## **Week 5 - Encouraging One Another (13 – 19 March)**

Our diocesan 3rd Strategy is not only *Growing in love for one another* but also *Growing in* *encouragement of one another*. This week we are concentrating on this second part: growing in encouragement of one another. ‘ Encourage’ is defined in the dictionary as: ‘to talk or behave in a way that gives someone confidence to do something, to fill with courage or strength of purpose’.

Not far from us in Bunbury is the “Big Swamp” with a 2km track around it used regularly for a Park Run. This week there were messages chalked on the track at different places: “Only 250 metres to go, Cathy”, “you’ve got this”, “awesome”, “well run”. I imagine that Cathy and all the other runners would have been heartened and encouraged by these carefully pre-prepared messages.

1. How important is it to be encouraged?
2. How do other people encourage you? What do they do that make you feel encouraged?
3. How do you encourage others?

There are many possible answers to these questions above. Sometimes what is encouraging for one person may not be quite as encouraging for another. Can you think of any examples from your own experience, or from someone else you know about?

**The Example of the Trinity**

In Week 2 we began to consider the Trinity as a community of love between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. It is worthwhile seeing how the members of the Trinity interact with one another in the Bible. Each member has specific responsibilities, but they work closely together and they also acknowledge and glorify one another rather than themselves.

1. In what practical ways do you see members of the trinity encouraging one another in the verses below?

**Mark 1.35** *-* *In the morning, while it was still very dark, he [Jesus] got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed.*

**Luke 3.21-22** - *Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened,****22****and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, ‘You are my Son, the Beloved;[*[*a*](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+3.21-22&version=NRSVA#fen-NRSVA-25040a)*] with you I am well pleased*

**Luke 4.1** - *Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness*

**Luke 22:42-43**- *‘Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet, not my will but yours be done.’****43****Then an angel from heaven appeared to him and gave him strength.*

Continued overleaf

**John 16.13-15** – *‘When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come.****14****He will glorify me [Jesus], because he will take what is mine and declare it to you.****15****All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you’.*

1. What can you learn from these examples about how you can encourage others?

**Building Each Other Up**

The word for ‘building up’ in Greek is the same word you would use for constructing a house. It is also sometimes translated as ‘edification’. This word is used by Paul in his letter to the Ephesians:

 *‘Let no evil talk come out of your mouth, but only what is useful for building up, as there is need, so that your words may give grace to those who hear.’* (Eph 4.29) [[1]](#footnote-1)

1. What do you think it means to build a person up? How can our words do that?

Encouraging others has observable knock-on or ripple effects. For example, if we feel encouraged, supported or loved, we are much more likely to do the same for others. Thus, one act of kindness or encouragement for another person can lead to more acts of kindness and encouragement by that person, and so on. Furthermore, as each individual member does their part to build up the others in the body of Christ, the entire body grows up and becomes mature and healthy.[[2]](#footnote-2)

**Putting it into practice**

An Archdeacon in Gippsland, who was once one of my distance students, has for many years written a letter of encouragement each day to someone he knew or knew about. He believed this was something God was calling him to do. As we have seen there are many ways we can encourage others.

1. How can we encourage each other more in our churches and organisations?

**Pray**

Who can *you* encourage this week and how? Ask the Lord to bring to mind a person or people from your church or organisation whom you can encourage this week. Ask the Lord to show you how to do that. Write down what you think you hear and then act on it. Perhaps you could make this a regular practice?

**For Further Reflection**

Another form of encouragement is when we feel supported by others who care about us and our situation, particularly when we are shouldering a burden or a task of one kind or another. St. Paul speaks of this in Galatians: ‘Help to carry one another’s burdens, and in this way you will obey the law of Christ.’

There is a youth group game which illustrates this mutually supportive effect. You ask a group of young people to face the back of each other around a circle, standing quite close to one another. At this point you ask them to all sit down at the same time. If conducted well, they are all able to be support one another seated all the way around the circle, at least for a short time!

When you answered the questions at the beginning about what encourages us? Did being a member of a team get mentioned? Anyone who has been a member of a footy or hockey team will know, at their best, the joy and encouragement that comes from working together as a team, utilising different skills and abilities as well as just being there for one another. Jesus deliberately formed a team of 12 disciples. He also sent out 70 disciples in teams of two (Matthew 10:1-4, Luke 10:1-12) rather than on their own. Teamwork is about sharing responsibilities, supporting one another and achieving things together (see Luke 10:17-20). This kind of teamwork is exciting, dynamic and can lead to novel and astonishing results, all of which are incredibly encouraging in turn. Theologians have a technical term for how the Trinity acts like a team. The term is ‘*perichoresis*’ which means to dance around or dance together (*choresis* is the same root word as in *choreo*graphy). In short, the Trinity is the archetype and epitome of true teamwork. Being in the image of God is being in this teamwork image.

It is worth unpacking the encouragement that comes through teamwork a little more because there are several other things happening here. One of these is being *affirmed* for our particular role and contribution to the team. Paul uses the analogy of the body in Romans 12:3-8 to illustrate that everyone has an important but interdependent role in a church community. He developed this same illustration to make an identical point to the Corinthian Christians in 1 Corinthians 12:4-31. It may be worth having a look at both these passages. We do not always think of our contribution as being special or distinctive and we also do not always know we are valued. Thus affirming people for who they are and for what they mean to us, or to others, is vitally important in encouraging others. It helps underpin their specialness and their sense of self and self-worth.

Because we do not always realise our own contribution is special or unique, we may also labour under the misapprehension that others are equally and identically capable as we are. The truth is instead people may be amazed and appreciative of the ease and proficiency with which we can tackle matters they would view as far too challenging. Recently someone I know was thanked profusely by another person in their church for a particular task they were undertaking. It was something they found easy to do and were good at but the other person was so relieved they no longer had to fulfill this task, which for them was onerous. Some four decades ago, I was on a Mission team for the first time with a dear man, and later friend, called Alyn Haskey. He had a disability, due to cerebral palsy, and was in a wheelchair. Our assignment that evening was to go along to a rowdy youth club in a tough part of Nottingham and share the gospel. I mistakenly thought I ought to accompany Alyn because he might need help, or even protection! How wrong I was – he was a gifted story-teller and there was utter silence and respect from these outwardly tough young people when Alyn spoke.

A further significant encouraging aspect of teamwork is *acceptance* and *belonging*. We have been spruiking a book for our 3rd *Strategy of Growing in love for and encouraging one another*. It is: *Belong: Loving your Church by Reflecting Christ to one another by* Barnabas Piper.He argues our task is to create churches where everybody feels at home. He describes them as ‘places of depth and honesty, of real fellowship and community where people truly experience the love of Jesus.’ He says such churches are places where people feel they genuinely belong. As we saw from the accounts in Acts in Week 2, these church communities are also places where God’s Holy Spirit can and will send further people.

1. See also 1 Thessalonians 5:11, Romans 14:19, Romans 15:2 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Romans 12:3-8 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)