



Enriching Christian Community

Encouragement

When we speak, we do so as God's image-bearers: speaking is a God-like activity. God's words have power and so do ours.

God speaks powerfully to create (Ps 33:6), to judge (Gen 2:17), to save (2 Cor 4:6, 5:17), to show us himself (Jn 4:25-26; 2 Tim 3:16-17) and he speaks powerfully to change us (Rom 12:1-2). So God's words are powerful. God's word changes us; and through us it can change others as well. This is the idea that we are going to explore in this study. We are going to see that the key to encouraging others is to draw upon the power of God's words, not merely our own.

The book of 1 Thessalonians is a letter of encouragement from Paul to the Thessalonian Christians. In it we learn much of Paul's way of encouraging others.

Read 1 Thessalonians 1-3

- 1. What do you learn from these chapters about the importance of words and speaking?

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- 2. Paul's relationship with the Thessalonians was not only a matter of words. Look at the following verses in 1 Thessalonians, and note down what they tell us about Paul's actions and relationship with them:

1:2-3
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1:4-7
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2:1-13
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3:1-10
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- 3. We've seen already that sharing God's powerful words with others is central to encouragement. What are some of the other factors that might impact the way another person receives our words of encouragement?

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What things have you heard said that caused a shift in what you believe or in the way you view the world?

When has a friend drawn alongside you to encourage you, just when you needed it most?

To 'encourage' literally means to put courage into another person. Their courage is raised so that they have confidence to attempt something difficult or to persevere in trying circumstances.

4. Encouragement must be genuine and come from pure motives (see 1 Thess 2:3-6). Reflecting on these verses, describe the aim and practice of Christian Encouragement.
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5. Imagine you were putting up some posters in our church with a short message on each one about how we should relate to each other. Based on what you've read in 1 Thessalonians 1-3, see if you can come up with some different slogans for the posters, along with the verses where you got the idea. For example, "Mums are gentle with their babies. That's how we should be with one another" (1 Thes 2:7).
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Practical Assignment: Read the Bible with a friend

If God's word changes us and through us it can change others as well, then reading the bible together is going to be an easy and effective means of encouragement. Your assignment this week is to do just that: read the bible with a friend.

Begin by making an arrangement to meet together with a bible reading partner. This may be another person in your Home Group, a close Christian friend, your spouse or just about any Christian whom you would like to encourage. Before your meeting, take 15 minutes to read the passage through and answer the questions on the attached worksheet. At your meeting, share your answers and insights and then pray for each other—your actual meeting might be no more than 20 minutes. There is also a section on the worksheet to fill in at your meeting.

If you feel reluctant about doing this assignment, then 'take courage' and give it a go! Think about what it might do for your bible reading partner.

Before:

1. Take 5 minutes to pray for God to speak to you and then read the passage.
2. Write down up to five insights from the passage that you personally find helpful or challenging.
3. Note down any questions or things you are not sure about.

The meeting itself (20 minutes or so)

1. Share with your partner the insights and questions you have each written down.
2. At the end of your discussion, fill in the final section of the sheet.
3. Pray together about what you've learned and how it applies.

If your bible reading partner is not a member of this group, you will need to explain how this assignment works and why you want to do. See it as an experiment and 'encouragement practice'. Next week we will report on our experiences in doing this assignment.

Bible reading worksheet 1

God's word changes us; and through us it can change others as well.

Sometime before meeting with your Bible Reading Partner, take 15 minutes to prepare.

Before:

1. Take 5 minutes to pray for God to speak to you and then read the passage.
2. Write down up to five insights from the passage that you personally find helpful or challenging.
3. Note down any questions or things you are not sure about.

The meeting itself (20 minutes or so)

1. Share with your partner the insights and questions you have each written down.
 2. At the end of your discussion, fill in the final section of the sheet.
 3. Pray together about what you've learned and how it applies.
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Reading the Bible Together

Bible Passage: James 1:1-18

What do you think is the main idea of the passage?

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5 points from the passage

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2.
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Questions:

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Discussion Summary (fill this in together)

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