



ENCOURAGEMENT

In these studies we're going to be thinking about how to better encourage each other.

Encouragement can come in a lot of forms, a note can be encouraging, acts of service can be encouraging, but in these particular studies will be thinking about how to encourage each other in our conversation.

In one sense this is very simple. It's just about thinking about another person and having a conversation with them where we talk about things of the gospel and encourage them in their life to keep following Jesus.

If you're a Christian then I assume you want all your conversations to be encouraging ones! you want other people to be spurred on by you and not dragged down. You want other people to be genuinely thankful that they have spoken with you. I can't think of a greater privilege than to think that my words to another person might help them to keep following Jesus or to grow in their love and obedience to him.

And yet sadly not all about conversations are encouraging are they? Sometimes our conversations are too self-centred and selfish. And we never move beyond talking about ourselves or the trivial. Sometimes we just don't know enough about the other person to be able to know what to say that will encourage them.

The aim of these studies is to help us to think together about how we can be the kind of people who will encourage others. And really it's just about being genuinely concerned for another person so that you listen properly to them and from a posture of love and grace to discuss with them about how the gospel impacts of their life.

It will be helpful if you have read the book "encouragement: the key to caring" by Larry Crabb and Dan Allender, but if you haven't read it you can still do these studies. if you're reading the book and you find yourself getting bogged down in some of the nitty-gritty don't worry, just remember what it's all about, being genuinely interested in other people, and having experienced God's love and grace yourself, being able to help them think through the implications of the gospel in their life.

Split up into pairs and discuss with your partner what you hope to learn from this course on encouragement. Come back together and share some of the things that you hope this course will achieve.

STUDY 1

chapter 1, the power of a well timed word.

Read Hebrew is 10:24 to 25.

Why do you think encouragement is so important? Why do we need to be encouraged?

1. the words we speak

Proverbs 18:21

James 3 5 - 6.

unfortunately not all the words that we speak are encouraging. in his encouragement book Larry Crabb talks about 3 kinds of words, shallow words, death words, and life words.

“ shallow words”

a visitor from another culture once related to me the newly crushing disappointment he experienced during his first few months in a North American church. After an evening service... a number of people went out of their way to greet him. several added to their welcome an implied invitation: “ we’d love to have you over for dinner sometime soon.” the young man was delighted. He spent the next week eagerly waiting for the phone to ring, sometimes rushing home from work in order not to miss the call he knew would come. It did not come - not until 3 months later. he told me that to adjust to American culture, he had to learn many words were spoken without meaning” p21

“ death words”

“ I was once teaching a Sunday school class when a particularly conscientious young man asked a question. My mind quickly came up with a comical reply, though I don’t know why. I put the thought into words and won a laugh. 6 months later the young man came to me to resolve the bitterness triggered by the incident, in which he had felt terribly embarrassed.” p23

“ Life words”

“ I recall staring at the floor, too embarrassed to look around, and solemnly vowing never again to pray or speak aloud in front of a group... When the service was over, I darted toward the door... but I was not quick enough. A Christian man named Jim Dunbar intercepted me, put his arm on my shoulder and cleared his throat to speak. “Larry, he said, there’s one thing I want you to know. Whatever you do for the Lord, I’m behind you 1000%” Then he walked away. Even as I write these words my eyes fill with tears. I have yet to tell that story to an audience without at least mildly choking. Those words were life words. They had power. They reached deep into my being.” p25

Discuss the following questions together:

Can you think of an example of words that were spoken to you in the past which had a positive effect?
“life words”

Why do you think words can be so powerful to encourage us?

Why do you think is possible for words to have such a damaging effect on us?

Do you think you have spoken death words to other people? Why as followers of Jesus would we speak to other people in such a way?

Can you think of words spoken to you in the past which had a negative effect? “ death words”. (Don't name the person who spoke them to you!)

How important do you think is the context into which the words are spoken? How important do you think are the actual words that are spoken?

Do you think you are the kind of person who speaks life words or death words or shallow words?

As followers of Jesus, what stops us from encouraging each other?

What is one thing that you would like prayer for this week regarding your conversations?

To think about before next week:

Can you think of times when you make hollow promises or speak insincere words?

Can you think of recent time when you asked someone a question and weren't really interested in the answer?

Can you think of a recent time when you said the opposite of what you were really thinking or feeling?

NOTE: Chapter 3 is a real important one - would be helpful if you could read it.

STUDY 2

Chapter 3 - THE PROBLEM

NOTE: Chapter 3 is a real import month it would be helpful if you could read it.

Surface Community: The Obstacle to Encouragement

Read Genesis 3:10 together

Adam's core emotion was _____

Adam's core motivation was _____

Adam's core strategy was: _____

Discuss this quote:

"Fearful people committed to avoiding the terror of exposure will look for places to hide. Fear inspired ingenuity is capable of thinking up an endless variety of protective strategies: jokes, silliness, a cocky attitude, boasting, manipulative tears, feigned repentance and humility, remaining quiet during group discussions, a drink before making friends, spending hours doing homework without children, or watching television—anything that enables us to greet the world with a real selves hidden safely from sight." p34

How do we handle our fears...

Discuss what Larry Crabb means by "defensive layers".

Why do we relate to others from behind our layers?

Discuss how relating to each other from behind our layers blocks real encouragement.

"Any direct attempt to change a layer will thicken it."

Discuss. How do you see this in operation in Morning Church? What does this mean we shouldn't do after we finish this course?

What is the one thing that can address our deepest fears? (1 John 4:18)

Are you aware of any fears in yourself as you relate to other people?

How do you think the things in this chapter can help us better encourage each other?

Pray together

STUDY 3

Chapter's 4 to 7 are about some basics before we reach the solution.

SUMMARY: We cannot encourage others if we operate from behind layers of fear. Before we can encourage others we therefore need to work out what we do with our fears. Larry Crabb talks about two wrong solutions. 1. Ignore or repress our emotions. 2. Go the other way and try to find someone we can be totally open with so as to feel good.

WHAT DO WE DO WITH OUR OWN EMOTIONS AND STRUGGLES?

Are you an expresser or repressor? how does this cause difficulties for people around you?

What is the problem with repressing our emotions? (denying to ourselves how we're feeling)

What is the problem with expressing our emotions without any restriction? How or why is "total openness" the wrong solution to our fears?

What would it look like in church if we all just spoke everything that we thought or felt?

What should guide our sharing with one another? (eph 4:29)

discuss this quote from chapter 6:

"I am never permitted to disregard the effect my words have on others. There is therefore no one on earth - literally no one - to whom I can rightfully abandon myself"

Discuss this quote from chapter 7: *"encouragers must allow themselves to feel the full weight of their emotions, but then subordinate their expression to the purposes of God"*

SUMMARY: In order to encourage others, we need to **not** approach others with the desire to unload on them. Instead we find our refuge in God's love and grace to us, and then we approach others with the desire to encourage them. Only when we have dealt with ourselves before God can we choose what we share or don't share in order to serve and build up others.

Is this approach biblical? Where do you see it in the bible?

Read Psalm 42 together.

What kind of emotions is the writer aware of in himself and where does he go for an answer?

Share something you want to work on as a result of reading these chapters.

Pray

FOR NEXT WEEK: Make sure you read chapter 8. It is another key chapter to read

STUDY 4

Chapter 8: Encouragement.

Make sure you read chapter 8. It is another key chapter to read

Summary:

“Condition 1 for encouragement: Words that encourage are prompted by love not by fear, that is the words spoken must never function as a layer for the speaker.”

Another way of looking at it: When someone else is sharing a problem or burden with us all sorts of things start to go on inside of us and it's helpful to be aware of them so that we can actually look beyond them and not respond out of fear but out of love.

“Condition 2 for encouragement: words that encourage are aimed not at another's layers with the intent of rearranging them but rather at another's hidden fear with the intent of reducing it.”

Another way of looking at it: When we are listening to someone else it's good to ask questions that are looking beneath the surface and interested in what's happening inside the other person, why are they feeling like they are, what are their fears?

Share your general impressions and thoughts from your reading of chapter 8.

Exercise:

1. Split up into pairs. Have one person volunteer to share a recent experience in life where they felt a negative emotion. The person who is listening should try to be curious and ask questions gently. Also they should try to be aware of what is going on in themselves as they listen.
2. Now discuss this together: as you were listening, what negative emotions or fears did you notice in yourself? If you were to share these how would it make the other person feel?
3. Now discuss this together:
 - How might you respond in a way that is aimed at the person's layers and so causes them to clam up and doesn't encourage them?
 - How might you respond in a way that addresses what's really happening inside the other person and uses the gospel to comfort their fears and Encourage them?

BACK TOGETHER

Discuss this quote from Ch 8:

“The perfect love of Christ provides me with what I need to face my fears. in Christ I have a relationship I cannot lose, a relationship sufficient to sustain me if all others fail. I have an unbreakable safety net beneath me as I venture across the tightrope of involving myself in other people's lives.”

What is one thing that you'd like to pray for as a result of this section?

STUDY 5

Chapter 9-10: Practical ways to help a conversation be encouraging.

1. DOOR OPENERS AND CLOSERS

According to chapter 9, What is a door opener in a conversation? give an example

What is a door closer in a conversation? Give an example

Here are some people who need encouragement. Write down how you might respond to them in a way that opens the door to further sharing...

Mary is going into hospital for an operation and she is nervous because she has never been in hospital before. She is also worried about what will happen to the children. She wishes she could stop worrying that she can't.

Door closer..

Door opener...

Jim is frustrated with his work. He wants to quit his job but he is afraid that he won't find more work if he does. It gets him down.

Door closer..

Door opener...

Alex's life is going real well, he's just got back from holidays which were fantastic and he's looking forward to getting back into things and looking forward to being back at church and bible study!

Door closer..

Door opener...

You noticed Robin hasn't been a church much lately and you asked her why, she said she is lonely. She has tried to connect with other women at church but no one seems interested in wanting to know her. Coming to church just makes her feel sad

Door closer..

Door opener...

2. Playing the right tape.

What we are thinking about any given moment influences what we do and how we feel. If we turn up to church or Bible study or a meeting with another person completely flat with a critical spirit thinking about ourselves then it is unlikely that we will be able to serve and encourage others. We will be more likely to respond with a door closer! We need to take some time, even if it's just a minute, to change tapes and remind ourselves "how can I encourage someone today"

When are you more likely to have the 'wrong tape' playing?

Read eph 4:29 and pray.

This week try to have the right tape playing and look for opportunities to open doors!

STUDY 6

Imagine in your group right now someone says they were really frustrated since last week. Then with their eyes watering they say "I almost didn't come tonight"...

There is an awkward silence because no one quite knows what to say.

What tape would you be playing to yourself during that silence?

What are some of the possible things that might be behind the person's frustration last week? (come up with at least 6 possible reasons!)

What are some "door closes" that the group could respond with?

Come up with two good "door openers" that would help this person share their struggle with the group if they wanted to.

Chapters 12 and 13 have some practical tips on how to listen well but I think if you are genuinely interested in the other person they will notice! So rather than go through the details of chapters 11 to 13 let's use this last session to remind ourselves of what we've learned and pray for each other.

SUMMARY

What is encouragement?

What's of things do you think stop us encouraging each other at morning church and in our small group?

What practical ways do you think we can be better at encouraging each other?

Share an opportunity you have had in the last 3 weeks to encourage another person and how it went.

Why does encouragement take work and practice? Why doesn't the goal of ministering and serving other people come naturally?

*If you have a significant problem in your life who would you most easily feel able to talk about it with?
What is it about this person that makes you go to them?*

Who are the good listeners in your church? What makes them good listeners?

Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another--and all the more as you see the Day approaching. (Heb 10:25).

Pray together.