

## Words of Encouragement

Last week we talked about the Olympics as we reflected on good, better, and best. One church member even texted me when she heard a commentator say, “That was a good routine, but he could do better by...” It is nice to know that some people are listening!

The Olympic Closing Ceremonies will be shown this afternoon. As we watched the Olympics, I enjoyed watching the crowds, especially when they showed fellow Olympians cheering on their teammates in individual events or other US teams. What was even more wonderful to watch was when USA team members were enthusiastically applauded a good performance by someone from another country. Even on the medal podium, both Simone Biles and Suni Lee bowed to Rebecca Andrade in deference to her floor exercise performance in the individuals. Truly, the athletes who do this embody the spirit in which the games were supposed to be played. They also give us the same example of encouragement that we receive from the Apostle Paul in his letter to the Ephesians.

In his letter to the budding church in Ephesus, Paul also includes encouraging words with his exhortations. We are encouraged in many different ways that still ring true for us today. Here are ways that we can be encouraging to others.

The first way we can encourage one another is by removing falsehood and speaking the truth in love. This is one coin with two sides. One side states that we must stop lying to each other, while the other side of the coin says we must speak the truth in a loving manner. Many times we try to avoid conflicts by fudging on the truth. We do not want to hurt the other person's feelings, or so we tell ourselves. Actually, we probably don't want to get involved to the point that we put ourselves at risk. Loving relationships, though, mean that we do put ourselves in the place where we can be hurt for another's welfare.

At the same time we must not be blunt to the extent that we needlessly offend. Love must be our guide. We must ask ourselves what is the most loving way to express the truth.

Another way our passage teaches us to build up others is by forgiving them. Forgiveness means not taking into account the wrongs

we suffer. Forgiveness also involves treating the one who has sinned against us as though he or she has not done anything to us. We can forgive others even if they do not ask for our forgiveness, but full reconciliation occurs only when they admit their wrongs and ask our forgiveness.

Think of the times when we have had to ask for forgiveness. I don't know about you but I can remember how encouraging it was when you received forgiveness. So we must be "tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you."

Another way that Paul shows us how we can encourage others is to walk in love. Our whole attitude and demeanor should be characterized by love. Such a character trait includes putting others before ourselves, wanting and working for the best for and in others, being patient and kind, and hoping and believing in others. Love is an action and not soupy sentimentality. We can encourage others best when we love them most.

The apostle Paul has given us practical instruction into exactly how we can encourage other people. His theme of love is evident in other

letters he had written to other early Churches. Remember, in his first letter to the church in Corinth he wrote, “And these three remain: faith, hope and love. And the greatest of these is love.” Love isn’t always easy but our relationships with each other deserve the greatest effort we can exert. As we continue to strive to be good, or better, or hopefully, the best Christian, we do so through our encouragement of each other in love.

Let us speak the truth in love, forgive others as they forgive us, and to always walk in love.