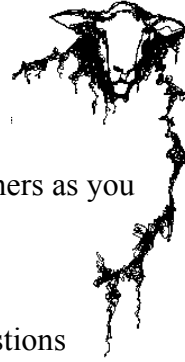


Encourage One Another **Hebrews 3:13-14; 10:23-25; 12:1-2**



Background for the Leader

May God encourage you and help you exercise your call to encourage others as you prepare and lead this Bible study.

A Note to the Leader

The numbered planning steps correspond to the numbered activity suggestions below. Choose among the activities based upon the amount of time, interests, needs, and learning styles of your group.

1. Read through the suggested exercises and make sure they would be safe for your members. Practice each exercise so you can lead it in a relaxed way as you encourage everyone to participate in the fun. You may want to play a tape or CD of lively music during the exercises.
2. Prepare to lead the discussion about the benefits of physical exercise.
3. Prepare to read or ask another member to read Hebrews 3:13-14; 10:23-25; 12:1-2. If possible, read from *The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language* since this translation makes the exercise analogy clearer than other translations. No matter which translation you choose you may want to provide copies of the Scriptures for members to follow along as you read and for the fourth activity. Provide a chalkboard, large sheet of paper, or dry-erase board and chalk or marker. Prepare to lead the discussion based on the summary and questions offered below.
4. You will need the chalkboard, paper, dry-erase board and chalk or marker again. Prepare to lead the discussion from the ideas suggested.
5. Provide index cards (at least two or three for each member) and pencils or pens.
6. Make a list of names and addresses of shut-ins or others in your church community who may need encouragement. Provide note cards or plain paper, envelopes, and pens.
7. Plan to join one of the circles described so you can also be an encourager and encouraged. Prepare to lead the time of prayer.

Leading the Program

Activity One: Involve Members in Simple Exercises

Invite group members to join you in the following exercises. Ask members to have an arm's length of space between them and the next person. Demonstrate each exercise as you call out the numbers and instructions with a spirit of playfulness.

- Touch your nose. Remain seated with your arms at your sides. On the count of 1 raise your right hand to your nose. On 2 return your hand to your side. On 3 raise your left hand to your nose. On 4 return your hand to your side. Repeat 5 times.
- Stretch your arms. Remain seated with your arms at your sides. On the count of 1 raise and stretch out arms at shoulder height. On the count of 2 raise both arms and touch the top of your head with your fingers. On the count of 3 return your

arms to shoulder height. On the count of 4 return your arms to your sides. Repeat 5 times.

- Bend and circle. Ask members to stand. On the count of 1 bend your head and shoulders forward. On 2 bend to the right. On 3 bend backward. On 4 bend to the left. Repeat 5 times.
- Touch your knees or toes. Members will need to stand with arms at shoulder height and may choose whether to touch their knees or toes. On the count of 1 stretch your right hand to your left knee or toes. On 2 stand up straight with arms at shoulder height. On 3 stretch your left hand to your right knee or toes. On 4 stand up straight. Repeat 5 times.
- Touch a friend's shoulder. Stand facing a partner with your arms at shoulder height. On the count of 1 reach your right hand to touch and pat your partner's right shoulder as you smile. On 2 return your hand to your side. On 3 reach your left hand to pat your partner's left shoulder as you smile. On 4 return your hand to your side.

Activity Two: Talk About the Benefits of Exercising

Say: "Now that we've warmed up with some exercises, I'd like for us to list possible benefits of exercising. Some of us may suggest benefits from our own experience while others share what we've heard or read as encouragement to exercise." (*Members may suggest some of the following and other benefits: flexibility, weight management, cardiovascular health, strength, relief of stress, social relations, overall satisfaction.*) Ask: "Are these benefits of exercise most effective when we read or hear about them, intend to exercise, or actually engage in the exercises? Why or why not?"

Activity Three: Relate the Benefits of Physical Exercise to the Exercise of Our Faith.

Suggest that just as we must actually do physical exercise to reap its benefits, our faith also must be active. The writer of Hebrews had quite a bit to say about exercising our faith. Ask members to listen as you or another member read Hebrews 3:13-14; 10:23-25; 12:1-2 and listen for words and phrases that remind them of the exercise metaphor. If you have made copies of the Scripture passages, distribute those now. Read the passages slowly with expression, placing special emphasis on words that relate to exercising. After reading the Scriptures, as members mention words or phrases print them on a large sheet of paper, a chalkboard or dry-erase board. (*Ideas might include the following depending on which translation you used: hold firm, lay aside the weight, run the race, stay on your toes, don't lose your grip, don't quit, just do it.*) Talk further about each idea. We are to hold firm (not lose our grip) on what we believe. Our confidence and strength is grounded, not in our own strength, but in the trustworthiness and faithfulness of God. (You may want to read Hebrews 6:17-19 to emphasize that God is always true to God's promises and is the source of our encouragement and hope.) Because we are concerned for our own and others' spiritual welfare, we should lay aside our sins and everything that would slow us down in exercising our faith. Because Christ is our partner, we are never left alone in our struggles. Worshiping God with others is one of the important ways to strengthen our faith. The active life of faith is kept alive as Christians who care about one another meet together in worship. Meeting together for Bible study, prayer, and fellowship is just as necessary for a healthy faith as exercising is beneficial for our physical health. The writer of Hebrews

emphasizes the necessity of exercising our faith today, while there is still time.

Activity Four: Discover the Call to Encourage One Another

Invite members to form groups of two or three and listen or look for calls to encourage one another in Hebrews 3:13-14 and 10:23-25. If you distributed copies of the Scripture for the third activity, members can search the Scriptures or they may listen as you or another member read those passages again. After groups have found words, ask them to call them out while you print them on the large sheet of paper, chalkboard, or dry-erase board.

Suggest that we may have found words in some translations that we often think of in negative ways but they have positive meanings in these passages. For example, though we may think of *exhort* as scold or insist it can also mean to encourage or advise strongly. Ask: “When or how often does the writer say we are to exhort or encourage one another?” (*every day*) Even though we may use the word *provoke* to mean to irritate or aggravate, it here means to stir up or to excite to action. Ask: “What does the writer say that we are to stir up or excite others to do?” (*to love and do good deeds, to be thoughtful and do helpful things*)

Ask pairs or groups to discuss ways our example can encourage others. They may want to start their discussion by talking about how another person’s example encourages them. Invite the groups to share what they discussed.

Note that we find in the Book of Job an example of the effect of encouraging another person. Job’s friend Eliphaz said to Job as Job was undergoing terrible trials, “Your words have supported those who were stumbling, and you have made firm the feeble knees” (Job 4:4). Invite members who wish to do so to tell about a time when a person’s presence or words supported them when they were stumbling.

Activity Five: Explore Creative Ways to Encourage One Another

Mention: “We have heard how the writer of Hebrews calls us to be encouragers. Let’s see how creative we can be in thinking of ways to encourage one another.” Give each member two or three index cards and a pencil or pen. Tell them that extra cards are available if needed. Invite members to write on each card a creative idea for encouraging another person. The idea might be something either an individual or your women’s ministry group could do. The idea might be an example of a way someone has encouraged her. Note that this is a kind of written brainstorming so there are no limits and no wrong ideas. Give members time to write their ideas on the cards.

Collect the cards, mix them up, pass them around, asking each member to take two or three cards. Encourage members to listen for creative ideas they could practice as other members read the ideas from the cards they are holding. Ask, “How can we use our creative ideas to carry out this year’s women’s ministry theme: Be Shepherds of God’s Flock: Glorify the Lamb?” You may want to guide a discussion of ideas your group wants to begin to use immediately. Keep the cards where individual members or your group can draw from them when they need ideas for encouraging others.

Activity Six: Write Notes to Persons Who Need Encouragement

Encourage members to take a note card and envelope and write a note of encouragement to a shut-in or other person they know who needs a word of encouragement. Make available the list of names and addresses you made, but make clear that notes may also be written to other people. You may want to provide time during the meeting for members to write these notes or

ask them to write their notes at home.

Activity Seven: Encourage One Another and Pray

Ask members to form two circles, one inside the other, with members in the two circles facing each other. Ask each member to find a partner in the facing circle. Each member may exercise her call to encourage one another by placing her hand on the shoulder of her partner and speaking words of encouragement. Her partner will then speak words of encouragement to her.

Invite members to join in a time of silent prayer for their partners and others in the group. In closing offer a spoken prayer asking God to help us hold firmly to our faith, to encourage us, and to strengthen us to encourage one another.

About the Writer

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Encourage One Another

Hebrews 3:13-14

This passage reminds us how much we need each other as Christians. In 1988 a dear friend of mine moved away. Before leaving she gave me two simple gifts. One, an African Violet with many pretty blooms, the other a sour dough bread starter. I had confidence that I could keep the African Violet alive to remember her by, but I had my doubts at keeping the bread starter going. Before very long the flower began to wither and eventually died. On the other hand, I believe God truly blessed the bread starter. I have been able to keep it alive for 16 years and been able to give encouragement to many people through a gift of a simple loaf of bread. I continue to remember my friend each time I bake bread. So many times God has impressed on my spirit to make bread for someone, and I have been the one encouraged through their response.

Hebrews tells us to encourage each other daily as long as it is called Today. We are living in the day of divine grace and opportunity to trust God. The Bible teaches us that this time won't last forever. Many hearts are hardened by sins deceitfulness. We need to encourage one another as Christians to hold on firmly to the confidence we had in Christ when we were first saved.

We see people who accept Christ and walk with a new excitement at first, but as time goes on they grow cold. Living a Christian life may be like a roller coaster to some. We climb to the top, only to quickly be brought down again. The writer of Hebrews is encouraging us as Christians to be there to help others not give up. The Bible does not teach us that living a Christian life is easy, but it does promise us many blessings. It teaches us that we can share in Christ by walking with Him daily and holding on to our faith in Him.

We can use words of encouragement to help those that are weak in their faith. The older Christians can share their faith experiences with the younger to help them learn to trust God more. The more difficulties we walk through in faith with Christ, the more we learn to trust Him. As we look back to see where we've been with the help of Christ, looking ahead gets easier. We learn to walk in confidence with Christ fully trusting Him to lead and let us follow. It may be as simple as taking a loaf of bread to someone in need, or it may be just to call someone to let them know you care. When we see someone losing their excitement, we need to encourage them to hold firmly to their faith in Christ.

PRAYER:

Dear Lord, Thank you for the encouragement in your word and for Christians whom you have sent to encourage us. Help us to reach out to those that are hurting and bring them to you for healing both spiritual and physical. In your name. Amen

Martha Chambers
Hands of Harvest Region