“Everyone needs encouragement! Life is tough, and whether it is to take on a challenge or to deal with a setback or just to get up to face the day, we all can use some encouragement. But real encouragement often means more than a pat on the back and the words “hang in there, it will get better.” With our weak economy, job losses, financial problems, health problems, and the challenges of raising kids, people of all ages are facing long and difficult challenges that just don’t go away because we want them to. People today need practical help and real encouragement that can help them to face problems that just won’t go away. The scriptures give us many practical ways to encourage one another that are based on truth and really work. Come to this Bible Study and learn practical techniques to encourage your family members, coworkers and friends in a way that will build them up and equip them to handle life’s challenges. Perhaps you will find encouragement too! “

What does “encouragement” mean in the Greek language? ______________________________

I. What are some common ways we encourage each other today?

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.

II. What is the need for encouragement here in the Scotts Valley area?

1)
2)
3)
4)
5)
6)
7)

III. Encouragement was a major theme in the early Church as recorded in the book of Acts and the Epistles

1. Acts 4:36 Joseph (called Barnabas) sold property and gave it to the people
2. Acts 9:31 Paul was preaching and when he left the church was encouraged by the Holy Spirit
3. Acts 11:23 Barnabas encouraged early Christians in Antioch “to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts”
4. Acts 13:43 Paul and Barnabas “urged them to continue in the grace of God”
5. Acts 13:42 Paul “strengthened the disciples and encouraged them to remain true to the faith”
6. Acts 15:31 People read the epistle and “were glad for its encouraging message. Judas and Silas said much to encourage and strengthen the brothers.
7. Acts 15:41 Paul “went through Syria and Cilicia strengthening the churches”
8. Acts 16:5 Paul and Timothy visits “so the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers”
9. Acts 16:40 Paul and Silas out of prison...“they met with the brothers and encouraged them.”
10. Acts 18:23 Paul went throughout the region of Galatia “strengthening all the disciples”
11. Acts 18:27 Apollos to Achaia, the “brothers encouraged him and wrote to the disciples there to welcome him.”
12. Acts 20:1 Paul in Ephesus, “after encouraging them, said good-by and went to Macedonia, “speaking many words of encouragement to the people”
14. Acts 27:22 Paul on ship to Rome, “now I urge you to keep up your courage” …”So keep up your courage men for I have faith in God”

15. Acts 27:33-36 Paul “urged” the men on the ship to eat “they were all encouraged and ate some food.”

1. Acts 28:15 Paul met in Rome by brothers ”and was encouraged.”


IV. Where does the power for encouragement come from?  

I. Feeling inadequate to handle the challenges you are facing?

a. Problem – the person is trying everything they can, but they’re feeling inadequate. “I can’t do it, I’m out of strength, there is no solution, I just don’t know what I’m going to do, I can’t go on”

b. Truth – God is adequate –

   i. 2 Cor 3:4-6 “Such confidence as this is ours through Christ before God. Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God. He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant – not of the letter but of the Spirit – for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.”

   ii. “Nothing is impossible with God” “Because you have so little faith. I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there’ and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you.” Matthew 17:20-21

   iii. When the Angel of the Lord visited Mary in Luke 1, Mary asked “How will this be?” “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be barren is in her sixth month. For nothing is impossible with God.” Luke 1:34-38

   iv. Jesus said “what is impossible with men is possible with God.” Luke 18:27

c. Encouragement – God is all powerful, and he has shown his power through the ages from creation, to delivering Israel from Egypt – all the miracles in time of Moses, to victories for Israel against overwhelming odds, to restoring Israel from Babylon captivity, to all the miracles of Jesus!

d. Application – What are the examples where God has shown his power in your life? When has he answered prayers and delivered you from difficulty? When we run out of gas, remembering God’s strength and adequacy reminds us that we should not be operating on our own strength but on God, who strengthens us. Why not give the project over to God in the first place?

e. **Encouragement and Faith go together:** Encouragement implies faith – but faith in a power greater than ourselves
“Everyone needs encouragement! Life is tough, and whether it is to take on a challenge or to deal with a setback or just to get up to face the day, we all can use some encouragement. But real encouragement often means more than a pat on the back and the words “hang in there, it will get better.” With our weak economy, job losses, financial problems, health problems, and the challenges of raising kids, people of all ages are facing long and difficult challenges that just don’t go away because we want them to. People today need practical help and real encouragement that can help them to face problems that just won’t go away. The scriptures give us many practical ways to encourage one another that are based on truth and really work. Come to this Bible Study and learn practical techniques to encourage your family members, coworkers and friends in a way that will build them up and equip them to handle life’s challenges. Perhaps you will find encouragement too! ”

What does “encouragement” mean in the Greek language? – To Call Alongside, to come alongside another

I. Encouragement was a major theme in the early Church as recorded in the book of Acts and the Epistles

17. Acts 4:36 Joseph (called Barnabas) sold property and gave it to the people
18. Acts 9:31 Paul was preaching and when he left the church was encouraged by the Holy Spirit
19. Acts 11:23 Barnabas encouraged early Christians in Antioch “to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts”
20. Acts 13:15 Favorite verse: “Brothers, if you have a message of encouragement for the people, please speak”

Otherwise, keep your mouth shut! 😊

21. Acts 13:43 Paul and Barnabas “urged them to continue in the grace of God”
22. Acts 14:22 Paul “strengthened the disciples and encouraged them to remain true to the faith”
23. Acts 15:31 People read the epistle and “were glad for its encouraging message. Judas and Silas said much to encourage and strengthen the brothers.”
25. Acts 16:5 Paul and Timothy went back to churches, “so the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers”
26. Acts 16:40 Paul and Silas out of prison…”they met with the brothers and encouraged them.”
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31. Acts 27:33-36 Paul “urged” the men on the ship to eat “they were all encouraged and ate some food.”
32. Acts 28:15 Paul met in Rome by brothers “and was encouraged.”

IV. Where does the power for encouragement come from? Acts 9:31 The Holy Spirit!
V. **Ways to Encourage one another**

II. **From Conflict to Unity**

a. **Life problem:** a lack of unity or estrangement amongst your children, your siblings, a spouse, a co-worker – frustration that people are not working together? You or your friend have conflicts that can’t seem to be resolved – often due to people pursuing their own interests above the interests of others.

b. **Truth – Philippians 2:1** “If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus”

   i. Unity comes from the Holy Spirit. Unity > getting your own way
      1. Spectrum of opinions – find the place where you are “One”
      2. Pray for Oneness (Gen 2:24), God will answer that prayer

   ii. “Seek first to understand, then to be understood.” Steven Covey
      1. “He who answers before listening – that is his folly and his shame – Proverbs 18:13

   iii. **Remember - Encouragement comes from the Holy Spirit – Throughout book of Acts.** You may not understand what is going on, “the purposes of men’s hearts” (1 Cor 4:5) or what to do, but the Spirit does

   iv. **Colossians 2:2** “My purpose is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding”

c. **Encouragement:** When there is conflict, you can find unity through the work of the Holy Spirit. When we believe and are baptized into the faith, we each receive the same Holy Spirit

   i. **You cannot change anyone** – but God knows their hearts

   ii. The Holy Spirit can change someone’s heart and mind

   iii. You can begin the work by humbling yourself and placing the interests of others above your own

   iv. When we believe and are baptized into the faith, we each receive the same Holy Spirit.

d. **Application:** When you face conflict, will you stop and think about how the other person views the situation? Will you give them a chance to express themselves to you before you speak? Will you trust God to bring the unity through the Holy Spirit who knows the secrets of all men’s hearts?
Bible Study: ‘How to Encourage One Another’
Week 3

“Everyone needs encouragement!
What does “encouragement” mean in the Greek language? – To Call Alongside, to come alongside another

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48. Acts 27:33-36 Paul “urged” the men on the ship to eat “they were all encouraged and ate some food.”
49. Acts 28:15 Paul met in Rome by brothers “and was encouraged.”

IV. Where does the power for encouragement come from? Acts 9:31 The Holy Spirit!

V. Ways to Encourage one another
1. You know someone who says, “I don’t understand the trials and suffering I’ve been experiencing? Why me?”
   a. Life problem: Trials and the accompanying suffering it brings is discouraging. We all face trials of various kinds, and often we cannot figure out why. You have a friend in a trial that needs encouragement
      i. What are reasons we experience trials and suffering?
         1.
         2.
         3.
         4.
         5.
b. **Truth:** James 1:2  “My brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of any kind, consider it nothing but **joy**, because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance, and let endurance have its full effect, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking in nothing.”
   i. 1 Peter 1:6  “In this you **rejoice**, even if now for a little while you have had to suffer various trials
   ii. Acts 5:41  “The Apostles left the Sanhedrin, **rejoicing** because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name.”
   iii. Acts 16:25  “About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God (after flogging) and the other prisoners were listening to them.”  The jailor’s family was saved.
   iv. 2 Cor 1:3-7  “Praise be to God...who comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort those in any trouble...”
   v. 2 Cor 7:4  “I **am greatly encouraged**; in all our troubles my **joy** knows no bounds.”

**People find encouragement in the midst of their trials and suffering if they have a “reason” for it**

c. **Encouragement:** we are not a victim of our trials. God often brings trials into our life for our good and for the encouragement and comfort of others. You can find strength and encouragement by reading the Bible and seeing all the trials Biblical characters faced and how God worked through them to bring blessing to them and glory to his name.
   i. **Trials produce “perseverance, maturity, completeness, and they refine our faith** – of greater worth than gold (1 Peter 1)
   ii. (Romans 15:4-5) – For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow the Lord Jesus.

d. **Application:** When you’re encouraging someone who is facing a trial, will you help them to remember that God may be doing a work in them to strengthen them for the future? God is refining them like gold, making them more like his Son Jesus Christ. Will you help them to seek God in their prayers, and to pray for patience and endurance during the trial rather than just eliminating the trial?
III. I’m feeling alone, and really need someone in my life to come alongside to be with me and pray for me

a. **Problem** – I’m feeling alone, no one cares, no one checks in on me, I’m alone in my struggle against ____________, I can’t even share/confess what I’m struggling with, will someone pray for me?

   i. What were some Biblical situations where this was true?
      1.
      2.
      3.

   ii. What was God’s response in these situations? ______________________________________

b. **Truth** – How do we encourage someone who is feeling alone?

   i. Help them to remember that God is with them

      1. Abraham (Genesis 12-18, 21:22), Isaac (Genesis 26:3), Jacob (Genesis 28:15-22, 31:3-5, 42, 46:3-4), Joseph (Genesis 39), Moses (Exodus 3:12), Joshua 1:1-5, Samuel (1 Samuel 3:19-21), David (1 Samuel 16:18, 17:37, 18:14, 28)

      2. Jesus said he would go away and give us the Holy Spirit (John 14-16)

   ii. **Pray for them!** James 4:13-18 “Are any among you suffering? They should pray. Are any cheerful? They should sing songs of praise (read the Psalms). Are any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord. The prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise them up: and anyone who has committed sin will be forgiven…” Come together in community to pray

      1. Jesus told us to pray to the Father – The Lord’s prayer – pray it daily

      2. Paul’s prayers: Paul prayed for his churches and the people in them and either promised to come or he sent others to encourage them.

         a. Paul send Tychicus to Ephesus (Eph 6:21-23) and Colossae (Colossians 4:7-9)
         b. Paul sent Timothy to Thessalonica (1 Thess 3:1-3)

      3. God hears and can answer our prayers: 1 John 5:14-15 “And this is the boldness we have in him, that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have obtained the requests made of him.”


      4. Encourage them to read the Psalms which include many believer’s prayers to God

   iii. **Put them to work in a ministry serving God**

      1. Encourage them to fulfill the great commission! Matt 28:16-20 Share your faith
      2. Acts 11:22-24 Barnabas found Saul and put him to work serving God
3. When people get their eyes off themselves and on to serving others, they no longer feel alone

c. **Encouragement** – Prayer can bring change to your life and the lives of others. **When you pray for someone, the Holy Spirit gives us additional insights as to what we could do for them to encourage them** – go by for a visit, write them a letter, send them a gift, connect them with a job opportunity...As we pray for others, our love for them increases. As we pray, God changes our own hearts to be more like His and then he can use us to encourage others.

d. **Application** – When you tell someone you will pray for them, do you? Do you go back to them and ask them how they are doing, and remind them you are continuing to pray for them?

IV. I don’t know what to believe anymore – I’m confused and don’t know what to do -- what is truth?

a. **Problem** – with so many voices in our media and the Internet, and greater exposure to other cultures around the world, what can you believe anymore? Should I take a side? Which side is the right side? I’m looking for wisdom to help me solve problems in my life, but I don’t know where to turn. When I read the Bible, it sounds good but can I believe it? Can I trust it? Even Pontius Pilate asked “what is truth?”

b. **Truth** – God is the source of truth – his words are true and just and fair. His words are the secrets to how life really works.

   
   ii. “He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.” Titus 1:9
   
   iii. “For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.” Romans 15:4
   
   iv. “If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does.” James 1:5-8
   
   v. “All Scripture is God is breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.” 2 Tim 3:16

c. **Encouragement** – Jesus said the man who ignored his words would be like the man who built his house on the sand, and the storm came and his house was destroyed. “Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock.” Matthew 7:24-25

   Application –

   d. **Application**: If your life feels like you are on shifting sands, or you are like a beachball on the sea, blown and tossed by the wind, or like your house has been destroyed, go back to the rock to stabilize your house but reading and believing the words of Jesus.
Bible Study: 'How to Encourage One Another'
Week 5

V. I don’t know what to believe anymore – I’m confused and don’t know what to do -- what is truth?

a. **Problem** – with so many voices in our media and the Internet, and greater exposure to other cultures around the world, what can you believe anymore? Should I take a side? Which side is the right side? I’m looking for wisdom to help me solve problems in my life, but I don’t know where to turn. When I read the Bible, it sounds good but can I believe it? Can I trust it? Even Pontius Pilate asked “what is truth?”

   i. **What other questions do our friends ask today when they are struggling for wisdom?**

b. **Truth** – God is the source of truth – his words are true and just and fair. His words are the secrets to how life really works.

   i. Proverbs 1:1-7, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline.”

   ii. Proverbs 3:13-18, “Blessed is the man who finds wisdom...She is a tree of life to those who embrace her; those who lay hold of her will be blessed.”

   iii. All of Proverbs 8, Proverbs 9:10-12 – The value of Biblical wisdom

   iv. “He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.” Titus 1:9

   v. “For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.” Romans 15:4

   vi. “If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does.” James 1:5-8

   vii. “Wisdom brightens a man’s face and changes its hard appearance.” Ecclesiastes 8:1

   viii. “All Scripture is God breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.” 2 Tim 3:16

c. **Encouragement** – God’s words orient our lives in the right direction -- Jesus said the man who ignored his words would be like the man who built his house on the sand, and the storm came and his house was destroyed. “Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock.” Matthew 7:24-25 To be encouraged, sometimes we just need to reorient someone’s life toward truth

d. **Application:** If your life feels like you are on shifting sands, or you are like a beach ball on the sea, blown and tossed by the wind, or you feel like your house is being destroyed, go back to the rock to stabilize your house by reading and believing the words of Jesus.
Encouragement topic for next week?

VI. Falling short of the life and service that you would like to live? (feeling unworthy)

VII. Feeling guilty or chastised?

VIII. You don’t feel useful or that anyone needs you?

IX. You notice a friend or co-worker who is down or perhaps failed at a project, or was just laid off

X. You’re trying hard to encourage someone, but it doesn’t seem to be working

XI. I’m trying hard to please God but I don’t know if I’ve done enough

XII. I am working hard at serving, but I don’t know if God is pleased, where is the fruit?

XIII. I need a friend, someone to come along side me and understand my situation, and help carry my burden

XIV. I’m facing criticism from others, or I have others tell me I’m critical of them – I’m just trying to help?

XV. I’ve made a mess of my life, or difficult circumstances have come upon me – how can any good come of this?

XVI. I have so many financial needs, who can help me? What do I do to keep my house?

XVII. I need someone to have my back in the midst of this struggle. I’m willing to stand, but I don’t want to stand alone

XVIII. Someone gave me some good advice (visit from Paul) but then they disappeared. Where are they now when I need them?
VI. I'm facing criticism from others, or I have others tell me I'm critical of them – I'm just trying to help?

   a. **Problem:** we can become discouraged when we face criticism, whether it is warranted or not. No one likes to be beat down by another person, or an organization, or a culture. We all view ourselves as naturally right most of the time. So it is difficult when we hear that we are not right for whatever reason. How do we deal with this? How do we help others to deal with it? Can Jesus help us? Did he ever face criticism? Can you think of some examples?

      i. How did Jesus face criticism?
         1. 
         2. 
         3. 

      ii. How (or from whom) do we or others face criticism?

   b. **Truth:** Defining Good and Evil – the basis for criticism – Genesis chapters 2-3 and the forbidden tree

      1. The Serpent said to the woman, “For God knows that when you eat of it (the tree) your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil” Gen 3:4-5

         a. What really happened in the Garden of Eden?

      2. How does God know good and evil? Or how do we now know good from evil?

         a. And God said; “Let there be light,” and there was light. God saw that the light was good.

         b. “You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.” Gen 2:16-17

         c. The Lord God said, “It is not good for man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.” Genesis 2:18

             **God/Christ’s Perspective**

---------------------------------------------------------------

**Eve’s Perspective** 

**Adam’s Perspective**
ii. **On Judging others** -- “Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, ‘let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.” Matthew 7:1-5

iii. **On having a critical spirit:** “Make a tree good and its fruit will be good, or make a tree bad and its fruit will be bad, for a tree is recognized by its fruit. You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks. The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him.” Matthew 12:33-35 “Are you still so dull? Don’t you see that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and then out of the body? But the things that come out of the mouth come from the heart, and these make a man ‘unclean’. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. These are what make a man ‘unclean’ but eating with unwashed hands does not make him unclean.” Matthew 15:16-20

iv. **How can we cleanse our inner spirits?** With the Holy Spirit! What is the fruit of the Spirit?

c. **Encouragement for others and for you**

i. God loves us and has forgiven our sins in Jesus Christ, past, present and future, and he accepts us into his kingdom based upon the finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross. We need not fear someone else “judging” us as unacceptable, we only need to fear our God and believe in Him.

1. "I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more. But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after the killing of the body, has power to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him. Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten by God. Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.” Luke 12:4-7

d. **Application**

i. **For someone facing criticism:** Encourage them to set their eyes on Christ and make sure their own actions are as close to Christ’s ways as possible. Then remind them that others criticize them from their own perspective and try not to take it personally. Finally, remind them that if they have done wrong they may deserve criticism and they should take steps to confess their wrongs and make amends for them.

ii. **On having a critical spirit:** when you feel the urge to criticize, remember to focus on the Holy Spirit within you rather than your “own” spirit. What would Jesus say? Are you speaking out of your own heart from your own perspective on what you think is right? Are you placing the interests of others above your own? Are you listening before speaking? The Holy Spirit can bring a word of love, discernment, wisdom, or encouragement to the situation. The Holy Spirit can bring “peace” to the situation, and diffuse the conflict.