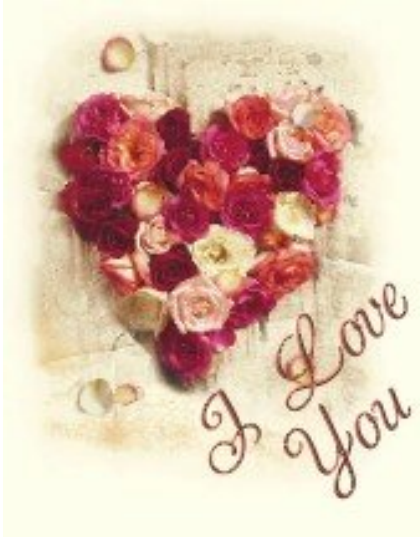


Melva's Corner



Need Encouragement? (Be A Friend)

November 26, 2007

**Central Truth: I'm eager to be a person
who can listen sensitively . . .**

People seem to respond quickly when I write candid messages about spiritual struggles, relationship pain, times of believing you're just not good enough to be saved and just about anything else that "rings true" deep down in the soul. When you have these kinds of thoughts . . . you need a friend.

Most people like the prospect of having a "spiritual friend" who tries to be compassionate and understanding to those who have to deal with a lot of "stuff" in their lives — especially spiritual matters. I'm eager to be a person who can listen sensitively and walk alongside another in mutual respect and encouragement.

All of us have a profound longing for friendship — a poignant searching for the kinds of things that only a close and lasting relationship can bring. People desire that kind of connection that makes their lives significant to someone else.

But I've found sadly that often people don't know how to make friends because they are afraid to risk themselves to another person. If you fear opening up to someone else, remember that others are just as fearful in this area as you are.

The difficulty in developing spiritual friendships actually begins with the fact that relationships such as these must weather many challenges. Some challenges are: so many changes in life's circumstances, limited energy, not enough time, people's changing emotional needs and the perceived travel distance between friends.

Through the years, God has blessed me enormously. I think immediately of the wonderful people He has placed in my life along the way. And I can be a heavy load sometimes so I am very grateful for the people around me.

Sometimes we all need a word of encouragement. We need a friend to help us shoulder the load . . . because we face all kinds of issues today. There are ordinary issues: nagging illnesses make us feel not quite ourselves; our jobs become boring and repetitive; we worry about our children; we don't feel appreciated and so on!

Then there are real issues, serious ones: the tumor is malignant; the company is downsizing and you lose your job; your single daughter is expecting; your parents have to move in with you; your faith is challenged and you begin to wonder if you've lost it altogether.

How do we live as Christians in times like these? How do we live bold, confident lives in an age that is increasingly neutral or even hostile to Christian faith? How do we keep our faith and keep our children faithful in the face of the greed and violence of a culture rushing madly after pleasure?

What we need is a word of encouragement. And I am just the friend to bring it to you.

A Timely Word

This introduction points you to a book that gives encouragement — the biblical book of Hebrews. Hebrews is one of the neglected books of the New Testament. We neglect it, perhaps, because it speaks of things so foreign to our experience: sacrifices, high priests, tabernacles and covenants. It tells stories of obscure characters like Melchizedek. We're not even sure what kind of biblical book this is. We place it with the epistles or letters, but it doesn't read like a letter. We don't even know who wrote it. Why study such a strange book?

Because we live in strange times — sometimes difficult times. We need strength. We want encouragement. That's exactly what Hebrews supplies. Near the end of Hebrews, the author tells his readers, **"I urge you, brothers, to bear with my word of encouragement, for I have written to you briefly"** (13:22). The author of Hebrews writes to Christians who live in troublesome

times. Their world, like ours, was increasingly hostile to Christianity. They, too, feared for their children. They, too, faced sickness of body and soul.

Hebrews is written to encourage them — and us. All the things mentioned in Hebrews — angels, Moses, Melchizedek, priests, heroes, tabernacles, sacrifices, and covenants — are there to point us to the greatest encourager of all: Jesus Christ. No matter what we face individually or as the people of God, Christ has faced it before us. He is there as the pioneer of our faith, who blazes the trail for us. He is the champion who has won the victory for us. He is there, suffering with us in our hour of deepest despair. He is there, waiting for us to join Him in glory. No matter what we face, no matter what trouble comes, Jesus is always there for us. That is the message of Hebrews: a word of encouragement. And that is exactly what we need to hear.

Scriptural References:

“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. (Romans 15:13)