

Making A Start

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[0:00] Well, we're in a series on encouragement. I think today is going to be the next to the last time that we're in this series. So next week I think we'll finish it up.

But today's lesson is called Making a Start. Making a Start. And today is all about possibilities. All about different ways that we can put into practice the different things that we've learned.

I hope you're convinced that the Word of God is powerful in your life and the Word of God is powerful in other people's lives.

It's powerful to change you. It's powerful to change others. And I hope you've seen from Ephesians chapter 4 as we've gone back to it over and over again that you have a role.

Pastors have a role in speaking the Word of Truth, speaking the truth in love. And we all together have a role in speaking the truth in love.

[1:06] Now, last week we talked about the problem of inadequacy. Inadequacy. I think a lot of times we don't encourage the lost.

We don't encourage our brothers and sisters because we don't feel like we can do a good job.

We're afraid that we're actually going to make things worse.

We're not articulate. We don't have the words on the tip of our tongue. We're nervous. But that can't be an excuse.

We saw that last week. That can't be an excuse for not encouraging because encouragement is ultimately God's work. It's His work in other people's lives.

And His power is made perfect in our weakness. So remember, the Apostle Paul wasn't this dynamic speaker. He wasn't this powerful, powerful speaker that could go in front of every audience and with great bravado speak.

[2:10] He said He preached the Gospel in fear and trembling. He didn't use persuasive words. And that was good.

It was good. God puts things in different columns than we do. A lot of times we put things in the asset column that God puts in the liabilities column. And we put things in the liabilities column that God puts in the assets column because His grace is made perfect.

His strength, His power is made perfect in our weakness. And so when we are weak, that gives Him room to shine. So another way to think of it. Grace is like a liquid.

Now, if you put an apple on the kitchen table, it stays there. You come back and it's there. But if you spill a glass of milk on the kitchen table, it has a way of finding that big crack in the middle, doesn't it?

And seeping down. That's what grace is like. It finds the cracks in our lives, the weak places, the holes, the emptiness. And that's where it goes.

[3:22] And so it fills in the gaps. When we have weakness, that's where His grace comes in and makes us strong. So Paul says, I'll boast all the more in my weakness.

I'll boast in these things because it's when I'm aware of those things that God's power works through me. So we can encourage one another.

So we've talked about what we can say. We've talked about the gospel. We've talked about wisdom over the course of this series.

We've talked about how our lives are... We are to be full of grace. And so we're to be like those kitchen rags that are full of water. And when you squeeze them, water comes out. We're to be full of grace.

And so when you squeeze us, out of our mouths comes grace. We're to speak wise words. God's wisdom stretches to all aspects of living.

[4:21] And so our encouragement can reach into every part of life. Now, today we want to talk about possibilities for encouraging.

What are the ways? Who are the people? How can we do it? How can we put these things into practice? And so this isn't going to be the end all, be all of how to do encouragement. It's going to be how to get started.

Make a start. That's the name of the lesson. And so that's what we want to do. So first I want to ask you a question. Are you a passenger or are you a driver?

Passenger or a driver? Too many people assume that church behavior is like bus behavior. Okay? Now, the seating is sort of the same.

In the main part, you have a lot of people sitting and then you have a driver. You have seats in the main part and you have a driver at the front. And too often people think because the seating is the same that the behavior is the same.

[5:25] So you get on the bus. You sit down quietly. And you politely do whatever the driver tells you to do. And you're careful not to make eye contact with anyone when you're on the bus.

You don't stare at the other passengers. And then when the bus ride is over, you politely thank the driver and you get off without speaking to anyone else. That's what it means to be a passenger. That might be how you act on a bus, but that is not how God calls us, calls you, to act in the church. There's no passengers in the church.

We're all called to speak the truth and love to one another to one degree or another. We're all called to fulfill our gifts. Use our gifts. Use them for the good of the body.

And I said this before, I'll say it again, but all the grace that you need, God doesn't give directly to you. A lot of the grace that you need, He gives to your brother or your sister.

[6:31] And a lot of the grace that they need, He gives to you. And if you don't speak, if you don't actively help them, then they're going to be poorer for it.

So there's no passive members in a body. A lot of people think that, or a lot of people have thought that, you know, the appendix, we don't need that or something. There's no passive members in our physical body.

There's no passive members in the spiritual body of Christ. There's no passengers. There's only drivers. Listen to how the Apostle Peter put it. Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.

Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms.

If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. And if anyone serves, he should do it with the strength that God provides, so that in all things, God may be praised through Jesus Christ.

[7:35] To him be the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen. Speakers, doers, we are all to do it in the strength of the Lord.

We're all to do it relying on him so that God would have the praise. But do you see that we should each one of us use whatever gift we have for the good of the body, to serve others?

So, ask yourself. Examine yourself. Am I a passenger or am I a driver? Am I passive or am I active? Am I loving? Am I speaking? Am I serving? And if not, what are you waiting for? What are you waiting for? Why not come to church early? And there's other people that come early and you can come to church early and you can encourage those and talk to them.

Even meeting newcomers, greeting visitors. It's one way that you can encourage. Even speaking hello, a friendly hello to someone.

[8:43] It is a good place to start. Why not sit next to different people? You know, there's no assigned seating here.

Back in the old days, they actually did have assigned seating. And we don't have that anymore. You can feel free to sit by totally different people each week. And maybe you need to take the time and think about or make a plan and decide, I'm going to speak to one or two different people each week. People I don't normally talk to. You know, it's easy to get into ruts. I know that. It's easy to sit in the same place and talk to the same people.

But we need to keep on going back and to remember who we are, what we are. We're all in the body of Christ together. We're all one in Christ. And so we need to act like it.

We're not several different bodies. We are one body in Christ. And so be proactive in loving your family here. You know, there are those people that were like, you know, I really should know more about them.

[10:00] I should know them better. And my question is, what are we waiting for? Carpe diem.

Make a beginning. It's only awkward at first. But remember who you are in Christ. You are unified. You are one. We have deep spiritual unity with one another.

Christ died to tear down walls. Let's not have our fear or our laziness put those walls up again. But in grace, go out and speak. Let's be sure to be friendly to those who are visiting.

Let me tell you, you guys have a good reputation for that. And I want to encourage you in that. I've repeatedly heard from different people and different visitors that they were so friendly.

And I want to say, keep it up. Excel still more. Don't let that fall off. Don't, you know, wear yourselves out or don't grow weary in well-doing.

[11:02] I love to hear it when visitors come and they've already been invited for lunch. That is a good thing. Keep it up. Keep it up. And when we're in that situation, don't worry about being a smooth operator.

You know, you got it all under control. You know, don't be afraid to be shy. Don't be afraid if you're a little bit awkward.

That's okay. Visitors want reality. They want people that are genuine. And if it's obvious that you're not slick, you're not the used car salesman, your shyness, your bit of awkwardness can actually make that person feel more welcome.

Um, here's another idea. Talked about visitors. Talked about sort of a general way in the church. Here's a simple way that you can start encouraging someone. Find someone to meet just for the sake of encouraging them. Meet one-on-one.

[12:15] Meet one-on-one with them. Maybe you could do it here. Maybe you can do it over lunch. Maybe you can do it at a park. Maybe you can do it in a parking lot. Um, it doesn't really matter. Um, maybe you can do it over the phone.

But, when you found a person, you found a time and a place. Now what? Well, here's the idea. Um, you just take yourself, you take them, you take your Bible, and you go with them before God.

There's no lessons. There's no Bible study plans. There's no anything. It's just you, them, your Bible, and God.

and you just read your Bible together. It's really so simple. Uh, you, you pick out a half a chapter. You pick out a whole chapter.

You pick out a song. And you simply read it with them. And talk about the things that, that you see there. Talk about how that helps you. Talk about how that, how you need to do this better.

[13:22] Or, how we can encourage one another. Just simply talk. 10, 15 minutes. We did this in the college and career for a while. Uh, where we had partners.

We got together. We had a passage that we were going to read. We read it together with our partner. We prayed. And, it was very encouraging. It was just encouraging to be with another person of like mind, like faith, reading God's word, and praying with them.

And, so there, there's, you don't need great planning. You don't need great detail. You don't need to, it's not a Bible study. It's just you, your friend, the Bible, and God. And, God used that for our, our encouragement.

And so, it doesn't have to be fancy. It really doesn't. Remember, God's word is powerful. The gospel of, is the power of God unto salvation.

With God's word, he creates. And with God's word, he recreates. And so, maybe it doesn't seem like very much. Just to say, hey, let's get together and read a psalm and pray about it.

[14:31] But, the practice really was encouraging. Now, maybe sometimes you won't even get to the word of God. Maybe you'll just sit down and you'll talk together.

You'll talk about what's going on, what they're going through. And you'll listen to them. We've talked a lot about listening in this encouraging series. So, you'll listen to them.

You'll talk with them. You'll think together about God's promises. You'll talk about the difficulties that you're sharing. And then you pray. I do that frequently with a brother here.

We get together. We eat breakfast. We talk. And we pray. And it's encouraging. It's encouraging for me. And I hope it's encouraging for him too.

Do you see that encouragement isn't a grand idea. It's something that's simple that we just do over and over again.

[15 : 31] It's the way we love one another. Maybe the place where you need to start encouraging is with your spouse. With your spouse. Let me ask you.

Do you have a time of prayer with your spouse? Do you have a time of prayer with your spouse? Do you have a time of just talking with your spouse? I know life is busy, busy, busy.

But I'm not talking about hours. I'm talking about five minutes, ten minutes where you're talking together and you're praying. You're having spiritual intimacy with one another before God.

In Ephesians, Paul says that Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word.

Washing with water through the word. That's how he's loved his bride. So husbands, have you given your wife a bath lately?

[16 : 34] A bath in God's word. Jesus calls us to be like him. That's what Paul says. Here's the model. Now you do what Jesus did.

So he calls us to sanctify our brides with the word of God. And we do that by bathing them in the word of God. That means gently, safely, intimately using the word of God to sanctify them.

It's a bath. It's not a hammer. Okay? You're not hurting them. You're loving them with the word of God. Now, this is a revolving door. It swings both ways.

So, husbands, you need to do that for your wives. And wives, your husbands need you to do that for them. men. This isn't a picture of husbands have all the answers and husbands know everything.

Yes, Christ does, but we're not there yet, men. And so, wives, you need to speak to your husbands the word of God and bathe them in the word of God. And so, that's going to take some proactive thinking.

[17 : 42] That's going to take some initiative. See, we're not natural, we're just not going to naturally fall into this where we start praying together. I'll tell you what, with my wife and I, at the very beginning, it took this conscious effort.

We, I'm going to do this. We're going to pray together. And, you know, the first or second time it was like, okay, what are we doing? But then, it's just a habit.

We're going to pray together. We're going to talk together. But it takes proactive thinking. We're not going to just stumble into encouraging our spouses. Don't you find that it's a lot easier to let critical words come out?

Hurtful words, spiteful words, unhelpful, selfish words. Those things come out naturally. We fall into those. But we're going to have to really make an effort to do this with our wives and our husbands.

So, the call is to active, determined obedience. Doesn't take long. Doesn't need to be involved.

[18 : 49] But are you doing it? Reading a few verses. Other ways, I'm not going to blow your minds away with any of this, but just think about these things.

You could write notes to each other. Wives, have you sent your husband a gospel email lately? So, along with your pick this up on the way home, write a gospel email to them.

remind him, remind your wife of who she is in Christ, who he is in Christ. Leave a promise on the seat of their car.

So, when they get up in the morning and they go to work, they have that index card of a promise for them. Buy her Christian books to read, men.

maybe you could ask her, what are you reading in quiet time in your devotions? What are you learning? Let's talk about that.

[19 : 57] Memorize scripture together. Read a book together. It doesn't have to be a marriage book, just any good biblical book. Maybe you're saying, but she knows more than I do.

Or maybe he knows more than I know. And so, I can't encourage him. And, you know, it's like, that's just a totally wrong-headed idea of what encouragement is all about because encouragement comes from God's truth.

It comes from the gospel. We probably all know John 3, 16, don't we? But, it's not just having it up there that's encouraging. It's when someone brings it to our attention and we're reminded of it.

And so, we're not talking about things that you know. We're talking about bringing that before them again. So, it's not a matter of knowledge whether you can encourage someone or not. It's a matter of initiative.

Will you do it? Will you take what they need and give it to them? See, you know, the farmer who goes and he gets his plow ready and he plows his field and then he plants the seed, that farmer will see a harvest.

[21:07] But, you know, the agricultural major that knows all about farm equipment and knows all about weather patterns and knows all about soil, but doesn't plant the seed, he doesn't see a harvest.

And so, let's be those faithful farmers, brothers and sisters, where we're just planting the seeds day by day, day by day, in our husband, in our wife, in our friends, in our family.

and God promises growth. Some will see 30 fold and some 60 and 100, but he promises that his word won't return to him void.

Now, there's other, there's one last group of people that we need to think hard about how we can encourage and that's your children.

Your children. If you have children and you're still raising them, so they're in your home, do you see that you need, that they need encouraging?

[22:13] encouraging? That they need encouraging? I think the default position with parents, I know the default position as my life and my life is we do behavioral management.

Behavioral management. The goal is to manage them, to get them where they need to be with their clothes on, with food in their stomach, and in a generally good decorum, right?

We just want to manage that, get their, you know, get their lives in some sort of proper order. And what is the best tool to manage someone? Well, it's our words.

We speak. And what's the best kind of words to manage someone's life? A command. The commands. So, now don't hear me wrong, commands are good, they're necessary, you have to have them, they're absolutely positively necessary.

But remember, again and again, the Bible just doesn't give us naked commands and expects as a way of motivating. God uses the gospel, he uses grace to obey, so he tells us who we are, what we have in Christ, what could be ours in Christ, and then he tells us, now go live a life worthy of the gospel.

[23:36] Do you see that God isn't into just behavioral management? management. He's not just into behavioral management, he wants our hearts, because if he has our hearts, he will have the obedience of our hearts.

And so, because he wants our hearts, because he wants our love, he spends a lot of time talking about what he's done for us. He spends a lot of time telling us what he's doing for us now, or what he's done for us then, or what he's going to do for us.

He heaps up encouragement, and out of that encouragement, he says, now go live a life worthy of the gospel. You do these things because of what I've done. Now, what does that have to do with parenting?

Just this, that in our parenting, we need to make sure that we rise out of just management, just behavioral management, and we need to make sure that we're spending a lot of time evangelizing, gospeling, encouraging, our children.

Now, is there going to be a lot of management in child raising, child rearing? Well, yes, especially when they're younger. I mean, nothing will get done if we're not managing.

[24:49] I'm not saying we don't do that, but God wants us to do more than manage. He wants us to be active in growing them.

He just doesn't manage our behavior. He wants to see us more and more like Christ. And so that should be our goal in parenting. So, what does that mean?

Well, imagine a situation. Okay? You hear a scream coming from upstairs from one of your kids' bedroom, and you rush up to the stairs to see what's the matter, and your eight-year-old boy is on top of your six-year-old boy just pummeling him, crying and hitting.

And you go in and you grab that eight-year-old and you drag him off of his younger brother and you say, Johnny, what are you doing? You have to love your brother.

And through his tears, he says, but I can't. He makes me so mad. Now, what do you say at that point? Do you say, oh, yes, you can.

[25:58] God tells you to, and you're going to do it or else. Well, what's wrong with that? Just this, that Johnny can't love his brother.

And us telling him that God expects him to doesn't even give him the power to do it. Johnny's a sinner just like his mom and dad.

God. And mom and dad can't obey without God's spirit working in his life. And so he can't love his brother. He can't obey God's law without God's spirit.

Now, do I say, now do we say, well, then we don't give him the command? Not at all. But by saying, oh, yes, you can.

God tells you to. That isn't going to put Johnny in the place where he finds help. That isn't going to take Johnny to Jesus, where he can repent and see that, yes, he can't obey, but Jesus did.

[27:07] See, we come to faith in Jesus in the place of repentance, in the place of brokenness, when we say, you know what, I can't obey. So, now is the time as a parent to say, Johnny, you're right, you can't, you haven't, you've sinned, but Jesus perfectly obeyed God's commands.

When Jesus was a little boy, he perfectly loved James and Jude and his brothers and sisters, and then he died, so that you can come to him and be forgiven, and you can have a righteousness where now you don't have any righteousness.

You can come to him and be saved. Jesus can save you, and then Jesus can help you love your brother. Johnny, you can't do it, but Jesus can. Okay?

Now, what did I just do? Well, I used the gospel to instruct and train the child, my child. I wasn't just going for behavioral management.

It's not good enough just for Johnny to not be hitting his younger brother. We have to go for the heart. We want to go for real change, heart change, biblical Christ likeness.

[28:27] Now, will I have to spank Johnny? Probably. Will I tell Johnny not to do it again? Yeah, for sure. The gospel, it's not opposed to God's laws at all.

The gospel is the only way that we can't obey God's law. Only when Johnny is trusting and looking to Jesus will find the grace to love his brother. And so when his little brother is picking on him and taking his stuff and he just wants to hit him, there's going to be something in there that if we have been encouraging him to look to Jesus, to look to Jesus, he's going to learn over time that, you know what, Jesus is.

Jesus can help me. At least we'll put it into his thoughts. So, in the middle of discipline with your children, remember to encourage them. Spanking has its place.

It has its place right next to the gospel, and so we want to remember to encourage them. We're not just about behavioral management. We're going for heart Christ-like change. Now, how about all the time with our children?

children? I challenge you to find more and more ways to encourage your children in God's word. You know, Deuteronomy talks about that.

[29:54] You're walking along the road, and you're sitting down, and you're standing up, and you're talking. You're talking about God's commands, you're talking about what God has done. As they go along, they see a pile of rocks, and your son says, well, what is that?

And you explain to them, that's the place where God did this. That's the place where God did that. So, as we're walking down the road of life with our children, let's be bathing them in the word of God.

Talking about God's laws. Talking about Proverbs. Talking about the stories, the history, and talking most of all about how Jesus can save sinners, what Jesus did.

Talk about how Jesus saved you. You want a good way to evangelize your child, tell them all about your story, about how God saved you. Because you are important to them.

You are real to them. And when you talk to them about the gospel, and when you show them from the gospel what Jesus has done for you, it becomes real to them. And so, tell them about God's love for sinners in Jesus.

[31:07] Memorize promises together. When they're scared, don't just say, there's nothing to be afraid of. God doesn't say, oh, there's nothing to be afraid of.

He tells us, do not fear, I am with you. So, talk about how Jesus is the Lord. When they're anxious, you can talk about how Jesus gives rest.

They can find peace in Jesus. When they sin, talk about how Jesus died that they could be forgiven if they would believe. And when they're worried, I'm thinking about teenagers, they're worried about what they're going to wear, they're worried about how they look, they're so self-conscious, and it's such a hard thing for them to deal with.

Talk to them about how Jesus can give them full acceptance with God. that in the end, it doesn't matter what your friends think. If they have God's approval, God's well done, God's saying, you are right, then they can go without their friends' approval.

And so, fill them, fill their lives with grace. Paul tells us to raise our children in the training and instruction of the Lord.

[32 : 29] Jews raise their children in the training and instruction of Moses or the traditions of the fathers. Greeks raise their children in the training and instruction of the gods or the philosophers.

But Christians are called to raise their children in the training and the instruction of the Lord. So, we're going to talk about God's commands. And we're going to talk about wisdom and creation and history, but we're going to do it all under the umbrella of Jesus.

What Jesus has done, who Jesus is, it's the training and instruction of the Lord. So, make a start. I know that's a lot to think about, but just put all those things together.

Our encouraging can start here at the church, it starts in our families, with our husbands and our wives, we can start with our children, we can start with the lost, by evangelizing them.

And as we do, keep remembering that Jesus says, my grace is sufficient for you. We're going to mess up. We're going to really just blow it sometimes. We're going to get into a situation and we're not going to know what to say, or we're going to say the wrong things, or our children are going to misbehave and we're just going to give them a law and we'll spank them, but there's no encouragement.

[33 : 57] We're going to struggle, but just keep on going back. My grace is sufficient for you. My power is made perfect in weakness. When we sin, we ask for forgiveness.

And he is faithful and just to forgive us for Jesus' sake.