

ENCOURAGE

Intro

Jesus walked alongside his disciples. He showed them the way, and by his attitude and actions he modeled for them how to live faithfully in the world. Jesus expects us to do the same within the many communities of faith in which we live, such as our families, our congregations, and our youth group. This faith practice calls for us to encourage each other, to motivate, console, and inspire each other to live like a follower of Jesus. The most powerful message we can give our neighbors and those we meet in life is the knowledge that Jesus loves them; Jesus forgives them, Jesus accepts them as they are, and Jesus is always generous and gracious. Everyone needs an encourager because everyone at some point or another will need encouragement. We need each other to walk along side each other.

Small Group Activity

Take a marker and turn to a partner. Each of you will write a word of encouragement on the other's hand. For example: maybe you write the word "loved" or "peace" or maybe you heard your partner say something specific recently and your word relates to a specific need for encouragement such as "strength" or "believe". We will give you a minute to do this. Make sure everyone in your group gets a word.

(Adapted from "I don't need to know Your Name to be Your Friend," written by Conrad Weiser and published by Fortress Press 1974 ISBN 0-8006—0124-6

Reader 1:

Stand in a circle in your small group, not too close to each other, only close enough so that if you stretched out your arms you could touch another person's hand. Stand so that you can see all the other members of your group. 1 Thessalonians 5:11 says: Therefore encourage one another and build up each other, as indeed you are doing. Now, take a deep breath. How do you feel?..... Are you happy?..... Are you sad?..... Do you like what you see inside?..... Are there things that you can see that no one else knows?..... Are there happy things that you can recall that make you want to smile?..... Are there sad things that make you want to cry? And God says...

Reader 2 (*Voice of God*):

What you see inside yourself is you. No one else knows you as completely as I do. I created you. I know your name. I gave you gifts at your baptism, and I want you to share them in the world.

Reader 1:

Now open your eyes and bring your hands up in front of you.... Palms facing you.... Just look at your hands.....Look at their shape. Do you have long fingers or short fingers?.... Are they old hands or young hands?..... Are they hard, calloused hands or soft hands?..... These hands are different from everyone else's hands.

Reader 2 (*Voice of God*):

Look at your thumb. Notice your thumbprint. I created that. No one else has or will have the same thumbprint as you. You are unique. Your hands are an extension of yourself and of me.

Reader 1:

Where have your hands left their marks? Have they been hurtful? Have they been caring? Have they worked? Have they played? Your hands are you. What they do and what they do not do, reveals who you are. Your hands are part of you. Your hands can reach out to others. Now, if you are comfortable, reach out to the person on either side of you and take their hands. Hold these hands tightly, feel each other's strength and encouragement. This is an example of God's people being stronger in community than alone. Now look around at each member of your group. Together these hands holding each other are hands of people reaching out, reaching to one another.

Reader 2 (Voice of God):

May these hands love and not strike down, heal more than hurt, forgive and be forgiven. You are a child of God. You belong to me. You belong to each other. I'm counting on you to be my disciples and my hands in the world!

Reader 1:

Find a partner and with your fingers draw a cross on each other's hand as you repeat this blessing after me.

"Child and gift of God. You are a disciple of Jesus,
May God bless you and keep you this day
And may you be Jesus' hands in the world."