**Encouragement** **by Lisa Jackson**

Encouragement is something everyone needs from time to time. The definition of encouragement refers to offering someone hope or support. We can be encouraging whatever our station in life, whether we are in a dating relationship or not, divorced, married, or never married. Encouragement is one of the spiritual gifts and can be demonstrated in many ways, from our words to our actions. Paul includes encouragement or exhortation in the list of gifts: Romans 12:7-8: *if it is serving, then serve, if it is teaching, then teach; if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.* Another scripture, First Thessalonians 5:11 states: *Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.* Encouragement is something you can begin doing today and once you start encouraging others, see what a difference it makes! Below are some encouraging words to get you going:

* I’m praying for you today!
* Your friendship is a blessing.
* I respect and trust you.
* I am so proud of the person you are.
* You are not alone even when I can’t be there by your side, know that I am there by you in my thoughts and prayers.
* You are valued.

For those whom God will call to marriage, encouragement will play a key role in that relationship. If you feel God is leading you in this direction, begin preparing today to become an encourager. Look around at your opposite sex friends and think about ways you can encourage them--about their job, education, finances, relationships, etc. The more you step out and make a conscious effort to encourage others, the easier it becomes to develop this gift and all the while, you will be preparing yourself for healthier relationships and maybe one day, a marriage!

Even Solomon, in all his wisdom, knew the importance of encouragement: *Like apples of gold in settings of silver is a word spoken in right circumstances* (Proverbs 25:11).