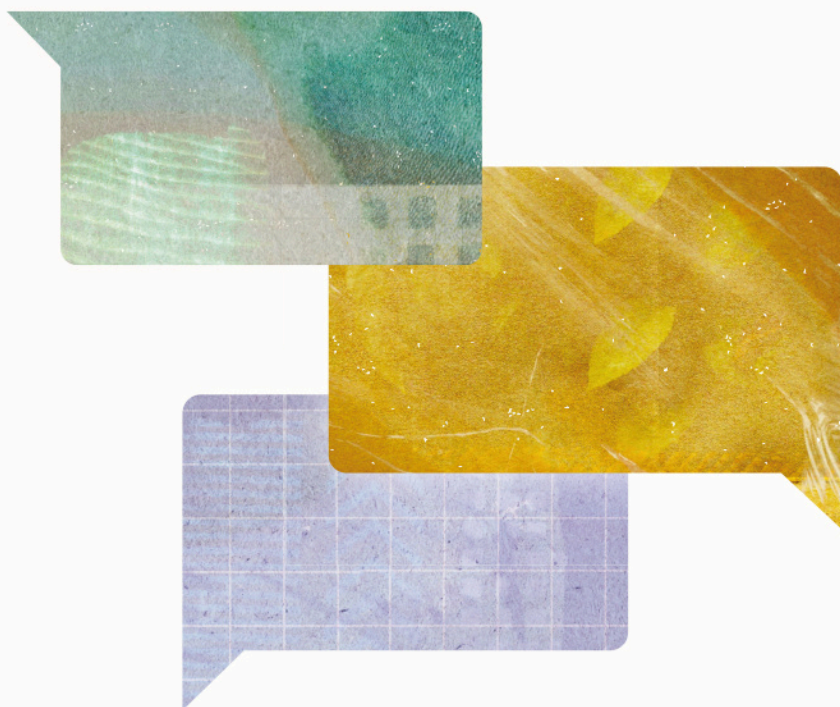


A Seven Session Course

Encouraging Conversations

Building Each Other Up
with How We Talk



Andrew Nicholls

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Encouraging Conversations

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Contents

Introduction	5
Session One: We Are Part of a Body	7
Session Two: Life Is Hard (and We Make It Worse)	15
Session Three: We Can Ask for Help	27
Session Four: God Equips Me to Be Helpful	37
Session Five: Listening Well	47
Session Six: Speaking Well	53
Session Seven: Looking Up and Looking Out	63
Optional Session: Listening to People Who Are Different	73
Notes for Leaders	81
Acknowledgements	95

Introduction

Welcome to *Encouraging Conversations*. By the end of this course, with God's help, you will have become better Christian friends to each other. You'll have seen from God's word, and from talking together, just how precious you are to each other and how the words you say can be among God's greatest blessings to others.

Among all the conversations we have as we go through our weeks and months, the ones Christians have are unique, because they help us go to our heavenly Father for what we need. So the purpose of these sessions is not simply to encourage you as Christians to have conversations. It's to equip you as Christians to have genuinely and uniquely *encouraging* conversations, as you share what's going on in your lives and build one another up to find strength in Christ.

Over the coming sessions, you'll see two vitally important truths. First, how God has made us all need help from each other. And second, how God enables us to be helpful in the lives of other people through how we listen and what we say.

In each session, there will be time to watch a video, to hear from and respond to God's word, to pray, and to discuss together what you're

hearing and thinking about. There will also be something to seek to put into practice as you go about normal life in between each session.

And, throughout the weeks, there will be opportunities to have a go at enacting the ideas that you're thinking about. Because we are all growing together and growing new skills, it's absolutely okay to make mistakes along the way. After all, most conversations aren't perfect! But, by God's grace and as a result of what we look at together over these sessions, what you say in your conversations can become ways that you build others up in Jesus in real and lasting ways—and ways in which you are built up in your faith too.

Session One

We Are Part of a Body



**Watch Intro
Video** (5 mins)

Pray (1 min)

Read Ephesians 4:1-16 (3 mins)

¹ As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. ² Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. ³ Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. ⁴ There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; ⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism; ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

⁷ But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. ⁸ This is why it says:

*"When he ascended on high,
he took many captives
and gave gifts to his people."*

⁹ (What does “he ascended” mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions? ¹⁰ He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.) ¹¹ So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, ¹² to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up ¹³ until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

¹⁴ Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming.

¹⁵ Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. 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.



Watch Session
One Video (5 mins)

Part One: I Am Part of a Bigger Body

Read 1 Corinthians 12:4-20 (2 mins)

⁴ There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. ⁵ There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord.

⁶ There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work.

⁷ Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. ⁸ To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, ⁹ to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, ¹⁰ to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. ¹¹ All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines.

¹² Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. ¹³ For we were all baptised by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. ¹⁴ And so the body is not made up of one part but of many.

¹⁵ Now if the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. ¹⁶ And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. ¹⁷ If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would

the sense of smell be? ¹⁸ But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. ¹⁹ If they were all one part, where would the body be? ²⁰ As it is, there are many parts, but one body.

Whole-Group/Pairs Discussion (15 mins)

Discuss the following questions. You might like to split into pairs and threes to do so.

- How does the picture of a body in these verses help us to understand how God has made the church and its members?

- If we are made to need each other, why do you think we often find it hard to ask for help?

- If you were going to think of yourself as a part of the body of the church, which part do you think you would be? In your discussion, help each other think about your answers.

(To give you some examples, one pastor once described himself as a stomach, digesting the food of God's word and making it available to the rest of the body—important for life, but not very attractive to look at! Someone who prays for the church every day might say they are a toe—invisible but very important in holding up the rest of the body. Someone who unlocks the doors each week and puts out chairs so people can meet and sit together might say they are like the joints or ligaments that allow the bits of the body to be close to each other! You can think creatively, and there are no particular right answers—except to remember that Jesus himself is the head!)

Quite often, people feel uncertain about the part God has given them to play in the life of the church. It's helpful to remember that, as you have just seen, God has given every single member of the church a part to play in order for your church to be what he wants it to be. We may not always see what our part is, but we can ask God for help to discern it, and in the meantime aim to make sure we treat each person as equally valuable. If some of you in the group are not sure how you fit in the church and what your contribution is, it's important for you to remember that God says this really does apply to you too—see especially verses 6 and 11!

According to the end of this chapter, God says that every part of the body is crucial, but some people might not think they are important at all...

Read 1 Corinthians 12:21-26:

²¹ The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!" ²² On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, ²³ and the parts that we think are less honourable we treat with special honour. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated

with special modesty, ²⁴ while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has put the body together, giving greater honour to the parts that lacked it, ²⁵ so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. ²⁶ If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honoured, every part rejoices with it.

- How do these verses describe the parts of the body which might seem less impressive (or “honourable”)? How should they be treated?

- Churches do not always give special honour to the parts that lack it. How do these verses prompt you to pray for your church? Are there “weaker parts” who you want to give thanks for? Are there things you want to ask for God’s help to change?

These verses make clear that God has made some people to be parts of the body who get especially cared for. Of course, which of us those people are may change as we move in to and out of different seasons of life. But in a culture where we are being told that we prove our worth by being productive, this can be hard to get used to.

Part Two: I Need the Body to Grow

Whole-Group Discussion (15 mins)

Paul uses this picture of church as a body to emphasise how much we need each other—no one can say, “I don’t need you” to any other member of the body (v 21). Spend some time talking about how your church and its people help you to grow as a Christian. You might try to think of examples of some of the following:

- *People who show me what it looks like to be patient*
- *People who are better than me at loving other people in a costly way*
- *People who are good at encouraging me when I am struggling*
- *People who remember to pray for me*
- *People who help me understand God’s word*
- *People who persevere when things are hard for them*
- *People who look a bit more like Jesus than I do*
- *People who can tell me straight when I do things wrong*
- *People who are good at answering questions when I have them*
- *People who serve me cheerfully*
- *People who are gracious when life is difficult for them*
- *People who are good at asking for help from others*
- *People who are good at receiving help from others*
- *People who are almost always gentle with other people*
- *People who are available to help others*

- How do these people help you personally to grow as a Christian?
How different would it be if you had none of these people around you to help you?

Some of these people might be with you as you talk together—don't be afraid to speak directly about how you value them! Paul nearly always begins his letters with heartfelt appreciation for the people to whom he is writing. Remember that the goal is not to fish for compliments from others so you feel reassured about your part, but to appreciate the things in others that help you to grow. Equally, do accept others' encouragement, and allow yourself to feel encouraged if someone shares a way that they are grateful for you.

Prayer (5 mins)

Spend some time thanking God for the great things you have been recognising as his gifts in each other.

Homework

Next week we will spend some time thinking about some of the hard things in life that we need help with from the other parts of the church body that God has placed us in. So spend some time this week noticing what is difficult in your life and, if you can, in the lives of other members of your church. Write down some examples you notice to share when you meet next time. This will not be to gossip or undermine others, but to grow our understanding of things that are hard in our lives.