responsibility of urging and guiding you in your obedience. Overwhelm them with appreciation and love

Get along among yourselves, each of you doing your part.

Our counsel is that you warn the freeloaders (idle) to get a move on. Gently encourage the stragglers (timid), and reach out for the exhausted, pulling them to their feet.

Be patient with each person, attentive to individual needs. And be careful that when you get on each other's nerves you don't snap at each other.

Look for the best in each other, and always do your best to bring it out.

Be cheerful no matter what; pray all the time; thank God no matter what happens.

This is the way God wants you, who belong to Christ Jesus, to live.

(1 Thessalonians 5:12-21, Message)

An old man with not too much to offer said the following prayer: "**Lord we can't hold much but we can overflow a lot.**"

Closing hymn: "Blest Be the Tie That Binds" or "Bind Us Together in Love".

Closing prayer

(Adapted from Family Ministries resource material)

Simple Ideas for the Encourager

These are gifts you can give all year, at any time. Try them at home, work, or at school, and see what happens.

1. Praise God for one of His mighty works
2. Say “Thank you” graciously. Smile
3. Say “You look wonderful!” and mean it
4. Rub a tired back. (That feels good)
5. Say “Good morning” even if it isn’t
6. Place a surprise phone call
7. Mail an unexpected and caring letter to an old friend
8. Hum a happy tune when you are feeling down
9. Ignore a rude remark
10. Invite an elderly person to Sabbath lunch
11. Send a “Thinking of you” card to a missing church member/shut-in
12. Say “Please”
13. Play catch with a little child
14. Take a box of homemade cookies to work
15. Pass on some good news, not the gossip
16. Catch your teenager doing something right and say, “Great job!”
17. Help someone figure out a solution instead of giving advice
18. Encourage a youth to do her/his best
19. Examine your demands on others. Give some of them up
20. Read something uplifting to someone
21. Give someone a flower from your garden
22. Free yourself of envy and malice
23. Listen
24. Never miss an opportunity to be affectionate to your loved ones

25. Give a warm hug to your spouse and your children
26. Keep a confidence
27. Share an experience and offer hopefulness
28. Look for something beautiful in one person everyday
29. Tell a bedtime story to a little one, or ask the little one to tell you a story
30. Give a blanket to a homeless person
31. Allow someone to make a mistake
32. Talk to a lonely child
33. Mail/send someone a poem
34. Point out the beauty and wonder of nature to those you love
35. Say, "I love you" first to your spouse and children. Say it often
36. Take the children to the park
37. Forgive an old grudge
38. Try to understand a teenager. Try again and again. Succeed
39. Save the "Want Ads" for a job hunter
40. Serve breakfast in bed to Mom and Dad (for the young)
41. Share a dream (for the young)
42. Wash the dishes when it is not your turn (for the young)

(Adapted from Chicken Soup for the Soul)