

Session 4:

We Encourage One Another

QUESTION 1:

When have you benefitted from

a little encouragement?



THE POINT

We need the encouragement of others—and they need ours.

THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

In 1895, sixteen-year-old Edward Steichen bought a camera 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.¹

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.



WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

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,

Becoming a Christian is not about improving yourself, becoming more spiritual, or “turning over a new leaf.” It’s a radical transformation, a rebirth. 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.” God saves us just the way we are, but He loves us too much to leave us that way.

Because of our new life 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.” 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—but he preceded that in verses 17-21 by telling us why. We are 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).
- ▶ ... Christians aren’t to continue living as the old self (vv. 20-21).

QUESTION 2:

What are some characteristics of our “old self”?

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? It’s ludicrous because 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.

And that’s Paul’s point in this passage. You and I have a biblical responsibility to not 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 (see Galatians 5:22-23).

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.

In the Christian life marked by contrasts, 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 are "to put on the new self." 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." The old self was characterized by darkness, ignorance, and impurity (see vv. 18-19), while the new self is characterized by "righteousness and purity of the truth." Jesus saves us in order to change us. This does not mean we will always be perfect, but it does mean we should not intentionally return to our "former way of life" (v. 22). Instead, we are to persistently pursue attitudes and actions consistent with our new life in Christ.

The pursuit of holiness includes both individual and corporate responsibility. Each believer is responsible for his or her own choices. God holds each one of us accountable for what we do not "take off" and for what we do not "put on." But the body of Christ serves as an invaluable resource in encouraging us in our pursuit. In turn, we should encourage our Christian brothers and sisters in their pursuit of living for Christ. And all of us can and should depend on God's grace to empower us in our Christian growth.

QUESTION 3:

Who has inspired you to live consistent with your new life in Christ?

If you've been a Christian for any length of time, you know that growing in Christlikeness can be difficult. Some life changes come easier than others, but as a whole, putting on the new self can be challenging. Like young Edward, our many failures might tempt us to throw in the towel. We need encouragement from others—and they need our encouragement for the same reason. Let's help one another to live consistently with our new life in Christ.

*“Even if you don’t need encouragement right now,
now is the time to be that encouragement
to someone else.”*

TONY EVANS



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.

We receive encouragement in a variety of ways. Sometimes, we feel it as we are quietly meditating on the Lord. But most of the time, encouragement comes from the words of others.

QUESTION 4:

How do we apply these verses to our interactions on social media?

Paul exhorted us to watch our mouths. "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." Wow! What an incredible admonition from God's Word! How might our relationships thrive if, when talking to others, each of us consciously thought about using our words to build others up rather than spewing speech that tears them down. In other words, use language that brings life rather than death!

Ephesians 4:29 serves as a holy standard for all Christian vocabulary and conversation. And 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. We can infer from verse 30 that it's the Holy Spirit of God 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.

Tearing others down with our words leads to a harvest of rotten fruit including bitterness, anger, wrath, slander, and malice. Just like all foul and worthless language, Paul commanded us in verse 31 to put these away too.

Life-giving words produce: 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. So, 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.

QUESTION 5:

What role can our group play in encouraging one another as these verses describe?

THE POWER OF WORDS

Review today's Scripture passage, and list below loving words and hurtful words you find in today's text. Then briefly describe how someone used loving words to encourage you.

Loving Words

Hurtful Words



How loving words have been used to encourage me:

