

4 | We Encourage One Another



THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

In 1895, sixteen-year old Edward Steichen bought a camera with money his mother gave him and started snapping pictures around the house—fifty of them, in fact. When the film was developed, he had forty-nine bad pictures and only one good one: a picture of his sister at the piano. His father thought that was a poor showing, but his mother insisted that one photo was beautiful and more than compensated for forty-nine failures. Her encouragement convinced the boy to stick with his new hobby.

Edward pressed on to become one of the world's most renowned photographers. But, in the beginning, he almost gave up. What pushed him forward were his mother's encouraging words in the midst of a lot of failure.¹³

The Christian life can be hard at times. Temptations abound, and we sometimes struggle to honor God in our lives. Encouragement from fellow believers is a great help in this struggle. Their words of support push us forward when we might be tempted to give in or give up. We need the encouragement of other believers—and they need ours.

GROUP TIME

THE POINT: We need the _____ of others—and they need ours.

Becoming a Christian isn't about improving yourself or becoming more spiritual. It's a radical transformation. It's about receiving a new identity—one that produces new longings, godly dispositions, and fruitful behaviors. The Christian life is marked by contrasts; it's a life that distinguishes between "what I used to be" and "what I am today." As the apostle Paul wrote, "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, and see, the new has come" (2 Corinthians 5:17). Through our new identity, God produces a new way of living.

Ephesians 4:17-22 ¹⁷ Therefore, I say this and testify in the Lord: You should no longer live as the Gentiles live, in the futility of their thoughts. ¹⁸ They are darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them and because of the hardness of their hearts. ¹⁹ They became callous and gave themselves over to promiscuity for the practice of every kind of impurity with a desire for more and more. ²⁰ But that is not how you came to know Christ, ²¹ assuming you heard about him and were taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus, ²² to take off your former way of life, the old self that is corrupted by deceitful desires,

_____ sinful habits.

Because of our new lives in Christ, we must resist returning to sinful attitudes or actions. Toward that end, Paul told us "to take off your former way of life, the old self that is corrupted by deceitful desires" (v. 22). As people living a new life through Jesus, we must put away those attitudes and actions that conflict with God's holiness. In verse 22, Paul told us what to do—discard the old way of life.

Ephesians 4:23-28 ²³ to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, ²⁴ and to put on the new self, the one created according to God's likeness in righteousness and purity of the truth. ²⁵ Therefore, putting away lying, speak the truth, each one to his neighbor, because we are members of one another. ²⁶ Be angry and do not sin. Don't let the sun go down on your anger, ²⁷ and don't give the devil an opportunity. ²⁸ Let the thief no longer steal. Instead, he is to do honest work with his own hands, so that he has something to share with anyone in need.

Encourage others to live _____ with their new lives in Christ.

In the Christian life, we've seen what we're supposed to "take off" (our old sinful habits). Now, let's consider what we're to "put on." We're "to put on the new self" (v. 24). In saying this, Paul painted a stark contrast between the old self and the new self.

- ▶ "The old self" (v. 22) was "excluded from the life of God" (v. 18), while "the new self" was "created according to God's likeness" (v. 24). The old self was characterized by darkness, ignorance, and impurity (vv. 18-19) while the new self is characterized by "righteousness and purity of the truth" (v. 24).
- ▶ Jesus saves us in order to change us. This doesn't mean we'll always be perfect, but it does mean that we shouldn't intentionally return to our "former way of life" (v. 22) or knowingly make room for old besetting sins. Instead, we're to persistently pursue attitudes and actions consistent with new life in Christ.

Ephesians 4:29-32 ²⁹ No foul language should come from your mouth, but only what is good for building up someone in need, so that it gives grace to those who hear. ³⁰ And don't grieve God's Holy Spirit. You were sealed by him for the day of redemption. ³¹ Let all bitterness, anger and wrath, shouting and slander be removed from you, along with all malice. ³² And be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving one another, just as God also forgave you in Christ.

Take every opportunity to _____ others with your words.

Paul exhorted us to watch our mouths. How would our conversations differ if we resolved to allow no room for language that was coarse, foul, or worthless? How might our relationships thrive if, when talking to others, each of us consciously thought about using our words to build up others rather than spewing speech that tears them down? God expects His children to build up one another.

HE MAKES ALL THINGS NEW

Use the space below to record specific words that describe your "old self" (your character before encountering Jesus) and your "new self" (your character after encountering Jesus).

Old Self

New Self

ENGAGE

DAY 1: Christ died so that we can put off our old way of life and put on His righteousness.

Read Ephesians 4:17-22.

In verse 22, Paul told us what to do: put away our old way of life. But, it's important to see that he told us *why* in verses 17-21. We're to shed our former way of living because:

- ▶ Christians aren't to do the same things non-Christians do (v. 17).
- ▶ Christians aren't to be ignorant to God's commands (v. 18).
- ▶ Christians aren't to allow their hearts to become hardened to the things of God (v. 18).
- ▶ Christians aren't to increasingly pursue impure living like non-Christians do (v. 19).
- ▶ Living in sin isn't how Jesus has taught us to live (vv. 20-21).

And that's Paul's point in this passage. You and I have a biblical responsibility not to return to the dirty clothes. Jesus didn't save us so that we might continue to wear the things He died to save us from. He saved us to wear a new wardrobe—to be adorned with the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23).

What sin do you need to let go of and move past? Confess this today and repent. Don't remain shackled by the weight of sin you no longer have to bear.

“Jesus didn't save us so that we might continue to wear the things He died to save us from.”

CHRIS JAMES

DAY 2: In Christ, we are made new.

Read 2 Corinthians 5:17.

Picture a summer day of working or exercising outside. The weather is especially warm. Maybe you jogged a few miles, played ball with a couple of friends, or did yard work. Whatever you imagine yourself doing, at the end of it, you're hot, sweaty, dirty, and smelly. Your clothes and your body are a dirty, stinky mess, but how refreshing it is to shed those dirty clothes and stand under a cool, cleansing shower! What once was filthy has now been washed clean. What was weary has been renewed. I love this imagery because it pictures in a small way how Jesus cleanses us at salvation. When we bring to him the dirtiness of our sin, He places us under the cleansing flow of His grace, and He makes us new. Thank God for His grace—and thank God for showers!

How ludicrous it would be after a long, hot day to come inside and take a refreshing shower only to put on the same filthy clothes again! I cringe just thinking about it. Why? Dirty, soiled clothes don't belong on a bathed, clean body. In much the same way, impure attitudes and actions aren't suitable in a life made pure by the blood of Jesus. A life characterized by sin just doesn't belong with a heart saved by the gospel of Jesus.

Spend a few moments thanking God for His work in your life. Praise Him for bringing you out of your old way of life and offering you new life in Christ.

DAY 3: Our lives give evidence of Christ's redemption.

Read Ephesians 4:23-28.

We can demonstrate the "new self" in our Christian lives in numerous ways. In this passage, Paul outlined three specific life changes. Each one includes a negative principle and a positive alternative.

- 1. LIFE CHANGE #1 (v. 25):** Put away lying. Instead, speak the truth to each other.
- 2. LIFE CHANGE #2 (vv. 26-27):** Don't let the sun go down on your anger (unrighteous anger). Paul inferred that we can be angry sometimes and yet not sin. This is commonly called righteous anger, and it includes anger over injustices and harm done to others. (See Mark 3:5; 11:15-17.)
- 3. LIFE CHANGE #3 (v. 28):** Do not steal. Instead, do honest work.

Whose life displays evidence of Christ's work? Let them know with a quick verbal encouragement, a short note, or a handwritten Bible verse.

DAY 4: Our words offer life-giving encouragement.

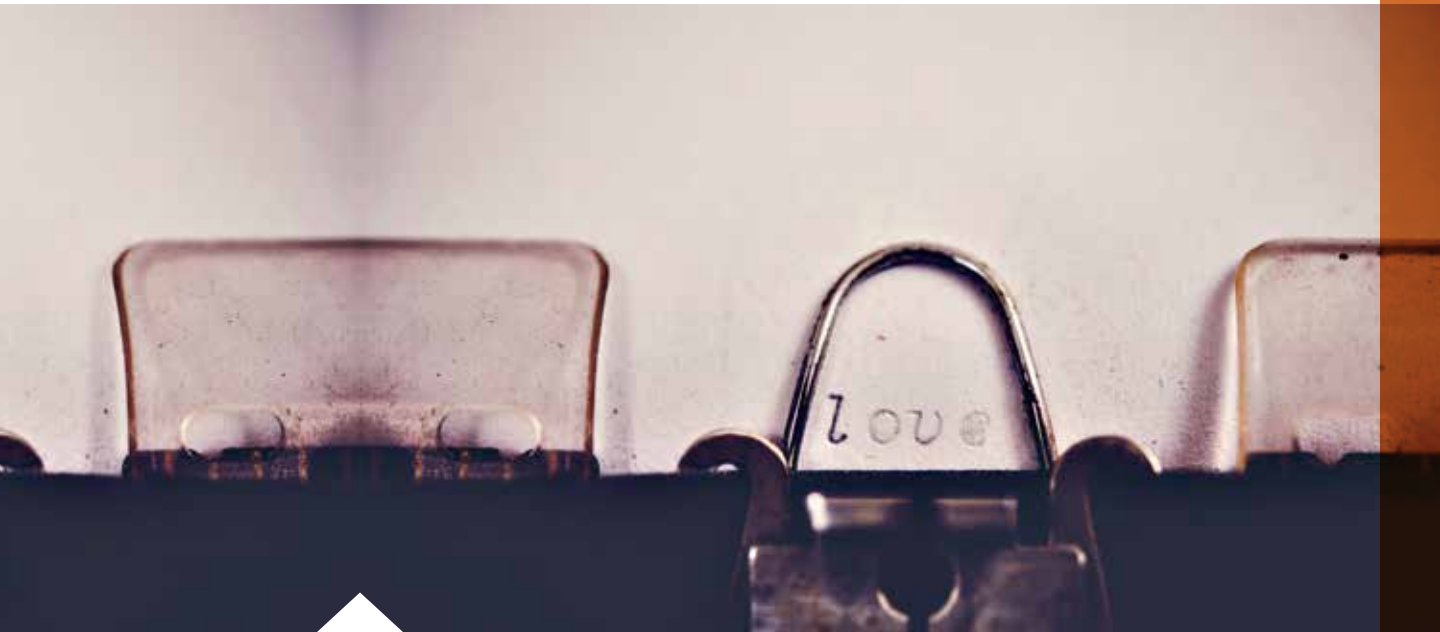
Read 1 Thessalonians 5:11.

We receive encouragement in a variety of ways. Sometimes, it comes through the presence of a friend or a pat on the back. Other times, we feel it as we are quietly meditating on the Lord. But most of the time, encouragement comes from the words of others. As a matter of fact, it's hard to imagine how one might be consistently encouraged in life without words. But not all words are encouraging. People also cheapen words by being insincere or by “weaponizing” words to inflict harm. Christian counselors Larry Crabb and Dan Allender have organized the words we speak to others into three primary categories:

1. Shallow words: insincere words that lack meaning or depth
2. Death words: hurtful words that tear down
3. Life words: encouraging words that build up.¹⁴

The words we speak matter. James described the tongue as “a small part of the body” with the power to set “the course of life on fire” (James 3:5-6). With it, we have the ability to both bless and curse (v. 10).

*Support someone you know who is going through a trial or suffering.
A quick note, meeting for coffee, or sharing a Bible verse are a few options.*



DAY 5: Our speech reflects the power of the gospel.

Read Ephesians 4:29-32.

Ephesians 4:29 serves as a holy standard for all Christian vocabulary and conversation. Although none of us can obey this command perfectly, consistently speaking this way to others is another way God showcases His work through our lives. Since the world generally doesn't speak this way to others, Christians demonstrate the gospel's power to save when we do. We can infer from verse 30 that it's the Holy Spirit who empowers us to speak life-giving words and to guard our tongues. When we choose foul and worthless words, we grieve God's Spirit.

When we choose to guard our tongues, we also protect ourselves from igniting further sins of personal destruction between ourselves and others. Tearing others down with our words leads to a harvest of rotten fruit including bitterness, anger, wrath, slander, and malice. Each of these sins is intricately connected to the words we say. And just like all foul and worthless language, Paul commanded us in verse 31 to put these away too.

While unwholesome talk leads to a flurry of interpersonal sin, life-giving words produce just the opposite: a well-spring of interpersonal joy. Verse 32 says, "Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving one another, just as God also forgave you in Christ." Speaking life-giving words both encourages our brothers and sisters in Christ and emulates our perfect Father in heaven. Let's not grieve God's Spirit by tearing each other down with our words; instead, let's depend on the Holy Spirit and build each other up with our words.

Underline Ephesians 4:29 in your Bible. Let this be a reminder of how God uses our words to build up others.

"No foul language should come from your mouth, but only what is good for building up someone in need, so that it gives grace to those who hear."

EPHESIANS 4:29