

APPENDIX 3

Encouragement Ideas

Adapted from *Treasures of Encouragement, Women Helping Women*, by Sharon Better

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

I THESSALONIANS 5:11

Ideas for Older Women:

1. Regularly text or call your grandchildren or children. Texting is a good way to share scriptures and/or how you are praying for them individually. Ask how you can pray for them. Follow up with how you are praying and ask how they are doing. Refuse to give in to hurt if they do not respond. Continue to express your love for them. Be intentional and take responsibility for the relationships.
2. Periodically send cards with a personal note to grandchildren. If you enjoy writing, send a monthly note to each grandchild and share your life, present and past. Email is easy but handwritten letters will be saved and discovered years later as a special gift from beloved grandparents. Trust the Lord to touch their hearts with your love in His time.
3. One of the best places to meet younger women is the church nursery. Volunteer to serve on a regular basis. Pray for the Lord to make you sensitive to the mother that needs encouragement. Bring cards to the nursery so you are prepared to write a personal note to a mom and slip it into the diaper bag.
4. Tell a struggling mother, “This, too, shall pass,” and share a time you noticed what a good parent she is. I remember an older woman encouraging me with these words when our children were young, and I felt like a failure. It’s especially meaningful when a mother tells her daughter she is a good mom. Those few words will stick in her heart for the rest of her life.
5. Pray for the Lord to connect you with a family who doesn’t have grandparents nearby. Slowly but intentionally connect by speaking to the children, inviting the family for dessert or a meal and asking how you can pray for them. If the friendship develops, offer to attend special school and sports events. Surprise the family with snacks for the ride home after church. An older woman in our church regularly gave us a homemade pastry on Sundays. What a treat for a pastor’s family who didn’t get home from church until way past lunchtime. She also prayed for us by name every morning.
6. Be a surrogate grandmother to the pastor’s family, especially if they are far from home. We will always be grateful for the older people in our churches who paid special attention to our young children and demonstrated their unconditional love for our family.

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7. Look for a single mom who needs extra hands on a Sunday morning. As your friendship grows, if you are able, offer to watch her children for a few hours.
8. Send notes to your pastor, church staff and/or elders, letting them know you are praying. Emails are good, but handwritten notes are even better.
9. Organize several friends to prepare and deliver lunch to your church staff.
10. Are you retired? Pray about where to volunteer, especially in the context of connecting with younger women or children. Meet with your pastor or church staff member who oversees ministries with the goal of letting them know you are looking for a place to use your experience. Be intentional in praying for opportunities to pass on to the next generation the love of Jesus. Consider volunteering to read at your local school or library. An older professional couple in our church felt isolated by their age but knew they had a lot of life left in them. To meet the need to connect and serve, they volunteered at their church every week to do whatever the staff needed. Though you often saw them at the copy machines or stuffing envelopes, their love for and influence over the young staff was eternal. They flourished and were life-givers to everyone who came in contact with them. Consider taking that same servant's heart into a secular non-profit, praying each day for the Lord to connect you with someone who needs Jesus.
11. Write a letter to each member of your family telling each one why you are glad he or she is a part of your life. Give a copy to them now but also file a copy with your will to be read after your death. I wrote such a note to our grandson's new wife without any expectations. She told me she cried when she read it.
12. Do the same (#11) for special friends.
13. Make a list of people who have hurt your feelings. Ask God to search your heart for any bitterness. Replace your bitterness with kindness by doing something nice for each person on the list.
14. Ask a leader in a church ministry what his or her needs are—time, books, equipment, refreshments? Ask several friends to join you in meeting one of those needs.
15. Find a scripture that describes a good quality in a younger woman; send a copy of the verse to her along with a note of explanation and appreciation.
16. Treat a younger woman to breakfast. Ask someone who needs extra attention. If she is struggling, text encouraging scriptures every day or a few times a week.
17. Grandmothers, don't compete with the other grandparents. Be grateful for the ways they love your grandchildren, perhaps in ways you cannot. Express your gratitude for extended family.
18. When someone asks you to pray, stop and pray with them.
19. Pray about how you can come alongside your pastor's wife as an encourager.
20. Pack a basket of potato salad, sandwiches, fried chicken and fruit for a family that's moving.

21. Deliver a bucket filled with cleaning supplies to a friend's new house or apartment. Stay and help clean if you can.
22. Prepare a double batch of your favorite dinner and take it to a young woman. Consider single women as well as young moms.

Ideas for younger women:

1. Be intentional about connecting with older women in your church or neighborhood. Especially check in on older women living alone.
2. Offer to take a woman who is unable to drive any longer shopping, out for lunch, or to a park. Does she need someone to pick up groceries or medicine? If she is hesitant to ask for help, give her gift coupons for free grocery pick up, dinner, shopping, a walk around the neighborhood, a visit, cleaning, etc. Ask her each week which coupon she wants to redeem. Determine if she has family and friends who care for her, and if not, regularly connect with a quick visit or phone call. Does she like jigsaw puzzles? If so, stop by each week to put together the puzzle with her. Offer to bring ingredients for a specialty dish so she can show you how to make it. Such activities will create conversation opportunities. More spiritual mothering often happens around a kitchen table than in a structured study. Your goal is to cultivate a relationship where you are both pouring life into one another.
3. Ask an older woman to go for a walk. When younger women ask me to walk with them, I pray to be sensitive to their unspoken needs.
4. When you observe an older woman extending kindness, send her a note telling her why her behavior encouraged you.
5. Ask your parents to tell your children about their childhood. Create some questions to get the conversation started.
6. Do yardwork for a shut-in as a family project.
7. Ask the Lord to connect you with an older woman who wants to invest in a younger woman.
8. If you don't have grandparents nearby, get to know an older woman, and if the relationship turns into a friendship, ask her to be a stand-in grandmother.
9. Whatever ministry you are involved in, be intentionally generational in the committees or support team. Be on the lookout for retired women who may feel "thrown to the curb" and tap into their expertise.
10. Be sure the older women in your church know they are valued. Ask an older woman for her expertise about a ministry she led when she was younger.

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11. Treat an older woman to lunch and ask her to share her story. To get the conversation started, prepare questions like: Why did you pick _____ as a career? What did you like about it the most, the least? Where did you grow up and what was the hardest part of growing up? The best? Did you attend church as a child? How was church for you then different than for children in church today? What is your favorite hymn and why? What are your favorite books? Your favorite scripture and why? What would you say to your twenty-year-old self?
12. Pack a picnic basket and invite an older woman to join you and your kids at the park.
13. Invite older single women to join your family for dinner, holidays, or special events.
14. Ask a nursing home administrator for the name of a woman who has no visitors and, with permission from the staff, start visiting her with the goal of developing a friendship. When appropriate, take your children for a quick visit. To make your children more comfortable, take a favorite children's book and suggest that your older friend read it to your children. On holidays, ask your children to share special songs, etc.
15. If your pastor is older, surprise his wife with a special luncheon prepared by the younger women in the church. Make it festive with balloons, a gift card for dinner, etc. Ask each woman to pray for her and/or share how she has encouraged them.
16. Prepare extra dessert to share with an older woman. Drop it off or share it together.
17. Encourage your children to stay connected to their grandparents, whether through visits, phone calls, texts, or emails. Help your parents understand the best way to connect with their grandkids. Ask the grandparents to attend special events—maybe include dinner at your house before or after. Ask your parents to pray for specific needs.
18. Text encouragement to older women who are isolated by illness or age. Ask the pastor or deacons for suggestions of older women isolated by health issues or age. Visit with the purpose of identifying what practical needs you or a group of women could meet.
19. Organize a group of women to clean the house of an older woman who is homebound. Take your own supplies and include lunch or dinner.
20. Sit with a woman who is alone in church or at special events. Offer to meet her at the door or drive together.