

## LIFE WITH GOD IN RECOVERY: Encouragement

***Those of us who are strong and able in the faith need to step in and lend a hand to those who falter, and not just do what is most convenient for us. Strength is for service, not status. Each one of us needs to look after the good of the people around us, asking ourselves, "How can I help?"*** (Romans 15:1-2 MSG)

When we love and care for a person our desire is for them to have the very best in life. When our friends or loved ones are struggling with a problem we need to take the time to talk with them and try to understand what is happening in their lives. Sometimes just discussing a problem may help the person find a solution and possibly resolve the issue. Sometimes the problem is not easy to resolve quickly and we can encourage the person by following up on our discussion with a phone call, a note, another meeting or whatever it takes to help the person get through the troublesome time.

Showing others that we truly care about them is encouragement to them whether the problem is resolved or not. Life will always have ups and downs. That is part of living and each of us needs to come to terms with that fact. We, our friends, and our family are not unique in having problems. Jesus said, ***"In this godless world you will continue to experience difficulties. But take heart! I've conquered the world."*** (John 16:33 MSG)

As we mature in faith and overcome our own struggles we can then be part of a support team network for others. In the same way we have been supported through our ongoing recovery process we can encourage others attempting to walk the same journey. A person who is on a known road can help those who are trying to find their way. God invites us to love others as we have been loved. Love goes beyond mere words. Sometimes it is spoken in silence, particularly when we don't condemn those who are asking for our help. ***Dear brothers and sisters, if another believer is overcome by some sin, you who are godly should gently and humbly help that person back onto the right path. And be careful not to fall into the same temptation yourself. Share each other's burdens, and in this way obey the law of Christ. If you think you are too important to help someone, you are only fooling yourself. You are not that important.*** (Galatians 6:1-3 NLT)

God invites us to be people who make a difference. How do we do that? We start by being the unique person God created us to be. We affirm that God created us with a plan for our lives and that we are part of the overall plan of God in this world. Like a piece of a jig-saw puzzle, if we do not take our place, then the picture is not complete. Every believer has been given a gift by the Holy Spirit to build up the body of Christ. Can I cook? Can I clean? Can I encourage? Can I teach? Can I listen? Can I pray? Can I paint? Can I write? Can I organize? Can I smile? Can I hug? Can I play a musical instrument? Can I say "Thank you". Can I compliment? What can I do today, with what I have today, that will bless others and give me deep satisfaction?

***In this way we are like the various parts of a human body. Each part gets its meaning from the body as a whole, not the other way around. The body we're talking about is Christ's body of chosen people. Each of us finds our meaning and function as a part of his body. But as a chopped-off finger or cut-off toe we wouldn't amount to much, would we? So since we find ourselves fashioned into all these excellently formed and marvelously functioning parts in Christ's body, let's just go ahead and be what we were made to be, without enviously or pridefully comparing ourselves with each other, or trying to be something we aren't.*** (Romans 12:4-6 MSG)

While it is true that failure and disappointment and hurt in our lives may have removed some of our God given desire to serve others, God is always in the business of renewing us to "mint" condition. As we remember demeaning and discouraging words we may have been the object of, God can help us resolve in our heart to be a person whose words always build up and encourage others. Through the forgiveness and healing we have received, we can reach out and be an understanding comfort. As we do this, God's wonderful purpose and plan for our lives is restored. ***God is our merciful Father and the source of all comfort. He comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort others. When they are troubled, we will be able to give them the same comfort God has given us.*** (2 Corinthians 1:3-4 NLT)

Do you remember a time when someone encouraged you to have hope, to keep going, to do the right thing? We who are living with God in recovery should consider how we might be that person to encourage someone else. Look around you; assess how you might be able to help someone, not in a co-dependent way, but for their good. If you live in community, let your light shine so that others may find you approachable. Just as seasoning brings out the best flavor in food we should have a positive effect wherever we may be. A famous man, St. Francis of Assisi says it in a prayer this way:

***Lord, make me an instrument of your peace,  
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;  
where there is injury, pardon;  
where there is doubt, faith;  
where there is despair, hope;  
where there is darkness, light;  
where there is sadness, joy;  
O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled  
as to console;  
to be understood as to understand;  
to be loved as to love.  
For it is in giving that we receive;  
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned;  
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.***

### Questions For Reflection and Discussion

1. What have others done for you that encouraged you?
2. What's your experience of living as a person described in the Prayer of St. Francis?