



Imitating His Steps

Not many of us have probably ever climbed a snow covered mountain. But from my husband's experience and books I've read, I've learned that climbers generally try to follow the footsteps in the snow of climbers who have gone before them. It's much easier to step in another's prints and not have to "break through" the snow yourself to find a footing. The other advantage is that the person who has gone ahead has already discovered the safest route to take. He's discovered the deep crevices and unsure footings. He's avoided the potential slides and thin ledges. This is the way to the top.

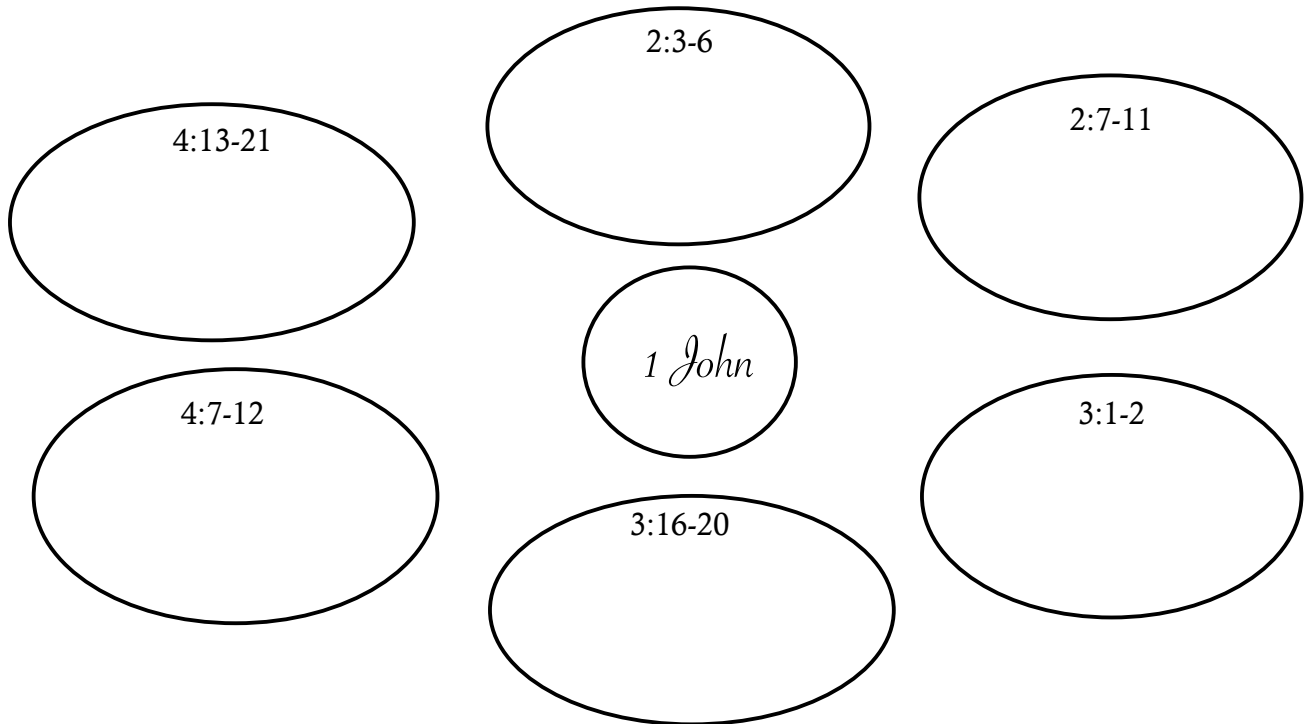
Serving one another is all about following in Christ's steps. He came to serve, he led the way through life and he gave us direction through his Word. His route may still be a "hard climb" but it's the easiest path through this life.

Let us begin with some direction from 1 John.

Let's Start with the Gospel

Theme of 1 John: That you may have fellowship...he addresses them as "dear children" often throughout. John had actually "walked" with Jesus (and was possibly even his first cousin)

Read and highlight the key thoughts from each of the following passages in 1 John.



- † 2:3-6 *We have come to know God – and God's love is made complete in those who obey His words*
- † 2:7-11 *whoever loves his brother lives in the light – hate leads to darkness*
- † 3:1-2 *How great is the love the Father has lavished on us – we are his children*
- † 3:16-20 *We know what love is – Jesus Christ laid down his life for us*
- † 4:7-12 *Love one another, for love comes from God – whoever does not love does not know God*
- † 4:13-21 *He has given us his spirit and we live in God. God is Love. Whoever loves God must love his brother.*

Where Jesus Leads

1. What kind act(s) did Jesus perform in each of these passages? *Skim for the key thoughts.*

- † Mark 6:34-44 *He saw a large group & had compassion on them – feeding of 5000*
- † Luke 8:43-48 *He healed the woman who had been subject to bleeding for 12 years*
- † John 8:1-11 *the woman caught in adultery – if any of you is without sin, let him throw... (forgiveness of sin)*
- † Titus 3:4-6 *he saved us because of his mercy – NOT because of righteous things we'd done*

2. What does Jesus teach us in the following passages?

- † Luke 16:19-25 *Rich man and Lazarus...it only matters what we store up in heaven*
- † Luke 10:27 *Love one another – love God, love your neighbor as yourself.*
- † Matthew 25:35-40 *For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat...
Caring for others is caring for Jesus...even when we're oblivious that it's him.*

3. What attitudes do we need to have toward others according to Philippians 2:3-5.

- † *³Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. ⁴Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. ⁵Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus*

The Greek is "the everything of everyone"

Our encouragement. . .

4. What is one act of encouragement someone did for you that you will never forget?

5. Who doesn't thrive on encouragement? Where does our encouragement come from?

- † Romans 15:5 *⁵May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, Christian brothers and sisters*
- † 2 Thessalonians 2:16-17 *¹⁶May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, ¹⁷encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word.*
- † Matthew 14:14-17 *Even though God was right with them, the disciples looked to themselves for a solution...then Jesus stepped in with the solution and encouraged them with his actions. Are we going to Christ? Do we believe he's really there to help?*

6. In the New Testament, Jesus reached out and changed the lives of many people. He brought new strength and healing to those who were suffering. Take a look at these two verses in Matthew:

† Matthew 9:2 ²*Some men brought to him a paralytic, lying on a mat. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven."*

† Matthew 9:22 ²²*Jesus turned and saw her. "Take heart, daughter," he said, "your faith has healed you." And the woman was healed from that moment.*

† Why do you suppose Jesus' first words to these two people were "be encouraged"? What did they have to be encouraged about?

He reminded them that even though they had problems in this life...they had eternal life. They had faith, they were saved!

7. Encouragement is there for us, so long as we know how to find it. **Where do we find it?**

† John 20:31 ³¹*But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.*

† Romans 15:4 ⁴*For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.*

We often think of encouragement as a mood-lifter. It's that little compliment, a bouquet of flowers an unexpected present, or a warm hug. But the encouragement God provides touches us more deeply than that. He doesn't offer a quick fix for when we get depressed. He offers us encouragement for our faith. This encouragement will last longer than a friendly hug or even a bouquet of flowers. It's meant to last us for eternity. And with the Spirit's help, it should have an unparalleled impact in our lives while we remain here on earth.

8. As we talk about encouraging others, whether it's specifically encouraging them in their faith or generally encouraging them in their Christian lives, why is it so important for us to be regularly "in the Word" ourselves?

Unless we are continually being filled with the Spirit, we're not going to have anything to "give out."

9. If we remain in the Scriptures, receiving encouragement and knowledge from God's Word, what effect will it have on us?

† 1 Peter 2:2 ²*Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation,*

10. What does it mean to "grow up" in the Lord?

† Ephesians 4:11-16 *be prepared for works of service to build up the body of Christ - attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ – become firm on our foundation*
Becoming more and more like Christ – stronger and finding that firm foundation.

† 2 Peter 3:18 ¹⁸*But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen.*

11. How does this “growing up” appear in our everyday lives?

† 2 Thessalonians 1:3 ³*We ought always to thank God for you, brothers, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and **the love every one of you has for each other is increasing.***

12. According to 1 John 4:7-8, what is God, and what is the characteristic of a woman who truly knows God?

† 1 John 4:7-8 ⁷*Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. **Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God.*** ⁸*Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.*

13. How are we supposed to love each other?

† John 15:12 ¹²*My command is this: Love each other **as I have loved you.***

† Romans 12:10 ¹⁰*Be devoted to one another **in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves.***

† 1 Peter 1:22 ²²*Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another **deeply, from the heart.***

Because our LORD encourages us, we are better able to give encouragement to those around us.

Now, some women are much better at encouraging and comforting people than others. Maybe you know some of those women? They always have a kind word or a gentle response. They are quick to compliment and give others a “boost.” And the wonderfully spiritual nature of their encouragements tend to give us that gentle nudge toward the Scriptures...whether it’s for guidance or a desire to delve into the Word ourselves. It shouldn’t surprise any of us that encouragement is listed as a spiritual gift in Romans 12:8.

† Romans 12:9-13...recipe for an encourager:

⁹*Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good.* ¹⁰*Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves.* ¹¹*Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord.* ¹²*Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.* ¹³*Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.*

† 1 Corinthians 14:12 ¹²*So it is with you. Since you are eager to have spiritual gifts, try to excel in gifts that **build up the church.***
(which encouragement certainly does)

It’s all connected. It’s actually sort of like a spiral, with ever widening circles. As we dwell in God’s Word and allow the Holy Spirit to work in our hearts, we grow in our faith and are given a deeper and greater understanding of the Lord, our Father and Savior. This shines in our lives and affects how we treat those around us. We are also led to a greater appreciation for the grace and mercy which was bestowed upon us, which grants us the desire to continue to delve into the Scriptures so that we can continue to better know our loving God. This is spiritual growth. A maturing Christian usually grows in a variety of areas of their lives as they grow in the faith.

Learning to follow. . . Discuss and answer the following questions in groups of 3-4. Give 15-20 min

14. As Christians, we should aspire to lead God-pleasing lives. How does Paul describe the ministry of encouragement a believer should have in Titus 1:9? In Titus 2:3-5?

Hold firmly to the trustworthy message – to encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it!

Be reverent in our lives, not slanderers, teach what is good...

Train the younger women...love and be pure...busy at home...so that no one will malign the word of God.

15. Paul knew the value of encouragement. He was always sending messengers back to the churches he'd planted. (And who doesn't find encouragement from a piece of "real" mail from friends?) Who did Paul send out in Colossians 4:7-9? Why does he send them?

Tychicus & Onesimus...that they may encourage your hearts (and fill you in on current events)

16. Paul was a great encourager. He begins many of his Epistles with a very sincere and honest encouragement. (Have different ladies look up and read aloud to the group.)

† Philippians 1:2-5 *remembered and prayed for them because of their partnership in the Gospel*

† Colossians 1:2-4 *prayed for them and grateful for their faith and love of all the saints*

† 1 Thessalonians 1:2-3 *thank God and prayed...remembered their actions prompted by faith and love*

† What example does Paul set for us? *Pray and remember the other Christians and be thankful for the faith they do have...in each letter Paul goes on to instruct and teach.*

17. How does the writer to the Hebrews encourage us to live?

† Hebrews 10:24-25 ²⁴ *And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds.* ²⁵ *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.*

What do you know about spurs?

Spurs are designed to produce pain – this may hurt.

18. What else can we take unexpected encouragement from according to Hebrews 12:5?

⁵ *And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons: "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you,*

He will discipline because he loves – otherwise he wouldn't bother with us.

Is there anything from your group's discussion that you'd like to share with everyone? Any observations or thoughts? Any encouragements?

In all the trips Paul and his friends took, in all the letters (Epistles) he sent, what made them such a source of encouragement? Why were they so valuable?

He truly cared for all aspects of their lives and their continuing growth in their faith.

So full of love and building up these Christians – great books of encouragement

What did Paul often do in his letters that we find difficult, even with close family and friends? Why did he do it?

He had to instruct and tell them what they were doing wrong or what false doctrines they were falling into to.

Sharing doesn't come easily to us. It's the first good behavior our parents try to coax out of us. God asks us to share freely of our resources and possessions to help other believers when they are in need. Have you ever considered that sharing words of encouragement and testimonies of God's power in your life would also be welcome gifts to others?

19. Is your faith a part of your daily life? Do you talk about it with your friends? Do you discuss it with your children? Acquaintances? Do you encourage others in their faith? Or is it just for Sunday mornings?

Is your faith work? Or is it a joy welling up inside you and bursting to share?

It's a little ironic that sometimes ministry families are the least likely to share their faith or be in the Word for personal growth and encouragement. Yet it happens often. Sometimes, because it's our husband's job (and ours as well), our faith starts to feel more like a duty. We may start to treat it as a 9-5 thing. We don't talk about our faith or grace outside of church because we've gotten enough of it "at work." Sometimes we don't even talk about it at church and with our members because we're nervous, or we feel people don't "want to hear it" or we just don't think to bring our faith into the conversation.

20. How can we encourage the faith of our sisters in Christ if we never talk about the faith we share? Often, it's difficult to share our faith because we've never really considered what it means to us or how to put that meaning into words. Take a moment now to consider...

Encourage the ladies to take a moment and consider these...maybe even jot a few points down. But really to take it home and fill it out.

- † Why am I a Christian?
- † What do I believe about who Jesus was/is? Why?
- † Why do I go to church and study the Bible?
- † Why is it "such a big deal"?
- † What does Christianity mean for my everyday life? What comfort do I receive? What strength?

Your testimony of God's faithfulness may be all a person needs to give them the determination to persevere through trials they are facing right now.

Be an Encourager!

21. Often we hope people will be encouraged by our mere presence. After all, it takes a good amount of effort just to show up some days! What excuses do we have for avoiding a commitment to encouraging others?

Too busy, too tired, not enough time...

Fear of what others might think... what does she want now?

My family is more important (not necessarily untrue)

It's too much work or effort...

22. Name some of the cultural influences that may be distracting you from other's needs.

Our culture is very self-centered and focused on building ourselves up rather than others.

We're praised for being super busy and active

Political correctness / church vs state / Being afraid to offend anyone

23. Contrast today's cultural influences with what the following Scriptures say.

† Romans 8:6-8 ⁶The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; ⁷the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. ⁸Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God.

Philippians 4:8 ⁸Finally, 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.* *Contrast to the movies, music, TV, etc.*

† Colossians 3:1-2 ¹Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. ²Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. *Contrast to materialism*

24. What does Jesus ask us to do in John 13:5-17?

Stoop to the level of a servant and "wash one another's feet." Serve with all humility.

† What does this mean for us as Christian women? How will this instruction be carried out in your life?

A guideline for what we should be doing...

How can we serve in such a manner?

Jesus was willing to do a slave's job by washing his disciples' feet. And when he was done, He told His disciples they should serve one another too. Jesus didn't say we would always be appreciated. He didn't say we'd never be taken for granted. What He asks of us is to love and to serve. After all, it is the Lord Jesus Christ you are serving.

²⁴since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.

Colossians 3:24

25. How many lives touch yours on a regular basis? How many people are you “connected” to?

26. What does encouragement “look like”? *Skim these passages for the answers.*

In each of these passages, who is the encourager and what are they doing?

- † Judges 4:4-9 *Debra had to share God’s will and then went with Barak to support him*
- † Job 2:11-13 *Job’s friends just sat with him – just their presence was encouragement*
- † Mark 14:3-9 *Mary washed Jesus feet with perfume*
- † Acts 4:36-37 *Barnabas (son of encouragement) gave land and wealth*
- † Hebrews 12:1 *cloud of witnesses who surround us as we “run the race”*

Think of marathon runners...especially on those last 3 miles they get such a boost and burst of energy when even complete strangers along the route offer encouragement to them...it pushes them on

And our cloud of witnesses can even include those who Christians who “shout” to us from the scriptures. What a boost!

† Consider what aspects of people’s lives would benefit from encouragement?

† How can we give them that needed boost?

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THEREFORE
ENCOURAGE
ONE ANOTHER
AND
BUILD
ONE ANOTHER UP
JUST AS YOU ARE DOING
I THESSALONIANS 5:11

27. Encouragement may take a little effort, but it’s fun! Let’s get creative.

† Our husbands:

2 Corinthians 4:7-9 *⁷But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. ⁸We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; ⁹persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.*

Our respect and admiration (obedience)

Our example and lives which reflect upon his ministry

† Our family:

Proverbs 31:28
her:

²⁸ Her children arise and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises

her.
Being a positive mom, grandma, daughter, sister, etc.

† Friends:

2 Corinthians 9:13 ¹³*Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, men will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else.*

† Our members:

Ephesians 4:16 ¹⁶*From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.*

*Our Christian example
Kind words and thoughtfulness*

† Strangers and Unbelievers we meet:

Colossians 2:2 ²*My purpose is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ,*

*Sharing our faith
Leading a loving, Christian life...winning them with our attitudes*

It doesn't take much to brighten someone's day. All that's needed is something a little out of the ordinary. And often, when we don't have time to put that card in the mail, a listening ear, a shared experience, or a kind smile can be that "boost" someone needed to get them through the day.

Closing Prayer

Dearest Savior,

You came down from your heavenly throne to teach, to lead, and to be our substitute. We humbly thank you for your wondrous example and ask that you grant us your Spirit in abundance that we may hope to follow in your footsteps. We long to have the love of the Father made complete in us. Lead us to your Word, that it may dwell in us. Fill us with your love that it may flow out of us into the lives of others. Help us to put other's needs before our own and to encourage all who's lives we touch as Christ did. Thank you for the gifts you give and the assurance that you will continue to bless and comfort and strengthen us.

In your name we pray,

Almighty Encourager,

Amen