



SIX STEPS TO ENCOURAGEMENT

HOW WORDS CHANGE LIVES

GORDON CHENG

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matthiasmedia

Six Steps to Encouragement

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INTRODUCTION

For some Christians, who are very active in their churches, it can seem that there's never enough people to do all the jobs. Other Christians feel just the opposite—they feel that everybody has a role to play in church except them. All the jobs seem to be taken. What can I do to contribute?

This course teaches every Christian how to make one simple and foundational contribution to church life—encouraging other people. The writer to the Hebrews says that this is one of the basic reasons for meeting with each other:

Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near. (Heb 10:24-25)

Paul says much the same thing in Ephesians 4, where his vision of the church working as it should is one where every single member “speaks the truth in love”.

However, our words to other Christians in many instances don't seem to progress much beyond the weather, the TV, and the weekend trivia. Sometimes when we do get beyond trivialities, we struggle to know what to say that will genuinely encourage others in their lives and their Christian walk.

In this course, we look at the why and how of Christian encouragement. In particular, we look at how Christians *speak* to each other—because although encouragement is supported and adorned by loving actions, and bathed in prayer, it mainly consists of what we say.

There are six sessions in the course, and they begin with the fundamental idea that *God* is the one who speaks to *us*. This word that God speaks is powerful and effective, and moves us from death to life through the word of the cross—the gospel of Jesus’ death and resurrection. It is the very same word that brought creation into being, and through the word of promise guaranteed the resurrection of Jesus and the gift of the Holy Spirit.

The enormous privilege Christians are given is the privilege first of hearing and understanding that word; then, second, of being allowed, encouraged and commanded to speak God’s word to others. It is literally a life-transforming word, and as useful as theological study may be, we don’t need a one-year diploma or a three-year degree before we can speak it—simply and straightforwardly—to those around us.

This may mean giving a talk, but it may equally mean something as simple as meeting with one other person to read the Bible and to pray. It can happen in a huge range of contexts: across a fence, after church, next to a hospital bed, during a lunch break, in a kids’ programme, or to a workmate. It may be a long conversation or talk; it may be a five-minute chat on the phone or a quick email. In this course we will look at what the Bible says about words, in particular the word of the gospel; and we will then consider and actually put into practice different ways of speaking God’s word.

By the end of the course, you will have met regularly with one person for the purpose of speaking and hearing God’s word, you will have prayed for opportunities to do more, and you will have made practical decisions about how to make progress in speaking and encouraging others in their relationship with God. This is an extraordinary privilege that God gives to every member of Christ’s body, the church.

Gordon Cheng
November 2004

GOD THE SPEAKER

Discuss

What part did words play in you becoming a Christian? What things were said that caused a shift in what you believed?



Video: God speaks powerfully

Notes on video

Five ways God speaks:

1. God speaks powerfully to ...

2. God speaks powerfully to ...

3. God speaks powerfully to ...

4. God speaks powerfully to ...

5. God speaks powerfully to ...

The motto of this course:



Bible study

1. Romans 1:16 says: “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek”.

How would you use this verse to encourage someone:

- a. who doesn't think we should tell the gospel to others—that instead, we should just live good lives?

 - b. who is worried that their failure to live up to gospel standards means that people won't listen to them?

 - c. who is worried that they won't be able to answer difficult objections to the gospel?
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2. Look up Psalm 119, and randomly assign one section to each member of the group—or, if you prefer, work on a section in pairs. Summarize:
 - a. what your section says about the trustworthiness and value of God's word.

 - b. how your section helps us in using God's word to encourage others.

Summary: why this course?

This course is designed to help you, a Christian who wants to contribute to the life of your church, to take the first steps (or, in some cases, the next steps) in encouraging others in the Christian life, using the word of God. By the end of the course, you should be equipped to speak to at least one other person and bring them encouragement from God's word, and you should have taken the first practical steps to doing this on a regular basis.

With this aim in mind, the course has these three elements:

a. Theory: Through Bible study we will be reminded of how powerful and trustworthy God's word is, how it transforms our lives, and how that same word is given to us to tell others.

b. Practical: We will apply this understanding to a number of different examples and case studies, such as:

- welcoming newcomers;
- listening well;
- giving advice and encouragement;
- rebuking;
- dealing with suffering;
- taking initiative in ministry.

You shouldn't expect to be an expert in these areas by the end of the course. But if you follow through on the Bible studies and homework, you will have made a start, and have a good foundation for further encouragement.

c. Homework: Each week, group members will meet with one other person, a 'Bible reading partner', who may be a group member or may be someone else entirely (your leader will suggest the way forward). Together, you and your partner will read through a part of Ephesians, discuss what was learned, and pray. There will be a sheet to fill in each week, with the passage, a space to write key points, and a space to write a summary of your discussion.

The idea is that we learn best by putting into practice what we are talking about.

Introducing the ‘Reading the Bible together’ sheets.

You will find as part of this course that you’ve been supplied with two lots of five ‘Reading the Bible together’ sheets (see pages 35-45). The idea, as the name suggests, is that for each week of the course (beginning this week), you will meet with a ‘Bible reading partner’ and share insights from the Bible passage that is referred to on the sheet. Each week, read the passage, and fill in the sheet (except for the last point) before you meet with the person (give them their sheet in advance so they can do the same).

The passages are all brief sections taken from the second half of Paul’s letter to the Ephesians. We are reading Ephesians because it is full of helpful teaching that relates directly to the subject of our course, encouragement. Here’s how to use the sheet:

Before the meeting (15 minutes)

1. Take 5 minutes to pray and to read the set passage.
2. Write down up to five insights from the passage that you personally find helpful or challenging.
3. Note down any questions or things you’re not sure about.

The meeting itself (30 minutes)

1. Share with your partner the insights and questions you have each written down.
2. At the end of your discussion, fill in the final section of the sheet.
3. Pray together about what you’ve learned and how it applies.

This pattern is meant as a guideline for your time together, not a strait-jacket. However, by working through the sheets, you will gain some experience in an important task of Christian ministry, and have a useful basis for discussion when the exercise is reviewed during each week of the course.

It’s recommended for these five meetings (and as a general principle for one-to-one ministry) that males should meet with males, and females with females. This helps to avoid any suggestion of impropriety (Ephesians 5:3).



Prayer

1. Share the names of two people, one Christian, one not, that you are hoping to bring God's word to in some way:

Person 1: _____

Person 2: _____

2. What are you hoping to learn from this course? Share something of your own experience in ministering to others, and talk about what you would like to do better. Use this as a basis for prayer.



Assignment

1. Find one person to meet with this week to fill in your first 'Reading the Bible together' sheet. Invite them to be a 'Bible reading partner' for the next five weeks. If the person is not a member of the group, you will need to explain the system to them. Suggestion: The person you ask to be your partner could be the person you have already nominated as the Christian who you are praying for.
2. Read 1 Thessalonians 1-3. Write down the verses that show the impact of either your life or the gospel in encouraging others.