

A group of people, including a woman in the foreground and a man to her right, are smiling and looking towards the left. The background is a soft-focus outdoor setting with greenery and a bright sky.

KEYS TO HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

book twenty-five in the series:

THE OWNER'S MANUAL TO THE NEW YOU

DOUG BRITTON, MFT

Five-day Bible study for individuals, small groups, and churches

- Day One: Love Others As-Is
- Day Two: Listen to Deeply Understand
- Day Three: Talk with Respect and Love
- Day Four: Be an Encourager
- Day Five: Review and Test

Keys to Healthy Relationships: Book twenty-five in “The Owner’s Manual to the New You”

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By Doug Britton, MFT

Twelve books on "Knowing God"

Twelve books on "Developing a Godly Character"

Twelve books on "Enjoying Healthy Relationships"

Twelve books on "Overcoming Personal Problems"

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The Owner's Manual to the New You

"The Owner's Manual to the New You," published by LifeTree Books, is a series of forty-eight cross-cultural discipleship books by Bible-based Marriage and Family Therapist Doug Britton. LifeTree Books is making these books available free of charge for individual use.

Each book is ideal for a five-day study by small groups, classes, or individuals. Although this is a forty-eight-book series, each book can be studied as a complete book by itself.

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- Book 6: How to Pray
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- Book 8: Successful Christian Living
- Book 9: Living a Joyful Life
- Book 10: Knowing God's Will
- Book 11: Obeying God
- Book 12: Living in God's Power

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- Book 13: Growing in Christ
- Book 14: Changing Your Self-Image
- Book 15: Changing Your Attitudes
- Book 16: Living with Humility
- Book 17: Living with Purpose
- Book 18: Living with Self-Control
- Book 19: Living with Integrity
- Book 20: Growing through Problems
- Book 21: Trusting God
- Book 22: Breaking Free from Our Culture
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- Book 24: Staying Faithful to God

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- Book 25: Keys to Healthy Relationships
- Book 26: Making Friends
- Book 27: Showing Grace to Others
- Book 28: Forgiving Others
- Book 29: Serving Others
- Book 30: Resolving Conflicts
- Book 31: Overcoming Peer Pressure
- Book 32: Helping Others with Wisdom
- Book 33: Dating, Marriage, and Sex
- Book 34: Embracing the Body of Christ
- Book 35: Respecting Authority
- Book 36: Sharing Your Faith

Overcoming Personal Problems

- Book 37: Overcoming Your Anger (Part 1)
- Book 38: Overcoming Your Anger (Part 2)
- Book 39: Overcoming Rejection
- Book 40: Overcoming Temptation (Part 1)
- Book 41: Overcoming Temptation (Part 2)
- Book 42: Overcoming Anxiety and Fear
- Book 43: Overcoming Jealousy and Insecurity
- Book 44: Overcoming Self-Sufficiency
- Book 45: Overcoming Guilt and Shame
- Book 46: Overcoming Discouragement
- Book 47: Overcoming Failure
- Book 48: Overcoming the Fear of Death

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Foreword

When I was first asked to write a series of downloadable books for intensive discipleship training, I was excited. Jesus has revolutionized my life, and I am glad to share his truths with you.

The pages you are about to study come straight from God's word. They contain truth that puts our feet on the path to the fullest life possible—truth that sets us free.

As Jesus said, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (John 8:31-32).

May God speak to your heart as you read, and may he bring his truth alive in your life.

Your brother in Christ,

Doug Britton

P.S. LifeTree Books is offering this downloadable book and all the other books in “The Owner's Manual to the New You” series free of charge. If you find these books helpful, please feel free to spread the news to churches, ministries, and individuals who might benefit from them.

Small Group Leader's Guidelines

Introduction. These studies are for new believers as well as mature Christians. They are for small groups, discipleship classes, mentors, and individuals. They are ideal for studies lasting from sixty to ninety minutes.

Choose the key points, verses, and discussion questions you will talk about. Don't think you need to cover every verse and question. With new believers, go over the main points, key verses, and selected questions. Go into more depth with mature Christians.

Begin and end each study with prayer. Start by asking God to help each person grow from the study. At the end, ask everyone to pray for help to put God's truth into practice.

Review homework. Before starting the current lesson, ask group members to discuss their answers to some of the previous day's homework questions.

Personalize the lesson. Although it's okay to read each lesson word-for-word, the material will "come alive" if you discuss some of the key points in your own words. Share your own experiences and struggles, and how God has helped you.

As you read, identify important points and key parts of verses. Ask group members to circle them, and then explain why you want to emphasize these points.

Get everyone involved. The more people are actively involved, the more they are impacted by what you are studying. Don't ask questions that can be answered by "yes" or "no." For example, don't ask, "Do you have any thoughts about this?" Instead, ask, "How does this insight speak to you?"

Consider breaking up into smaller groups to discuss the questions if you are leading a large group or class.

Use day five for a review and test. Use the questions in day five as a review and/or test. Remove these pages if you do not want group members to see the questions ahead of time.

Want to Learn More?

Free online resources: For more suggestions for small group leaders as well as many online Bible studies on Christianity and daily living (anger, marriage, self-image, finances, and more), visit www.dougbrittonbooks.com/resources/small-groups

Small group leader's book: For detailed information on how to lead small groups and overcome typical problems, visit www.dougbrittonbooks.com/bookstore/small-groups.

Day One: Love Others As-Is

In this book you will read four guidelines from God’s word about how to get along with other people. Today’s lesson covers the most important one—to love your neighbor as yourself.

Jesus commanded us to love others—even your enemies

It’s not always easy to love other people. Yet Jesus said that is God’s second most important commandment. Read what he said when he was talking to some Jewish leaders:

Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.” (Matthew 22:37-40)

When Jesus said to love your neighbor, he wasn’t just talking about loving your friends. He was saying we are to love everyone—including our enemies.

You have heard that it was said, “Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.” But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect. (Matthew 5:43-48)

Discussion questions

1. Do you think Jesus really wants us to love our enemies and pray for people who persecute us? If so, do you find this easy to do? Why or why not?
2. Why did Jesus imply that we will get a greater reward for loving our enemies than for loving people who love us?

Be prepared for disappointments

Be ready to be disappointed by people from time to time. That doesn’t mean you should always expect the worst moment by moment. But it does mean that in the back of your mind you should realize others will disappoint you now and again.

In a way, life is like the weather. Every morning, you look outside hoping for a blue sky, but if it’s raining, you are not entirely undone. Why? Because you know your hopes for a sunny day will be



disappointed from time to time. Likewise in life, expect some rainy days, with an outside chance of a hurricane.

When you realize that disappointments are inevitable, you are less likely to respond with an indignant, "I can't believe you did that!" Or, "How could you be so rude?" Or, "If that's the way you feel, I'm not speaking to you."

Instead, you expect others to sometimes say or do things that hurt you.

A man's wisdom gives him patience; it is to his glory to overlook an offense. (Proverbs 19:11)

Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. (1 Peter 4:8)

Discussion questions

3. How do you usually respond when you are disappointed with others?
4. How will expecting to be disappointed from time to time help you respond differently?

"Bear with" others

The Bible says to "bear with" other people. That means putting up with other people's faults, differences, and quirks. It means showing compassion, love, tolerance, gentleness, and patience. It also means not commenting every time someone does something wrong.

Love is patient, love is kind. (1 Corinthians 13:4)

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. (Colossians 3:12-13)

Discussion questions

5. What does the Bible mean by "bear with each other" (Colossians 3:13)?
6. Describe a situation in which God helped you bear with someone.
7. Describe a situation in which you would like someone to bear with you.

Remember that you too are imperfect.

If you always tell the truth, you may fly into a rage when other people appear to be telling a lie. If you pray one hour a day, and someone else only prays to find parking spots, you may not respect his or her spiritual life.

It's easy to slip into a judgmental attitude when someone else does something you overcame in your own life. For example, if you used to be late for church but now are usually on time, you may get upset when others are late.

One way to overcome a judgmental spirit is to confront your own sins. You may not have the same faults as someone else, but you have lots of different faults of your own. This realization can help you live with others' shortcomings.

Discussion question

8. How can the knowledge that you are imperfect help you be patient with other people's shortcomings?

Replace frustration with loving concern.

It's easy to react with anger, bitterness, or sarcasm when other people's words or actions disappoint you. Instead, ask God to help you respond with compassion. For example, if someone speaks loudly, don't simply react with irritation. Try to understand the tension he or she is feeling and respond with wisdom and love.

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin. (Hebrews 4:15)

Realize that the Holy Spirit convicts of sin.

You may think you need to point out someone else's faults for his or her own good. Although gentle confrontation sometimes is appropriate, don't make a habit of it. The Holy Spirit speaks to each of us, convicting us of sin. If you continuously criticize other people, you may get in God's way. When you argue, others are less likely to hear the Holy Spirit. You usually are much more effective if you pray for them instead of criticizing.

Discussion questions

9. Do you think you sometimes get in God's way because you correct others a lot? If so, how do you think your responses get in God's way?
10. What would be a better way to respond to others' faults?

Look for the positive

If you look for the negative, you will find it. Likewise, if you look for the positive, you will find it. Focus on the good, lovely, and noble things about other people—his winsome grin, her gentle touch, his jokes, her organizational skills.

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. (Philippians 4:8)

Forgive others

If you hold on to a bitter, angry, or resentful attitude, you are grieving God. His word repeatedly commands forgiveness.

Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as Christ forgave you. (Ephesians 4:32)

Discussion questions

11. Do you easily forgive others? When is it hard for you to forgive?
12. What are times it is easy for you to forgive?
13. Read Matthew 6:14-15, 1 Corinthians 13:5, and Colossians 3:13. What is the key message in these passages? How will this message help you forgive?

Discuss problems courteously

Although you should not constantly complain, from time to time it is loving and appropriate to voice a complaint, make a request, express concern for someone else's well-being, or discuss problems.

Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses. (Proverbs 27:6)

As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another. (Proverbs 27:17)

Confront serious sin

Loving others does not mean you should not confront serious sin. For example, if you are married, if your spouse physically abuses you, commits adultery, is a drug addict, or engages in other types of serious sins, take action. Ask God to help you respond in love, yet also set limits, talk to your pastor, insist on counseling, call the police, or take other steps.

Do you know Jesus?

This book was written to help believers in Jesus grow in their faith and personal life. You will get the most out of these pages if you know Christ, since it is through his love and power that you can truly change. If you have not yet entered into a relationship with Jesus, let me invite you to accept him as your Savior and Lord. Make this your personal prayer:

Jesus, I believe you are the Son of God, and I need your help. I confess I have sinned and failed you in many ways. I invite you to be my Savior and Lord, and I ask you to help me follow you the rest of my life. Thank you for loving me, forgiving me, and accepting me as your child.

If you prayed this prayer, welcome to the family of God. God has plans for you—to transform you. You have an exciting life ahead of you!

Memory verse

Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. (1 Peter 4:8)

Homework – Day One

1. Should we love our friends and hate our enemies? Why or why not?
2. What types of people are most difficult for you to love? Why do you think that is true?
3. Does God want you to love these people? How can you develop the right attitude toward them?
4. Does loving someone mean you think everything they are doing is okay?

Day Two: Listen to Deeply Understand

Listening, not talking, is the most important part of communicating. When you deeply understand what other people are saying, you build the foundation for an intelligent and meaningful conversation and an intimate relationship. When you listen superficially, you lay the groundwork for a shallow discussion, one likely to frustrate both of you. You leave that person feeling misunderstood and alone.

When words are many, sin is not absent, but he who holds his tongue is wise. (Proverbs 10:19)

Be quick to listen, slow to speak. (James 1:19)



Are you a good listener?

Do you think, “Other people don’t listen to me”? If so, let me challenge you with a question: Do others think you really listen? You may have been friends for years and yet not have truly heard the most basic things someone has been trying to tell you.

Just as you have a deep longing to be understood, to know that others care about what you say, so does that person. As you study this lesson, don’t focus on your desire to be heard. Rather, focus on being a better listener yourself.

Discussion question

1. Do you need to become a better listener? Explain your answer. (If you answered “yes,” in what ways have you been a poor listener?)

Seek to deeply understand other people

It is possible to listen to someone else and accurately quote all the words back, yet not understand his or her heart. Jesus talked about people who heard his words but did not hear his message (Matthew 13:15-16). In the same way, at times we are deaf to what other people are trying to tell us.

When you listen, make it a goal to deeply understand that person. Do your best to really understand what someone thinks and feels—to enter his or her world, to see through his or her eyes.

Approach this task seriously. See yourself as a researcher trying to grasp a hidden mystery. Show a genuine interest in what that person says. Be like Timothy, of whom Paul wrote:

I have no one else like him, who takes a genuine interest in your welfare. For everyone looks out for his own interests. (Philippians 2:20-21)

Discussion question

2. Has anyone ever listened to you in such a way that it seemed he or she deeply understood what you were saying? If so, what did that feel like? How can you listen to people in the same way?

Learn to understand other people's "language."

You and someone else may speak different "languages," languages as different as Mandarin Chinese and French. For example, you may speak like a lawyer (the language of logic) and the other person may speak like a poet (the language of emotions).

Discussion questions

3. Do you and someone else speak in "different languages"? If so, how would you describe that person's language? How would you describe your language?
4. What changes could you make in the way you listen to better understand his or her language?

Realize you may misinterpret.

People are often absolutely certain they understand someone else's message, yet they frequently are very, very wrong. Or they understand the message, but don't see what's underneath the words. By trusting their impressions instead of fully listening, they put up a massive roadblock to effective communication.

Don't be satisfied with simplistic interpretations of that person's moods or actions, no matter how sure you are that you are correct.

Discussion questions

5. Describe a time you misinterpreted what someone said. Why do you think you misinterpreted?
6. What steps can you take to make it less likely you will misinterpret other people's words?

Listen to emotions, not just words.

If you listen only to someone's words, you may miss what he or she is really saying. Listen to the literal message, but also ask yourself, "Why is this person saying this? What are the underlying emotions?"

Discussion questions

7. Have you ever noticed that someone's words did not seem to match his or her emotions? If so, describe that situation.
8. How can you become more aware of how people are really feeling?

Let go of past hurtful words

If someone says hurtful things, it's easy to fixate on them, turning them over and over in your mind. You may distrust anything that person ever says again because you are sure the unkind words are what that person really thinks.

Although it may be understandable to feel this way, ask God to help you look at the situation through his eyes. Remind yourself that:

- Words said in anger do not tell the whole story.
- People change.
- God calls you to forgive. Read Colossians 3:13.

Make it easy for others to talk

Sometimes we put up roadblocks that cut off conversations, not realizing what we have done. For example, if you have a silent friend, there is an excellent chance that you talk too much. If you fill the air with too many words, your friend may see no reason to talk or may not know how to get a word in edgewise. Remember Solomon's warning:

When words are many, sin is not absent, but he who holds his tongue is wise. (Proverbs 10:19)

The following ideas will help you encourage others to talk more freely. Check each one that you need to work on.

- Encourage people to express their feelings.
- Ask for feedback if someone is distant or upset.
- Monitor your intensity level. (Don't get too loud or intense.)
- Ask open-ended questions (questions that can't be answered by "yes" or "no").
- Speak respectfully when you disagree.
- Respond to criticism without getting defensive.
- Watch your nonverbal communication (such as frowning or looking away).
- Ask clarifying questions.
- Paraphrase what other people say (by saying what they said in your own words).
- Give others time to think before they speak.
- Do not ask a question, then answer it yourself.
- Let someone finish talking before you speak.
- Avoid focusing on what you will say. Pay attention to the other person.

Discussion questions

9. Choose two of the previous ideas that will help you make it easier for others to talk and help you listen more clearly. Explain why you chose them and how you think they will help.
10. How will you remind yourself to put these ideas into practice?

Ask if you are a good listener

You might be a poor listener without knowing it. For instance, you may not realize when you interrupt, or you may think you understand others when you really don't.

Ask other people to tell you if there are ways you cut off communication. Also ask if there are things they have been trying to say that you don't seem to have heard or understood. If someone gives you feedback about this, do not argue. This is an opportunity to listen without getting defensive or slipping into hurt feelings.

Discussion question

11. Who could you ask if you are a good listener? Make a plan to ask him or her. Be sure to listen carefully to his or her words. Don't argue.

Memory verse

When words are many, sin is not absent, but he who holds his tongue is wise. (Proverbs 10:19)

Homework – Day Two

1. Why is listening the most important part of communication?
2. What does it mean to deeply understand people?
3. Why is it important to deeply understand people?
4. Have you ever noticed you and someone you were talking with had “different languages”? How did this affect your conversation? Were you able to overcome it?

5. Describe one time you misinterpreted someone or someone misinterpreted you. Did this cause problems? Were you able to resolve these problems? If so, how?

6. What are some ways you can make it easy for people to talk?

7. What do you think you should do to become a better listener?

8. Ask someone you know if you are a good listener. Ask for examples of times you listened or didn't listen. Write what this person tells you here:

Day Three: Talk with Respect and Love

God cares about the way we talk. In fact, there are numerous scriptures telling us how to talk. For example, the Bible says, “A word aptly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver” (Proverbs 25:11).

God says our words should be things of beauty, “like apples of gold in settings of silver.” But what does that mean?

Is God saying we should always speak with great eloquence or that we should speak in poetry? No, that’s not what he is saying. Let’s read three more proverbs that help us understand his point.

*The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life.
(Proverbs 10:11)*

*Pleasant words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul
and healing to the bones. (Proverbs 16:24)*

The tongue has the power of life and death, and those who love it will eat its fruit. (Proverbs 18:21)

God is telling us our words should be pleasant, offering healing and life.

Discussion questions

1. Are your words things of beauty, “like apples of gold”?
2. Read Proverbs 18:21. What does this proverb mean?

The way you talk is usually more important than whether you are right or wrong

The key to life-giving conversations is to determine that you personally will talk in a loving, godly manner regardless of how other people talk. The way you talk is usually more important than whether you are right or wrong, whether others listen to you, or whether you get your way. In other words, the process usually is more important than the result.

This concept is foreign to most of us. We would rather focus on who is right or wrong than examine how we talk. It is as if we were in a court of law, interested only in winning our case. We may be relatively unconcerned about our bitterness, sarcasm, or anger. After all, we think, wisdom is on our side. But look at what the Bible says about wisdom.

But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. (James 3:17)

Is it wrong to seek a solution when discussing a problem? No. But make this your secondary goal. Your main goal is to talk courteously. You may not “win” an argument, but you can walk away a winner in Christ because you loved other people and talked courteously. As Paul wrote:



We know that we all possess knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. (1 Corinthians 8:1)

Discussion questions

3. Read 1 Corinthians 8:1. What does this verse mean?
4. Do you agree that the way you talk is usually more important than whether you are right or wrong? Why or why not?
5. Are you willing to try to speak courteously, no matter what? Explain your answer.

Guard your tongue

Better a patient man than a warrior, a man who controls his temper than one who takes a city. (Proverbs 16:32)

The tongue of the wise commends knowledge, but the mouth of the fool gushes folly. (Proverbs 15:2)

But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken. (Matthew 12:36)

If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless. (James 1:26)

Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing. (1 Peter 3:9)

Discussion question

6. Name one of the previous verses that will help you speak with love and respect. Why do you think it will help you? How can you remind yourself of it?

Speak politely

A big part of speaking courteously is being polite. Love, according to the Bible, “is not rude” (1 Corinthians 13:5).

With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness. Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be. (James 3:9-10)

Certain words and phrases make a big difference. Although we teach them to our children, we often neglect to say them ourselves. When we use these words, it is like oiling a squeaky hinge, mulching a garden, or putting icing on a cake. Life goes on if we neglect these things, but not nearly so pleasantly.

Make these words common in your conversations:

Please.

Thank you.

I'm sorry. Please forgive me.

I forgive you.

I love you.

I appreciate you.

Discussion question

- How often do you use these words? How can you remind yourself to use them more frequently?

Ideas to help you speak with respect and love

As you read the following points, evaluate yourself on a scale of 0 to 10 on each point.

- “0” means “I really need to work at this.”

- “10” means “I do very well at this.”

I minister to others as I talk. My score (0-10): _____

I seek mutual resolutions, not personal victories. My score (0-10): _____

I don't take criticism or suggestions personally. My score (0-10): _____

I forgive others. My score (0-10): _____

I control my anger. My score (0-10): _____

I share feelings and opinions without attacking. My score (0-10): _____

I make my point fairly quickly. My score (0-10): _____

I speak quietly. My score (0-10): _____

I use respectable language. My score (0-10): _____

I say, “I'm sorry. Please forgive me.” My score (0-10): _____

I stay calm. My score (0-10): _____

I exercise self-control when I speak. My score (0-10): _____

I realize that people remember things differently. My score (0-10): _____

I allow others to have different opinions. My score (0-10): _____

Discussion questions

- Name two of the previous ideas to help you speak with love and respect with low scores. Explain why you gave yourself low scores.
- Are you willing to work on raising the scores in these two areas? Why or why not? If you said “yes,” how will you remind yourself when you are talking with someone?

Memory verse

The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life. (Proverbs 10:11)

Notes

5. How easy is it for you to let other people have different opinions when you feel strongly about something?
 - a. Do you feel a need to argue until the other person changes his or her mind?

 - b. What are the results when you keep arguing?

 - c. Is it sometimes best to stop arguing and put the issue into Jesus' hands? Why or why not?

6. Write out three verses in this lesson that speak to you personally.

a. The verse:

How it speaks to me:

b. The verse:

How it speaks to me:

c. The verse:

How it speaks to me:

Day Four: Be an Encourager

Have you ever known someone who believed in you, someone who frequently spoke words of encouragement? The kind of person who made you feel you could do it, whatever “it” was?

That’s the kind of person God wants you to be—someone who makes a point of building up others. Your words matter.

Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing. (1 Thessalonians 5:11)

Paul gave us a great guideline when he wrote that everything we say should build up the one who is listening.

Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. (Ephesians 4:29)



Discussion question

1. Do you know someone who is an encourager? What is it like to be around him or her?

Think positively. Look for things to encourage.

Do you bring sunshine or gloom into the room? If you are a negative person, don’t say, “I’m just a worrier. I was born that way.” Or, “It’s my nature to be depressed.” God is in the personality-changing business. He wants you to “be conformed to the likeness of his Son” (Romans 8:29). You can change. You can become known for your encouraging words.

Life is full of problems, and we need to deal with them. But if we aren’t careful, all we see are the problems. There are lots of good things we can focus on. Instead of “catching people being bad,” catch them being good. Make your words a fountain of life. Be a positive person. Encourage one another.

Ask God to help you develop a positive thought life. Immerse yourself in his word. Pray. Over time, you will discover that you can control the way you think, choosing to focus on some thoughts and to reject others. The following verse can be life changing. Write it out and post it where you will see it regularly—on your refrigerator, bathroom mirror or the dashboard of your car.

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. (Philippians 4:8)

When you wake up in the morning, ask God to help you look for and focus on the positive. Pray for this attitude throughout the day. Choose to meditate on the positive.

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer. (Psalm 19:14)

Discussion questions

2. Read Philippians 4:8. What does this mean? Can we choose what we think about? Why or why not?
3. How can you train yourself to look for and focus on the positive?

Speak positively. Encourage others daily.

When you talk, you make a series of choices about what subjects to discuss, what memories to bring up, and what points to make. Sometimes it is appropriate and helpful to remind someone to do something. And at times it can be helpful to challenge that person to get involved in an activity. However, it's usually much more effective to be an encourager.

Choose to specialize in encouraging words, not in critical comments.

But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness. (Hebrews 3:13)

Discussion questions

4. Do you bring sunshine or gloom into the world? Do you focus on the positive or the negative? Do you encourage or criticize?
5. Who are some important people in your life? How encouraging are you with them? What can you say to encourage them? When will you say these encouraging words?

Monitor your positive and negative remarks.

Learn to be self-aware and listen to what you say. Be sure you make many more positive comments than negative ones.

Respond to others' problems with hope, comfort, and encouragement.

How do you respond when things go wrong for other people? For example, if someone was involved in an automobile accident or is denied a promotion, would you give a speech about responsible driving habits or make suggestions about how to get the promotion?

Or what would you say if a friend has an argument with a neighbor, breaks precious chinaware, forgets the words when singing a solo, or breaks a leg? If you're like many people, you would respond with criticism or advice.

There may be times when it's appropriate to offer suggestions. However, when someone tells you bad news, what usually helps the most is quiet support—words of comfort, a look of sympathy, or a hug.

Listen with compassion and avoid simplistic advice. Perhaps say nothing. Or perhaps say something such as, "I know this is a tough time for you, but let me encourage you that I love you and I'm here to help any way I can."

The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life. (Proverbs 10:11)

The tongue that brings healing is a tree of life, but a deceitful tongue crushes the spirit. (Proverbs 15:4)

[God] comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God. (2 Corinthians 1:4)

Discussion questions

6. Describe a difficult time you went through. Did someone try to encourage you as you went through it? Was that helpful? Why or why not?
7. How do you normally respond when people go through a difficult time?
8. Why is it usually better to offer comfort instead of advice?

Encourage people in their Christian walk.

Tell people how their Christian example has blessed and encouraged you. When friends seem discouraged in their Christian walk, look for ways to encourage them.

Judas and Silas, who themselves were prophets, said much to encourage and strengthen the brothers. (Acts 15:32)

We sent Timothy, who is our brother and God's fellow worker in spreading the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you in your faith. (1 Thessalonians 3:2)

Therefore encourage each other with these words. (1 Thessalonians 4:18)

Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching. (Hebrews 10:25)

There are many ways you could encourage people in their Christian walk. For example:

- Call, email, or text to tell others how they have blessed you.
- Invite a pastor or teacher from your church to dinner. Let him or her know your appreciation.
- Get together with a friend you admire. Tell this person what you respect about him or her.
- Tell people at church, "I appreciate you."

Discussion question

9. Name one person you will encourage in his or her Christian walk. What will you say to this person? When will you say it?

Help others recognize and use their gifts and talents.

Many think that when God gave out talents, he passed them by. They cannot identify, much less develop, the gifts God gave them. They waste their potential. Your encouragement and praise can help them realize they have something worth developing.

Discussion questions

10. Think about someone. What are his or her abilities, talents, and gifts?
11. What are practical ways you can help someone develop and use his or her gifts?

Memory verse

Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing. (1 Thessalonians 5:11)

Want to learn more?

Free online Bible study

Encourage One Another. Say Encouraging Words Daily
www.dougbrittonbooks.com/resources/encourage-others

Marriage book by Doug Britton

Encouraging Your Spouse
www.dougbrittonbooks.com/bookstore/encourage

5. When people have problems, what is the best way to help them?

6. Name three people you will encourage in the next two days.

a. Person's name:

What you will say to encourage him or her:

b. Person's name:

What you will say to encourage him or her:

c. Person's name:

What you will say to encourage him or her:

7. Who is someone who has encouraged you? What did he or she say? If you have not thanked this person for encouraging you, write a plan to thank him or her:

Day Five: Answer Key to Test (may be removed by leader)

Note to teachers and small group leaders

Remove this page if you do not want group members to see these answers ahead of time.

True or false

- F 1. Jesus said it's okay to hate your enemy.
- T 2. Jesus said you must pray for your enemy.
- F 3. Jesus said you must do whatever your enemy says.
- F 4. Loving others as-is means not being aware of their faults.
- F 5. Loving others as-is means never confronting anyone.
- F 6. Listening to understand is not very important.
- T 7. The way you talk is usually more important than whether you are right or wrong.
- T 8. God wants our words to be things of beauty.
- F 9. We should not encourage other people or they will never grow close to Jesus.
- F 10. The best thing we can do when someone has been wounded is to give advice.

Memory verses

- 1. Proverbs 10:19
When words are many, sin is not absent, but he who holds his tongue is wise.

- 2. Proverbs 10:11
The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life.



About the Author

Doug Britton, Bible-based Marriage and Family Therapist, has helped hundreds of thousands of people as a therapist, clinical director of a treatment center, seminar speaker, radio co-host, and author of over twenty books that show people how to apply God's truths in their daily lives.

He has also trained pastors, counselors, mentors, and lay leaders in biblical counseling, mentoring, and small group leadership.

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Books

Doug has written Bible-based books on many daily-living topics. Visit www.dougbrittonbooks.com/bookstore.

Free online Bible studies for daily living

Read and download Doug's free online studies on marriage, parenting, anger, self-concept, anxiety, depression, temptation, fear of death, biblical counseling, mentoring, small group leadership, and other topics. Visit www.dougbrittonbooks.com/resources.

Seminars and retreats

Doug is the founder and president of LifeTree Institute and LifeTree Books. If you would like him or another member of the LifeTree team to speak in your church on any of the above topics, please visit www.dougbrittonbooks.com and click on the "Seminars" link.

We would love to hear from you

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More Books by Doug Britton

In addition to “The Owner’s Manual to the New You,” Doug Britton has written many more cross-cultural, Bible-based books on leadership, discipleship, and key areas of daily living.

Growing in Christ

Getting Started, Getting Connected
First Things First
Living by Grace

Living Free

Breaking Free (from Drugs and Alcohol)
Conquering Depression
Defeating Temptation
Healing Life’s Hurts
Overcoming Jealousy and Insecurity
Six Keys to Personal Growth
Six Keys to Successful Relationships
Strengthening Your Marriage
Victory over Grumpiness, Irritation, & Anger
Who Do You Think You Are?

Marriage by the Book

Laying a Solid Foundation
Making Christ the Cornerstone
Encouraging Your Spouse
Extending Grace to Your Mate
Talking with Respect and Love
Improving Your Teamwork
Putting Money in its Place
Celebrating Intimacy and Romance

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