

### Time to Reflect

- As Christians, how can we seek to be encouragers to our friends and family, as well as the members of our Parish and the local community?
- Throughout our studies of Galatians and Ephesians, what has impacted you most about how Paul led and mentored the people of God?

Last week we reflected on the armour of God and we focused on the theme of spiritual warfare. We discovered that the Christian life is a battleground and not a playground, and we concluded that we need to keep our hearts pure by embracing Godly living. This week, as we reach the end of this study series, our attention is called to the importance of encouragement.

**“We are not fighting the battle alone. There are other believers who stand with us in the fight, and we ought to be careful to encourage one another.”**

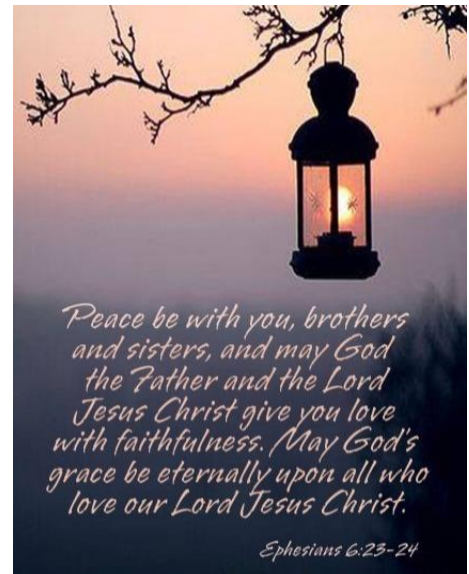
(Warren Wiersbe, *Be Rich: Ephesians*, p185)

### Specifics

- It has been suggested that the Duke of Wellington, the British military leader who defeated Napoleon at Waterloo, was not an easy man to serve under. He was brilliant, demanding and not one to shower his soldiers with compliments.
- In his old age a young lady asked Wellington what, if anything, he would do differently if he had his life to live over again. He thought for a moment and then replied. **"I'd give more praise."**
- From the earliest age we all like to receive praise, a pat on the back, a word of encouragement.
- The American author and poet William Arthur Ward once said this: **"Flatter me, and I may not believe you. Criticize me, and I may not like you. Ignore me, and I may not forgive you. Encourage me, and I will not forget you."**
- Encouragement really does go a long way and these final verses from Ephesians challenge us to be encouragers. Throughout his letter to the Ephesians, Paul sought to offer instruction and guidance but he was also a consistent encourager.
- Paul recognised the importance of encouragement and note how he sent Tychicus to the Ephesians **"...that he may encourage you" (v22).**
- As Christians, we must be encouragers to others. A word of encouragement does indeed go a long way. It does, however, need to be genuine and warranted as opposed to false flattery.
- One positive outworking of genuine encouragement is that it reminds us that we are part of something much bigger than ourselves – we are members of the family of God.
- Like any family, there will be good and difficult times. Yet, through it all, there is power in being together. This is developed further by Warren Wiersbe as he writes, **"What an encouragement to be part of the family of God! Nowhere in the New Testament do we find an isolated believer. Christians**

are like sheep; they flock together. The church is an army, and the soldiers need to stand together and fight together.<sup>1</sup>

- Note also how Paul was open and honest with the Ephesians. He wanted Tychicus to give them a full report on how he was and what he was doing (v21).
- Such characteristics help to build positive relationships and Paul knew this. He wasn't the kind of missionary or leader who kept his affairs to himself.
- This does not imply that the Ephesians knew every little bit of detail about Paul's personal life. It does, however, reveal that Paul wanted them to know what God was doing through him so that they could be encouraged that their prayers were being answered.
- Again, we are reminded of the importance of a word of encouragement. Paul wasn't being self-aggrandising or pious. Nor was he trying to be selfish. What we see here is the heart of a mature leader investing in and encouraging God's people.
- The final two verses (v23-24) contain words of blessing and these were used by Paul to conclude his letter to the Ephesians.
- Paul spoke of peace, love, faith and grace. It is remarkable to think that these words were foremost in Paul's mind when he was in prison and living in challenging circumstances.
- He could have been focused entirely on his own situation but he wasn't. Paul sought to pray a tremendous blessing on the Ephesians. He was praying out of the overflow of his heart.
- This reveals much to us about the depth of Paul's own Christian faith and his total trust in God. No matter what he experienced in life, he truly believed that God was in control and this brought him a deep sense of peace.
- William Barclay reflects, "Paul finishes with a blessing – and in it all the great words come again. The peace which was a man's highest good, the faith which was complete resting in Christ, the grace which was the lovely free gift of God – these things Paul calls down from God upon his friends. Above all he prays for love that they may know the love of God, that they may love men as God loves them, and that they may love Jesus Christ with an undying love."<sup>2</sup>
- Put simply, Paul wanted the Ephesians to be blessed with all spiritual blessings. Having started his letter with words of blessing (1:2), Paul signed off with words of blessing (6:23-24). For Paul, it was always about bringing glory to God, directing other people to God, and encouraging them to seek God wholeheartedly.



<sup>1</sup> Warren Wiersbe, *Be Rich: Ephesians* (David C Cook, 2009), p185.

<sup>2</sup> William Barclay, *The Letters to the Galatians and Ephesians* (Saint Andrew Press, 1976), p185.