

“Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another.”

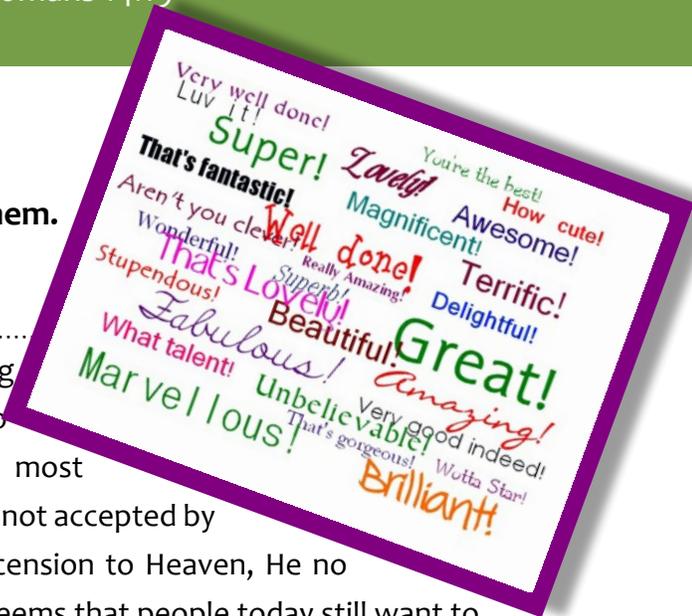
Romans 14:19

Praise & Encouragement

Theme: Giving others a pat on the back can really help them.

Review of Lesson 16

We all get treated unfairly at times, and we are guilty of doing the same to others. So we need to have a sensitive heart to know how to live peacefully with others. Jesus was the most misunderstood and unfairly treated person of all times. He was not accepted by His own people and he was shamefully treated. After His ascension to Heaven, He no longer was an earthly man but the exalted Lord in Heaven. It seems that people today still want to view Him as a man, and thus misunderstand Him more now than when He was on earth. Misunderstandings about Him are reduced as we learn how to interpret the Bible correctly. Misunderstandings are also reduced if we learn to follow the last instructions (orders) from the Lord. Our orders are found in the Pauline Epistles and are given specifically to us—the last orders from the Lord for our Age.



Bible Truth

Introduction

The subject of encouragement is a very important topic in the Bible. The actual word "encourage" is rarely used, but many New Testament words present the idea of encouragement. The words beseech, urge, edify, and exhort relate to the topic of encouragement; for example, "...but we urge (encourage) you..." (1 Thes. 4:10, parenthesis added). The preceding verse encourages us to love one another and to do the right things in life. However, encouragement is not always about telling someone to do the right thing; it can also mean giving someone a pat on the back for what they are doing. A simple pat on the back can make someone feel it is worthwhile to keep doing the right thing; it provides them with the assurance they need to move on in life.

Discouragement takes many forms. It can be dissatisfaction with the past, a dislike for the present, or doubt about the future. Encouragement is the universal antidote for discouragement; it provides hope and support. Some common things that "get us down" are:

- family problems (illness, divorce, etc.)
- one bad thing after another happens
- school is difficult and disappointing
- you feel inferior
- friends betray you
- you feel no hope for the future

We all know discouragement is a thief. Discouragement steals from us the good things in life;

it steals our joy and brings us down. Discouragement takes away our energy and creates fatigue. It takes our satisfaction and makes us wallow in self pity. It takes away our confidence and hope—making us feel helpless. Discouragement is discussed in the Bible because it is easy for any believer to think living a godly life is not worth the struggle (examples: Num. 21:4; Deut. 1:21; Col. 3:21). The good news is the Lord never gets discouraged, **"He will not fail nor be discouraged, Till He has established justice in the earth..."** (Isa. 42:4a). The fact our Lord never gets discouraged should actually encourage us because that means He will never give up on us and will always keep His Word to us.

Discussion: Discouragement takes our joy, peace, confidence, etc. Discouragement has some friends—things that come into our lives as a result of being discouraged. These friends are sorrow, worry, helplessness, fatigue, hopelessness, self pity, depression, and bitterness. Discuss.

Encouragement looks forward in time. It is designed to help someone move forward in life and not give up serving the Lord. How can a person know he/she is doing the right thing? One way is for another person to confirm that truth to them. Saying something kind to someone can really help them realize they are of value to others (for example: nice job, way to go, congratulations, what you are doing is wonderful, you are a true friend). We all need this type of support and encouragement, and it is easy to do. Even pets respond to the power of kind words.

That's Not My Gift

This lesson encourages believers to do what they have learned from the Bible. In addition, they are given support and praise for what they are doing. Each person needs some praise and encouragement for doing the right thing. With support, especially

from those we respect, we can see the value of continuing to do the right thing, **"...do not grow weary in doing good"** (2 Thes. 3:13b). In a similar manner, your encouragement is needed by others. This latter type of encouragement ("thanks for doing a good job") is the primary concern of this lesson.

Thanking another and building them up can be considered a form of human *praise* (not to be confused with praise for the Lord which is related to worship). The human form of praise helps overcome discouragement. Too much praise can be interpreted as insincere, or may also lead to pride; but we all need some and we have to learn to give it to others. Praise is a great encourager. Even world rulers recognize good actions and praise us, **"Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same"** (Rom. 13:3b). Most importantly is the praise and encouragement we receive from God, **"Then each one's praise will come from God"** (1 Cor. 4:5b). Thus, God and the human rulers give praise to us; it's encouraging to hear this.

In Romans 12:8, Paul instructed certain people, who had a special gift from God, to use that gift. God knew it would be important to encourage new believers when He started today's Church (body of believers from Paul's day until now). He knew it was so important that He gave certain people a special gift to help others; that was the gift of exhortation. The gift of exhortation urged others to keep on doing good, gave praise, proved comfort, built others up, and encouraged them. The purpose of that gift was to help others, right then, not to wait around and hope someone would need it—someone always needed it. Someone in your life needs encouragement right now.

Today we all have the skills and talents needed to be an encourager, and we get a great deal of instruction on how to do it from the Word of God. If we want to

be mature, both as a Christian and as a person, then we have to assume the spiritual responsibility we all have been given from God to encourage, praise, and comfort others (often called edification). We cannot escape our duty by saying, "That's not my gift;" God has given us all that responsibility, **"Therefore I exhort (encourage) first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men (humans)"** (1 Tim. 2:1, parentheses added).

Sure, some people may be more talented in this area than others, but we should learn how to encourage others.

Discussion: It is great to get a pat on the back. It encourages us to keep on doing the right things. What other things do you find most encouraging in your life?

Life Applications

Essentials of Encouragement

We will now look at several factors concerning encouragement—with special emphasis related to praise. It is great to be praised and encouraged because they build us up, they give us a boost, and they provide a source of joy on the inside. Similarly, if we learn how to give such things to others, we will then help build them up. Pretty soon there is a snowball effect (like snow rapidly building up on a rolled snowball). That is, our actions create a blessing that is passed on as person after person learns how to encourage each other.

1) Think Positively: You cannot be an encourager to others if you are always grumpy and negative. If you are always negative, if you bring gloom into the room, most people will not want to listen to you for very long. A group of negative people will only bring each other down. There is no encouragement or praise in being negative. Also, there will be times when anyone is emotionally down. However, if you are always down, then it will be hard to encourage or praise others. Having any of these traits does not make you bad or a sinner, but it is something you should address in your life. So the first step in learning to be an encourager is to have a positive attitude—one that will enable you to help others.

Being negative is not how you have to live your life, and it certainly is not how God wants you to live your life. Study Romans 8:29, **"... He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son... ."** This means each believer in Christ has been selected to grow spiritually to have a mind/attitude that is like His (positive and forward looking). God chose this destiny for you before He created the world. None of us can totally understand what this means, but we do know it means God is in the people changing business—transforming lives (Romans 12:2). He wants to make each of us like His Son.

God has specifically told the believer to think on positive things. He says this for a very specific reason—positive thinking is needed for good mental health. Each person needs to ask God to help him/her develop a positive way of thinking. Positive thinking concentrates on those things worthy of praise, **"... if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things"** (Phil. 4:8b). When negative thoughts occur (even if they are true), you cannot let them capture your mind, but instead change your thoughts to something good. This will be hard to do, so seek His help in prayer and by reading encouraging verses in the Bible.

Life has many problems, but you can't let them be the only things you think about. When you get up in the morning, ask Him to help you look and focus on the positive things. Pray about this during the day. Choose in your heart to think about the positive. Before you know it, you will bring sunshine into the room. When you have a positive frame of mind, you will be better equipped to encourage others. By His grace you can do this. As an added benefit, a positive outlook will be beneficial to your long-term physical and mental health.

2) Act Positively: Try to recall a time in your life when someone put more faith or confidence in you than you thought you really deserved. That person really believed in you and gave you an attitude that "no matter what, you can do it." The confidence they had in you made you perform in a manner that may have even surprised you. They gave you a pat on the back, and that made you feel important. When someone does that, you will do your best not to disappoint them; you will try hard to succeed. That person built you up. God wants each of us to be this type of person.

Since we are asked to be the type of person that is an encourager and who gives praise, God teaches us how to do it. **"Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification (building up), that it may impart grace to the hearers"** (Ephesians 4:29, parenthesis added). Any corrupt (worthless) talk that comes out of our mouth tends to hurt or discourage others. Instead, we are to say what is good for the purpose of building others up. When we build others up, we are ministers of God's grace. Yes, you can be a minister of God's grace by the words you speak. This verse is not saying you have to preach a sermon, but refers to what you say to others. What you say can give them a boost or a pat on the back. By doing this, you are a minister of grace to them. The word grace in this verse means: the

divine influence on the heart. God uses your kind words of praise as a divine influence on their heart. By doing this, you will be known for the positive and encouraging words you speak to lift others up bringing hope and joy into their lives.

Your primary goal with others should not be to look for what they are doing wrong, so that you can correct them. Instead, search for things they do which can be praised—that would encourage them. Thus, the Bible says, **"The mouth of a righteous is a well of life"** (Proverbs 10:11a). Your mouth can be a fountain bringing life-sustaining comfort and encouragement to others. A fun person to be with is one that offers praise and encouragement, not criticism and negative reminders. An encouragement can be as simple as saying thank you or offering a hug.

Discussion: Give an example of when someone had faith in you or praised you. How did it make you feel? Did this encourage you to try your very best to do a good job?

3) Speak Positively: A Christian should make a conscious decision to find ways that will edify others (build up and encourage). **"Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify (build up) another"** (Romans 14:19, parenthesis added). So you must think about what topics to discuss and select the positive ones that will praise others. Each person must choose to specialize in encouraging words—not the critical ones. The people in your life may not be encouragers, so it will be difficult for you to change the pattern of their thinking. However, encouragement is contagious—it catches on.

A good rule is to not start complaining about something the minute you see your friends or relatives. Instead of telling them what upsets you,

maybe it would be better to ask them how their day is going, give them a kind word, let them know you are praying for them, and give a word of praise. You will be surprised how this will change their attitude and outlook on life (the snowball effect). Go out of your way to acknowledge the abilities and work of others. By doing this you build them up, and they will in turn see you in a different light. Hopefully it will rub off on them, and they will learn to give you some praise too. As you talk to people, make a conscious effort to say more positive things than negative. Try not to speak in a negative way about others, and avoid responding with an attitude of gloom and doom. Some unsaved people can be positive and provide encouragement because of their positive attitude. Christians can be even more uplifting because we can provide His Word of encouragement.

Another good rule is to not talk about yourself nonstop. "I, me, and myself" discussions get boring quickly. Acknowledge others, ask about their lives,

and ask about their problems. Someone may be going through a hard time and not talking, so try to be observant and ask that person what is wrong. As you become aware of their situation, respond in a kind manner. Remember, God comforts and encourages us in our hard times, so that we will know how to comfort others (2 Cor. 1:4). It is never easy to know exactly what to say to someone who has experienced a tragedy in his/her life. Sometimes it is best to listen and just be there—just your presence may be the best encouragement of all. Let them know you are there for them, pray with them, and share a verse of God's love for them (Rom. 8:31-39; Heb. 4:16; Psa. 46:1-2).

Activity: Write down the names of people you think could use a word of encouragement. Think about, or discuss with others, what might be a good thing to say. Pray that God would use you for this mission. Then carry out your plan and give them that praise.

Take 2 Heart

Summary

We all need to be encouraged and to be given a "pat on the back." Encouragement is aligned with giving praise. When we praise another, it ministers grace to their heart. The Lord clearly teaches us that it is a need of everyone to receive praise; even some animals respond to human praise. Discouragement results from things going wrong (or not as we hope), and it robs us of joy and brings us down. It makes us feel tired, dissatisfied, full of self pity, and helpless. Because we all experience disappointment, God instructs us to give praise, comfort, and encouragement (edification) to each other. This enables a person to know they are appreciated by

another human which can help them move forward in life. To be an encourager, the main things to remember are: **think positively, act positively, and speak positively (avoid the put-downs)**. Having a desire to build others up is a character trait the Lord can develop in each believer.

Gospel

The good news is God is in the transforming business. His desire is to change our negative thought patterns to positive ones if we seek His direction and follow the Word. We can have our minds renewed and learn how to help others through words of praise and encouragement. We all need to get praise and a pat

on the back from others, and they need it from us. The whole process of encouragement starts with believing Jesus Christ died for our sins. He had to die in our place, so that our sins could be forgiven. Once we believe, no bells or whistles will go off. However, there will be a peace and assurance that we never realized before. The Holy Spirit comes into our heart and begins to transform us to be more like Christ each day. Just as God is the God of all mercy, comfort, and grace, so too we can be His ambassadors ministering the same to others.

Encouragement

God has given us the position of being an ambassador to the people in this world. He has incredible confidence in us (more than we believe we are

worthy). He is always with us and will provide the help we need to be all He desires. Christians should be praised and thanked for their love for Him and what they are doing. On a personal basis, you may think you are not doing anything, but just studying this lesson is a start. A good way to be an encourager is to give someone a call, send a card or text message, let someone know you are praying for them, etc. Receiving praise and encouragement really helps bring the truth of the Word to others from the mouth of another human. God knew this was necessary, and that is why He asks us to do this. Try to give several words of praise each day. You will soon receive many back. This will help you be someone that honors the Lord and is known as someone who encourages and builds up others.