

# Encourage one another



**All Saints Homegroup series**

**January – March 2019**

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## Introduction to 'Encourage One Another'

Encouragement can make a tremendous difference to every one of us. We all have times when life seems to get on top of us and the challenges ahead seem more than we can cope with. Even the most optimistic people have times of discouragement.

Many of us have been blessed with friends who stood by us in the hardest times and helped us to get going and to keep on going.

Some of us have had the privilege of helping others through hard times.

Many of us have been blessed by people who recognised our potential, helped us to glimpse that potential, and then encouraged us to press on to achieve it.

Some of us have had the privilege of encouraging others to develop more of their potential.

The greatest encouragement is much more than a comfort which makes us feel good for a time. It is more the original sense of the English word "comfort" from the Latin *con fortis* meaning "with strength".

The presence of an encouraging friend can give strength while they are with us. The greatest encouragement comes from the God of encouragement who has promised his people that he will always be with us.

**Christian encouragement is helping one another to find our strength in God, by our words and actions, so that we walk closely with the Lord and live lives that are worthy of him.**

This short series of studies follows the sermon series and explores the theme of encouragement. Pray that the Lord will use this to:

- Encourage you in your walk with the Lord
- Encourage other members of your homegroup
- Make you someone who encourages others
- Build a culture of encouragement in our church
- Develop partnerships of encouragement

# 1. The God of Encouragement (Romans 15:1-13)

**Ice breaker:** Is the idea of God as Someone who wants to encourage you something you have experienced? Or, a new idea to you? Explain.

READ Romans 15:1-13

1. Romans 15: 4 has been expressed in the following ways in different translations of the Bible:-

*“For all those words which were written long ago are meant to teach us today; that when we read in the scriptures of the endurance of men and of all the help that God gave them in those days, we may be encouraged to go on hoping in our own time.” (J.B.Phillips)*

*“Even if it was written in Scripture long ago, you can be sure it’s written for us. God wants the combination of his steady, constant calling and warm, personal counsel in Scripture to come to characterise us, keeping us alert for whatever he will do next.” (The Message)*

*“These things that were written in the Scriptures so long ago are to teach us patience and to encourage us so that we will look forward expectantly to the time when God will conquer sin and death. (Living Bible)*

*“Everything written long ago was written to teach us so that we would have confidence through the endurance and encouragement which the Scriptures give us.” (God’s Word translation)*

*“Everything that was written in the past was written to teach us. The Scriptures give us patience and encouragement so that we can have hope.” (New Century version)*

Compare these versions with the Bible you normally use.

- How do they, together, help you to build up a picture of the role of the Scriptures, the Word of God?
- Which aspects do you find most helpful?

2. Knowledge of the Scriptures affects our attitude towards both our present and our future.

(a) What positive effects does knowing the Bible well have on us? Give some examples.

(b) When you are discouraged by circumstances, are you more likely to read the Bible to get encouraged; or to stop reading the Bible? Why?

(c) How does your response in (b) help or hinder you as you face challenges in life?

3. What is revealed about the character of God in this passage of Romans? (vs 5, 13)

4. What should be the effect of experiencing God's encouraging words on our relationships with fellow believers?

5. Look more closely at Paul's prayer in Romans 15:13. What is he asking God for?

(a) **Re-write this prayer** in the space below, changing all the "you" words into "me" and "I" words. Then pray this out loud.

**(b) Illustrate it:** How would you visualise this prayer?

- Can you find pictures to illustrate some of the words?
- Or, use different sized letters to emphasize key words?

**(c) Receive it:** What encouragement is there for you in this description of God?

6. What encouragement will you take away with you as a result of this study?

## 2. The Spirit of Encouragement (John 14:15-31)

**Ice breaker:** What is the most affirming thing that anyone has ever said to you? What difference did that make in your life?

If you have different Bible translations, you may find different words used in John 14:16 to describe the Holy Spirit. Various translations have used Advocate, Comforter, Counsellor, Friend, Helper and Paraclete.

- **Advocate** comes from outside the New Testament and it is used of a legal defence. It does not fit with John 14.
- **Counsellor** keeps the idea of legal defence and adds some advice.
- **Comforter** was used by Wycliffe in an early English translation. When he used the word, it meant “with strength”, but that emphasis has been lost in modern use.
- **Paraclete** is based on the Greek word but makes little sense without the Greek background. The Greek words for encouragement and paraclete have the same root.
- **Helper** is probably the best word that fits all the passages, but we could also use **Encourager**.

READ John 14:15-31

1. Why did the disciples need “another Helper”?

[Note: “Another” here has the sense of “another of the same kind”.]

- In what ways had Jesus been their Helper?
- How was that going to change?
- What did Jesus do to provide another Helper?

READ John 15:26-27, 16:7-15

2. What do we learn about the Helper and His work from the following verses?

John 14:16-17

John 14:26

John 15:26-27

John 16:7-11

3. Jesus said “It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Helper will not come to you”? (John 16:7)

- How do you think the disciples reacted when they first heard these words?
- How do you think their response changed after Pentecost?

4. In what ways have you experienced the presence of the Helper in your life? (See your answers to question 2)

5. In what ways do you desire to experience more of the presence and power of the Helper in your life?

(Turn what is shared into prayers for one another : either now, or at the end of the study.)



READ Ephesians 4:29-32

6. Paul writes about the danger of grieving the Holy Spirit, the Helper in our midst, by the way we relate to each other in the body of Christ.

- What negative behaviour grieves the Helper?
- What positive behaviour pleases the Lord?

7. Discuss how we can speak words that build up other people. Share practical examples, such as:

- Saying thank you when ...
- Giving praise when ...
- Helping the discouraged by ...

### 3. The Son of Encouragement

(Acts 4:32-37, 9:26-31 and 11:19-30)

**Ice breaker:** What is the most appropriate nickname you have heard?

What is the most amusing nickname you have seen?

What nicknames have people given to you?

In this session we are looking at Barnabas. His original name was Joseph, but the apostles gave him the nickname Barnabas which means “son of encouragement.” He was well known for the consistent encouragement he gave to the people around him.

*“Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means Son of Encouragement), sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles’ feet.” (Acts 4:36-37)*

READ Acts 9:20-31

1. Why were the disciples afraid of Saul when he arrived in Jerusalem?  
(Acts 8:1-3 and 9:1-2 give more of the background.)
2. How do you think Barnabas discovered what was really happening in Saul’s life? What courage did it take to go to someone who made others afraid?
3. What did Barnabas do to bring Saul and the church together?
4. What were the positive results of Barnabas’ initiative for the disciples in Jerusalem (9:28-30) and throughout the region (9:31)?

5. If the “son of encouragement” had not intervened, in what ways might the outcome have been different:

- for Saul
- for Barnabas
- for the disciples
- for the further growth of the church

6. When you were a new believer, did you have people like Barnabas who encouraged you in your faith and who linked you with a group of believers? What did they do?

- How can you in turn, encourage and support a younger believer ... a fellow disciple ...?
- Discuss different ways that we can provide encouragement to another person. What suggestions do you have?

READ Acts 11:19-30

The good news came to Antioch as a result of believers being scattered by persecution. Many people came to faith and turned to the Lord because “the Lord’s hand was with them.” There was now a church full of new believers who needed teaching and strengthening. In response, the church leaders in Jerusalem sent Barnabas to Antioch.

7. What were Barnabas’ reactions to what he discovered in Antioch?  
(See verse 23 and verses 25-26)

What lessons can we learn from his actions?

## 8. How does Luke describe Barnabas and his ministry (11:24)?

- To what extent do we match Luke's description of Barnabas? Do our lives have the same impact?
- What are some specific steps you can take to become more like Barnabas? (Ask for God's help in taking a first step this week.)
- What would it take for you to develop the reputation of being "a good person, full of the Holy Spirit and faith"?

Barnabas, the Son of Encouragement, had a powerful ministry of affirming the strengths he found in other people and helping them to continue growing in the Lord. He recruited Saul and trained him as they worked together. He didn't keep power for himself – he wanted to find the right person for the task, and he was happy to let Saul (Paul) overtake him and end up with a more prominent role.

## 4. The Ministry of Encouragement

(2 Thessalonians 2:13-3:5)

**Ice breaker:** Have you ever been away from family or friends when they were facing big challenges? How did you feel? What did you want to do to help them? What did you do?

Paul's first visited Thessalonica on his second missionary journey in AD 50-51 [see Acts 17:1-9]. He stayed three weeks, planted a church, and then had to leave quickly because of violent opposition. He left behind a small fragile church surrounded by danger. He sent Timothy back to Thessalonica as soon as he could [see Acts 18:5]. We have two of the letters Paul wrote to the believers in Thessalonica - probably in AD 51-52.

The letters show Paul's deep concern for this new church. He cannot be with them to encourage and teach them. He does send others to help them when he can. But there is one thing that he can always do – he prays for them. He is a dynamic activist, but he is convinced that prayer comes before action.

1. Paul starts both of his letters to the Thessalonians with prayer:

*“We always thank God for all of you, mentioning you in our prayers. We continually remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labour prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.”* [1 Thessalonians 1:2-3]

*“We ought always to thank God for you, brothers and sisters, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and the love every one of you has for each other is increasing.”* [2 Thessalonians 1:3]

- Which words does Paul use in both opening prayers?
- How would these prayers have encouraged members of the church?

2. Paul's letter continues with more prayers for the Thessalonian believers. **Read** 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12 in your own Bible version, and compare it with the versions below:-

*“That is why we always pray for you, asking our God to help you live the kind of life he called you to live. We pray that with his power God will help you to do the good things you want and perform the works that come from your faith. <sup>12</sup> We pray all this so that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ will have glory in you, and you will have glory in him. That glory comes from the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.”* (New Century Version)

*“And so we keep on praying for you, that our God will make you worthy of the life to which he called you. And we pray that God, by his power, will fulfil all your good intentions and faithful deeds. <sup>12</sup> Then everyone will give honour to the name of our Lord Jesus because of you, and you will be honoured along with him. This is all made possible because of the undeserved favour of our God and Lord, Jesus Christ.”* (New Living translation)

- When Paul says “we constantly pray for you” (1:11, NIV) what does he mean? [see also 1 Thessalonians 5:17]
- What are Paul's main prayer requests in verse 11? (What would he expect to see in the Thessalonian church as an answer to these prayers?)
- What motivates Paul, Silas and Timothy to pray in this way?
- What is the connection between grace and glory?

3. From these prayers for the Thessalonians, what example has Paul given us regarding how and what we pray for one another?

READ 2 Thessalonians 2:13-3:5

4. Look at 2:13-15. What was God's part in the Thessalonians coming to faith? What role did Paul and his friends play in this?
  - How should this affect the way that we pray for those who do not follow Jesus?
  - How should this encourage us to share the good news about Jesus?
  
5. What does it mean to "share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ"? (2:14)
  
6. Take a few minutes to reflect on Paul's prayer in verses 16-17 (set out below). Underline words that seem important to you. (Notice: Where does encouragement come from? How abundant is the source? Where does encouragement come to?)

*" May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father,*

*who loved us*

*and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope,*

*encourage your hearts*

*and strengthen you in every good deed and word."*

7. Paul and his friends pray for the Thessalonians, but they also ask for prayer for themselves – see 3:1-5.

- What are Paul's prayer requests?
- How is Paul's confidence in the Lord expressed alongside his requests?
- What is communicated by the example of a more mature believer who humbly asks for prayer?
- Do we have the humility to ask people to pray for us?

8. Use the words of Paul's prayers that we have looked at to pray for yourself, and for people around you.

- Either use the prayer as it is, or use it as a framework for your own prayer.
- In groups of two or three, use these prayers to pray blessing and encouragement for one another.

Paul sees prayer as the primary approach to encouraging the Lord's people. When he is away from his friends, he writes to them and sends others to help them. When he is with his friends, he teaches them, encourages them, and urges them to be the very best that they can be for the Lord. This flows from his prayers for them.

**ACTION: WILL YOU PRAY ENCOURAGEMENT INTO THE HEARTS OF PEOPLE AROUND YOU?**



## 5. The Partnership of Encouragement (1 Samuel 23:7-18)

**Ice breaker:** in Session 4 we were challenged to pray encouragement into the hearts of people around us. Have you been doing this? How has this changed you? Have you seen any answers to your prayers?

*“Jonathan went to David at Horesh and helped him to find strength in God.”* [1 Samuel 23:16]

David and Jonathan are close friends. Jonathan is the son of Saul, the first King of Israel, and he might have expected to be the next king. Saul has made a mess of being king and the Lord is not pleased with him. Samuel has already anointed David to be the next king of Israel. David is popular with the people and they have celebrated some of his victories – starting with killing Goliath with a stone from his sling. Saul is determined to kill David, but Jonathan stands by his friend.

READ 1 Samuel 23:7-18

1. In this passage, what danger does David face?
2. Who does David turn to for help?

Note: The ephod (v9) was a long sleeveless vest made of linen, worn by priests. The high priest’s ephod had special significance, including 12 precious stones, representing the tribes of Israel. A pouch on the ephod held the Urim and Thummim, two small objects used to determine God’s will in some national matters.

3. What action did David take? Why was David kept safe (verse 14)?
4. Why did Jonathan want to come to David even though Saul wanted to kill David (see 1 Samuel 20:30-31)?

1 Samuel 18:1-3

1 Samuel 19:1-7

1 Samuel 20:16-17

1 Samuel 20:42

5. Jonathan helped his friend to “find strength in God” (23: 16). What does this mean? What is the difference between finding strength in the presence of a friend and finding strength in God? What do you think Jonathan did?

6. What did David and Jonathan do when they parted (verse 18)?

READ Ruth 1:16-18 and 2:11-12

7. What similarities do you see in the relationships of David and Jonathan, and Naomi and Ruth?

DAVID + JONATHAN	FRIENDSHIP LOVE COMMITMENT COVENANT ENCOURAGEMENT STRENGTH	NAOMI + RUTH
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Good friends bring us strength and encouragement. The greatest friends help us to find our strength and encouragement in God.

8. How should we respond to this?

- Do you have friends like this?
  - If “yes”, pause and thank God for them
  - If “no”, pray that God will give you friends like this
  
- Are you a friend like this to other people?

\* \* \* \* \*



**Partners in Encouragement** is the name we are using to describe a deliberate approach to encouraging one another.

The purpose is to encourage one another to find strength in God so that we walk closely with the Lord and live a life worthy of him.

The idea is for a group of 2, 3 or 4 people to get together at least once a month for SHARING, LISTENING, ENCOURAGING and PRAYING.

You will find more information in the accompanying booklet to this series - **“Partners in Encouragement.”**

## 6. The Circle of Encouragement (2 Corinthians 1:1-11)

**Ice breaker:** Who are the people who have helped you the most at the lowest points in your life? How did they help? Why were they able to do this?

Paul wrote his second letter to the Corinthians in about AD 55. He writes surrounded by pressures that threaten to overwhelm him – “in troubles, hardships and distresses; in beatings, imprisonments and riots; in hard work, sleepless nights and hunger ... dying, and yet we live on; beaten, and yet not killed; ... having nothing, and yet possessing everything.” [2 Corinthians 6:3-10 – see also 4:7-12 and 11:22-29] He has come to the end of his own considerable resources. He despairs even of life.

It is at that lowest point that he has a fresh encounter with the Lord. He receives comfort, encouragement and help from the Lord. He is given new hope. He receives grace to help in his time of need. He then shares that comfort with those around him.

READ 2 Corinthians 1:1-11

1. Paul begins by praising God in verses 3 and 4.

- What has he discovered about God that he turns into praise?
- What difference has this made to his experience?
- What have you discovered about God in your own difficulties that you can turn into praise?

2. Verse 3 describes a “circle of encouragement” – a circle of comfort. In the space below, draw a diagram to show what Paul describes.

- Where does the praise in verse 3 fit in your diagram?
- Which parts of this “circle of encouragement” are most familiar to you?
- Which parts of the “circle of encouragement” need to be developed in your life? How can this happen?

3. What did Paul mean by “the sufferings of Christ” (verse 5)?

- In what ways did Paul experience of the sufferings of Christ?
- How do people experience the sufferings of Christ around the world today?
- In what ways might we experience the sufferings of Christ?

4. Paul writes “our comfort overflows” (verse 5). How would you visualise comfort “overflowing” in a distressing situation you know?
5. What difference will comfort bring to the experience of the Corinthian church as they encounter suffering (verse 6)?
6. How does Paul describe his circumstances in verses 8-11? [You may like to read 4:7-12, 6:3-10 and 11:22-29 to get more details.]
7. What positive lessons do Paul and his friends learn through this experience (verses 9-10)?
8. What positive actions do they take in verses 10-11 to apply these lessons?

*“But God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus, and not only by his coming but also by the comfort you had given him.”*

[2 Corinthians 7:6-7]

“Being comforted can also mean receiving strength, encouragement and hope to deal with our troubles.” [Note in NIV Life Application Bible]

9. Think about a challenge that you are facing and ask yourself these questions:

- Have I come to the end of my own resources?
- Have I discovered what it means to rely on God who raises the dead?
- Have I set my hope on God?
- Have I asked others to pray for me?
- Can I praise God for what I am discovering about who God is?
- Can I complete the “circle of encouragement” by sharing the comfort I receive from the Lord with someone else?

### Conclusion

Look back over these studies. Think through all that has been discussed and shared, and all that you have learnt.

Ask the Lord to help you continue to live and grow as a disciple of Jesus who knows the encouragement that comes from walking with God and with fellow believers; and to make encouraging others an everyday part of your lifestyle.