

What Does It Mean To Be A Christian?

A Christian Is An Encourager



Discovering God's Word

Bible Study Series

A Christian Is An Encourager

Learn why it is important for every Christian to be an encourager and some principles for offering encouragement

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Discovering God's Word Bible Study Series

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Written by Eric Krieg

About the author: My name is Eric Krieg. I am a disciple of Jesus, a Bible student, a truth seeker, and an evangelist. My interest is in using the Bible as my only guide in my faith. My desire is to help others understand the message of the Bible and pursue true, New Testament Christianity.

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My plea: It is my hope and prayer that you are searching for the truth that is contained in God's word, the Bible. My desire is to help you understand and obey these truths God has revealed in the pages of His word. It is to that end that I write this material. Please observe all of the Scripture references and evaluate whether the conclusions I have drawn are in harmony with God's word. If they are, I ask that you make honest application of those truths to your life and obey God's instructions.

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A Christian Is An Encourager

What does it mean to be a Christian? Being a Christian means a great deal. Fortunately, God has given us all the information we need to know about what being a Christian really means. As we study His saving message, we discover that a Christian is an encourager.

Encouragers Are Needed In The Lord's Work

God wants you to be interacting with other people. However, He does not want this interaction to be for the purpose of fulfilling selfish desires and ambitions. Instead, He wants you to live a life that is focused on both Him and others. One of the ways in which you can serve God and serve others is by being an encourager. He wants you to be helping other people serve Him. He wants you to do this by encouraging those who are lost to become Christians and obtain the forgiveness of their sins. Then, He wants you to help those who are Christians by encouraging them to live for Him.

I want you to carefully consider how you have lived your life relative to accomplishing God's purposes. Think about working for the Lord as building a structure. This work takes a great deal of care, time, and effort to construct. However, think of living contrary to the Lord's work as tearing down the structure that you or others have built. Now, consider: Are you a wrecker or a builder?

Consider the following poem by Charles Franklin Benvegar (originally published in 1967 in "The Songs of the Free State Bards" – access on September 23, 2015 from <https://bible.org/illustration/builder-or-wrecker>).

“As I watched them tear a building down / A gang of men in a busy town / With a ho-heave-ho, and a lusty yell / They swung a beam and the side wall fell

“I asked the foreman, ‘Are these men skilled, / And the men you’d hire if you wanted to build?’ / He gave me a laugh and said, ‘No, indeed, / Just common labor is all I need.’

“I can easily wreck in a day or two, / What builders have taken years to do.’ / And I thought to myself, as I went my way / ‘Which of these roles have I tried to play’

“Am I a builder who works with care, / Measuring life by rule and square? / Am I shaping my work to a well-made plan / Patiently doing the best I can

“Or am I a wrecker who walks to town / Content with the labor of tearing down? / ‘O Lord let my life and my labors be / That which will build for eternity!’”

Which one of these describes your past work? Now, you can examine the fruit that your life has produced and examine whether you have been a builder or a wrecker in God's work. Maybe you have been both – sometimes working to build up, while sometimes working to tear down. However, one of the unfortunate things about tearing down is (as the poem demonstrates) it is much easier and much faster to tear down than it is to build up. Therefore, even though most of your life is spent on building up, you

can destroy everything you have built in a moment of recklessness and carelessness.

Not only do you need to evaluate how you have lived your life in the past, but you need to evaluate how you are living your life *right now*. Are you living your life with great thought and care, measuring each word and deed by the standard of God's word? Or, are you casting aside that standard in order to live how you think you should live?

As you evaluate yourself, I want you to suppose (for just a moment) that you chose not to serve God any longer. How much would you be missed? How much would the lost miss your service for God? Would they miss your attempts to point them to Jesus Christ? Or, would they even notice that you had changed? How much would your brethren miss your service for God? Would they miss the way you took advantage of opportunities to encourage them to be faithful and do good works? Or, would there be little impact in their lives?

You will know whether you are a builder or a wrecker in God's service by your fruit – just as others will know you by your fruit! In Luke 6:43-45, Jesus said, “For a good tree does not bear bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. For every tree is known by its own fruit. For men do not gather figs from thorns, nor do they gather grapes from a bramble bush. A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth evil. For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.”

Who should be an encourager

Now that you have been considering whether you are a wrecker or a builder, I want you to take a moment to understand who God wants to be serving as an encourager. Some might think that this work is primarily for preachers. They might believe that the preacher is the person in the congregation who should be the primary encourager in a local church, knowing the problems all of the members of the congregation may be having (both physical and spiritual) and being devoted to encouraging all of the members at these times. Or, they may believe that this work belongs to elders and deacons.

Yet, while it is certainly true that preachers, elders, and deacons *should* all be devoted to the work of encouraging, this work is not limited to them. Instead, the Bible clearly helps us to understand that every Christian should be devoted to the work of encouraging others. To see all of these points, we simply need to consider Paul's teaching in Ephesians 4:11-16.

“And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head— Christ— from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.”

First, notice that it is the work of those identified in verse 11 to edify (encourage) the body of Christ. This included apostles and prophets for a limited time. Today, this continues to include those who are evangelists, pastors, and teachers. Yes, it *is* their work. These have a definite function to build up Christ's body in spiritual strength, equipping every Christian to be grounded in the faith of the gospel and to accomplish the work God has given them to accomplish.

However, verse 16 demonstrates that even though they *do* have the responsibility to edify, it is not theirs *alone*. Notice that every part of Christ's body (every Christian) has the responsibility to do “its share.” And, notice that when this happens, there will be growth and edification in the body. So, every Christian must contribute what he/she is capable of contributing in order to share in the edification of Christ's body!

Other passages also demonstrate this same principle. For instance, Ephesians 4:29 instructs,

“Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers.” Therefore, every word you speak to another person should be focused on providing the necessary encouragement. Certainly, then, you must be devoted to being a builder – and never act as a wrecker. Your words, as specifically identified in Ephesians 4:29, must never be used for corrupt purposes (“Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth...”).

Consider Romans 15:2. “Let each of us [those who are Christians] please his neighbor for his good, leading to his edification.” Earlier, Romans 14:19 says, “Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another.” There is a clear focus that those who are Christians are expected to have on edifying (encouraging) one another to follow Jesus Christ. And, as these passages (in their context) help us to understand, this responsibility involves making personal sacrifices for the good of your Christian brothers and sisters.

Finally, 1 Thessalonians 5:11 demonstrates the reciprocal element that is to be involved in edification. “Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing.” In the context (beginning in 4:13), Paul has been teaching the Thessalonian Christians about the return of Jesus Christ. He has assured them that those Christians who have died will not miss out on this day. He has taught them about some things that will take place when Christ returns. He has taught them that the coming of Jesus Christ will be like a thief. Then, he demonstrated that those who are Christians should not be caught “off guard” by Jesus’ return – because they should always be preparing and looking for His coming. He says that those who have been faithful as Christians are not appointed to experience wrath on the Day the Lord Jesus returns, but to obtain salvation through Jesus Christ! And, as we have already seen, Paul says that these facts ought to be used in comforting and edifying one another.

Notice that Paul did *not* say they should wait to be comforted and edified in this way by a select few people who have been appointed to that work. Instead, they were to “comfort each other” and “edify one another.” Now, there is no member of a local

church who is exempt from this! Therefore, the picture is one of every Christian trying to work to encourage as many other Christians as he/she has the ability and opportunity to encourage. The picture is *not* one of Christians who are sitting back and always waiting for and expecting their brothers and sisters to encourage them!

Who you should be encouraging

As a Christian (and a member of the body of Jesus Christ, the church), you have the responsibility to be an encourager. But, who do you have the responsibility to encourage? Do you only have the responsibility to encourage your family members? Your closest friends? What, exactly, is your God-given responsibility to be an encourager? Let’s consider the two areas every Christian has the responsibility to be an encourager in.

(1) Encourage those who are not Christians to follow Christ. Consider Peter’s work on the Day of Pentecost. In Acts 2, Peter (and the other apostles) preached the gospel to those who were present in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost. As Peter preached to them, some of the people asked, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” (Acts 2:37). To this question, Peter responded, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38). Then, Acts 2:40 says, “And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, ‘Be saved from this perverse generation.’”

Now, what was Peter doing? He was making God’s message known to the people. Yes. But, he was doing more than this. He was also exhorting them to act upon the truths he had presented in order that they would be saved! He was pleading with them. He was *encouraging* them to do what needed to be done so that they would not experience the consequences of their sins.

Once again, this work of encouraging those who are not Christians to follow Jesus Christ is the work of everyone who is a Christian. 2 Timothy 2:24-26 clearly demonstrates this fact. “And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those

who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will.” Like Peter, you need to be preaching to and exhorting (encouraging) those who are living in Satan’s captivity to come to Jesus Christ and find refuge from the consequences of sin!

(2) Encourage those who are Christians to continue with Christ. Consider some of the opening words in Jude’s epistle. “Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 1:3). In the context of Jude’s short epistle, Jude recognized the need to warn his Christian brethren about those who pervert the gospel of Jesus Christ. Verse 4 says, “For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Therefore, Jude, while he wanted to write to his brethren concerning their “common salvation,” found the need to devote his epistle to exhorting them to “contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.” In the presence of these evil influences, Jude saw the need to plead with and encourage his brethren to diligently pursue the faith of the gospel of Jesus Christ!

Other examples of this can also be seen in the Scriptures (in addition to the passages we have already considered). For instance, Acts 11:23 records the example of Barnabas purposefully visiting new Christian brethren. On this occasion, the Bible says that he “encouraged them all that with purpose of heart they should continue with the Lord.” Then, Acts 14:22 records the example of Paul and Barnabas visiting brethren in the cities of Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, “strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying, ‘We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God.’” While these are just a few of many passages we could consider, they clearly demonstrate the responsibility of Christians to be

concerned about encouraging other Christians to continue with Jesus Christ!

Why encouragers are needed

Why do Christians even need to be focused on encouraging others – both those who are and those who are not Christians? Think back to the four passages we have just been considering. In Acts 2:40, Peter exhorted the people so that they would do what was required of them in order to be saved. In Jude 1:3, Jude exhorted the Christians to contend earnestly for the faith of the gospel because there were those who were trying to overthrow that faith. In Acts 11:23, Barnabas encouraged new Christians to continue with purpose of heart in serving the Lord (as he recognized the danger of falling away from Christ). Then, In Acts 14:22, Paul and Barnabas encouraged Christians to persevere through the tribulations that are associated with following Jesus Christ.

Now, what do all of these passages have in common? And, why was the encouragement that was given in each of these cases even necessary? All of these encouragers recognized that there was a danger of failing to encourage these individuals. They all recognized that there is an enemy who is actively working in this world to stop people from following Jesus Christ and obtaining the salvation of their souls. 1 Peter 5:8-9 identifies him simply as “your adversary the devil,” and pictures him as walking “about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.”

Satan’s influence is worldwide. He is working to keep those who are enslaved to sin in captivity. He wants to keep these people discouraged, wandering aimlessly like sheep without shepherds (as Jesus saw the lost in Matthew 9:35-38). And, he is working to discourage those who are following Christ so that they will give up Jesus. So, discouragement is one of the most powerful baits Satan uses in his snares!

He discourages people from following Christ by tempting them to pursue their own desires rather than submit their desires to the desires of Christ (see James 1:14-15). He discourages through the wicked conduct of other people. He has convinced people to

speak discouraging words to others. He has convinced people to persecute those who follow Christ. He has convinced people to lead others into false religion.

Consider Hebrews 3:12-13. “Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; but exhort one another daily, while it is called ‘Today,’ lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.” The Hebrew writer commands that those who are Christians be devoted to the work of exhorting their Christian brothers and sisters every day. But, at this point in the lesson, I want to focus on the reason *why* this passage says this work is so desperately needed. Notice that there is the possibility that those who are Christians can develop an “evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God” and that they can “be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.”

Examples of encouragers

Now that we have learned about the personal responsibility every Christian has to be an encourager and learned about the need for encouragement, we will be profited by considering the example of some encouragers. While there are many who could be considered, we will limit our study to focus on only three.

(1) Aaron and Hur. In Exodus 17:8-13, “Amalek came and fought with Israel in Rephidim.” Moses instructed Joshua to choose some men to go and fight with Amalek. He said, “Tomorrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the rod of God in my hand.” So, while Joshua and the people went to fight with Amalek, Moses, Aaron, and Hur went to the top of the Hill. Interestingly, whenever Moses held up his hand, the Israelites prevailed in the battle. Yet, when he let his hand down, Amalek prevailed. Then, verses 12 and 13 say, “But Moses’ hands became heavy; so they took a stone and put it under him, and he sat on it. And Aaron and Hur supported his hands, one on one side, and the other on the other side; and his hands were steady until the going down of the sun. So Joshua defeated Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword.”

What a wonderful example of encouragement! Moses needed help in fighting this

battle. On his own, he became weary. But, through the strength that was offered by Aaron and Hur, he could be victorious! In the same way, the church (the body of Christ) needs every member to be devoted to the work of being arm-lifters! As we see people around us who are engaging in their own spiritual war with the devil, Christians must lend a hand whenever there is opportunity to help others be victorious. You might have the opportunity to “lift the hand” of someone who is caught in Satan’s snare, but does not know the way of escape. You might be able to “lift the hand” of your brother/sister in Christ who is a new child of God and is facing entirely new struggles to live for the Lord. You might be able to “lift the hand” of a brother/sister in Christ who frequently becomes weary and loses battles with the devil. You might be able to “lift the hand” of a brother/sister who has put his/her hands down and is currently seeing the enemy prevail in his/her life. Or, you might be able to “lift the hand” of a brother/sister who is strong and mature in the faith, simply recognizing that even the strong can grow weary if he/she must bear every burden alone. The bottom line is that you have many opportunities all around you to imitate the example of Aaron and Hur – and help someone be victorious in his/her battle with the devil!

(2) Barnabas. The apostles were collecting funds for needy Christians (see Acts 4:32-35). Those who were Christians were selling their possessions, lands, and houses in order to give to their needy brethren. At this time, we are introduced to Barnabas. “And Joses, who was also named Barnabas by the apostles (which is translated Son of Encouragement), a Levite of the country of Cyprus, having land, sold it, and brought the money and laid it at the apostles’ feet” (Acts 4:36-37). Notice that Joses was given the name “Barnabas” (which meant “Son of Encouragement”) by the apostles – who evidently recognized that he truly was dedicated to the work of encouraging. Then, this work of encouraging is demonstrated by his willingness to sell some of his land and contribute that money to help his brethren.

But, this is far from the only example in Scriptures we have about Barnabas as an encourager. In Acts 9, after Saul (who was a well-known persecutor of Christians) had become a Christian and

wanted to join the disciples in Jerusalem, Barnabas was the one who took him to the apostles and declared that he truly was a disciple of Jesus Christ – when all the others did not believe that he was a disciple (read verses 26-27). In Acts 11:19-24, it was Barnabas who was chosen by the church in Jerusalem to go to visit those who had become Christians in new areas, for the purpose of encouraging them all “that with purpose of heart they should continue with the Lord.” In Acts 11:25-26, it was Barnabas who sought Saul and brought him to Antioch so that they could assemble with the church there and teach “a great many people.” In Acts 13-15, it was Barnabas who was joined with Saul (Paul) in all the teaching and encouragement that was accomplished during Paul’s first “missionary journey.” And, whenever John Mark had fallen out of favor with Paul to accompany him on his journey, it was Barnabas who went with John Mark and strengthened churches through Syria and Cilicia with him (Acts 15:36-41). Later, John Mark was again considered to be useful to Paul (2 Timothy 4:11). But, I wonder what would have happened with him if Barnabas had not been an encouragement to him.

Barnabas was very clearly devoted to the work of encouraging. So much that the apostles gave him this name! But, what about you? Are you known as being an encourager by those who are around you? Are you devoted, like Barnabas, to taking advantage of any opportunities you are given to encourage others (whether those who are Christians or those who are not Christians)?

(3) Aquila and Priscilla. We are introduced to these two Jewish individuals in Acts 18. They are husband and wife. And, they are providing the apostle Paul with a place to stay while he works to preach the gospel in Corinth. Though the Bible does not say whether they were Christians at the time Paul met them, they did become Christians at some point and Paul developed a very deep affection for them and was thankful for their contribution in God’s service. In Romans 16, for instance, Paul writes that they were his “fellow workers in Christ Jesus,” had “risked their own necks” for his life, and both he and the churches of the Gentiles gave thanks for them (see verses 3-5).

Then, in Acts 18:24-28, we read about the influence this husband and wife had on a man named Apollos. Apollos was “an eloquent man,” “mighty in the Scriptures,” “fervent in spirit,” and was speaking and teaching “accurately the things of the Lord.” However, we discover that he only knew the baptism of John. So, whenever Aquila and Priscilla heard him teach in the synagogue, they “took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately.” From that point, Apollos continued teaching – but now had accurate knowledge concerning the important subject of baptism. Now, just consider how this example of Aquila and Priscilla encouraging Apollos regarding the truth about baptism would not just have helped Apollos, but would have helped everyone Apollos taught thereafter!

Finally, Romans 16:5 indicates that these two people were allowing a church to meet in their house. While this may not seem very significant at first, recognize that everything that is to be done in the assemblies of a local church is designed to edify (see 1 Corinthians 14:26). So, whatever encouragement Christians received at these times and whatever encouragement unbelievers received during these times was accomplished in a small way because of Aquila and Priscilla doing what they were able to do to be encouragers.

As a husband and wife team for Jesus Christ, Aquila and Priscilla demonstrates how a family that is devoted to serving Christ can work together to encourage. Christian families can lean on their example to continue to find encouragement to encourage those who are around them – even today!

Important Principles In Encouraging Others

Now that we have been learning about the Christian’s responsibility to encourage others, let’s embrace some important principles that should help you accomplish this God-given work.

The true purpose of encouragement

Let's understand what true encouragement *looks* like. I believe that many people have become confused when they talk about encouragement/discouragement. You see, the true purpose of the kind of encouragement Christians must be engaging in is not the equivalent of a good *feeling*. Many people speak of being encouraged when they feel good about themselves, happy, content, etc. However, the Scriptures do not teach that true encouragement is to be equated with positive feelings.

Go back and consider what true encouragement looked like in the passages we have already discussed. For instance, Barnabas encouraged people to follow the Lord with purpose of heart (Acts 11:23). Peter exhorted people to be saved (Acts 2:40). Jude exhorted Christians to contend earnestly for the faith (Jude 1:3). Even Jesus Christ was not focused on leaving people with positive feelings about themselves. In fact, He bluntly told some people that they were hypocrites (when it needed to be said) and offended people at times (see Matthew chapters 15 and 23). Was He tearing people down – or was He actually building them up? He was encouraging them to follow the way of truth rather than live for sin (as they had been doing). The same is true about encouragement today. True encouragement is focused on building people up in the faith of the gospel of Christ. It is focused on encouraging them to do what they need to do in order to be right with God!

The source of true encouragement

The apostle Paul recognized a principle in 1 Corinthians 10:23 that you also need to embrace. He said, “All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful; all things are lawful for me, but not all things edify.” So, as Paul was focused on doing everything that was within his ability to encourage others to serve the Lord, he understood that there were some things that would accomplish that goal and some things that would not. Today, I believe that there are many things people try to do to encourage others that fail to provide true encouragement. Sometimes, people will offer worldly and ungodly

advice. Sometimes, people will engage in flattery. Sometimes, people will speak the truth – but will fail to speak the truth in the way it should be spoken.

You need to embrace the fact that the ultimate source of true encouragement is the gospel of Jesus Christ. In 1 Thessalonians 2:3-5, Paul said, “For our exhortation did not come from error or uncleanness, nor was it in deceit. But as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who tests our hearts. For neither at any time did we use flattering words, as you know, nor a cloak for covetousness – God is witness.” Similarly, Acts 20:32 simply states that it is the word of God's grace that is “able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.” God and His word is the source of true encouragement. And, in order to be an effective encourager, you must put His word to work in your life as you attempt to encourage others to follow His word!

Remember that you need to be encouraged

Can you remember what it was like when you were living in sin and needed someone to exhort you to be saved? Are there ever times in your life when you quit serving God (even if it is only temporarily)? Do you struggle to overcome any temptations? Do you ever have burdens that weigh you down and hinder your service to God? Have you ever wondered how you would possibly be able to continue serving God and overcome the tribulations you face? Could you ever use a “shot in the arm” to provoke you to be more diligent to serve God?

If the answer is “yes” to any one of these questions, you have been in need of an encourager. Did someone fill that role for you? If so, you can use your experiences to recognize the value of an encourager – and fulfill that role for someone else. If not, you know what it is like to need encouragement and not receive any. Then, you can determine that you will not sit idly by while there are others who need that kind of encouragement!

Recognize that you may be able to help point others to Jesus

There are other people who are living around you who need encouragement. Just like you need (and have needed) encouragement. There are those who have never become Christians you can encourage to forsake their lives of sin and find true peace and salvation through Jesus Christ. And, there are those who are Christians you can encourage to continue with the Lord.

As a Christian, your entire life must be viewed as an instrument to accomplish the righteousness of God (Romans 6:12-13; 1 Corinthians 6:19-20). As Matthew 5:14-16 describes, you are “the light of the world” – like a city that is set on a hill that cannot be hidden. And, you are to use your influence in this world to encourage other people around you to glorify the Father in Heaven. Jesus said, “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven” (verse 16).

Recognize that you are a member of your brothers and sisters in Christ

Though you also have a responsibility to encourage unbelievers to follow Jesus Christ, I want you to specifically focus on your Christian brothers and sisters at this time. You need to recognize that the Scriptures give you special responsibilities toward them. In fact, the Scriptures teach that Christians are “individually members of one another” (Romans 12:5).

Developing this kind of mentality toward your brethren will dramatically impact your dedication to encouraging them. The language calls to mind the interconnectedness of the human body. All of the individual members of the body are dependent upon one another and work together in order to accomplish a common goal. The same should be true concerning members of the body of Jesus Christ. Each member of the body is important in helping the other members accomplish their goal of living eternally in Heaven and glorifying God on this earth. Given this close fellowship that binds Christians together, every Christian should be

concerned about the well-being of every other Christian – and do whatever he/she is capable of doing to encourage faithful service to the Lord!

Sometimes encouragement involves correction

I have already established the fact that true encouragement is not defined by developing positive feelings in others. Instead, it is defined by helping other people live in a way that is pleasing to God. So, in keeping with this understanding, it is important to recognize that encouraging others will require rebuke and correction at times.

Certainly, the one who has never become a Christian will need to come to the realization that he/she is dead in sin and be pointed to the spiritual life that is in Jesus Christ. But, the same is also true concerning a Christian who has committed sin. What good would either one gain from “encouragement” that makes him/her feel good about himself/herself while living in sin? Instead, this person needs to understand the serious nature of his/her sin and repent while there is opportunity. Therefore, James 5:19-20 says, “Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins.” While each situation may call for a different approach (see Jude 1:22-23), encouragement requires that those who are in sin be pointed away from their sin to Jesus Christ!

Assembling together is crucial to mutual encouragement

While there are many ways you can encourage others to serve God, God clearly states that assembling with your brethren in the local church is one crucial ingredient. Hebrews 10:24-25 says, “And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.”

Christian brothers and sisters should be focused on stimulating each other to love and to accomplish good works. It is certainly easy for

Christians to neglect the work God desires them to be involved in. And, generally, Christians face temptations and struggles that work to pull them away from serving Jesus Christ faithfully. Therefore, God has instructed that Christians faithfully assemble with the local church. While these assemblies also accomplish the purpose of worshiping God, they also provide excellent opportunities for Christians to encourage each other in the faith of the gospel.

Avoid everything that tears down

While you think about things you can do to encourage other people to serve God faithfully (whether your brethren or unbelievers), it is just as important to avoid doing things that tear other people down or cause them to stumble. We began learning this principle from Ephesians 4:29. “Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification.” So, the implication is that there are many ways you can use your words to harm people spiritually. You could gossip, deceive, lie, blaspheme, slander, use offensive language, etc. All of these things would fail to point people to Jesus Christ.

Romans 14-15 is another passage that helps to see that there are things you can do to hinder people from following the Lord. The context deals with issues involving Christian liberty (things that God has not commanded to be done or not to be done). Yet, even in these issues that are of no consequence to God, there is a way to destroy the one for whom Christ died. Consider the instruction in Romans 14:19-20. “Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another. Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All things indeed are pure, but it is evil for the man who eats with offense.” So, this passage (and many others) should simply encourage you *not* to be a participant in anything that would cause another to stumble or turn people away from following Jesus Christ.

Encouragement is needed every day

You have now seen the importance of being an encourager. But, I now want to impress upon your mind how often this encouragement is needed.

Hebrews 3:12-13 says, “Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; but exhort one another daily, while it is called ‘Today,’ lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.”

Earlier in this lesson, we looked at this passage to understand why encouragement is needed. We established that there is an enemy who tries to stop people from following Jesus Christ. Now, I want you to recognize that you are instructed by the Hebrew writer to “exhort one another daily.” Just as there is daily pressure that tries to pull you away from God, you need daily encouragement to serve God. And, other people need that same daily encouragement. You have been given that responsibility to work to encourage people to follow Jesus Christ every single day!

You can do something to encourage others

“What can I do?” Maybe you are asking yourself that question right now. Maybe you just do not know what you could ever do to encourage someone to follow Jesus Christ. Yet, God says that you *do* play a role in this encouragement. Ephesians 4:16 says that every member of Christ’s body, when each one does its share, causes “growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.”

Each Christian has different abilities, opportunities, strengths, weaknesses, etc. And, though some can do more than others, everyone can do something to serve God and encourage others. I simply want to challenge you to focus on others – and learn to see their needs. Then, consider how you can utilize your individual abilities and opportunities to encourage each person who is around you (whether Christian or unbeliever) to follow Jesus.

Conclusion

Are you actively working every day to encourage other people to faithfully serve Jesus Christ? Let me simply suggest that if you are not doing your part to encourage those who are around you, you are helping them to be discouraged! Remember that there are those who are around you

who would greatly benefit from your encouragement – just as you benefit from the encouragement of others. Won't you determine to do your share and encourage people to serve the Lord with purpose of heart?

What are your opportunities to point others to Jesus?

How should you view your Christian brothers and sisters?

Study Questions

1. Encouragers Are Needed In The Lord's Work

Are you a wrecker or a builder? How can you tell?

Does true encouragement ever involve rebuke and correction?

Who should be an encourager?

How is assembling together crucial to mutual encouragement?

Who should you be encouraging?

What are some things you should avoid (i.e. things that tear down)?

Why are encouragers needed in the Lord's work?

How often is encouragement needed?

List and briefly explain three excellent examples of encouragers.

What can you do to encourage others?

2. Important Principles In Encouraging Others

What is the true purpose of encouragement?

What is the source of true encouragement?

Why do you need to remember your need to be encouraged?