

Chief Advocate



No one else can encourage your spouse the way you can.

Before my wife went into surgery to have a tumor removed, she told me that her greatest wish was to wake up without the breathing tube still in her mouth, and with me holding her hand telling her, "It's not cancer."

That became my prayer too.

I pleaded with God to allow me the opportunity to say those words to His daughter. By His grace, I was able to hold my wife's hand in the recovery room, brush the hair from her groggy eyes, the same gentle eyes I've looked into first thing in the morning for the past 34 years, and be the first to tell her, "It's not cancer. It's not cancer. You're going to be OK. Now it's just about getting better."

I was beyond grateful to God for allowing me to deliver that news to my wife.

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I was reminded of this encounter when I read the apostle Paul's admonition for us to "encourage one another and build each other up" (1 Thess. 5:11). It was a blessing to be able to encourage my wife in the hospital, but would I carry that same attitude home?

Paul obviously wasn't talking to husbands whose wives were in the hospital. He wasn't writing to wives whose husbands had just been fired. As a matter of course, in the normal patterns of life, Paul was telling us to deliver encouraging, healing words to others every day, beginning with our spouse.



We don't have to wait until there's a potentially life-altering illness, a betrayal, or a personal failure to encourage and build up our spouse. But when others do launch an assault, that's the time for us to step up and put encouragement into hyper drive.

"No, you're not the worst dad in the world; you're one of the best! I'm so proud of the way you love our kids."

"Your boss doesn't understand how good she has it to have you working for her."

"I only wish others could see the wonder of you the way I do; then they'd be knocking each other over to include you in their lunches."

Let's be our spouse's chief encourager. No one else can encourage them the way we can. Their parents may favor other siblings; their friends may get too busy to call; children may resent being told "no." It's our job to survey whatever threatens our spouse's physical and spiritual well-being and cooperate with God to say, "I have some good news for you. Some wonderful news"

It was a joy to have encouraging words for my wife in the hospital, but I pray that one episode will become a more regular pattern of encouragement now that she's back home. □

We can be the dissenting voice speaking encouraging words of assurance, hope, and comfort.

Though my wife's body was attacked by a tumor, her soul is consistently attacked by unkind words, the spiritual rebellion of those she loves, her own imperfections and negative self-talk. Every spouse regularly experiences these "soul attacks." We can be the dissenting voice speaking encouraging words of assurance, hope, and comfort.

What if we prayed, "Lord, please give me at least two things I can encourage my spouse about today?"

"Lord, I'm asking for some supernatural insight to build up my spouse. What would you have me say?"

What if we waited eagerly for our spouse to come home so that we could share with them what God inspired us to say? Wouldn't that be better than holding a fight inside, just waiting to unleash on them as soon as we have a moment alone?

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Gary Thomas is a bestselling author and international speaker whose ministry brings people closer to Christ and to others. He unites the study of Scripture, church history, and the Christian classics to foster spiritual growth and deeper relationships within the Christian community. Gary is married, has three children, and lives in Houston, Texas, where he is a Writer in Residence at Second Baptist Church.

