

session 5 study guide

encouraging God's people

the gift of exhortation

dig

*We have different gifts, according to the grace given us . . .
if it is encouraging, let him encourage.*

ROMANS 12:6,8

The word “exhortation” means “to come alongside.” When you exhort someone, you come alongside that person to encourage and support him or her. You’ve probably been around people who have a real gift for encouraging others. They have the unique ability to make you feel special. Their ministry of comfort, challenge and counsel helps and heals discouraged people.

1. Who is someone in your life who provides advice and encouragement to you?

2. What qualities or characteristics are helpful for someone with the gift of exhortation to have?

3. The apostle Paul had the gift of exhortation. As you read the book of Acts, you will see that Paul was an encouragement to others even though he himself suffered great trials, enduring brutal beatings, mobs and imprisonment. How did Paul use his gift of exhortation in these Scripture passages?

Acts 14:21-22:

Acts 20:17-35:

4. Read 1 Corinthians 9:19-23. How does Paul relate to the people he is preaching to?

5. Read 1 Corinthians 1:4-9 and Philippians 4:13. What compliments does Paul give the church at Corinth? Of what strength does he remind the Philippians?

6. Read Philippians 1:6 and 2 Corinthians 4:8-10,16-17. What hope does Paul give the Philippians? What reminder of hope does he give the Corinthians?

7. Read Galatians 4:8-20 and 1 Thessalonians 4:2-8. What is Paul's difficult message to the Galatians? What hard truth does Paul give to the Thessalonians?

8. Another New Testament Christian who stands out as possessing the gift of exhortation is Barnabas. Everywhere Barnabas appears in the Bible, he is encouraging someone. According to Acts 4:36, what does “Barnabas” mean?

9. Read Acts 11:19-26 and list several ways Barnabas was an encouragement to the believers in Antioch.

Although Barnabas and Paul were great champions for the faith, they didn't always get along. Acts 13 tells how Barnabas and Paul left the church in Antioch and began to preach around the world. On their first long trip, they took Barnabas's nephew John (called Mark), who Barnabas saw as a potential Christian leader. (Barnabas saw and encouraged potential in people.) John Mark didn't make it through the entire trip, leaving to return to Jerusalem (see Acts 13:13).

After the first trip was completed, Paul and Barnabas decided to go back to visit the churches they had planted (see Acts 15:36). Barnabas wanted to take John Mark along again, but Paul insisted that because John Mark had deserted them on their earlier trip, they should not take him. A sharp disagreement broke out. Paul's priority was their work; Barnabas's priority was people (see Acts 15:37-41).

10. Read Acts 15:36-41. What was the result of their argument? (See verses 39-40.)

11. If you were Paul, would you have given John Mark a second chance? Why or why not?

12. What characteristics made Barnabas a good friend?

We might be missing a big chunk of the Bible had Barnabas not used his gift of encouragement. Although Barnabas never wrote a book in the New Testament, Paul wrote 13 and Mark wrote 1—and Barnabas encouraged them both!

reflect

1. Who in your life needs your encouragement?

2. What specifically can you do to encourage him or her?

3. Encouragement isn't only done with words. What other ways could you demonstrate your encouragement for someone?

4. Why is it important to have people who encourage us, especially in our walk with Jesus?

5. Why is it sometimes difficult to encourage others?

6. The gift of exhortation involves encouragement and occasional confrontation. Why is it difficult to confront someone even though you know it will help him or her get back on the right path?

7. Have you ever had to confront a friend with a difficult truth in order to help him or her get back on track? What was the result?

meditation



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.

HEBREWS 10:25