

"Encouragement" - a Worksheet

As you explore the topic of "encouragement," pay close attention to the context of the verses given below. Some passages give specific examples of ways in which a person can encourage someone else - or even ways in which *God* may encourage someone. Other passages give commands for us to follow.

You may also wish to look for additional verses on this topic. Since there are many synonyms to the word "encouragement," you may wish to include other words or phrases, such as, *building up* someone or *comforting* them. Some translations may use the word *consolation*. Don't forget both noun and verb forms of these words! You may also look up verbs such as *appeal*, *entreat*, *urge*, *exhort* - which are often used in the sense of encouraging someone to do something.

PART 1 - Who Is (Or Should Be) the Source of Encouragement?

As you look at these verses, you will realize that *all* of us have a part in encouraging each other. Yet you will also see that God is the ultimate source of encouragement. These two concepts go together, and sometimes a specific verse could fit into either category. After all, God uses people to accomplish his purposes!

1. Encouragement as a command or obligation for all.

- a. **We *all* need to encourage each other.**
 - i. Commands: Hebrews 3:13; 10:25.
 - ii. Examples: Encourage the oppressed - Isaiah 1:17; encourage the sinner who repented - 2 Corinthians 2:7.
- b. **Encouragement with a focus on the future:** the coming judgment and our future with Jesus - 1 Thessalonians 4:18; 5:11.

2. Leaders need to be a source of encouragement for other people.

- a. **A command or requirement** - 2 Timothy 4:2; Titus 1:9; 2:6, 15.
- b. **An example to follow:** This was the apostle Paul's goal - Colossians 2:2 (he struggled to provide what was necessary for other people's encouragement); 1 Thessalonians 2:12 (he encouraged them to have lives worthy of God).
- c. **Note that leaders also *need* encouragement** - Romans 1:12. (The goal is *mutual* encouragement.) [Any leader who thinks he doesn't need the rest of us is not qualified to be a leader. Paul did not have such an attitude - as shown by some of the examples in PART 2.]

3. Some people may have a special ability to encourage others.

- a. **The ability to encourage others may be a special gift** - Acts 4:36 (a person who was nicknamed "Son of Encouragement"); Romans 12:8 (the gift of encouragement).
- b. **However, *all of us can encourage in one way or another.***
 - i. Even the faithful use of *other* abilities or gifts can be a source of encouragement - 1 Corinthians 14:3, 31. (Example: "prophecy," an accurate proclamation of the Word, can encourage others.)
 - ii. Building-up (encouraging) others is to be the goal of everything we say and do - Ephesians 4:19; Romans 15:2-3.

4. We must realize that the ultimate source of encouragement is God and his Word.

- a. **It comes from God, through the Scriptures** - Romans 15:4-5 (the encouragement that comes from the Scriptures... the God who gives encouragement).
- b. **It is made possible because of...**
 - i. God's unchanging nature - Hebrews 6:18. (We know that his promises *cannot* be nullified.)
 - ii. Our union with Christ - Philippians 2:1. (If there is anything encouraging about being united with Christ, then we ought to be "Christ-like" in the way we live! Look also at what Paul says *after* this verse.)
- c. **It will last forever (it is *not* short-lived)** - 2 Thessalonians 2:16-17. [In our present circumstances, we might not always *feel* encouraged, but this is only temporary.]
- d. **Our obligation:**
 - i. Trust and anticipation - Psalm 10:17 (God encourages the afflicted who trust in him); Psalm 119:28 (an example for us to follow: the psalmist anticipated encouragement through the Word of God).
 - ii. A willingness to share this encouragement with others - 2 Corinthians 1:3-7. (God encourages us, so that we can also encourage others.) [An example of this is seen in 2 Corinthians 7:6-7 - the Corinthians encouraged Titus, and Titus encouraged Paul.]

The encouragement the Bible talks about is not the shallow, "don't-worry-everything-will-be-O.K." type of encouragement that many people give. It is much deeper. It is willing to admit that, in this present life, things *aren't* always O.K. It is willing to admit that some injustices will not be corrected until the final Day of Justice, in the presence of God. It not only rejoices with those who rejoice, but it weeps with those who weep (Romans 12:15). This type of encouragement *shares* the hurts and sorrows of others; it takes them on, as though they were its own.

PART 2 - What Are Some Ways That People Can Be Encouraged?

Below are some examples of ways mentioned in the Bible, in which people were encouraged. This list of examples does not cover *all* the possible ways that someone can be encouraged! But it shows a variety of ways which might give you some ideas for either encouraging others, or for being encouraged yourself.

Again, some verses mention *people* encouraging people; others verses mention *God* encouraging people. Since these two concepts go together (and since God uses people to accomplish his purposes), some verses would fit into *both* categories. Also, the two main sections overlap, since words and actions are often interrelated.

As you look at the examples of *people* encouraging others, you may notice that there are times in which people didn't realize that they were a source of encouragement to someone else. This shows us that, even when we aren't *trying* to encourage someone, what we do may have an impact on them. Our actions, good or bad, have a greater influence on people, than we realize!

1. Some examples of encouragement by what was said.

a. By what people said.

- i. Encouragement to remain faithful and true - Acts 11:23 (Barnabas encouraged them to remain true to the Lord); Acts 14:22 (Paul and Barnabas encouraged them to remain true to the faith).
- ii. Good things said about one's friends - 2 Corinthians 7:7 (Paul - encouraged when he heard about the Corinthians' concern for him); 1 Thessalonians 3:6-10 (Paul - encouraged by the good news about the Thessalonians' faith and love).
- iii. Good news about someone the people were concerned about (Paul); probably also some general words of encouragement - Ephesians 6:22 and Colossians 4:8. (Tychicus was being sent to encourage the people in this manner.)
- iv. General statements about encouragement by what someone said (no specific details) - Acts 15:32 (by Judas and Silas); Acts 16:40 (by Paul and Silas); Acts 20:1-2 (by Paul).

b. By what God said.

- i. God's will, as expressed through the written letter of the apostles - Acts 15:31. (The people had been troubled by false teachers. In this context, *the apostles'* words were *God's* words.)
- ii. Comments about the significance of discipline - Hebrews 12:5. (When God disciplines us, it proves that he has chosen us to be his children.)

2. Some examples of encouragement by what was done.

a. By what people did.

- i. A visit - 2 Corinthians 7:6-7. (Titus encouraged Paul by his visit; the Corinthians had also encouraged Titus.)
- ii. Observing (or hearing about) someone expressing love to others - 2 Corinthians 7:13 (Paul - encouraged when he saw how the Corinthians had encouraged Titus); Philemon 1:7 (Paul - encouraged by the way Philemon expressed his love for others).

- b. **By what God did.**
 - i. God used people to encourage others - 2 Corinthians 7:6.
 - ii. The church was encouraged by the Holy Spirit - Acts 9:31. (Context - a time of persecution had just ended. They were now being strengthened and built up.)
 - iii. God's protection and guidance through various circumstances and opportunities - Ezra 7:28.

3. **A few comments about encouragement during suffering.**

- a. **Who gets encouraged?** In this context, most people think about the person who is suffering as being the *recipient* of encouragement. What most people don't realize is that the person who is suffering can also be a *giver* of encouragement!
- b. **When *we* suffer:** Our willingness to suffer for what is right can be an encouragement to others - Philippians 1:14. (Paul's willingness to be in chains for Christ encouraged others to proclaim the Word of God.)
- c. **When *others* suffer (and *we* aren't suffering):** Our growth in the faith can be an encouragement to others, when they are suffering for the faith - 1 Thessalonians 3:7. (This is what the Thessalonians did. Paul had sent Timothy to the Christians at Thessalonica, to encourage *them* - verse 2. He had been fearful that his own trials might discourage them. Yet in the end, they encouraged *him*!)
- d. **Note:** We shouldn't be (or remain) discouraged when we or others experience persecution - 1 Thessalonians 3:2+. (See also Hebrews 12:3, 12-13.)

PART 3 - Things to Think About and to Do

Think about what you learned in the first two parts of this study. Include those verses, as well as any others you may have found on your own, as you examine the following questions.

1. **About *Getting* Encouragement:**

What are some specific ways in which you can get encouragement - (1) from God? (2) from other people? (This may include ways in which people can *indirectly* encourage you - perhaps not even realizing they are doing so.)

2. **About *Giving* Encouragement:**

a. **What are you able to do?**

What are some ways in which you can encourage others? [Focus on *potential* ways that you might be able to encourage others, taking into consideration your specific circumstances in life, your abilities, etc.]

b. What are you *going* to do?

What are some specific ways in which you can begin to encourage someone else? Is there anyone you know, who needs encouraged? (This may take some thought, if you haven't considered it before.) What are you going to do about it? [Focus on the *application* of what you have learned in this study.]

3. Things We Need (when studying this topic):

a. Regarding application of what is learned.

We need to apply these things to our lives. It does us no good to learn a lot of facts, and not put them into practice. (God holds us accountable for the way we respond to the facts we learn.)

b. Regarding motives.

We need to do these things for the right reasons. We must first begin by examining our own hearts and motives. We have an *obligation* to encourage others, but our acts of encouragement must also be an expression of *love*. It does us no good to try to "encourage" someone else, if we are doing it merely to fulfill a duty or an "assignment"!

c. Self evaluation.

Think about these two comments regarding application and motives. If you need to make some changes in either of these areas, confess it to God. Repent (which means changing the way you think and act), and (with God's help) begin to make the necessary changes.

Of course, you may benefit from other people encouraging you to be faithful in these matters. But ultimately (whether or not people are available to encourage you) you can trust in God, who uses the power of his Word to accomplish all good things in our lives.