

St Martins C3 – April 21, 2024

Iron Sharpens Iron – Spirit-led Encouragement

Sermon Summary:

The Bible puts a lot of emphasis on us being part of a church family who are there to provide the appropriate encouragement and support for us to grow into all that God has called us to be.

In **1 Thessalonians 5:11**, we read: ***“So encourage each other and build each other up, just as you are already doing.”***

The substance of what we ought to encourage each other with is in the surrounding context of this verse, which is what Christ has done and is doing in our lives. Mutual encouragement within Christ’s church is centred on our identity and calling as children of God. The truth of who we are in Christ, provides the foundation for how we think of ourselves, and how we encourage each other.

Here is what this might practically look like in a one-on-one catch up with someone:

1) Pray for the person – before you meet up.

Pray for God to empower them and for them to fulfill God’s call on their lives. Pray also for God to give you wisdom as to how to encourage the other person in their spiritual growth.

2) Take a genuine interest in the other person.

Meaningful encouragement is best received in the context of a healthy relationship.

3) Ask some exploratory questions if you need to.

For example: What has God been revealing to you recently? What has God been doing around your life? What have been some challenges that you are facing or praying into?

4) While you are having the conversation, prayerfully ask God to reveal to you, His perspective.

God always sees more potential than we do. Therefore, pray for a revelation or insight into that.

5) Look for opportunities within the conversation to encourage them with what God is doing in their lives, or how they could live out their calling.

1 Corinthians 14:3 – *“One who prophesies strengthens others, encourages them, and comforts them.”*

There is a place for challenge and correction, but only if it is built on a strong foundation of love, support and encouragement.

If you want to take this one step further and be a great encourager, think about how God or other people have encouraged you over the years. How did they go beyond just a compliment?

Resources for Connect Groups:

Main Point:

Specific one-on-one encouragement from another Christian focused on our identity and calling in Christ is very beneficial for our spiritual growth.

Suggested questions:

Do you find giving encouragement to someone else comes naturally to you, or do you have to work at it?

When someone has taken a genuine interest in how your life, (and especially your spiritual life) how has that communicated value to you?

Can you think of an example where someone has encouraged you in your spiritual life? – Why was it particularly encouraging?

In what we covered on Sunday or in the weekly devotions, what have you found helpful in approaching others in an encouraging way?

What could being a more encouraging person look like for you?

Monday's Devotion – Pray for each other.

2 Thessalonians 1:11

“So we keep on praying for you, asking our God to enable you to live a life worthy of his call. May he give you the power to accomplish all the good things your faith prompts you to do.”

In this week's devotions, let us explore in more detail how we approach these one-on-one conversations we are encouraging in our church.

Firstly, before we catch up with the person, we pray. Preparation prayers are powerful because they help us bring God's empowerment and wisdom into our minds as we prepare for the conversation.

Praying in advance for the person gives God the opportunity to speak to us about something we may not have thought of, and also gets our hearts in the right place, where we are receptive to the Holy Spirit's promptings. Personally I have found it best to not assume how the conversation is going to go, or rehearse the conversation, but rather, simply pray for God to lead and guide me.

As you make preparation prayers a habit in your life, you will discover that God creates many divine opportunities around you. They were probably already there, however, prayer has made you more attentive to those opportunities. So, let us be people of prayer, especially as we prepare for intentional conversations with others regarding spiritual growth.

Tuesday's Devotion – Genuine help

James 2:8

“If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, “Love your neighbour as yourself,” you are doing right.”

An important aspect that we want to keep emphasizing, as we go on this discipleship journey, is that all of what we are talking about needs to flow from a natural and authentic relationship. We are not making you connect with people you don't want to connect with. Rather we are encouraging you to make the most of the connections you already have. Use those times of connection to encourage spiritual growth in each other's lives.

I like how James says things very plainly and in a common sense way. Here he is explaining that the basis of all healthy relationships is to treat others how you want to be treated. Mirroring the teaching of Christ.

One of the essential things that we are looking for from those around us, is for them to take a genuine interest in our lives, or to be genuine in their offer to help us when we need it. So, if those are some of the basic things that we need, then let us take the initiative and offer those things to others. In doing so, we are going to form good new relationships, or we are going to strengthen the ones that we already have.

Take a moment and ponder these questions today: Who has God placed around my life? Am I taking the initiative to connect with them, help them and take a genuine interest in their lives?

Wednesday's Devotion – Appropriate questions.

John 5:6

When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, he asked him, "Do you want to get well?"

Inevitably, as we relate to others in a genuine way and seek to have conversations with each other about our spiritual growth, questions will be needed. However, keep in mind there are appropriate and inappropriate questions. So, what made Jesus' question in this situation so good?

The key is in the context. Jesus had learnt that the man had been lame for a long time. That means, he was now an older man and would not have had the chance to learn and use a productive skill like other able men his age would have had. If this man was restored to full health, it would mean going out and getting a job and not relying on the charity of others. So, Jesus asks a good inquiring question.

In the context of our one-on-one conversations, good inquiring questions are appropriate. Questions that are not making assumptions. Questions that are not making judgements or accuse the person of anything. Rather, questions that help the other person identify what is going on in their lives at the moment, especially what is going on in their relationship with God.

If we approach the conversation, with appropriate questions and a genuine desire to help bring the Kingdom of God, we will be pleasantly surprised how God will use us.

Thursday's Devotion – Feedback

1 Timothy 1:18

Timothy, my son, I am giving you this command in keeping with the prophecies once made about you, so that by recalling them you may fight the battle well.

Constructive feedback is helpful. It can form the context for how we encourage others. In the letters of 1 & 2 Timothy we have Paul giving Timothy feedback on his faith and ministry. The overall theme of the letters is the need for Timothy to stand strong in the calling that God has placed on his life and in what Paul had commissioned him to do.

Mostly good feedback is given in an encouraging way. It is firstly, listening well to what is going on in the other persons life. Listen for what they might be struggling with or what questions they might have. We haven't got the benefit of reading Timothy's letters to Paul, but we can see from Paul's replies that Paul is listening well to Timothy's concerns and that is giving him the framework for the appropriate encouraging feedback.

The other difference we see in the personal letters of Paul, in contrast to the church letters, is that they are a lot more specific. This is the benefit of one-on-one conversations. The encouragement (feedback) can be directed to a particular situation or issue. Keep in mind, the more specific you can make the encouragement, the more helpful it is. So, pray that God helps you listen well and helps you give specific and meaningful feedback on what the person is telling you.

Friday's Devotion – Prophetic Encouragement

1 Corinthians 14:3

But the one who prophesies speaks to people for their strengthening, encouraging and comfort.

Within these one-on-one conversations, the Holy Spirit will lead you, at times, to give a specific God-focused encouragement that didn't come to your mind naturally. These Holy Spirit's promptings are to bring strength, encouragement, or comfort to the person. In my experience, God will usually prompt me to say something that is encouraging them in their identity as a child of God or in their calling. It seems that these are quite foundational in God's mind.

The benefit of a one-on-one interaction, is that a prophetic word can be given in a discussion like way. It may be as simple as saying something like, "I feel God prompting me to emphasize... to you." Then you can immediately follow that up with the question: "Does that resonate with you at all?" One-on-one conversations are good places to test and grow in the use of prophetic words. Don't be discouraged if you don't get positive feedback the first few times, see it as an opportunity for you to learn and fine tune your awareness of God speaking to you.

It would be pretty normal for Christians to pray for each other at the end of a conversation on spiritual growth. This helps close the whole loop from praying before you met up, through the conversation, (which included listening to them and to the Holy Spirit), to praying God's blessing as they go. May God mightily use these conversations we are having with each other!