

Helping Each Other Grow

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Sermon Study Guide

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The Sermon Study Guide is designed for Life Groups. For Life Groups, we recommend that you choose part of the Sermon Study Guide for your lesson. The Bible Study of Life Group should last about 30 minutes and be an interactive time for the entire group with discussion, questions, and bible study.

While the Sermon Study Guide contains all the scriptures and main points of the weekend sermon, it also provides extra material not covered in the weekend sermon. It is recommended that you listen to the corresponding sermon in your preparation for Life Group.

The body of Christ is made up of many members. Each member is important to the well being and growth of the entire body. In fact, the body depends upon each part to function properly. Just like the human body needs all its parts, the church – the body of Christ – needs every part (every person).

Romans 12:4-5 NIV

⁴Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, ⁵so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.

We do not all function the same in the body of Christ. Some have certain gifts and others have different gifts. Often, the less noticed or significant parts – those that are sometimes taken for granted – are the most important.

In March of 1981, President Reagan was shot by John Hinckley, Jr., and was hospitalized for several weeks. Although Reagan was the nation's chief executive, his hospitalization had little impact on the nation's activity. Government continued on. On the other hand, suppose the garbage collectors in this country went on strike, as they did not long ago in Philadelphia. That city was not only in a literal mess, the pile of decaying trash quickly became a health hazard. A three-week nationwide strike would paralyze the country. Who is more important--the President or a garbage collector? In the body of Christ, seemingly insignificant ones are urgently needed. As Paul reminds us, "The head cannot say to the feet, 'I don't need you!' On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable" (I Cor. 12:21-22).

Now, the Bible says that Jesus is the head of the body – His church. Apart from Him, we are a headless corpse. Have you ever seen a horror movie with a zombie without a head? (I know it's a weird question and some of the more spiritual people will say you shouldn't be watching those kinds of movies. I agree, but go with me on this one). The zombie is wandering around aimlessly, most of the time looking for his head. The head offers vision, wisdom and direction. The body responds to what the head tells it to do.

The Church, or person, that tries to operate without Christ as the head will just be wandering around aimlessly with no purpose. Most of the time, they will be about the wrong purpose. I know a lot of churches that do some really good things. But in reality, they are not the true things Christ is leading or desiring the church to do. He wants us to win souls and make disciples. He wants us to love Him with all our heart, soul, mind and strength and love our neighbor as ourselves. If these are not part of what the church is doing, we should stop what we are doing.

Colossians 2:19 NIV says this:

¹⁹He has lost connection with the Head, from whom the whole body, supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows as God causes it to grow.

4 THINGS THAT ARE OBVIOUS

We need each other to grow. How does each member of the body of Christ spur the other on in growth? There are four things that cause growth when we are connected to the body of Christ.

I. By **AFFIRMING** each other's **WORTH**

- With **ACCEPTANCE**

⁷Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God. (Romans 15:7 NIV)

This verse says that when we accept the other members of the body of Christ like Christ accepts them, we bring God praise. We should accept each other.

QUESTION:

1. Who do you know that needs acceptance from the Body of Christ?
2. Who have you been rejecting in the body of Christ? Why?

- With **ATTENTION**

¹⁰Therefore, whenever we have the opportunity, we should do good to everyone—especially to those in the family of faith. (Galatians 6:10 NLT)

We should look for opportunities to do good things for those in the body of Christ. They should always have our attention. If someone has a baby or has been in the hospital, we should help by preparing meals and doing things to serve them. If someone needs us, we help.

QUESTION:

1. Who do you know that needs some attention from the Body of Christ?
2. Is it easier to show attention to some people than others in the Church?

- With **AFFECTION**

¹⁰Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves. (Romans 12:10 NIV)

QUESTION:

1. Who are you honoring above yourself?
2. Who are you devoted to in the Body of Christ?

- With **APPRECIATION**

¹²Now we ask you, brothers, to respect those who work hard among you, who are over you in the Lord and who admonish you. (1 Thessalonians 5:12 NIV)

QUESTION:

1. Who do you know that works hard in our church body?
2. Who are your leaders in the church body?
3. Who are those that admonish and help you grow in the Lord?
4. How have you shown appreciation to them lately?

II. By PRAYING for each other's GROWTH

A tale is told about a small town that had historically been "dry," but then a local businessman decided to build a bar. A group of Christians from a local church were concerned and planned an all-night prayer meeting to ask God to intervene. It just so happened that shortly thereafter lightning struck the bar and it burned to the ground. The owner of the bar sued the church, claiming that the prayers of the congregation were responsible, but the church hired a lawyer to argue in court that they were not responsible. The presiding judge, after his initial review of the case, stated that "no matter how this case comes out, one thing is clear. The bar owner believes in prayer and the Christians do not."

Prayer works! It is necessary for us to grow. It is not only for us, but for the whole church. We should take time each day to pray for those in the church. Pray for your leaders, your children's teachers, those you are trying to win to the Lord, the new people in the church, those who make the everyday decisions, those who serve, the ministries, etc.

The prophet Ezekiel gives us the words of the Lord in Ezekiel 22: 30, "I looked for a man among them who would build up the wall and stand before me in the gap on behalf of the land so I would not have to destroy it, but I found none." Although this verse deals with the sins of Jerusalem, I believe that we have permission to apply it directly to our lives. There is a very sad verse because Jerusalem was in a sad and horrible state and the Lord was saying through the prophet Ezekiel that He was searching for someone who would intercede for Jerusalem and do what was necessary for her salvation. When He looked He found no one who would do intercede for the nation and the city.

There are times when we are in sad shape because of illness or life circumstances and we need the prayers of others to hold us up and encourage us. We may not even be able to pray in our own behalf because of our situation. That is when I believe God calls Christians to especially pray on behalf of others. This kind of praying requires commitment on the part of the person doing the praying. It is not just a quick one time prayer, but rather a request that is brought before the Lord many times until the person being prayed for sees results.

- Colossians 4:12 NIV
¹²Epaphras, who is one of you and a servant of Christ Jesus, sends greetings. He is **always wrestling in prayer for you**, that you may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured.

We are not just to mention believers in our prayers, we are to wrestle in prayer for them. This indicates lengthy, thought-out, consistent prayer.

QUESTION:

1. Do you want someone wrestling in prayer for you?
2. For whom are you wrestling in prayer?

- Ephesians 3:18-19 LB
- Hebrews 13:21 NIV
- Ephesians 1:17 NIV
¹⁷I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit^[a] of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better.

This verse shows us that we should be consistent in our prayer life for others.

QUESTION:

1. What can you be more consistent in your prayers for others?
2. What, according to this verse, should we be praying for others?

- 2 Thessalonians 3:5 NIV
- Ephesians 3:16 NIV

III. By **ADMITTING** our own **MISTAKES**

Ephesians 4:25 NIV

²⁵Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body.

Earlier in Ephesians 4, Paul had said we will grow up into Christ by speaking the truth in love (Eph. 4:15). Sometimes speaking the truth in love in the community of God's people is the toughest place of all. Certainly it can lead to hurt and anger, but it is necessary to our corporate spiritual maturity. So the only alternative we have is to speak truthfully and deal with any anger it might cause. It is not an alternative to gloss over the truth or say you are okay when you aren't. These are opportunities for the Devil, the father of lies and deceit, to influence our lives. The devil's "footholds" include broken relationships, resentment, false accusations and any number of other things that unmitigated anger leads to. Let's not go there.

QUESTION:

1. Why is it hard to admit our mistakes?
2. Why is it hard to admit our mistakes to those in the Church?

When we do speak the truth to each other in love, there are some beneficial things that take place.

A. Three Things Happen

1. **EMOTIONAL HEALING**

¹⁶Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective. - James 5:16 NIV

2. **I get a FRESH START**

¹³He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy. - Proverbs 28:13 NIV

3. God **PROMISES** to help

¹⁰Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up. - James 4:10 NIV

QUESTION:

1. Are there sins in your life that if confessed would bring you healing?
2. Do you need a fresh start? Have you been hiding your sins?
3. How do you need to humble yourself so that God will lift you up?

IV. By ENCOURAGING each other's COMMITMENT

¹²that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith. - Romans 1:12 NIV

We are to encourage each other in the faith. Encouragement is a universally understood need. In thinking about this, I realized how many different ways people encourage one another. For instance, if you have ever clapped your hands after a speech or during a sporting event, you have participated in encouraging others. Cheerleaders, while not always utilized solely for the purpose of encouragement, are presumably employed by football teams to encourage the fans to encourage the team to encourage one another to win the game. Sometimes people make a phone call or send a card of encouragement.

The word "encourage" is made up of two parts: en-courage. To impart courage to another. Courage comes from the Latin word "cor," which means "heart." Courage is that quality of mind which enables one to encounter danger and difficulties with firmness, or without fear, or fainting of heart; valor; boldness; resolution.

Encourage means: To give courage to; to inspire with courage, spirit, or hope; to raise, or to increase, the confidence of; to animate; enhearten; to incite; to help forward; -- the opposite of discourage .

In **Romans 12**, Paul tells us that some are given the gift of encouragement by God.

For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith. For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith; or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness. (Romans 12:3-8, NKJV).

No one is given the "gift" of discouragement, or the "gift" of criticism. But there are those who are granted by God's grace, a supernatural predisposition towards encouraging (and some versions use the word "exhorting") the brethren. Think for just a moment about that: God makes special provision for the continuing encouragement of His people. It is not enough that He has delivered us from the condemnation we deserve for our sins, but He also blesses His people with those who have a special ministry among us of giving us courage in the face of trials and difficulties. But beyond that, He has given all of us the responsibility of being encouragers for the sake of one another, because we all need it. One of the most touching examples of encouragement found in the Bible is in **2 Kings 5:1-13**.

Now Naaman, commander of the army of the king of Syria, was a great and honorable man in the eyes of his master, because by him the LORD had given victory to Syria. He was also a mighty man of valor, but a leper. And the Syrians had gone out on raids, and had brought back captive a young girl from the land of Israel. She waited on Naaman's wife. Then she said to her mistress, "If only my master were with the prophet who is in Samaria! For he would heal him of his leprosy." And Naaman went in and told his master, saying, "Thus and thus said the girl who is from the land of Israel." Then the king of Syria said, "Go now, and I will send a letter to the king of Israel." So he departed and took with him ten

talents of silver, six thousand shekels of gold, and ten changes of clothing. Then he brought the letter to the king of Israel, which said, Now be advised, when this letter comes to you, that I have sent Naaman my servant to you, that you may heal him of his leprosy. And it happened, when the king of Israel read the letter, that he tore his clothes and said, "Am I God, to kill and make alive, that this man sends a man to me to heal him of his leprosy? Therefore please consider, and see how he seeks a quarrel with me." So it was, when Elisha the man of God heard that the king of Israel had torn his clothes, that he sent to the king, saying, "Why have you torn your clothes? Please let him come to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel." Then Naaman went with his horses and chariot, and he stood at the door of Elisha's house. And Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying, "Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored to you, and you shall be clean." But Naaman became furious, and went away and said, "Indeed, I said to myself, 'He will surely come out to me, and stand and call on the name of the LORD his God, and wave his hand over the place, and heal the leprosy.' "Are not the Abanah and the Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them and be clean?" So he turned and went away in a rage. And his servants came near and spoke to him, and said, "My father, if the prophet had told you to do something great, would you not have done it? How much more then, when he says to you, 'Wash, and be clean'?" So he went down and dipped seven times in the Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God; and his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean. (2 Kings 5:1-14, NKJV).

If Naaman's friends had not encouraged him to obey the words of Elisha, he would not have been healed. He needed encouragement from them. Encouraging someone in the Lord might mean to confront them in their sin. It may mean to help convince them of God's best plan or solution. Encouraging someone in the Lord literally means helping them line up with the Word of God and helping move them closer to Christ.

QUESTION:

1. What does it mean "to encourage someone in the Lord"?
2. Who do you need to encourage in the Lord today?