

How Encouragement Works (Part 2)

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[0:00] We are in our fifth study on the series in encouragement. Last time, which was January 1st, a month ago, we talked about the topic of how encouragement works, part one.

And so that means today the lesson is how encouragement works, part two. And last week we talked about the gospel, or last time we talked about the gospel.

And today we're going to talk about wisdom and prayer. The gospel words are not the only words that we speak to one another. And so today we're going to talk about wisdom and prayer.

But before we do that, since it's been so long, we do want to do some review. Now, in many respects, this study is sort of an extended meditation on Ephesians chapter 4.

And so, as we begin, I'm going to ask you to turn there to Ephesians chapter 4. We've read portions of this chapter several times. And today I thought what we could do is we could start at the very beginning of Ephesians chapter 4.

[1:14] We're going to start with verse 1. And we're going to read the first 16 verses. Not all in one sitting. But we want to remind ourselves of many of the things that we've talked about so far in this series.

So, Ephesians chapter 4 and verse 1. And we're going to read the first six verses at this time. As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.

Be completely humble and gentle. Be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called. One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all.

Who is over all and through all and in all. So, we've read the first six verses. Let me ask you, if you could summarize the main point of those first six verses with one word, what would you say that it is?

[2:37] The main point and one word of those first six verses. One. That's a good, that's a very good start.

That's not exactly what I was thinking. What does that one represent, though? The main word is only listed once in here.

Unity. I would say it's unity. The Apostle Paul is talking about unity. Why do we have this unity?

Because we have all these one things in common.

Because together, together, so look around, all of us as brothers and sisters in Christ, together we share in one Spirit. We look forward to one hope.

Do you understand how rare that is? For people to share one hope? Well, we have one hope. We share in one Spirit. We have one Lord. We have one faith.

[3:38] One thing we are trusting in. One baptism. And one Father. We're a singular family. We have one Father who's over all, who rules over all, who works in all, and is in all.

And so, brothers and sisters, this is the Christian life. It's a shared life. It's a unified life. And so, through the Spirit, through the bonds of the Spirit, we are united, intimately, together.

And through the Gospel, we've been joined together. And that means that we're going to live a certain kind of life. A patient life. A life of love.

But it's also a life of encouragement. Because, verse 6, leads to what comes next. And so, this Christian life, this shared life, it shows itself by the way that we encourage one another.

So, let's keep reading. But to each one of us, grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. This is why it says, when he ascended on high, he led captives in his train and gave gifts to men.

[4:53] What does he ascended mean? Except that he also descended to the lower earthly regions. He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens in order to

fill the whole universe.

It was he who gave some to be apostles and some, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers to prepare God's people for works of service so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith.

There's that unity idea again. Unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

And so, we talked about this passage last time. It's been some time, but this is what we talked about last time. The reason that we can encourage one another, the reason we have that ability as brothers and sisters is because the risen Christ has given us this ability.

When he overcame the grave, after he descended, he ascended and he gave gifts to men and so he has conquered and that means he's gifted his body.

[6:11] Now, each one of us has received gift, a gift of grace to speak to one another in order that we could all grow. Now, in this first part, he's talking about sort of the official speakers of the church, the apostles, the prophets, the pastors, the teachers, but no one can say, well, I can't encourage my brother and sister.

No one in this room, if you are a believer, can say, well, I don't have a part in this because Christ has conquered. Your ability doesn't depend upon yourself.

It depends upon a reality that has already happened. Jesus has already died. He has already been raised and he has given gifts to men and he's given gifts to the church.

Now, we can say more than that. He's put us in the same body to do that. So, encouragement flows out of our unity together. He's meant for this body to work in this way that he's put us together and so that we would love each other.

And one way that we love each other is by the way we speak to each other. So, if we've been united together with each other, if you've been united with your brothers and sisters here, you should feel something of the importance of speaking to one another.

[7:37] A family that doesn't speak is not healthy and a church that doesn't speak to one another is not healthy. So, we need to feel the importance of speaking the truth and love to each other.

And so, brothers and sisters, your brothers and sisters need you. Do you see that? They need you.

Some of the grace that your brothers and sisters need is in your hands.

It's in your mouth. And if you don't speak that grace to them, if you don't speak that truth and love to them, they are going to be poorer for it. They're not going to be all that Christ wants them to be.

If you don't speak the truth and love to them, then the body has a way of slowly decaying. Because part of that grace, part of the health of this church and our body is exhibited and is encouraged as we speak to one another.

And so, it's as we encourage each other, it's as we remind each other of the gospel that our body is built up.

[8:49] Well, let's keep reading. then, we will no longer be infants tossed back and forth by the waves and blown here and there by the, or excuse me, tossed back and forth by the waves and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men and their deceitful scheming.

Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the head, that is Christ. From him, the whole body joined and held together by every supporting ligament grows and builds itself up in love as each part does its work.

So, in the last paragraph, he's talking about the official speakers and in this paragraph, he opens it up to every member of the church, to all of God's people.

And so, what is the antidote to instability, to lack of growth? Well, Paul says, it's as we speak the truth in love to each other. It's not just the pulpit ministry that provides stability for the church, it's the body members as they each do their part of speaking to one another that we become empowered, that we grow.

And so, everyone has been gifted and empowered to do that, to speak to each other, to encourage each other. And so, the strength to speak to each other, like I said, it doesn't come from within, it comes from above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God.

[10:29] Well, enough of review. Let's move into today's lesson. Today's lesson is how encouragement works, part two.

And the first thing that we're going to talk about is wisdom, is wisdom. We talked last time about how the gospel is powerful.

The gospel is the power of God unto salvation. It's the power by the Spirit to convert and to sanctify God's people. But gospel words are not the only words that we speak to one another.

Our encouragement of one another rests upon the gospel, but it doesn't stop there. And that's what we're going to talk about today. Today we're going to look at words of wisdom. So, let's start with a couple of examples.

Let's say we're in the foyer. You and I, we're in the foyer after the service. And, I know that you've spent a lot of time the last few weeks, we're going to pretend it's summer here, a lot of times in the last few weeks building a tree house for your nephews.

[11:40] Okay? You were faithful, you were diligent, you're building this tree house for your nephews because you love them. And I say, I heard your nephews really love that tree house that you built for them.

I mean, they're practically living in it. They're taking all their meals up there. Their mom tells me that they just can't get enough of it. They spend every weekend all their time up there. So, I say that to you.

Now, that's just a little conversation. But, I've encouraged you, haven't I? I've encouraged you. I don't know what else we would call that.

I haven't told you the gospel. I haven't said any gospel words. But, it's pretty obvious that I've encouraged you in your show of love.

Or, let's think of another example. A very different example. Let's suppose that you have a close relative.

[12:41] A sister. And, she just died. And, I pluck up the courage to ask you, how are you, how are you doing?

How are you coping in this situation? How are you holding up? And, I empathize with you. And, I tell you about how I felt when one of my close relatives died.

And, I don't say much. I just, I just mourn with you. I'm just sad with you. And, I let you know that I know how you feel. Well, let me ask you, would that be encouraging?

Yeah, that would be encouraging. I didn't really speak the gospel to you. I just came close to you and showed that, you know what, we, I know how you feel.

I, I shared a common experience with you. and that was encouraging to you. So, what should we think about those kinds of things?

[13:49] Those kind of conversations? What should we think about what's going on here? If my words aren't explicitly and specifically Christian, specifically gospel oriented, does that mean they're not encouraging?

I mean, an unbeliever could have done and could have said the very same things that I said. So, does that mean they're not Christian encouragement?

Does that mean they're just, they're not real, real encouragement? Well, I think the answer is not at all. Not at all. And the reason is, is the world we live in is God's world.

world. All of it. Not just the Christian, churchy bits, but the whole thing. God made slugs.

And he made stars. And he made us in his image. And he's given us dominion over the whole world. And so that means in our spare time, we do things like build tree houses.

[14:56] And so he's made this world. And he's filled it with his wisdom. He used wisdom to create it. And we see that wisdom all around us. And he's given wisdom to men.

So when we use his wisdom, and when we reflect that wisdom in the way that we mourn for each other, the way that we love each other, the way that we speak, then it's not like we're not acting like Christians.

We are acting like image bearers. We're acting like our father. And so when our words reflect the goodness and wisdom of God, they can be very encouraging.

And that's what we, that's what I'm saying today. When our words reflect the wisdom of God, they can be very encouraging. So remember, encouragement isn't just about making people feel good. Encouragement is about building people up in Christ-likeness. And Christ isn't just a religious person. He wasn't just a religious person.

[15:58] He was an entire human being. And every part of his life is what we want to imitate. The way he mourned. The way he worked.

The way he loved. And when we encourage, the point is to bring people to be more like Jesus Christ. And it's not only gospel words. to do that. Words of wisdom do that as well. Now, you can see that clearly in the book of Proverbs. Proverbs isn't a very specifically Christian gospel sort of book, is it? It's not a very explicitly gospel book. I'm sure we could draw lots of connections and it's based on the gospel and we're going to talk about that later. But it's not on the surface anyways. But can anyone doubt that we do need to believe what it says and do what it says and obey it? That we need it to be Christ-like.

[17:05] The very fact that it's in our Bible shows us that we need Proverbs. So encouragement doesn't just include explicit gospel words. it includes all sorts of words that reflect the wisdom and the goodness of God.

And so maybe we are talking about tree houses and maybe we're talking about the death of a loved one. Maybe we're talking about how you work and how you spend your money. Maybe we're talking about how you play an athletic game or something like that.

Any part of life. We can encourage one another in whatever situation that we're in because this is my father's world. So my father's world, he created it, he rules over it in wisdom and with goodness and in his word he's told me how to be wise.

And so I can take that wisdom that he gives us in his word and speak it to you. listen to Proverbs chapter 8.

To you, O men, I call. This is wisdom speaking. To you, O men, I call, and my cry is to the children of man. O simple ones, learn prudence. O fools, learn sense.

[18:27] Hear, for I will speak noble things, and from my lips will come what is right. From my mouth will utter truth. Wickedness is an abomination to my lips. And this is a picture of wisdom crying aloud.

She stands in a high place and she speaks to every man. Wisdom isn't hidden. God in his word declares what is wise. And so we're expected to take it and give it to others.

And so brothers and sisters, here's the glorious thing about all of this. As sons and daughters of God, you have special access to the wisdom of God.

Because you have special anytime access to God himself. See, those proverbs and that wisdom, they can lie dead on the page until God takes it and puts it in us and opens our minds to see it.

And the wonderful, beautiful thing is as we are brought into relationship with God himself. We have this access to God who is wise and he teaches us wisdom.

[19:38] And that means that we have the special ability to speak to each other in every situation. So, imagine that you're an experienced car mechanic.

Okay? You're an experienced car mechanic that works not in a shop, but you work at a factory where a station wagon, the best station wagon in the whole world is made.

Now, this is a family-owned business, the station wagon factory is. And this station wagon has everything that you can imagine. Has an espresso machine, has a digital TV, has GPS, it has automatic navigation, so you don't even have to steer it.

I mean, this thing is a miracle of technology. It's obviously a fantasy. Not my fantasy, I don't ever want to drive a station wagon. No offense if you are.

Now, so you work in this factory where this marvelous machine is made, and the inventor is there. the inventor, you know him, you work at his factory, he's taught you himself how to work on this machine, how to work on this car.

[21:05] Now, I have a question for you. Could someone who didn't work at this factory, could another car mechanic try to figure out how this machine works, this car works?

Do you think he could, you know, maybe give it a shot and do fairly well at certain things? What do you guys think? So, Rex, what do you think? Anything's possible.

You know, so we'll suppose, you know, Rex, he's worked on a lot of cars. He's had a lot of experience in working on different kinds of cars. He knows generally how they work.

Could he give it a shot? Yeah, sure. Sure he could. The local mechanic, who's worked for years on cars, he's gained a lot of experience, he could try to fix it when it broke.

And maybe he would do a very good job at some things. But really, you are the one who works at the factory. You are the one who has any time access to the inventor.

[22:13] You have access to the blueprints and the engineering notes. You have access to what specifically will work best in every situation.

And you have personal dealings with the owner, with the inventor of this machine. And so you are in the best position to know how to take care of the station wagon.

Do you understand my point? a smart person of this world might know how to do some things wisely. But the person who best understands how creation works is the one who knows the creator. And the one who has any time access to the creator. And you as God's child have that access to him.

You might and you don't have perfect wisdom. Like he does. But you know him. And he speaks to you. He speaks to you in his word.

[23:24] And you can speak to him in prayer. And he can teach you by his spirit. And so what I'm saying is you have words of encouragement.

to say. In any situation. You can speak. Because for one. You have the word of God. Where wisdom is found. You know the inventor.

The creator. And so you have something to say. And that is all part of speaking the truth in love.

The truth has specific application to the gospel. We've seen that.

But the truth isn't just the gospel. It's how everything else is connected to the gospel. How everything else in the Bible that shows us about the setting that we're in and the life that we live and all the different trials and circumstances that we find ourselves.

All that is part of the truth. And so that's my first point. Words of wisdom are encouraging words too.

Now the second point I want to make briefly is that the gospel and wisdom are connected.

[24:29] The gospel and wisdom are connected. So the wisdom is not separate from the gospel.

Actually the gospel is the supreme manifestation of God's wisdom.

Okay? Listen to 1 Corinthians. He's going to talk about two different people and two different things that they seek. For Jews demand signs.

That's powerful signs. the Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom. But we preach Christ crucified. That's the gospel isn't it?

We preach Christ crucified a stumbling block to the Jews. There's no power there and they stumble over it and it's folly to the Gentiles.

The Greeks want wisdom and they think that is foolish. But to those who are called both Jews and Greeks Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

[25:35] Jews want power and the gospel is where God shows his power. And the Greeks want wisdom and the message of Christ crucified is the wisdom of God.

This is God thinking at his best and showing us what is he's showing us the depths of how wise he is. Isn't that the point of Romans 11?

When he gets done going through the entire gospel, he says, oh, the depths of the knowledge and the wisdom of God. God. You see, the gospel of Jesus, it gives us the proper perspective on everything.

The reason that we don't use and misuse and abuse Proverbs is because we understand the gospel. The gospel teaches us the correct perspective on everything.

You see, there are lots of good ideas that can become bad ideas when they are divorced from the gospel.

[26:42] Lots of things can be good, but then when they're taken out of the gospel, they become terrible. They can become very damaging. Now, for some reason, I thought of this as an example.

Capitalism. Because people have been talking about this a lot lately. You know, the whole Occupy movement and all these things. People are really starting to question our economic system lately.

Now, so I'm thinking about capitalism here. Capitalism is a great idea. It's the idea that people should have the right to own their own things. And they should have the right to have their own money and do what they want with their own property, to invest it, to save it.

It's the basis of our economy here. And all you have to do is go to North Korea and see that the alternative, communism, where the state owns everything, is a bad idea.

Where they own everything, it's a bad idea. It's a terrible idea in comparison to capitalism. But something very bad can happen to our best ideas when they're unhinged from the gospel.

[27:53] people. And so if owning and possessing money and the means of production and wealth becomes the highest good, the measurement by which we measure all things, then it becomes

something very bad because people are destroyed.

And so the wealthy can manipulate and abuse the poor and there's no compassion because if the highest good is to be rich and the worst thing to do is to be poor, then naturally there's going to be all sorts of terrible things happen.

So how do we think about these things? Well, I don't have a complete answer, but where do we get wisdom to think about money and about government and about business and all those kinds of questions?

Well, I want to say we want to start with the gospel. We want to start with the gospel. And this is a very rudimentary start. Jesus came to save and recreate this world.

And so that means things and wealth, those things are not bad in and of themselves because he's coming to redeem all these things, all these trees and rocks and us and this physical world.

[29:22] So material things are not bad, but he saved us and the world by becoming poor, not by gaining wealth, but by losing everything that he had.

And so gaining wealth can't be the highest thing. It can't be the highest goal. And so the antidote to the abuse of capitalism is not government, it's not redistribution or socialism or communism or anything like that.

It's the gospel. The abuse of the cure for every bad idea or good idea gone bad is the gospel. It's not government or human ideas, it's the gospel.

And so where do we get the perspective? Where do we get the foundation to think about every issue in life? Well, we start with Jesus.

us. He's the wisdom of God. Colossians says that all the wisdom, all the riches of the wisdom of God are stored up in him. He's the fulfillment of all the proverbs.

[30:30] He's the fulfillment of all prophecy. He's the fulfillment of every sign and picture in the Old Testament. And he's the fulfillment of all of wisdom. And that means that we can never outgrow the gospel.

We can go deeper into it. And we can see how it applies in different ways throughout our life. But we never can get away from the gospel.

Because gospel and wisdom aren't built, aren't against each other. Instead, wisdom is built on top of the gospel. And so what I'm saying is when we speak wisdom to each other, true wisdom, wisdom, we're not going off the rails and not speaking about the gospel.

In fact, our wise words reflect the gospel. And as we speak wisdom to each other, we do it resting on Jesus Christ. We don't do it by leaving him behind.

We do it by going deeper and deeper into what he's done and who he is. And so we don't leave the gospel behind. We go deeper into it. Now, this is our third point.

[31:40] We have five minutes left. Our third point, and that is prayer. If you set out to encourage your brother and sister, probably the best idea is that for your very first words, not to be spoken to them, but to be spoken to God instead.

When you set out to encourage your brother and sister, the first stop should be the throne of grace. We should start with prayer. prayer. Now, I want to ask you a question. If you want to encourage your brother and sister, why does it make sense to begin with prayer?

That's for you guys to answer. Why does it make sense to begin with prayer? He's the God of all comfort. He teaches us how to comfort one another.

Dear. Our ways are not always God's ways. Okay. Our ways are not always God's ways. I'm going to keep the question open, but I want to talk for a second about what Dare said.

Remember Job and his three friends? Job had three friends, and as you read Job, it's a very difficult book because so much of what they say seems so right.

[32:54] It makes sense. Isn't it wisdom that they're talking about? God. And then you get to the end of the book and you find out that they've sinned. It seems so wise what they were saying and it turned out to be misguided and wrong and their sin had to be atoned for because they misapplied some of God's principles.

They didn't think completely through everything. And so when we come to encouragement, it does us good to stop and sit down with God and reflect through what we have to say because the first things out of our mouth, they're not always the best things.

They're not our best and wisest things most of the time. Why does it make sense to begin with prayer? Our wisdom is not God's wisdom always.

Our ways aren't God's ways. God is the God of comfort. He teaches us how to comfort one another. What else can we say? We need to ask the Lord for help in speaking the truth to him in love because like you said, the first words out of our mouth is not always the best thing.

So we need his wisdom to speak in the way it's correct. It's according to his will, I guess. Yeah. Exactly. I mean, we need to pray because we're sinners.

[34 : 19] Isn't that true? We have sinful hearts still in this flesh and we're still partially blind. We need God's help just to give us the wisdom to know, to clearly perceive what's going on.

Job's three friends, they didn't see everything. They were blind in some way and it would have done them good to pray and ask for wisdom to know what to say. Why else do we need to pray?

Yeah, that's exactly right. When we preach, we can preach to your ears and we can preach to your mind.

Some people, we can preach to your emotions even. But God the Spirit has to go in and do that work inside your heart to convince you of sin, to convince you of what is righteous, to convince your heart of the goodness of Jesus and the sufficiency of Jesus.

I mean, we're all living cases of the fact that for years, for many of us, the gospel came upon us and had no effect. But then the Spirit of God came and worked powerfully in us.

[35 : 33] It's the same thing with encouragement. If I want to do and if I want to say things that make you like Christ, I don't have the power to reach into your heart.

I don't have the power to convince you of what I'm saying in the deepest parts of who you are. And so we need the Spirit to do that for us.

And so is there anything else? Why else do we need to pray? We need wisdom, we're sinful. Dare you have another idea? I'm all out, so. I'm just thinking we need to pray for God's Spirit to protect us in our encouragement because sometimes our words that are seeking to encourage the individual by speaking the truth of God in love is convicted to them.

And it can startle us because we don't know what that Spirit is doing in their heart, but they can react with light shedding on darkness. And if we take it personally, then we'll cease to seek to encourage it.

And yet we are continuing to encourage it. That's very good. I don't know how to summarize that in my own mind.

[36 : 55] But to say our words are not always going to be taken well. And we might get some shrapnel thrown on us.

And if we, like De'ar said, take that personally, we're going to shut down. And actually what's going to happen is we're going to grow bitter towards that person.

Here I am, I'm loving you, and you're treating me like this? And so just to say our hearts are sinful and prone to sin, and we need the Spirit of God to protect us in even that situation when we mean to do good, that's actually when we're most, at our most vulnerable, because it's when I'm doing something good for someone that it hurts all the more when they mistreat me.

Jim, do you have something? I think we can solve a problem with our own strength, we've got hands instead of bringing to God and ask the Lord, how can I reach out this person?

Because sometimes we think we've got all the answers, and I'm bad for that, and I find out I'm the fool because I thought I had all the answers. So it's while you ask why we pray, we ask the Lord of this situation, how can I speak to them in love?

[38 : 23] Yeah. I'm just thinking, this might be stereotypical, I don't know, of young husbands, men, we think we can fix our wives.

And it becomes our wisdom when we realize, oh, wait a second, the best way for us to help them is not for us to say, oh, let me fix your problem. and we can easily do that with encouragement.

Oh, I want to fix this person. And our idea of fixing it isn't God's idea of fixing it, and of course, no one likes to be fixed, do they? And so we're really not speaking the truth in love, we're speaking the truth generally in our own best interest.

That's all the time we have. We are dismissed. Thank you.