

## session 2 study guide

# the power of affirmation and encouragement

### starter

ARE YOU GOD? Read the following story individually, and then get together with a group of three or four people and discuss the questions.

Shortly after World War II came to a close, Europe began picking up the pieces. Much of the Old Country had been ravaged by the war and was in ruins. Perhaps the saddest sight of all was that of orphaned children starving in the streets of those war-torn cities.

Early one chilly morning, an American soldier was making his way back to the barracks in London. As he passed a doughnut shop, he saw a little boy staring into the window. The soldier turned the corner in his Jeep, got out and walked quietly over to where the child was standing.

Through the steamed-up window, he could see the mouth-watering morsels as they were being pulled from the oven, piping hot. The boy salivated and gave a slight groan as he watched the cook place them into the glass-enclosed counter.

The soldier's heart went out to the nameless orphan standing beside him. "Son, would you like some of those?" the soldier asked.

The boy was startled. "Oh, yes, I would!" he exclaimed.

So the soldier stepped inside and bought a dozen of the freshest doughnuts, put them in a bag, and walked back to where the boy was standing in the foggy cold of the

London morning. He smiled, held out the warm bag and said simply, “Here you are, young man.”

As the soldier turned to walk away, he felt a tug on his coat. He turned around, and the child asked quietly, “Mister, are you God?”<sup>1</sup>

1. Why do you think that the child asked the soldier if he was God?

---

---

---

---

---

2. Have you ever seen a little of Jesus in someone else?

---

---

---

---

---

3. How can seeing Jesus in someone else encourage your faith?

---

---

---

---

---

## message

All Christians are called to be encouragers and follow Jesus as our example. As you read about Jesus in the Gospels, you will find over and over again that He had the power to draw out the best in people. In this section, we will look at two individuals whom Jesus affirmed and how this affirmation forever changed their lives.

### a fisherman named simon

When Jesus met a clumsy, big-mouthed fisherman named Simon, He said to him, “You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas” (John 1:42). Jesus’ nickname, “Cephas” (in the Aramaic) or “Peter” (in the Greek), meant “The Rock.” Peter’s friends and family must have laughed at this new name, because he apparently had been anything but a “rock” of a personality. He was impulsive and opinionated.

Yet Jesus saw beyond Peter’s problems, his personality quirks and his sin. Jesus turned Peter’s weaknesses into strengths. He believed in Peter, and He had the power to draw out the best in him. Peter became Jesus’ disciple, and by spending time with Him, Peter changed as a result. It took years, but in the New Testament we see a man who was transformed by the power of God and who became a powerful leader in the Early Church. We see evidence of this transformation in Acts 3:1-12:

*One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer—at three in the afternoon. Now a man crippled from birth was being carried to the temple gate called Beautiful, where he was put every day to beg from those going into the temple courts. When he saw Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for money. Peter looked straight at him, as did John. Then Peter said, “Look at us!” So the man gave them his attention, expecting to get something from them.*

*Then Peter said, “Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.” Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man’s feet and ankles became strong. He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God. When all the people saw him walking and praising God, they recognized him as the same man who used to sit begging at the temple gate called Beautiful, and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.*

*While the beggar held on to Peter and John, all the people were astonished and came running to them in the place called Solomon’s Colonnade. When Peter saw this, he said to them: “Men of Israel, why does this surprise you? Why do you stare at us as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk?”*

1. What did Peter and John do in this passage that changed the man’s life forever?

---

---

---

2. What does this say about their faith in Christ and how they had taken on the Great Commission?

---

---

---

---

---

---

3. The people who went to the Temple would have seen this man outside of the gate called Beautiful on each of their visits. He would have been well-known to them. What was their reaction to this healing?

---

---

---

---

---

---

4. What did Peter say to them in response? By whose authority had this miracle been done?

---

---

---

---

---

---

### a tax collector named zacchaeus

Another person whom Jesus affirmed and encouraged was Zacchaeus. This former tax collector's life was turned around when Jesus called him down from a sycamore tree and invited Himself to dinner. While it is not certain how Zacchaeus got his name, it meant "pure and righteous one," which was a bit ironic given the way that most people felt about him. We find his story in Luke 19:1-10:

*Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. He wanted to see who Jesus was, but being a short man he could not, because of the crowd. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way.*

*When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today." So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly. All the people saw this and began to mutter, "He has gone to be the guest of a 'sinner.'"*

*But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount." Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost."*

1. Why were the people in the crowd surprised that Jesus chose to spend time with Zacchaeus?

---

---

---

---

---

2. Why do you think Jesus chose Zacchaeus?

---

---

---

---

3. How did Jesus' affirmation and encouragement change Zacchaeus's life?

---

---

---

---

---

4. Remember that Zacchaeus's name means "pure and righteous one." In what way did this name become a fitting representation of his new life in Christ?

---

---

---

---

---

### **dig**

*Webster's Dictionary* says that to "affirm" means to "say positively; declare firmly; assert to be true." Just as Jesus affirmed Peter and Zacchaeus, He affirms us as well. It is through this affirmation that He shows His love for us and His belief in us and also draws out the best in us.

1. What are a few ways that God has affirmed you?

---

---

---

---

2. What are some ways that God has shown He loves you?

---

---

---

---

---

---

3. What do you think it means that God “believes in you”?

---

---

---

---

---

---

4. What are some positive personality traits God has helped you develop? How has He drawn out the best in you and used your talents and abilities for His glory?

---

---

---

---

---

5. Why do you think Jesus made affirmation an important part of His ministry?

---

---

---

---

6. When we encourage others, we demonstrate to them what Jesus is like. Our encouragement helps other Christians be strong in their faith, and it creates an environment in which those who don't know Jesus can learn about Him. Perhaps this is why the Bible so frequently challenges us to share our faith through encouragement and affirmation. Read each of the following verses and write down who is giving encouragement and the result of that encouragement.

2 Thessalonians 2:16-17

---

---

---

---

---

Hebrews 3:13

---

---

---

---

---



Hebrews 10:24-25

---

---

---

---

---

1 Thessalonians 5:11

---

---

---

---

---

One of the most important gifts a Christian can share is affirmation. When we give people the gift of affirmation, we are giving them something far greater than material gifts. As American psychologist William James once said, “The deepest principle in human nature is the craving to be appreciated.”

### **apply**

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (1869–1948) was the pre-eminent political and ideological leader of India during that nation’s quest to obtain independence from Great Britain. In his biography of Gandhi, Louis Fischer commented, “He refused to see the bad in people. He often changed human beings by regarding them not as what they were but as though they were what they wished to be.”

Of course, Gandhi was not the first to do this. As we have seen, Jesus also refused to allow the opinions of others—and even the opinions of the people about themselves—affect what *He* thought about them. In fact, each of us has the power to affect the lives of others simply by the way we believe them. It is important to praise those around us and recognize them for who they

are. Not only will they appreciate it and respond to our praise, but—if it is done sincerely—a door might also be opened for us to share Christ with them.

1. Mark Twain once said, “I can live two months on one good compliment.” Why can encouragement be such a powerful force in affecting someone’s view of himself or herself?

---

---

---

---

---

2. What is it like to be around a person who never has anything good to say about others? Is this a person with whom you like to spend a lot of time?

---

---

---

---

---

3. When someone is an encouragement to you, how does that affect your day or your week?

---

---

---

---

---

4. In what way has someone encouraged you this past week?

---

---

---

---

---

5. How have you seen God encouraging and affirming you? Has this had an affect on how you help and encourage others? Why or why not?

---

---

---

---

---

6. On a scale from 1 to 10, rate how often you think you encourage others.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Never	Seldom		Sometimes		Often		Always		

7. Who are three people you could list who need to know you believe in them and would be built up by your affirmation? (In other words, who is your Simon Peter or Zacchaeus?)

---

---

---

---

## reflect

For this final exercise, find five or six other people and have each person write a short note of affirmation about each of the people in the group. Then, one at a time, bombard each person with the collected words of affirmation. Once everyone has received affirmation, discuss the following as a group:

1. How did being “bombarded” with affirming words make you feel?

---

---

---

---

---

2. What are some practical ways that you can encourage others in their relationships with God?

---

---

---

---

3. How can those in your youth group encourage one another?

---

---

---

---

---

4. How can affirmation be a positive way to share your faith with another person?

---

---

---

---

---

---

5. What are some of the different ways that you can give the gift of affirmation to others? (For example, write a note to a friend, tell someone in your family about your love for him or her, send flowers, and so forth.)

---

---

---

---

---

---

6. Why do you think people tend to hold back in the area of encouraging others? What keeps you from encouraging others more often?

---

---

---

---

---

---

7. How do being encouraging, being available and speaking words of affirmation allow you to reflect God's love and the relationship He desires to have with those you meet?

---

---

---

---

---

---

### meditation



If you have any encouragement from being united  
with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship  
with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my  
joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love,  
being one in spirit and purpose.

PHILIPPIANS 2:1-2

---

#### Note

1. Jim Burns, general editor, *Uncommon Stories and Illustrations* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2008), p. 97.