

# The Encourager

Helping People Live Courageously

Vol. 4, No. 4 Fall 1998

A Publication of Dave Dravecky's Outreach of Hope

## BACK TO THE BASICS

### Drawing Closer to God

by Dave Dravecky

*God made us simple, but we have made ourselves very complicated.*

ECCLESIASTES 7:29 (TEV)

Whether you're breaking home run records in the Big Leagues or hoping to catch a fly ball on a Little League field, one thing is the same—you need to know the basics. No amount of physical strength or determination makes up for the ability to catch, throw, and hit the ball. When life throws you a curve and you need God's love, strength, and wisdom the most, you may find yourself swinging blindly at the air if you haven't learned (or have forgotten) the basics of drawing closer to God. I know. I've been there.

You may be thinking, *My life is just fine, thank you. I haven't seen a curve ball in a while.* On behalf of those of us who have, here's a warning: we didn't see the curve ball coming, and you probably won't either. But the basics we're going to explore in this issue of *The Encourager* aren't just for curve balls and wild pitches. They apply to everyday life. They speak clearly and simply to a need each of us has.

The need I'm thinking about lurks just beneath the surface of our busy lives. It keeps company with our emotional wounds that won't heal, our unfulfilled desires, and the dreams we've shelved. You know the place. It's where we often have the aching sense that there has to be more to life than we are experiencing. It's the place where we reluctantly admit, *there's something missing.* But the pace we keep prevents us from slowing down long enough to figure out what it is. So at the end of the day, we often find ourselves agreeing with the lyrics Peggy Lee sang years ago when she asked of life, "Is that all there is?"

If you find yourself asking the same question, or if you're in the game of your life battling cancer, let's call a "time out" from our frenzied pace. Let's get back to the basics of drawing closer to God. He is the one who can heal our wounds. He is the one who can give our lives meaning and direction. He is the one who can give us the elusive peace we so desperately long to find. He is the answer to Peggy Lee's question.

— Continued on Page 2 —



Dave, Tiffany (age 6) and Jonathan (3) Dravecky. Candlestick Park, 1988.

Several years ago, I read Chuck Swindoll's book, *Intimacy with the Almighty*. It's a very small book, but it made a big impact on my life. In a simple, uncomplicated way, that book challenged me to take a hard look at my life and examine why I do the things I do in light of my desire to draw closer to God. The message of the book can be summarized in only four words: simplicity, silence, solitude, and surrender. Yet those four words can help open the door to experiencing a closer relationship with God.

Although prayer, Bible reading, and going to church have always been an important part of my Christian life, these activities at times have felt dry and even hurried. No wonder! My life felt dry and hurried! But when I began to apply these four words to my life, they helped me slow down and quiet my heart long enough to begin to experience God's love and peace rather than just reading about them.

These four words were like tools that built an environment where consistency, openness, and growth could occur in my life. They helped me discover my relationship with God, not just knowledge about Him. And that relationship brings peace and contentment no matter what my life situation is.

Having been raised with four brothers and then spending years on baseball teams, the idea of being alone and quiet was foreign to me. Then came the isolation room. After having a radioactive implant placed in my arm to stop the growth of cancer cells, I was moved into total isolation for five days—no visitors, no human touch, no companionship. And those hours were some of the most profound of my life. I experienced God's peace and love in a way I never had in the noisy world outside that isolation room.

So I wasn't surprised when Chuck Swindoll encouraged his readers to seek

simplicity, silence, and solitude in the midst of life. But living a life of simplicity is easier said than done. Jan and I both faced clinical depression before we stopped long enough to simplify our lives. We both had been running too hard. We both needed to make adjustments to simplify our lives. It was a difficult challenge to find a place (other than an isolation room!) where we can be quiet, where we can be still and free from distractions, where we can reflect on our lives and open our ears to what God has to say.

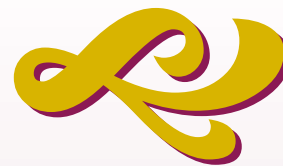
Anyone who's tried to simplify life knows how difficult it can be. Chuck Swindoll warns of the difficulty in *Intimacy with the Almighty* where he observes, "Everything around us works against reordering and simplicity in our lives." Finding silence and solitude is a challenge Jan and I continue to face. But as hard as it can be to simplify our lives, it's well worth the effort. It opens up opportunities to take time out for silence and solitude that we otherwise would miss.

Through the process of simplifying so that I can seek out quiet times to be still and reflect in solitude, I have found that I am better able to surrender myself to God. The more time I spend with Him, the more I am able to trust Him. When I make a connection with God, I have a much greater sense of His peace. I am then much more content to live through the situations of my life—no matter how good or bad they may be—and surrender myself to whatever God wants to do in me and through me.

If you have been struggling to find God in the midst of the busyness or heartbreaks of life, then I hope the tools shared in this issue of *The Encourager* bless your life as they have mine. My prayer is that these spiritual basics give you hope that an intimate, dynamic relationship with God is possible, no matter what your life circumstances may be. ♦

**Noise and words  
and frenzied, hectic schedules  
dull our senses, closing our ears  
to His still, small voice and making us  
numb to His touch.**

CHUCK SWINDOLL



## Simplifying -

Brings order to my world so that I can experience

## Silence -

Yields rest and restoration so that I can experience

## Solitude -

Gives God an audience in my soul so that I can experience

## Surrender -

Because I've learned to trust Him I experience His peace and presence.

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## BACK TO THE BASICS

# Finding Strength in Solitude

by F. LaGard Smith

*F. LaGard Smith is a law professor at Pepperdine University who seeks out the pastoral solace of England's Cotswolds region for several months each year in order to find the simplicity, stillness, and solitude he needs to surrender his life to God's perspective.*

There is a particular spot in the hills high above the valley floor from which I can survey the entire breadth of the Vale of Evesham. Especially on clear days, that lofty perch provides an awe-inspiring bird's-eye view of life below. The village of Stanton, off to the south, and the village of Laverton, at the foot of the hills, are miniature in scale. Cars traveling on the Winchcombe road look like they could have come straight out of a child's toy box.

From that height there's an almost God-like perspective. It's a great place to ponder, reflect, and meditate. Up there in quiet reverie, I can sort out the big issues of life. Most of all, there is a wonderful sense of quiet and solitude.

But just at the moment I am completely mesmerized by the tranquility of my lofty perch, the serenity of my contemplation is violently shattered by a screeching, thunderous roar that almost literally has me diving for cover. My whole body reacts instinctively, as if to a threatened attack. And the image of attack is precisely the right image. What I have just experienced is the startling apocalypse of warplanes practicing low-level contour flying, often so close that I can actually see the pilot's helmets! . . .

As you think about it, isn't that how life often plays itself out? One minute everything is calm, peaceful, and secure; the next minute we're under some kind of an attack from out of the blue. Maybe it's

those chilling words, "I'm afraid you've got cancer." Or a wife's worst nightmare—the hurriedly scribbled note saying, "I'm leaving you for someone else." Maybe it's the boss with a pink slip in his hand, or the juvenile officer standing at the front door with your son in tow. Or the teenager who announces she's pregnant, or the midnight call informing you that your father or mother has just had a stroke.

The day had been perfect, hadn't it? Then came the bad news, like an F-14 swooshing down from the sky to shake your body and nerves to the very bone! Whatever the bad news, it fairly took your breath away. It was too late for anticipation; you couldn't run away from it; there was no escaping the terror.

I suspect this is exactly how Job must have felt when his whole world suddenly crumbled around him. Flocks and herds, servants, even his sons and daughters—all suddenly dead. What had he done to deserve such a catastrophe? Nothing, really, as with Job, so with us all: Death happens—and disease, and alienation, and fear, and loneliness. At one time or another they all come screeching into our lives. Trouble never phones ahead for an appointment.

. . . Life is all about conflict. Peace comes not in the *cessation* of conflict but in learning how to *deal* with conflict. The peace process begins on the familiar battleground of our own hearts. . . . The peace of God comes to us when we use the quiet times in our life to turn our hearts over to God so that He can prepare us for whatever struggles we face.

I realize the notion of "quiet times" means different things to different people. For some it is a set time of daily devotionals, including Bible reading and prayer. For others it's a time of solitude and reflection on one's life in light of what we know to be God's will. Perhaps it's reading a book like this one, letting someone else suggest thoughts to ponder.

However we approach them, our quiet times will take on increased meaning when we begin to see that, out of those special times with Him, we will emerge better prepared for the spiritual battles which lie ahead.

Our "quiet time" may be a particularly wonderful day with the family—so that when loneliness strikes us we have something to look back on to remind us that we are surrounded by those who love us. Our "quiet time" may be yesterday's mountaintop experience, so that when today's discouragement swoops in we are not in as low a valley as we might otherwise be. Our "quiet time" may be a friend's gentle response to something we've done foolishly—so that, when our own temper threatens to explode, we can be stronger in controlling it. Are we alert to all the "quiet times" God brings our way each day? He is helping us to be prepared. He doesn't want any of us to be caught off guard. . . .

My walks in the Cotswolds are a never-ending search for moments of peace and tranquility. But when screeching warplanes disturb my quiet reverie, I begin to appreciate ever more fully that true peace comes only from God. The real war is not without, but within. I don't know what "spiritual warplanes" dive-bomb into your own life, but everyone knows that same inner struggle for peace within and that longing for harmony with those around us.

Would that we could make daily low-level sorties over the spiritual terrain of a life lived in Christ. Perhaps then we could know what it means to have true "peace on earth"—to know that, whatever intruder comes along to disturb our life, it can't win. To know that the greatest battle of all time has already been fought and won, and that through faith in Him who has triumphed over death itself, the same victory is ours!

Excerpted from *Meeting God in Quiet Places*, © 1992 by F. LaGard Smith, published by Harvest House Publishers, Eugene, Oregon 97402. ◆



# BACK TO THE BASICS

## The Gift of Silence

by Kim Jones

It was supposed to be the “working mom’s special”—a quick trip to the bank, post office, and grocery store during lunch hour—forty-five minutes tops. But this working mom’s lunch turned out to be much, much more.

As I raced out the door, a common Colorado expression rang unheeded in my ears, “If you don’t like the weather here, wait fifteen minutes.” Of course I had heard the weather forecast that morning. No one living in the shadow of the Rocky Mountains misses the weather forecast in the winter. I knew the “Arctic Express” was headed our way, but my holiday schedule didn’t have room for inclement weather. So off I headed to pack in my errands *before* the weather got bad.

As I pulled onto the highway, the snowflakes were just beginning to swirl around the car. *This will put me in the holiday spirit*, I thought. But the seemingly innocent flakes were just the welcoming committee. The warm pavement quickly melted every falling snowflake, and within minutes the frigid wind promptly froze their watery remains to the pavement! It seemed that all of Colorado had been invited to an exciting ice skating party! Many drivers declined the invitation and abandoned their four-wheel ice skates on the side of the road. Undaunted, I continued on.

An hour later, I had traveled a whopping (but thrilling!) four miles. Opting not to become a casualty featured on the evening news, I turned my four-wheel ice skates toward home. Once inside, I paced through the house, frustrated. Now what? No planner, no phone calls, no children at home (their car pool driver was out ice-skating, too). I tried to juggle all the activities I’d planned for that day (at least the ones I remembered) into another time slot. It wasn’t working. I stared out the window in defeat.

By now, several inches of snow had fallen. The snow-covered branches of the pine trees surrounding our home bent toward the ground. Gusts of wind swirled snow off the roof, changing the landscape with each swipe. The outside Christmas lights, which I had turned on as a welcoming beacon for my soon-to-arrive family, glowed under a cover of snow. The sight was breathtaking. A Christmas postcard scene had been delivered to me, right outside my living room window!

Leaning against the window frame, I paused to take in the wonder of the snow-blanketed scene before me. Gradually I felt the muscles in my neck and back begin to relax. My breathing slowed. My teeth unclenched. Tears filled my eyes as peace flooded the room and silenced my anxious heart. In the silence and solitude of the storm, God met me.

How often I had prayed for God to be more real to me and to help me be more sensitive to His presence, His voice. And how many times I felt disappointed that my prayers seemed unanswered. But God hadn’t been silent at all. He had been answering me. The problem was, I hadn’t been silent enough to hear Him. Like a child who rings the doorbell and runs away before it can be answered, I had not waited to hear His reply.

We often view times of solitude and silence as nonproductive or a waste of time, but much is accomplished during times of quiet and solitude. The rest and silence of sleeping allows our bodies to repair themselves. The silence and solitude of winter gives birth to spring. The cradling stillness of the soil causes a seed to sprout to life. And in the silence of our souls, our true feelings, hurts, needs, and disappointments can finally be heard. And so can God. No wonder the Psalmist wrote, “Be *still* and know that I am God” (Psalm 46:10 [italics mine]).

God knows how desperately we need to be still and quiet. He knows how much body, soul, and spirit need the rest, refreshment, and repair that solitude and silence can bring. Perhaps that is why Ecclesiastes 3:1, 7 remind us: “There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven . . . a time to be silent . . .”

My friend Betsy was recently reminded of this truth. Having come through a busy and trying season in her life, she scheduled a two-day prayer retreat in the nearby mountains so she could have

*Silence  
will speak more to thee  
in a day than  
the world of voices  
can teach thee  
in a lifetime.*

FRANCES ROBERTS





*“Come unto me,  
all you who are  
weary and burdened,  
and I will give you rest.”*

THE WORDS OF JESUS,  
MATTHEW 11:28



## BACK TO THE BASICS

### The Gift of Simplicity

*One hand full of rest is better than  
two fists full of labor and striving after wind.*

ECCLESIASTES 4:6 (NASB)

time alone with God. Like so many of us, she was beginning to experience the warning signs of physical, emotional, and spiritual overload: impatience, restlessness, forgetfulness, fatigue, a lack of joy, and a general sense of being out of balance. While she was alone in the silence and solitude of the mountains, God impressed upon her a message that sounded familiar to me: regular times of rest and quiet, like routine car maintenance, can prevent a multitude of small problems from becoming big ones.

Minor adjustments on a car’s valves and timing can prevent expensive and extensive repair bills. Likewise, minor routing adjustments on our attitudes and motives can prevent expensive and extensive personal pain and anguish. Just as an engine is best adjusted when it isn’t running, so the human heart adjusts best when it is still.

God doesn’t want me to wait for a blizzard to bring me to a screeching halt and enforce a few moments of solitude. He wants me to intentionally and routinely schedule times of silence and solitude with Him. When life doesn’t allow for weekends in the mountains, I can still go for a long walk and seek out a quiet place along the way. I can sometimes take the scenic route home from work (and keep the car radio off!). I can sit alone under the night sky and marvel at the expanse overhead. I can look forward to the few moments at the beginning or end of the day, when the rest of the household has settled down, to quiet my heart before Him.

Don’t wait until your engine knocks and your exhaust fouls the air before you turn off the engine. And don’t wait, as I did, for a winter storm to barricade you into solitude. If life seems too harried and busy for solitude and silence, then you’re probably past due for a tune-up. And I know a great mechanic! ◆

**W**hat does a less-complicated, simplified lifestyle have to do with drawing closer to God? *Everything!* If we truly desire to draw closer to God, pastor and author A.W. Tozer addresses one of the simplest yet most difficult requirements: “The man who would know God must give time to Him.” Ah, there’s the rub. We have no time left to give!

Time is a precious gift, one we shouldn’t take for granted. Those who are battling cancer soon discover just how precious time is. They often find their lives simplified by necessity. They don’t have the strength, the means, or often the desire to indulge in activities that they deem to be “striving after wind.” Betsy, for example, says, “Cancer made me stop! All my life I have been too busy to stop and recognize what is important. Cancer has given me the chance to live the life I have always wanted.” And Rebecca observes, “Cancer has made clearer the more important things in life. It has made me let go of petty things, the little imitations.”

It doesn’t have to take a serious illness to bring simplicity to our lives. We can choose today to start making the changes that will give us time to invest in what’s truly important. How? Consider the following suggestions that will help restore simplicity in your life.

- ◆ Pray for wisdom and discernment before agreeing to any new activity or commitment.
- ◆ View your time, energy, and resources like a bank account—don’t make withdrawals unless adequate deposits have been made. This may mean refusing to add an activity unless one is removed.
- ◆ Place value on your time. No one else can be expected to value it if you don’t!
- ◆ Evaluate whether or not your lifestyle decisions are motivated by peer pressure. You can choose not to “keep up with the Joneses.”
- ◆ Set goals and priorities for your family life and screen activities and requests through that grid.
- ◆ When necessary, don’t be afraid to say “no” to the requests of others.
- ◆ Ask why before you buy. Will a purchase require more energy and resources to maintain than is worth your effort?
- ◆ Refuse to allow guilt to motivate your decision making. This is especially true of purchases and commitments that others want you to make (such as joining a committee, teaching a class, hosting a club).
- ◆ Control the flow of information into your home and head. Between e-mails, faxes, and junk mail, clutter quickly accumulates in both places. Whenever possible, handle it once, if at all.
- ◆ Turn off the tube! It is estimated that Americans have only 30-40 hours of free time per week, and 16 hours of that time is spent watching television.

*Teach us to make the most of our time, so that we may grow in wisdom.*

PSALM 90:12 (NLT)

# BACK TO THE BASICS

## Surrender—Reaching Out in Trust



**B**reaking in a horse is often a painful process. Days, even weeks, of work finally culminate in a brief ride around the corral—unless you're Monty Roberts, the man who listens to horses. Unlike other horse trainers, he doesn't try to break the horse's spirit and motivate it to work out of fear. He has a different approach. He motivates a horse to work out of willingness.\*

During his youth, Monty spent several summers riding alongside wild horses in the Nevada backcountry where he noticed that horses communicate through their body position and the movement of their eyes, ears, and necks. Once back home, he tested out the "body language" he had observed on a three-year-old wild mustang. Within 40 minutes, he had gained the colt's trust and was riding him around the corral.

Native Americans had a different method of gaining the trust of a wild horse. They would corral the horse in quicksand and allow it to sink up to its neck. With no way out and a human being as its only means of survival, the horse quickly learned to trust the man on the edge of the quicksand who held the rope. The wild, untamed spirit of the horse was left behind in the sand.

Jim Arnoldi understands what it must feel like to be in quicksand and what it means to place one's trust in Someone who stands on solid ground. For eight years, through 19 major surgeries and countless minor ones, he has battled a rare form of cancer on which the weapons of radiation and chemotherapy are ineffective. While lying on his back in a hospital, it occurred to Jim that he had no place to run to and no one to lean on.

"Sometimes I think we get the best view of Christ and His presence when we are lying on our back," he

says. "That's when I begin to see. God was in my own shadow before He moved me aside so that His presence was in full view. It was then that I realized there was only One to go to, One to whom I could turn."

While on his back looking up, Jim discovered that God was watching, with rope outstretched, waiting for his response. Like a horse in quicksand, Jim chose to trust the One holding the rope.

Others trust the One holding the rope because, like the way Monty Roberts approaches horses, God has come to them in familiar ways. He has proven to them that He knows them intimately and cares for them deeply. Like Jim, these people have discovered that surrendering themselves and their circumstances to Him is a step that He will honor. God honors our surrender by offering:

His power in exchange  
for our weakness,  
His wisdom in exchange  
for our confusion,  
His answers in exchange  
for our questions,  
His protection in exchange  
for our vulnerability,  
His peace in exchange  
for our turmoil.

And that's not all. God honors us with something even more precious than His gifts and attributes—He offers Himself. Jim Arnoldi has experienced this gift firsthand:

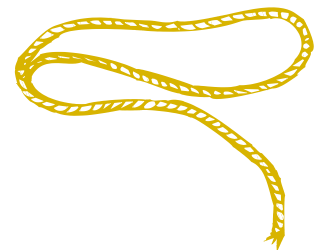
I found that I could endure anything, as long as I depended on Christ for everything. Yielding to Him opens the door to a new world, a world where He becomes the focus. What a wonderful distraction from the pain and suffering that accompanies serious illness!

Trust and surrender, like strands of a rope, are inseparable. But the rope they form is a lifeline that can rescue us from quicksand and give us a solid anchor when we have nothing else to cling to. It is a lifeline that connects us to God.

Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight. Proverbs 3:5-6

Jim Arnoldi's story is featured in Dave and Jan's newest book, *Portraits in Courage*. To order, refer to the envelope inside this issue.

\*Monty Roberts' story appeared in *Reader's Digest*, "The Man Who Listens to Horses," December 1997.



*As children bring their broken toys  
With tears for us to mend,  
I brought my broken dreams to  
Him  
Because He was my Friend.  
But then, instead of leaving Him  
In peace to work alone,  
I hung around and tried to help  
With ways that were my own.  
At last I snatched them back  
and cried,  
"How can you be so slow?"  
"My child," He said, "what  
could I do . . .  
You never did let go."*

Source Unknown



## RETURNED TO SENDER!

*Letters are a precious gift—to give and to receive. Many such gifts are mailed each week at Dave Dravecky's Outreach of Hope, and we receive several in return that contain beautiful expressions of love and appreciation. The encouragement others share with us we share with you, because your prayers and support make the delivery of this mail possible . . . both ways. Thank you for encouraging us!*

**T**his note is to express appreciation from our entire family for all that Dave Dravecky's Outreach of Hope has done to support and encourage us during the illness and death of my wife, Marjorie. Your staff has been compassionate beyond anything I have ever experienced. They are a credit to your organization and I must say that you made a difference in our lives. I know that you provide the same devotion and concern for those who elsewhere are in pain and grief. May God bless you and your organization richly in every way.

Enclosed is a donation in memory of Marjorie. I know that she is rejoicing for any bit of help that can further your ministry.

Guy Knowles  
Marietta, GA

**T**he recent newsletter on the question "Why?" was such a godsend for me. I had just celebrated a number of years since my treatment for cancer when something showed up during a routine exam that will require repeat testing. When I returned home from my appointment, I was feeling down and happened to notice The Encourager. Since I had been asking, "why?" all day, I immediately read it cover to cover and felt a peacefulness. It is still too early to tell what will come of this, but I thank you for your wonderful newsletter. Keep up the good work and may God bless you all!

Kimberly R. Beeler, R.N.  
Ft. Worth, TX



Dear Dave Dravecky,

I am nine years old, and I collect baseball cards, and I am trying to get yours. I read your book in the third grade. I liked it a lot. I'm glad you have Jesus in your heart so you're not sad about your arm. I know a lot of people have learned about Jesus through you. I would love to have your autograph and your picture. If you can, could you send me one? Here is \$1.00.

Brenden Reber  
Hickory, NC

**F**or so long I have intended to express to you my gratitude for the beautiful and helpful motivation you provide through The Encourager. . . . Your work does surely help us to live courageously. Clearly for me one of the blessings of ALS (Lou Gerig's disease) is a deeper awareness that I have no courage of lasting value except in my relationship with a gracious God. Learning to live in pain, physical and emotional, is learning to live in Him.

Don Wilhelm  
Toledo, OH

## New books by Dave and Jan Dravecky!

We all need encouraging reminders of basic truths that can sustain us through difficult times. The newest books from Dave and Jan Dravecky do just that. They inspire us to live with courage and hope.



*Portraits in Courage* shares the stories of ordinary men and women who have faced terrible losses, endured unthinkable pain, or bravely faced the final enemy—death, and done so with a triumphant trust in God. Readers who walk through this “Hall of Faith” will be deeply touched and strengthened as they discover the fortitude of those who have grappled with life’s cruelest blows.

Dave and Jan Dravecky walked out of their personal time of suffering with the certain knowledge that heaven is real. They discovered that heaven is a place to look forward to, that it offers a hope we can count on even in life’s darkest hours. In *Glimpses of Heaven*, they lift your sights heavenward and open your eyes to the wonderful truth of heaven. Let heaven’s precious reality captivate your heart and give you a joy and a hope that cannot be shaken.

Both books are available through your local Christian bookstore or can be ordered through the Outreach of Hope (order form inside this issue).

### Our Mission

Offering comfort, encouragement, and hope through Jesus Christ to those who suffer from cancer or amputation. We accomplish this mission by offering prayer support, personal contact, correspondence, resource referral, and the gift of encouraging literature.

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*The Encourager* is free, a gift from us to you. Now that you’ve read it, become an encourager yourself and share this gift with someone you know who needs uplifting. Don’t throw the gift away . . . pass it along!

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