

GOSPEL WORDS

WORDS THAT BUILD US UP



STUDY 1

ENCOURAGEMENT & COMFORT

WORDS THAT KEEP US GOING

1. At what times/in what circumstances have you needed encouragement? What types of encouragement have you found helpful?

In the face of setbacks and struggle, spiritual and otherwise, Christian believers often need encouragement and comfort. God is the one who gives encouragement, but he often does so through his people – as we see in Hebrews 10:25, where we are exhorted to ‘encourage one another’ (see also Hebrews 3:12–13 and 1 Thessalonians 5:11).

This encouragement comes in the form of our presence, especially when we gather as God’s people (also Hebrews 10:25).

And this encouragement comes in the form of our words as we speak to one another, arguably more so! Like the supporters of a sports team/competitor: their presence is an encouragement, but when they vocalise their support, they’re even more of an encouragement to the players/competitors to stay strong and keep going.

Let’s think a bit more about the ‘gospel power’ of encouraging words.

READ PROVERBS 12:25

2. Anxiety is said to ‘weigh down’ a person’s heart. What ‘cheers it up’?

- Why do you think this might be so?

- What might be an example of 'a good word'? Can you think of a time when you have experienced this (one way or the other)?

In the first half of Ephesians (chs.1–3) Paul establishes *who Christian believers are*, namely: those saved by God's grace and made new. The second half of Ephesians explains *how Christian believers live*.

READ EPHESIANS 4:25–32

3. What behaviour is mostly in focus here? What does that tell us?
4. Consider what Paul says about language in v.29.
 - i. How might it help us to define 'encouraging speech'?
 - ii. In the things that we say, what prominence should 'encouraging speech' have?
5. What are some concrete examples, then, of 'encouraging speech'?
 - The sorts of things we might need to say to build one another up?
 - The sorts of things we might need to *avoid* saying?

There is a connection between needing encouragement and needing comfort. Sad, mournful experiences also threaten to 'tear us down' or 'bring us to a stop', spiritually and otherwise.

READ 2 CORINTHIANS 1:3–7

6. What comfort can we expect from God when we face affliction of any kind (consider the connection between the sufferings of Christ' and 'the comfort of Christ')?
7. As those who have received God's comfort, what are we called to do?
8. A chief way we provide comfort is in the words we say.
 - What are some circumstances where 'words of comfort' would be helpful (try and be concrete)?
 - What might be some appropriate words of comfort for someone facing:
 - Sin and spiritual struggles?
 - Physical or mental health challenges?
 - The loss of a loved one?
 - Relational hurt?

N.B. Speaking words of comfort can be difficult as we don't accidentally want to cause more distress by saying the wrong thing, but it's also all the more reason to think through what might be and might not be helpful to say.

STUDY 2

TEACHING & CORRECTION

WORDS THAT GROW AND SHAPE US

1. In your experience, what does 'teaching' typically involve? What are some areas/times of life when we need teaching?

We've looked at words that *keep us going* (encouragement and comfort). In this second study we will consider words that *grow and shape us*. What place do words of teaching and correction have in the Christian life and community? Who should use such words? When should they be used, and what should they be like?

READ PSALM 25:4–10

2. What does the psalmist ask for?
3. How does he expect to experience this?

We're reminded here that God has made us to be people who grow through instruction and guidance. Spiritually God does this through his revealed word – importantly, a word that is enscriptured (e.g. the law, originally), in part so that it can be taught *by* God's people *to* God's people. Teaching was central to Jesus' earthly ministry, and it continued in the ministry of the apostles which has given us the majority of the New Testament. And when we look at the New Testament we see that there is an ongoing place for words of instruction and guidance.

READ EPHESIANS 4:11–15

- 4.** By 'He' Paul means Christ. In v.11 Paul lists various leadership roles Christ gives people in his church, including 'teachers'.
- i. What is the purpose/goal of these leadership roles (including teachers)?
 - ii. What ought to characterise/undergird Christians teaching fellow believers? When might this be most needed?
- What might it look like to 'speak the truth in love'? Can you think of an example or two?

Paul's words here about 'speaking the truth' suggests that teaching and correction isn't just reserved for designated leaders but is something all believers engage in to some degree – a point made clear in Colossians chapter 3.

READ COLOSSIANS 3:12–17

- 5.** What is 'the message about the Messiah' (HCSB)?
- 6.** What does it mean to let it 'dwell among you'?

- 7.** Paul says a specific way this happens is as believers 'teach and admonish one another' (v.16) – that is, as they speak words of teaching and correction (*admonish* means to correct and redirect).

What does this (and the few verses that precede it) show us about *who* should speak words of teaching and correction, and *how* it should be done?

- What might it look like for us to speak words of teaching and correction here at Minchinbury – and to receive them? Consider *formal* settings (on Sundays, in programs) and *informal* settings (1-2-1 discipleship, various relationships).
- When do you find it easier to speak/receive words of teaching and correction? When do you find it harder?

