

## Community of Encouragement

Hebrews 3:13, 10:24-25

### Scripture

Hebrews 3:12-13 <sup>12</sup> See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. <sup>13</sup> But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness. (NIV)  
 10:24-25 <sup>24</sup> And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. <sup>25</sup> 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. (NIV)

### Main Idea

#### Background

Both of our "encourage one another" passages are taken from the book of Hebrews. The community at Hebrews was in danger of leaving behind their community based on the gospel for their former community of traditional Judaism. The author of the book calls this community to see the eternal consequences of turning from Jesus to any Jesus-less form of religion. In Hebrews, the Christian life is presented as a journey of faith, since it is from faith that all other obedience springs forth. Because it is faith that unites us to Jesus, the author presents Jesus in all the glory and splendor of the gospel to strengthen our trust in the completed work of Jesus for us and the promises in Jesus that are yet to come.

#### Focus

Encouragement is the practice of coming alongside another person in their journey of faith and pointing them to the gospel. Encouragement can take a variety of forms but centers on a commitment to use your words and your presence to motivate others toward a life of faith. The focus on this study then is to foster the practice of "journeying together" in our walks with Christ.

### Starters

- Describe a time when you felt encouraged in your relationship with God by the words or the presence of another Christian.

### Discussion

Q1: According to 3:12, 13, sin turns us away from God through deceit and unbelief. Does this ring true in your life? And how might community counteract sin's strategies?

A1: It seems like the author of Hebrews is really getting at the heart of our struggle with sin. Use this question to discuss the way in which sin leads us away from God, to dig a little bit beneath the surface...then pursue how community provides a counteractive strategy against sin. Here are some thoughts on this two-fold question:

A. Deceit and unbelief lead us into false views and wrong responses to God and his word. Deceit and unbelief were Satan's twin strategies to lead Adam and Eve astray and plunge the human race into a fallen state. Satan lied to Eve and presented her with a false view of God and his word (Gen. 3:1-5). Adam and Eve then doubted the reality of God's love (Is he holding back? Is God's love enough?) and God's authority (Did God really say that? Will we really die if we eat this?).

Ever since the fall, we've faced the same struggle against deceit and unbelief. We often believe a particular sin will provide more satisfaction and pleasure than obedience to God. We often think that lashing out in anger and frustration will create a manageable life rather than pursuing reconciliation. We often uncritically accept the prevailing ideas in our culture (without consulting

God's word) about marriage, leisure, success and a whole host of other things. We struggle to trust in God's timing, God's provision and God's control in the nitty-gritty details of our lives. We struggle with believing the promises of the gospel are superior to the promises offered to us in a world of success, wealth, or pleasure.

B. Community counteracts sin's strategies by reminding us of what is true and real. When we see the reality of God's work in other people's lives are reminded of the reality of God's love and supremacy in our own lives. When someone else points us to the truth of God's word, we can escape the spiral of self-deceit. Very simply, community reminds of the truth of who God is and what God has done. The very fact that other people are living their lives based on the truth of who God is and what he has done in Christ shows us that we aren't alone – that we didn't make this whole thing up, that God is real and the gospel is objectively true. When we know we are in this struggle together it gives us renewed strength to journey on in faith.

**Q2: To guard our hearts against unbelief and deceit this passage (v13) tells us to encourage one another daily. Why do you think God points us to encouragement as a daily need?**

A2: There are a number of possible responses to this question. The author of Hebrews draws out the practice of daily encouragement from Psalm 95, which he quotes in 3:7-11 (Psa. 95:7b, 8a "...Today, if you would hear His voice, <sup>8</sup> Do not harden your hearts..."). The Psalmist is pointing to the daily opportunity we have to respond to the "voice" (word) of God. God takes the initiative toward us in speaking to us the word of the gospel (Heb 4:2 – For indeed we have had the good news preached to us). Our daily lives should be a response to the gospel we have heard. Each day brings its own unique challenges, opportunities and temptations – we need daily strength to continue our day-by-day journey of faith. The Israelite generation spoken of in Psa. 95 grew weary of daily walking by faith and depending on God and longed to go back to their former bondage. We can do the same when we lose sight of the gospel – that's why we need daily encouragement!

This might be a good place for you as the leader to talk about your own need for daily encouragement in your walk of faith.

**Q3: Is it possible in our day and age to make encouragement a daily practice? What keeps us from being daily encouragers and what might daily encouragement look like in our setting?**

A3: It seems to me that the practice of daily encouraging another Christian is a very rare practice in our modern church. It seems many of us have a hard enough time making it to worship on Sunday for weekly encouragement.

The greatest barrier we face, from my perspective, is that we don't live in community. The setting of our lives is stretched out over work, home, kid's activities, kid's schools, church, etc. We hop from community to community but don't live in any of them. Our christian community often gathers once or twice a week. The hectic nature of jumping from setting to setting leaves us tired and without energy to think of other people's spiritual journeys.

Daily encouragement, despite all these barriers, is still possible! We have phones, email, instant messenger, and regular mail. It may take a little extra thought and planning but it would not take much out of our day to encourage one person daily. Brainstorm other ideas with the group.

**Q4: Often, in our spiritual lives, we can become preoccupied with our own needs and growth. 10:24 calls us to consider/think about how we can spur and motivate others to love and good deeds. As we seek to do this for each other in this group, let's discuss how each one of us is**

motivated to love and good deeds. (i.e. What kinds of things spur you on and motivate in your walk with Jesus?)

A4: The purpose of this question is to discover how each of the people in your group is uniquely encouraged. Hopefully, you will learn a lot about each other and about how each person is in the journey of faith.

There is a lot of talk these days about "love languages", i.e. when and how do you feel most loved? Through affirmation, gifts, touch, etc... This is similar – What is your "encouragement language"? Not every one is encouraged in their walk with Christ in the same way. Some like a direct, in-your-face approach, some are encouraged by regular meetings over coffee, some are spurred on by hearing how God is at work in people's lives. Talking about how each member is encouraged will hopefully spur the entire group to think about unique ways to encourage each other.

Q5: In 10:25, the stress is on regularly meeting together. How can we develop the bad "habit" of not meeting together? And why is actually being in the physical presence of others such an important part of encouragement?

A5: We talked about (in Q3) creative ways to encourage one another daily without actually seeing each other. But 10:25 reminds us that there is no substitute for actually being together. Some of the original readers of the book of Hebrews were neglecting the regular meetings of the church. The author points to the habit of not meeting together as one key ingredient in falling away from God (the apostasy described in 10:26-31).

There are all other sorts of things that can gain priority in our lives over regularly meeting with Christians for worship and encouragement: kid's sports/activities, our own careers, tiredness, fill in the blank \_\_\_\_\_. But the habit of meeting together is presented here as a key practice in staying on track in our spiritual journeys.

Why? There may be a number of great ideas that come from group members here. I think it has a lot to do with how we were created. We weren't made to relate to each other primarily by phone or email as disembodied voices or words. We are made as whole beings body, soul and spirit. In order for us to fully relate to each other we need to be in each other's presence.

The gospel tells us this. In Christ, God came to us in the flesh, to dwell among us. The Incarnation of Jesus shows us that, in addition to the word of God, we needed the Word become flesh in order to be brought back to God.

Q6: In the broader context of these passages, the author of Hebrews encourages us by pointing to the richness and depths of Christ's work for us in the gospel.

In Chapters 3, 4, 5– he points to Jesus as a sympathetic and powerful high priest  
In Chapters 10 – he points to the complete and finished work of Jesus for our forgiveness  
In Chapter 11 – he points to the examples of those who believed despite hardship

In light of this, let's encourage each other by sharing how we have been encouraged recently by the richness and depth of the gospel.

A6: This is an open ended time of sharing. We are often encouraged by hearing how others have been encouraged.

Prayer

Share an area in your relationship with God where you are in need of daily encouragement. As prayer needs are shared, pair up as couples or as individuals to commit to a week of daily encouragement for the needs that are shared.