

ENCOURAGEMENT

A How To Guide

Encouragement—it is a command, it is a gift, it is a joy, and it is something we can all learn to do better. In this series we will look at some great encouragers in the NT and get some powerful “how to” ideas, because we all need to pour courage into one another.

These questions are designed to extend the impact of the weekend message. Use them to go deeper in your personal study time, with your family and/or with a group.

1 Read 1 Thessalonians 5:11 & Hebrews 10:24-25. We motivate others in the direction of Jesus. Rick notes that our effort to “do life together” is assumed. He says, “*We don’t just need a personal relationship with Jesus; we need a shared relationship with Jesus.*” Share a time when you were really blessed by a word or deed that encouraged you. To what extent would you say the encouragement changed you?

2 “SO ENCOURAGE. . .BY STEPPING OUT WHEN RADICAL GENEROSITY IS NEEDED”. Read Acts 4:36-37. Barnabas sold a possession and gave it to his leaders. His action brought such an encouraging result. This is what radical generosity does and should become the new normal of the church. Share a story you have heard of radical generosity. Describe in your own words what it would mean to consider community first, before you purchase that next possession.

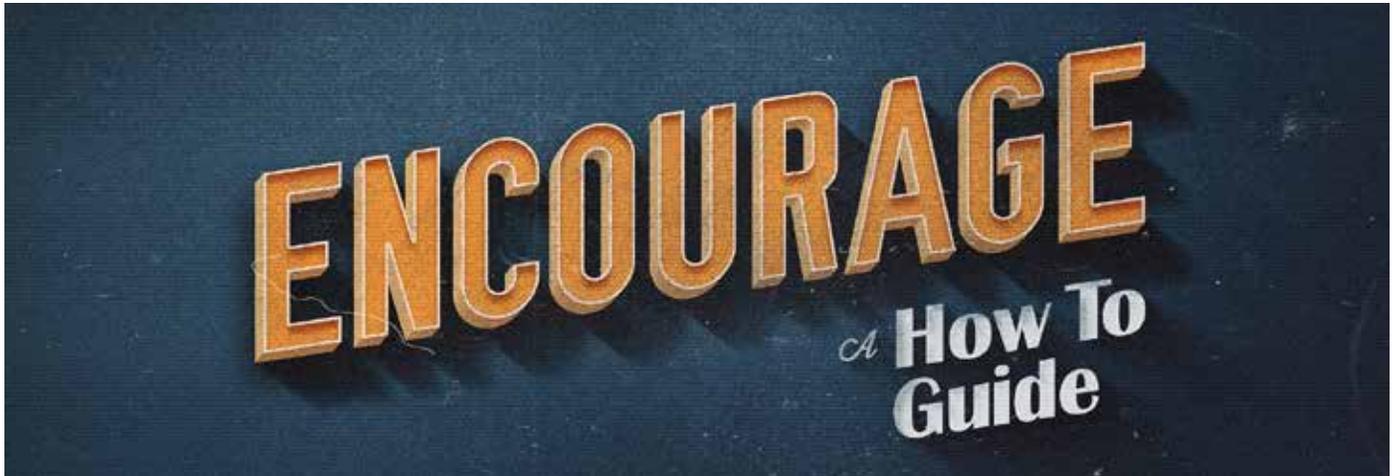
3 “SO ENCOURAGE. . .BY SEEKING OUT WHAT IS GOOD IN THE BODY OF CHRIST”. Read Acts 11:22-23. The racially integrated makeup of the Antioch church was drastically different. It most likely would become controversial. But, Barnabas was sent. He went to discover and encourage, not to investigate and condemn. Rick notes, “*There*

is something right about not looking for what’s wrong.” In what ways can you develop a practice of considering what God is doing before you consider what has gone wrong? How would looking for what’s good change the dynamics in our families, at work, and with our friends?

4 “SO ENCOURAGE. . .BY CALLING OUT THE KINGDOM POTENTIAL IN OTHERS”. Read Acts 11:25-26. Rick notes that encouragers focus more on what people can become than what they have done. Barnabas rescued Paul. Read Acts 9:26-27. Barnabas also rescued Mark. Read Acts 15:37-40. Rick said “*Barnabas was more than an optimist; he was a believer that the image of God exists in every person.*” Thus, Paul later accepted Mark and became an encourager himself. Share some current stories on the results when one believer called out the image of God in another person through encouragement.

5 “GO ENCOURAGE ON PURPOSE!” - Close by taking turns saying something encouraging to members in your group.





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1 Read 2 Timothy 1:15-18. “. . .for he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chains.” These words of Paul were spoken as he sat on death row. They describe Onesiphorus and illustrate the most powerful encouragement there is. **Onesiphorus showed up!** He came into a context that was full of fear and shame and delivered a message that was impossible to misunderstand. Rick said, “*There is no kind of encouragement more powerful than caring presence.*” Share a time when you were in a hard place and someone showed up to encourage you. How did that encounter encourage/change you?

2 “ENCOURAGEMENT THAT REFRESHES REQUIRES AUTHENTIC PRESENCE”. Read **2 Timothy 4:16.** Paul’s feeling of “aloneness” stresses that **we need each other!** Following Christ is not a private experience. It is to be shared. Rick said, “*Paul knew he was not going to abandon his faith; what he did not know was that some of his friends were going to abandon him.*” Paul’s chains had prompted his closest friends to be ashamed of him, to pull back when they were needed the most. Discuss Satan’s strategy to keep us from “showing up.” What does that strategy look like?

3 “PRESENCE IS A GIFT EVERYONE NEEDS AND ANYONE CAN GIVE”. Being present for others is the “litmus test” Jesus uses as He divides

the sheep from the goats. **Read Matthew 25:31-46.** So, needing to encourage like Onesiphorus, makes this call all-inclusive. This just doesn’t apply to a few, but is where anyone can show up and everyone ought to. Make a list together of some intentional ways you can show up for others.

4 “THE MINISTRY OF REFRESHMENT IS FREE AND COSTLY”. We are not talking about needing training, a large budget, or a top-notch program. We are talking about being an unselfish servant, about being intentionally aware to see others, about having humility that allows you to go unnoticed and about the courage it takes to involve yourself in the pain of another’s mess. Reflect on Rick’s statement “*Living this way is so worth it because of what our presence brought.*” What does our presence bring as we show up for each other?

5 “GOD COMMUNICATES HIS PRESENCE THROUGH YOUR PRESENCE”. Read **Matthew 18:20; 1 Corinthians 5:4; Matthew 25:40.** What is it about being in the presence of others that allows to experience an even greater awareness of the presence of God?”

Be Present: Have your group members repeat the following to each other: “I commit . . . to partner with God . . . to show up in your life . . . when you need encouragement.”



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1 Read Colossians 4:12. *“He is always wrestling in prayer for you...”* Paul’s words about Epaphras affirms the priority of prayer. Epaphras came to Paul with disconcerting words of a strange new teaching in Colossae. He then stayed in Rome with Paul while Tychicus and Onesimus delivered Paul’s letter to confront this challenge. How then could Epaphras encourage the followers of Jesus at Colossae? He kneeled in prayer from Rome! Rick said, *“He was always praying, not because there was nothing else he could do, but because there was nothing better he could do.”* Share some ways you point others in the direction of Jesus by interceding for them “from a distance.” What are the obstacles that prevent us from developing a consistent prayer life today?

2 TO ENCOURAGE THROUGH PRAYER . . . BE PERSISTENT. Read Colossians 4:2. Epaphras was practicing what Paul preached. “He is always . . . in prayer for you.” (Col.4:12). As Rick noted, *“Anybody can pray once, but encouragers pray often.”* Encouragers make their requests to God as much about other’s needs as they do about their own needs. It can be discouraging at times, because people don’t respond to Jesus by our time tables. And, God doesn’t change people outside of their own free will. On the other hand, He **never** gives up on them either. How can we imitate the posture of Jesus who intercedes for us **every time** we call on God? Describe a change in your routine that will help you be more persistent in prayer for others.

3 TO ENCOURAGE THROUGH PRAYER . . . FOCUS ON SPIRITUAL HEALTH. Apart from being vague, we can pray like Epaphras, who asked for spiritual maturity and for God to work His will out in the lives of those at Colossae (see again Col. 4:12). **Read Colossians 1:9-11.** Name some of the “spiritual blessings” Paul mentions in His prayer for the Colossians. Name some “material blessings” that this world may offer that Paul doesn’t mention. Discuss ways that we can train our minds to pray for the “spiritual blessings” that will help deepen another person’s relationship with Jesus.

4 TO ENCOURAGE THROUGH PRAYER . . . REALLY CARE. The scripture says Epaphras was “always *wrestling* in prayer for you.” The original word for wrestle is akin to our word “agony.” Rick said, *“Prayer is hard work. It is serious ministry, and it is strenuous ministry.”* It described Epaphras’ deep feeling for his brothers and sisters. He was a prayer warrior. He did not want them to be led astray. Name some ways that you can develop a deeper love for others that would demand this kind of prayer.

5 Rick concluded, “WE CAN STAND ANYTHING WHEN COVERED IN PRAYER.” Pray from a distance: Name a few people who might need to “feel your prayers.” Intercede for them in prayer that they may grow in the direction of Jesus.



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1 GOD ENCOURAGES EVANGELISTIC ENCOURAGEMENT. Read Acts 9:3-6, 10-18.

Ananias said “Yes, Lord!” until his fear prompted him to remind Jesus that Paul had a violent past. Jesus was, however, more interested in Paul’s future. As “grace giver,” Jesus puts everyone on his “invitation list”, even those who scare us. Thus, Jesus called Paul, “by His grace” before he was ever born (Galatians 1:15-16). Jesus invites all. We are sent to find the invited ones who are “open” and encourage them to accept Jesus. Rick said, *“The gospel is true for everyone, and the gospel can save anyone.”* Discuss some of the reasons we are afraid to invite those who are on Jesus’ invitation list?

2 GOD ENCOURAGES, SO . . . WE ENCOURAGE WITH THE CERTAINTY OF ETERNITY. The real story continues beyond time. So many in our world focus on the temporary, what is called the “good life.” It means having no worries and plenty of things. But in the end, these give no hope. Jesus offers far better. **Read 1 Peter 1:21; Colossians 3:1-4.** The real hope is sharing in the resurrection glory of Jesus. Rick said, (We) . . . *“need to share the claim of Jesus’ resurrection with all of the courage the Spirit can give us.”* Discuss how we can hear the Spirit and show courage to help others think about their eternity?

3 GOD ENCOURAGES, SO . . . WE ENCOURAGE WITH THE FIRMNESS OF FORGIVENESS. Rick noted, *“The good news is not that we can be saved,*

but that we are saved by grace.” **Read Romans 4:25.** Jesus has dealt with our sin problem. Our real struggle is having the faith to believe it. Faith says, “Jesus has given me a future with God!” Is it too good to be true? Probably, but it is true! **Read Acts 22:16.** Like Ananias, our message is the same. We encourage others to base their lives on what God has done, not what they have done. Consider what forgiveness means to you. How can your acceptance of forgiveness help you share Jesus with others?

4 GOD ENCOURAGES, SO . . . WE ENCOURAGE WITH THE PROMISE OF PURPOSE. Ananias told Paul that his life, although difficult, would bless a nation of people. And, Paul’s life has also brought meaning and salvation to millions throughout history. God chose him to bring us scripture, living words, that have blessed us and encouraged us to accept and to live like Jesus. This happened because Ananias encouraged Paul to follow Jesus. Share the story of the encourager who helped you accept Jesus.

5 NOTHING ENCOURAGES LIKE THE GRACE OF GOD. Encourage someone by speaking grace to them. Say, “Yes, Lord!” – Close your eyes and silently reflect for one or two minutes. Ask Jesus, *“Lord, please lay on my heart someone at work, in my neighborhood, from my relatives and friends, or a stranger you put in my path this week.”* Make a heart commitment to Jesus that you will pray for them and encourage them to come to Jesus.

