

Hebrews 10:24-25

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[0 : 00] And so this evening we come to the second of three studies of individual encouragement. And so tonight we're going to look at the practice of encouragement.

! You remember last time, two weeks ago, we looked at the need to encourage one another. And so what is the absence of encouragement? That's what leads.

Secondly, there's a Christian duty. It's a command by God. Secondly, it's a reflection of the nature of who God is. Because it's the most powerful and beneficial force in people's lives.

And I hope that you've thought about that. I hope that you take it seriously. I hope you agree with that. I hope you believe it. But God wants us to encourage one another. And that's what God wants from us.

And so I want us to think, how are we going to do it? How can we, how can you, how can I become encouragers? As the Lord wants to agree. And there's no instant answers, are there? I can't give you five or six pieces of advice that are going to turn you into tomorrow morning.

[1 : 03] A skilled encourager of people. It takes time to learn. And in many ways it takes a lifetime of experience and wisdom. And the longer we go on in the Christian life, the more sensitive and skilled we become.

And encouraging other people. What I want to do tonight is I want to give six suggestions to you. About how you can become an encourager. And these suggestions I hope are good and helpful are not only for encouraging.

But actually how we grow as Christians in general. First one. Consideration. They all begin with C, which should help hard. Consideration. So get the Bible and look at this.

Hebrews 10, verse 24 and 25. And there's clearly a link with encouragement there. Hebrews 10, verse 24 and 25. So verse 24. Let us consider how to steer one another out.

Let us consider one another. And then a few words later, in verse 25, encourage one another. And so encouragement begins with considering one another.

[2 : 04] It's pretty obvious. And literally it means to focus on, to think intently about. Let's think about one another. Let's turn away from focusing on our own interests and ourselves and our own needs and our own desires.

And turn our minds to our brothers and sisters in Christ. In 1546 there's a Polish astronomer called Nicolás Copernicus. He published a book in Latin which changed the world.

And in that book he showed that the earth was not the central planet in the system as people thought at the time. But in fact the sun was the central planet. And the sun did not go around the earth.

But the earth went around the sun. It's called, isn't it, the Copernican Revolution. And all the textbooks in Europe had to be changed. All the university lecturers had to scrap their notes and start again.

Maps had to be redrawn. Poets and theologians began to think differently. Copernicus, by one discovery, changed the world. He changed how people saw reality.

[3 : 03] And I think that we need some kind of Copernican revolution in our spiritual lives. Because we can be so easily like those folk, can't we, who thought the earth was the centre of everything. We naturally think, don't we, we are the centre of everything.

How does this feel to me? What did I get out of it? How did this affect me? Am I being satisfied? And this verse says we need to get away from being selfish and self-centred. And focus on the needs of other people.

To build our lives around the needs of others. And our own needs. To realise that people are hurting. People are lonely. People are discouraged. People fall into sin.

People like you and I are weak in our faith. And they may be overburdened. And they may feel useless. And this is the beginning of Christian wisdom. And I think it's got profound roots in our faith to consider others.

King Solomon was the wisest man in the Old Testament, wasn't he? And he was given a gift of wisdom by God. Do you remember the famous incident, wasn't it? Remember the two women with the two babies? One was alive and one was dead.

[4 : 09] And both women claimed the live baby. And Solomon has got to decide who was the true mother. How did he decide? How did Solomon come to that decision? Well it's very simple, isn't it?

He put himself in the position of a mother. He said to himself, if I were the mother of the living baby, how would I feel? How would I react? And when he offered to cut the baby in two weeks, it soon became very obvious.

It was very obvious who the mother of the baby was. He put himself in the other person's place and we are Christians. Why are you a Christian? You are a Christian because somebody else has put himself in your place, the Lord Jesus Christ.

I think it's a confoundedly Christian thing. To take the place of other people. And what the writer to the Hebrew says is, do that in your own activation, do that in your thinking.

How would I like to be treated if I was in that position? Well that is costly, isn't it? Because often we feel we need to be cared for. And we need to be encouraged. How can I encourage someone else when I need to be encouraged?

[5 : 12] How can I minister to other people when my needs, well they're crying out for satisfaction. And again it brings us back to the principle of the cross, doesn't it? We save our lives by losing them.

We save our lives by throwing them away. We gain ourselves by dying to ourselves. And forgetting ourselves. And that person is the most fulfilled and the most God honouring and the most God glorifying.

Who forgets about himself or herself. And gives themselves to other people. And then they find it a very wonderful way that their needs have been met. And they've been encouraged and comforted. We have to consider other people. We have to think about other people. And try to encourage them. Let me bring in a kind of noted caution and warning.

Don't go to extremes. I don't want you going home and thinking. Now next Sunday morning when I go to church. I am going to encourage every single person I meet. And if I start to see somebody who isn't smiling and grieving.

[6 : 17] I'm going to rush over to them instantly and say. Tell me your problems as I develop them with a hack. Why don't you share your burdens with me. It is very, very easy for nosiness and curiosity to come in and spoil something that is good and godly.

I like you have met other Christians. Some people who are obsessed to know about other Christians. They feel they need to know what is going on in other people's lives.

And there's many times when it's not appropriate to talk to someone. Sometimes when it's right to my own business. Sometimes when we see someone it is just right to pray for them isn't it?

Without even having to tell them we're praying for them sometimes. We need wisdom. It's a mutual mystery isn't it?

It's not that there are two groups within the church. There are not the group of encouragers. And the other group who are the discouraged. Who need encouragement. That is what we might think.

[7 : 21] But that's not the case. We all need encouragement. And we are all able to encourage. I love that. A marvelous tact and wisdom of the Apostle Paul. Paul in Romans chapter 1.

Where he's writing to Christians that he's never met. Listen to what he says. Paul in Romans chapter 1. And he says to Christians that he's never met.

For I long to you that I might impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you. That you may be established. Verse 11. That is that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith.

Both yours and mine. I long to see you that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you. That is that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith.

You see the graciousness of this man the Apostle Paul. He's not saying is he. You poor. You poor Romans. You've never had the privilege of hearing me preach. I have got good news.

[8 : 18] I am coming to you. No he says I am coming to encourage you. And as I do that I believe you will encourage me. And that's our first avenue to consider.

To think of other people. To stop being wrapped up in ourselves. The person who is wrapped up in himself is a very small parcel. And we need to start looking out to the needs of others.

The first avenue of approach is commendation. Consideration. Commendation. To build up other Christians. Not in a selfish sinful way.

But to commend them and praise them. To thank them. Commendation. To express our appreciation of them and of Christ's grace in them. You know I say.

Just as it comes to me with me. Are we really meant to commend one another? Isn't the Christian life what humility? Should we all be trying to be a little bit more humble?

[9 : 20] If I commend this person. Would it make them just a little bit big headed? Well it might. We must be careful. But we come back to the question of balance don't we? There is sound.

Biblical. Evidence. For commendation of our brothers and sisters. In Christ. The Lord Jesus had no inhibitions at all. About commanding his followers.

About making them feel good. So he said to a few humble limited fishermen. He said you are the salt of the earth. He said to them. You. Are the light of the world.

You are people of immense significance and value. You are people with a glorious destiny. With a significant task. Paul takes a similar approach. People think of the Apostle Paul.

All those harsh. Or steered. Or grim. And yet when you read his letters. Nothing can be further from the truth. He is constantly commending and praising. So he is building up the church to whom he is writing.

[10 : 17] So he writes his favourite church. In Philippians chapter 1 verse 3. And he says. I thank my God. And all my remembrance of you. Always and every prayer. Replying for all of you. Making my prayer with joy.

Because of your partnership with the gospel. From the first day until now. Well. You might say. Well that's his favourite church. Isn't it? But then he writes to Christians. To Christians he's never met. In Romans 1.

Romans 1 verse 8 says. First I thank my God. Through Jesus Christ. For all of you. Because your faith is proclaimed. In all the world. That's tremendously positive. Isn't it? As you read that.

As a church. I thank my God. Through Jesus Christ. For all of you. Because your faith is being proclaimed. All over the world. That gives us. In these Christians. A warm feeling of appreciation. He's praising them. He's commanding them. Not for themselves. But for God's grace in them. Paul is one of those people. Flattering. He's not a man. He's not a man. He's not a man. He's not a man. He's not a man. He's not a man. He's not a man. He's not a man. He's not a man. He's not a man.

[11 : 15] He's a man. He's a man. He's a strong apostle. But he commands them. He writes to the Ephesians. He says. For this reason. Because I fear of your faith. In the Lord Jesus. And your love. Towards all the saints.

I do not cease to give thanks to you. Remembering you in my prayers. So let me ask you. When did you last say to a friend. What are your parents?

Your brother or your sister? I thank God for you. And I pray for you. I give thanks. That I know you. As a friend. And what you've meant in my life. And Paul did that. Even when he's writing. To a church.

Which has got serious problems. In Corinth. There's serious issues out there. In Corinth. Doctrine and land moral. But he says. There's one. Print is one verse. For I give thanks to my God. Always for you.

[12 : 11] Because of the grace. Of God. That was given to you. In Christ Jesus. That in every way. You were enriched in him. In all speech. And all knowledge. We would say. Stay on Paul.

These people are. They are involved. They are involved in heresy. There's a bloke. Sleeping with his father's wife. There's immorality. The church is divided. They're fighting each other. And you say.

I thank God. For you. The gifts he's given you. And the grace. That you've shown. First of all. Paul is going to have some really hard things. To say to them. He's going to rebuke them.

He's going to say. You should be ashamed of yourselves. In lots of ways. He's going to say. You are wrong. And you need to turn away. From your sins. He's going to be stern. And harsh. And severe with them.

He's going to say to them. You better straighten out this situation. Because. Before I come. Because when I do it. You know. There will be trouble. He's able to honestly. And genuinely.

Commend them though.

[13:07] He doesn't always do it though. Does he? There's one book in the New Testament. Where he doesn't do it. The book of Galatians. There's people that are about to abandon the gospel.

There's real crisis. There's no time to compliments. He's allowed and disturbed. But he does it wisely. And so powerfully. And I think sometimes.

We can get into a situation. Where we're afraid. To commend people. In case we think. It'll somehow make them proud. But Paul wasn't afraid. And Christ wasn't afraid.

Actually. I want to say. I think it's a practical outworking. Of the doctrine of justification. By faith. If you are a Christian. What is the great reality. About you tonight. What is the great reality.

About you tonight. You might say. Well it's my sin. Well that is a reality. But it's not the great reality. It's not the ultimate reality. The great reality. If you are a Christian. Is that you. Is that you are in Christ.

[14:07] And that all your sins. Have been washed away. In the blood of Christ. And at this moment. God sees you. As holy. Sinless. Righteous. As perfect. Because the Lord Jesus is. That is the reality. That is the reality.

And so. What is wrong. With thanking God. For that reality. And praising God. For that reality. And encouraging. Our brothers and sisters. That that reality.

Is in their lives. And so. Remember. That you are forgiven. Remember. That you are cleansed. Remember. That God loves you. And holds you close to his heart. That is the. The sort of commendation.

I'm thinking. I'm not going to. Whirly flattery. But pointing to what God has done. For other people. And in them. And using it. To encourage them.

We are not responsible. For keeping people humble. It's a sad thing. Isn't it? When people have a scourge. In church life. When cold water.

[15:06] Is poured on people. Someone comes up. With an idea. Particularly on how to reach out. Reach out. To try it before. It didn't work then.

And it won't work now. You'll learn. It's a bit like that. You remember. When David went into battle. With the Philistines. And he asked. Didn't he. Who is this.

Giant Goliath. And how is the battle going. What's going to be done. About this Philistine.

Challenging God's army. And then his older brother. Says.

One Samuel 17. Verse. Why have you come down here. When did you leave. Those few sheep. In the wilderness. I know how conceited you are. And how wicked your heart is. You came down. Only to watch. The battle. Isn't it?

Shut up. Love a man. How discouraging. Let me just speak personally. For a moment. I do want to thank you. I think I want to thank you.

[15:59] On behalf of the elders as well. Because you are encouraging. And commending of your elders. In church life. People are often. Quick to complain. When there's something wrong. People don't often delay.

In writing. In letting you know that. And yet in many churches. People are reluctant to commend. If I don't say. Like you see. I want to commend you. For your commending. That's right.

Now I also don't want you. To come to me every Sunday. And say. Oh that was a really. Wonderful sermon. From time to time. Where you are helped. It is encouraging. To say. Well I appreciated that.

God spoke to me in this way. I never understood this. And I do know that. That's helpful. But. Keep on commending. Commendation. Thirdly. Consideration.

Commendation. Community. Community. Encouragement comes from Christian Feltschek. So come back with me. Hebrews 10 to 10. Hebrews 10 to 10. Come on. Hebrews 10 to verse 25.

[16:56] It's on page 10 to Hebrews 7. Encouragement comes from Christian Feltschek. Now this verse. I preached on this verse.

And I don't think I've really understood it until this week. So let me give you something. Which I think is absolutely great. We'll be at verse 25. Of chapter 10. Hebrews 10 to 10. Not neglecting to meet together.

As is the habit of some. But encourage one another. All the more as we see the day approaching. What I didn't realise this week. Is there opposite something. I didn't get it.

Not neglecting to meet together. As is the habit of some. But encouraging one another. And all the more as you see the day approaching. He gives you two contrasts. Two opposites. Two contradictory things. He says on the one hand. There's neglecting to meet together. But on the other hand. There is encouraging one another. You can't do both. Do you understand that?
[17:49] So let's play with the verse a little bit. If you don't meet together. What can you do? That's right. And if you want to encourage.

What must you do? So I want to say this to you. And I want to say this to you. As clearly as I possibly can. And I want you to say this to other people in our congregation. That actually when you don't turn up. It is profoundly discouraging. I don't want to let people trip on you. That sounds very guilty. Guilty to do something else. But I want you to see. That if we want to encourage each other. To live the Christian life. We must meet together. John Wesley said. The Bible knows nothing. Knows nothing of a solitary religion. It's a great danger of the internet. Isn't it? You think that actually. Because you. Maybe listen to goodness knows who.
[18:43] When you follow great. Facebook. People like tweets. We think that we're going to fellowship. But actually we're not. In English.

We no longer distinguish. Between the first person singular. And the first person plural. And it's amazing. How many of the commands. In the New Testament. Are in the second person plural. You. Plural. I read a sermon a couple of weeks ago. Preached on Ephesians 6. On the Christian soldier. And the fellow preaching. Eating his best. But he preached the whole passage. As if it was the first. Second person singular. You as an individual fight. You as one lowly soldier. Imagine this guy. His army fatigued. And his gun. Marching down Greenford High Street. Someone says. Where are you going? I'm off to fight. I ask in Syria. It's ridiculous. Soldiers don't fight individually. They fight together. The passage is a corporate body.
[19:39] We are a body of people. We meet together. We worship together. We pray together. We share one another's burdens together. We share our resources. We ascend all together. We encourage one another.

Some of the bigger reasons why we are first groups. The New Testament is. It is full of the one another's. Don't pray for one another. Confess your faults to one another. Bear one another's burdens. Honor one another above yourselves. And so on. And so if you look at the history of the Christian church. The Christian church is always at its strongest. When there are meetings. That are under the supervision of the elders. Where Christian men and women come together. And they pray together. And they share together. Their spiritual experience in their lives. And they talk together. And they encourage one another. Scripture says in it. Those who fear the Lord. Talk to one another. And the Lord heard it. And I think we need to do more of this.
[20:39] To meet together. With this express purpose. Of wanting to encourage one another. That's what we're doing in house groups. Remember that this Wednesday. We are meeting to encourage one another. It should be the same.

It should be the same. It's one Sunday. Even a sermon. When the preacher is kind of denouncing sin. And exposing sin. It must always be encouraging. Because it must end with the cross. There ends with forgiveness. There's cleansing. There's pardon. There's new beginning. There's hope. No matter what subject you take. If you preach on the day of judgment. There's still a day of grace. Isn't there? There's a saviour. If you will come to him. In the day of grace. You will be accepted. That's encouraging. You preach on hell. It's a dreadful and fearful subject. But. You don't stop teaching it. Until you tell people. You don't need to go to hell tonight. There's a saviour from hell. And you may find you too. Well that's encouraging. And our meetings together. Both formal and informal.
[21:37] For worship and fellowship. They are meant to be encouraging. We should not go out of truth. Wased down. And burdened. And crushed. And broken. And unable to cope. No.

Because Christ lives. And today is a day of encouragement. Today is a day of grace. I can't remember what number of words. For control. I think. Control. And I mean by that. Control of what we say. We touched on this last time. But it's so important isn't it? We need to be so careful of our words.

So you think of the criticism. Or the jive. Or the put down. Or the gossip. It's like gossip is one of the great sins of the Christian church. There are Christians who are addicted to it.

And it's usually unkind gossip. I mean it's untrue. I heard recently. One of the most bizarre and ridiculous things told me.

[22 : 34] About an elderly minister. And I knew. I knew the man. I knew there were lies. There were lies over each other. It was what Christine was telling me.

They were passing it on. They'd never met the man. I don't know who they did. They'd hear it from third aunt. Somebody's aunt. Seen a brother-in-law on a bus or something. You know it gets ridiculous doesn't it? And they'd passed it on.

But it wasn't true. And it's terribly serious. Gossip is poisonous. It breaks people's hearts. It causes scars that take years to heal.

And it is profoundly discouraging. Listen to Ephesians chapter 4. Verse 29. It says this. Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths.

But only such as is good for building up. There are no communication proceed down my mouth. Except for that which is helpful for building others up.

[23 : 33] But it may impart grace to the hearers. So easy to know. I don't know if you find that I find it so easy to say something that is crude. Or that is off colour.

That is impure and unclean. That's virtually damaging. So easy to be flippant about sacred things. Some of us are gifted or cursed with a sense of humour. And how often I have bitterly regretted something I've said which is witty.

You've got to laugh. But then you go home and you think. Why did I open my big mouth? I wish I hadn't said it. We need to be careful. We need wisdom. Because hurtful speech.

And pessimistic speech. Well that's a big fault for many of us. We're anxious about something. So what do we do? We unload our anxieties on someone else.

When I first came here. It's kind of struggling to cope with the boos of being the minister. I would come home for a church meeting. I'm upset or annoyed at something. I'm clear I would be in bed. And she would ask how it went.

[24 : 37] And I would tell her. I'd completely offload it. I'd tell her everything. And then I'd roll over and go blissfully to sleep. She would lie looking at the ceiling.

And all these women are doing. So easily can't we spread discouragement. It's like a poison. An anxiety and poison. Bitterness and disappointment.

We can pass on negative things. Churches that you go into. And it's kind of this cloud of gloom. That depresses people. And it creates a depressing atmosphere. We find that with children don't we? You're on a journey. And you get lost. And the dad exasperatedly says.

We're never going to find this place. There's a little quivering voice coming from the back of the car. Never. Doomed for all eternity. To drive around Mid Wales for thousands of years.

[25 : 34] All I meant is. It's going to take about ten minutes. S.M. Houghton. In his funny little book. Life books. Talks about a man who became an atheist.

How did he become an atheist? Because he grew up in the home of a hyper-Calvinist. His father spoke of John Wesley. The Methodist preacher. As a wicked and evil man. Who was doing great harm to the cause of Christ.

One day this lad was visiting a relative. And this saintly old man. Called John Wesley. Came in. White hair down to his shoulders. He took the boy. And he put his head on his.

He put his hand on his head. Put his hand on his head. And he said. God bless you my son. And make you a good man. That young boy said. I never believed one word. My father spoke from that home.

I remember. Growing up in Swansea. We grew up in quite a difficult church situation. For some reason. Sunday lunch. My mother and father were talking. And they made a negative comment.

[26 : 33] About someone in the church. It's very very rude. It's probably the same. I can remember it. My brother said. Is Mr. So and so a bad man? My father had a good grace.

And said. No no. He's not a bad man. He's a good man. He's a godly man. We shouldn't have said that. We need to be very very careful. Don't we? There was a regulation in the Royal Navy.

I don't think it's still there. But no officer shall speak discouragingly. To another officer. In the discharge of his duties. Good rule for church life. No Christian shall speak discouragingly. In the discharge of his duties.

Control. Fifthly. Fifthly. Where we are. Christ-centeredness. Christ-centeredness. But I think what I could be saying. Could be easily misinterpreted.

And misimplied. And actually you could go away with what I've said. And actually do quite harm. We live in an age of sharing. Sharing is the great thing.

[27 : 31] Let it all hang out. Encounter groups. And so we get together in our groups. And we tell each other our burdens. And our sorrows. And our temptations. And our sins. And our joys.

And our hopes. And so on and so forth. And we should share everything. We should share. And speak our minds. I don't think nothing can be more harmful. Or more dangerous. Or more unwise. Church is cursed in this country.

It's focusing on self. It's interesting. It's that since the fall. Since Adam and Eve fell. We are not able. And we are not meant to be physically naked.

In front of each other. We cannot handle it. We cannot handle that nakedness. Without sin. And nor are we meant to be emotionally naked.

To one another. We do not help each other. By sharing those things. That should be private. Between ourselves. And Jesus Christ. Our great high priest.

[28 : 31] It's been a trendy thing about preachers. To confess their sins. Publicly in their sermons. And it doesn't help. Believe it or not.

It would not help you. To know my temptations. And my failings. It is enough for you to know. That I am sinful. You know that. And I fail.

That's all you need to know. How would it help. The person next to you. The heart is deceitful.

Above all things. I'm desperately wicked. And when we come to the New Testament.

We do find this. This emphasis on sharing. But what are they sharing? They are sharing Christ. And it's totally different. They're not sharing ourselves. They're not sharing our sinfulness.

And weakness. And our problems. But they're talking of the Lord Jesus. And we have in common.

They focus on him. And think on him. And meditate on him. The whole book of Hebrews. Is a word of encouragement.

[29 : 28] Chapter 13 verse 22. And the whole book of Hebrews. Is the book of the Lord Jesus. He sets out. The writer. The glory of Christ. Throughout the letter. He's the divine son.

The creator. The priest. The sacrifice. The intercessor. His compassion. And his mercy. And his greatness. That Jesus Christ. Is the same yesterday. Today forever.

The writer. The writer. The Hebrews. Is always pointing. People to Christ. Chapter 3 verse 1.

Therefore holy brothers. You who share in the heavenly calling. Consider Christ. Chapter 4 and verse 14.

Since then we have agreed. Like Greece was passed through the hands. Jesus the son of God. Let us hold fast for our confession. Chapter 12 and verse 2. Therefore since we're surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses.

Let us also lay aside every weight. In sin that clings up closely to us. Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us. Looking to Jesus. The founder and perfecter of our faith. So when we get together.

[30 : 27] When we get together in house groups. What are we to do? We are to speak of Christ.

We are to talk about the saviour. How wonderful he is. And gracious he is. And holy he is. And pure. And loving. And powerful.

And faithful. And when we do that. That will encourage you. How are we to encourage one another? We are to remind one another. Of the Lord Jesus. Not selfish.

Self absorbed. Focusing on me. And my problems. Let me tell you about me. And my week. When I tell you about my week. You will feel sorry for me. And when you tell me about your week.

I will feel sorry for you. I don't understand what good that does. That's very good. Sharing yes. But sharing Christ. To talk of him. To meditate on him.

To focus on him. That brings us to the last thought. Compassion. Compassion. Perhaps this is the most vital thing.

[31 : 27] In us becoming encouragers. It depends on the sort of person that you are. It's not what you say. It's not what you do. It's who you are.

To be an encourager in church life. You've got to love people. And you need to be interested in them. And you need to genuinely respect them. And people can sense that in you.

Can't they? I've got a minister friend. Who is renowned. For when he's speaking to you at a conference. He's always looking over your shoulder.

To see if there's someone more important to talk to. So if Rico Tyson's to walk in the room. I won't give his name. Off he runs. But you know what that's like. Don't you? When somebody.

Who's just there. Not even listening to you. We know what that's like. It's very discouraging. The problem with techniques. I read. It was supposed to be a Christian book. On encouragement. In preparation for the series.

[32 : 24] Let me read it. There are certain techniques. That we can actually practice. That will make us good encouragers. There are five things that you need to do.

Number one. Squarely face the other person. Number two. Tightly cross arms and legs. Communicate distance.

And inhibit development of closeness. Number three. He says. A slight forward lean of the body and head. Communicates attentive interest.

Number four. Maintain steady eye contact. Number five. Consciously relax. And then. Not satisfied with that.

He puts it together in an acronym. SOLER. S-O-L-E-R. Squarely. Openly. Lean. Eyes. Relax. And then he says.

[33 : 25] And this is the best bit. You can practice this on your own. We might then ask a spouse or a close friend to evaluate.

Can you imagine? Well let me say. You've done great on eye contact. You've done really well on consciously relaxing. But the leaning. It's repulsive.

Isn't it? Isn't that repulsive? It is ludicrous. It is manipulating people. So imagine practicing how you're going to hold your body. To communicate interest in another human being.

How would you feel if you felt someone was doing that to you? In other words. There must be genuineness. Isn't there? There must be reality. A real frankness. An interest and love for people. They are not objects for us to work on. They are not projects for us to draw in. They are people made in the image of God. And so encouragement must spread deep from deep within us.

[34 : 23] Trust that. A compassion truly felt for people. It's a gift from God. And you must pray for it. And we must pray for it. And we must long for it. And learn it. And here is the hard part.

Isn't it? This is where God's equipping can be very painful. And it's a simple fact. That God brings suffering and pain into our lives. To equip us to be encouragers. And perhaps tonight you're thinking.

Actually I'd love to be an encourager. I'd love to be a compassionate. A more sensitive and friendly person. Who can get close to people. And help them. I hope you say that. But we have to say that we.

God might well put us in a hard place. To make us the sort of person. That we may have to weep many tears. Before you become that sort of person.

Because you can't learn it from a book. And you certainly can't learn it from a conference. Perhaps you know people have suffered. I can think of many people. And people are drawn to them.

[35 : 19] There's just something about them. You can't describe it. You can't categorise it. But they understand. And they can sympathise. And they can say. I know what God is like. And they say. Blessed be.

The God and Father. Of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Father of mercies. And the God of all comforts. Who comforts us. In all our afflictions. Why? So that we may be able to comfort. But those who are in any affliction.

With the comfort. With which we ourselves are comforted by God. Paul says this is. Why this has happened to me. Do you want to be an encourager?

I hope you do. Well be warned of some hard training. Some of you are going through very hard times. Some of you are facing things in this room.

That are cruel and discouraging and heartbreaking. And we can say. With the authority of God's word. God has a purpose. And God is not allowing you.

[36 : 16] To go through what you're going through. For nothing. And the day will come. When you will maybe be able to draw near to someone. And help them in a way that you could never have before.

One last point. I want to say. Smiling is not compulsory. And there are churches aren't there. Where we are taught. And that everyone is to be joyful all the time.

And you walk into those churches. And everyone is showing their teeth. And you begin after about five minutes. To think there's something wrong with these people. They smile all the time.

But there's a feeling. I think. In some parts of the Christian church in the UK. That it's unchristian. To be anything other than bubbling over. All the time.

But that is the picture of the New Testament. The New Testament says. It's alright to be sad. The New Testament says. It's alright to be discouraged at times. There are discouraging things. And you must not feel.

[37 : 20] You must not feel. That you've got to rush over. And cheer people up all the time. C.S. Lewis once said about a woman. She's the sort of woman.

That lives for others. You can tell the others. By the haunted expression on their faces. It's brilliant. There are people like that.

And sometimes the most encouraging thing of all. Is for our friends to leave us alone. And to pray for us for a while. I don't have to leave us alone.

Let's stop. Let's pray.