

WE ENCOURAGE ONE ANOTHER – EPHESIANS 4: 17-32

Sunday, August 16 2020

BIBLE STUDIES FOR LIFE

THEME FOR THIS LESSON: We need the encouragement of others – and they need ours!

The times we are living through right now in 2020 are possibly some of the most disheartening of our lives. Living and coping during the current pandemic, enduring social isolation and absence from friends, family, and church family, coupled with the terrible unrest and violent events happening in our society, can be a real “downer,” even to the most cheerful person! But God assures us through His word that we can encourage and uplift each other, and it can make all the difference. Listen to what Paul told the Ephesians:

Ephesians 4:17-22

¹⁷ So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. ¹⁸ They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. ¹⁹ Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, and they are full of greed.

²⁰ That, however, is not the way of life you learned ²¹ when you heard about Christ and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. ²² You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires.

Paul was an expert in encouragement, and he often stressed the need for believers to encourage one another. In this passage, he emphasized for his readers to put away their sinful habits. He gave us two images of a person before salvation and a person who is now a committed Christian. He then would go on to stress how believers should relate to each other within the church. Before salvation, these people exhibited **hardness of heart** and they became callous. They were spiritually and morally insensitive. But now that had learned the truth about Christ, and knew how to live for him. What a radical change!

Ephesians 4:23-28

²³ to be made new in the attitude of your minds; ²⁴ and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

²⁵ Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body. ²⁶ “In your anger do not sin”^[a]: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, ²⁷ and do not give the devil a foothold. ²⁸ Anyone who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with their own hands, that they may have something to share with those in need.

A saved person is renewed in the attitude of the mind. What a glorious peaceful feeling we experience when we are able through God’s Holy Spirit to transform our negative thoughts into positive ones, giving us a “newness” in our mind!

After highlighting the new nature of a saved person, Paul gave practical expressions of Christian behavior. He emphasized the need for truth-telling in the Christian life. Lying to a fellow believer is like lying to yourself because we are all part of the body of Christ. He addressed the topic of inappropriate anger. No matter what causes our anger, we should be careful. Emotions easily get out of hand and lead to verbal outrage or even physical altercations. This gives the devil an opportunity to work in our lives. Anger can be righteous if it is over injustices to others, but self-centered anger gives the devil an opportunity! We must carefully discern what type of anger we are experiencing! Paul then wrote on the issue of stealing. We are to do honest work with our own hands and share with needy people. Yes, we are to take care of our own needs, but we must also tend to the needs of others.

Ephesians 4: 29-32

²⁹ Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. ³⁰ And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. ³¹ Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. ³² Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

Paul and James, as well as the Book of Proverbs, agree that we must control our tongues. We cannot encourage others with words that are corrupting or unwholesome. Foul language reflects on what our true spirits are like. (And nasty language is a personal pet peeve of mine!!)

“Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God.” I don’t know about you, but this brings sadness to my heart when I think that MY actions and behavior cause GRIEF to God!!! Who wants to hurt the One who loves them the best???? My improper language, my bitterness, my rage or anger, my slander, all cause God grief! Oh, how I want to avoid that!!! Instead, Paul tells us to be kind, compassionate to each other, forgive each other ---- just as He forgives and love us! Because our current culture promotes self-centeredness, we need to work hard at identifying the needs of others and respond in a Christ-like manner. In 2 Corinthians 1:3-4, Paul taught that because God has brought comfort to us, we must reach out to comfort others. And we must reach out to forgive others, just as God forgave us in Christ.

HOW DO WE LIVE OUT THESE LESSONS FROM GOD’S WORD?

- Talk to God. Through prayer, ask God to keep our hearts and minds “clean” and to speak words of life and encouragement instead.
- Talk to yourself. Speak the Word of God to yourself. Memorize and call to mind encouraging words from scripture.
- Talk to others. This week, identify three people who might be encouraged by your words. Write a card, send an e-mail, send a text, or make a phone call and encourage them in their walk with Jesus. It does make a difference!!

No one can grow as a Christian in total isolation. To experience spiritual growth, we need the encouragement of other believers that God places in our path. Can you be that person who offers a word or act of encouragement to someone else today? **WHY, YES YOU CAN!!**

PRAYER: Father, help us to be kind and compassionate to one another, speaking words that build others up, not tear them down. And we praise you for those you place in our lives to offer encouragement just when we need it most. We recognize that they are your messengers and signs of your immeasurable love to us. Amen.