

Pieces of a Puzzle

In my travels, I've noticed that riots happen in all different countries, in different ways and for different reasons! In the United States, the 60's were a time of many riots and demonstrations, some against the government and war, some to show support for women's rights. In China, we've followed the results of riots for freedom and seen the changes they have brought. In Latin America, we often experience riots showing displeasure from any change, from a raise in bus fare to disgust with visiting presidents. We've been advised to not travel to the Middle East, as rioting between Muslims and Jews is so intense. Riots are frightening things! They are filled with energy, mostly negative, and bring a feeling of lack of control. They are self-feeding and build to a crescendo, until more and more action results. Did you know that we are encouraged to cause a sort of "riot" amongst fellow Christians? The literal word is to "incite" and is used in our passage today in Hebrews 4. We are to stimulate and incite others to love and good deeds. True...a very different kind of riot, but still, an energy-producing, result-felt riot that will have positive and productive consequences!



Fellowship

1. Share with the group something that someone did to encourage you or helped you this week.



Discipleship

There are two things that no one has yet been able to do by themselves: 1) get married, and 2) live the Christian life.

God has created us to be connected to one another, and we can't live the Christian life alone! Let's read together Hebrews 10:23-25.

“Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. 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.”

In Bible college, first year students are sometimes given an assignment in which they must make 100 observations...about a penny! Try to do it sometime: 10 *different*

characteristics. It's not easy! But the point of the exercise is to train students to go about Bible study with the same scrutiny. That's what we want to do with this Hebrews passage...and what we are to do in our Christian lives! The Amplified Bible says to "consider and give attentive, continuous care to watching over one another, **studying** how we may stir up/stimulate/incite to love and helpful deeds and noble activities." This command carries with it the idea of "irritating" one another...and indeed...sometimes when others incite us to do good, it is irritating! The youth pastor of our church recently challenged the youth to delete all illegal, pirated copies of "free" songs the kids had downloaded from the internet! He pointed out that although no one else knew they had "stolen" the songs without paying for them, God knew and it wasn't right! This was convicting for all the kids, but only half went ahead and followed their consciences. The other half were irritated, all right...but his inciting them to good deeds just produced an unproductive rebellion. The key to this verse and fruit-bearing in general is to be open to the constructive criticism and help of others as they fulfill this verse! We need the help, advice and feedback of others so we can be like iron sharpening iron! Spouses can be irritating too, can't they? Oftentimes they can see most clearly ways to stimulate us to be the best we can be.

Think about the best friends you have in your life. Chances are, they aren't just people who always tell you what you want to hear. If every time you asked your friend how you looked in a certain outfit and you heard, "Super!" you would start to doubt his honesty and trustworthiness. It may sound good to the ear, but it wouldn't help you to look better if the clothes were not flattering! Or, have you ever returned after hours of being with people, smiling to all you came in contact with...only to find a piece of spinach stuck in your teeth? How embarrassing...and frustrating to realize that although lots of people could have pointed it out, no one wanted to be the one to cause you a moment of discomfort...and were willing to cause you 3 hours of green smiles! Painful as it may be, we need the honesty and challenge our friends provide.

But the key to allowing the truth to produce the most fruitful result is "teachable ness". In fact, one professor challenged the girls in his college class to choose their husbands based on how teachable they are! He said that if they are just teachable...they will have potential to grow, change and love them far more than any other single quality (besides knowing Christ). Just like those kids in the youth group had a decision to make -- what they would do with the truth, whether to be teachable or not, whether they would grow up in Christ—we have those same choices to make each day.

What we decide will determine whether we **grow up** in Christ, or **grow old** in Christ. It's been said that to grow old in Christ, all you need to do is get up every morning! Growing up in Christ, however, can't be done alone. I love to camp, and an indispensable part of camping is roasting marshmallows. An indispensable part of roasting marshmallows is the bonfire. As I carefully constructed my fires throughout the years, I noticed that it was when I had the sticks, paper and other dry materials all leaning together and lending their heat, that's when I had the best fire. One stick burns out quickly alone...but when they all lend their heat to the other, I got the best result possible. As a church, we come together and share our gifts, worship and support to others. If you are having a great day,

be assured that someone else is struggling, and you may be the missing piece of the puzzle to meet his need!

2. Re-read Hebrews 10:23-25. What does verse 23 tell us we hope for as Christians?

3. Why is it so important to meet together (verse 25)?



Ministry

4. How can we help others hold onto this hope during hard times?

5. What kind of “love and good deeds” do you think verse 24 is talking about?

6. How do you need others to incite you to become a better person?

7. What form of “correction” *discourages* you rather than *encourages* you?

8. How can you encourage someone in this group this week?



Evangelism

9. Role-play a fun challenge for this coming week. Ask a fellow small group member how they are. Follow up their answer with a more probing one. For example, to a simple, “Fine”...you may say, “Really? Well, what is one thing I can pray for you about?” Or, “On a scale of 1-10...how is your day going today?” Plan a few scenarios and see what doors of opportunity God opens to minister encouragement to those you meet this week!



Worship

10. Take some time thanking God that you are assembled here with the opportunity to encourage each other! Share any prayer requests you have and write them down to remember to pray for them during the week.