



# The Backpack



*A Navigator Resource  
to help you on  
the Christian Journey*

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*The Navigators of NZ is a non-profit (and non-denominational) organisation that aims to help people find Good News for their life through the story and life of Jesus. We work with people in the areas of developing character, vision and practical skills so that they can follow Jesus in their everyday world. However, this is never just for their own benefit. We help people with the aim of them going on to also help others. The Navigators of NZ is also part of an international organisation - The Navigators – which is involved in over 100 countries around the world. If you'd like any more info on this, just make contact with us: [info@navigators.org.nz](mailto:info@navigators.org.nz).*



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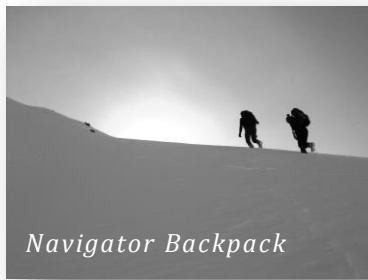
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## Introduction to the Backpack

Life is a journey...

Yes, it's a well-worn cliché, but before rolling your eyes, let's suspend judgment and imagine for a moment that life really *is* a journey. What would you need for the trip?

Like any good trip, you'd want to know where you are going, you'd want some travelling companions to go with you, and you'd want to have the right skills and equipment to get you there safely. And you would carry some of these things in a *backpack*.

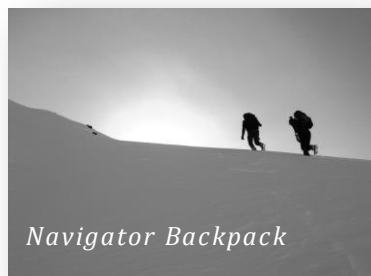
In our walk with Jesus through this life, there are some things that we will find helpful to *know* and to be able to *do*. The Navigator Backpack is a series of short studies addressing some of these things. It is divided into 3 sections:



These studies aren't everything you need to know about everything. After all, a backpack isn't a caravan or a holiday home – it's just a backpack. Neither are they designed to get you there alone. They are best used when worked through with someone else... for example, a person who has been on the journey a little longer helping a newer traveller on the way.

So, if you've been on this faith journey a little while, can we encourage you to use the Backpack with someone who could benefit from your help. And if you are fairly new to it, find an 'experienced traveller' you trust and admire and suggest you work through it together.

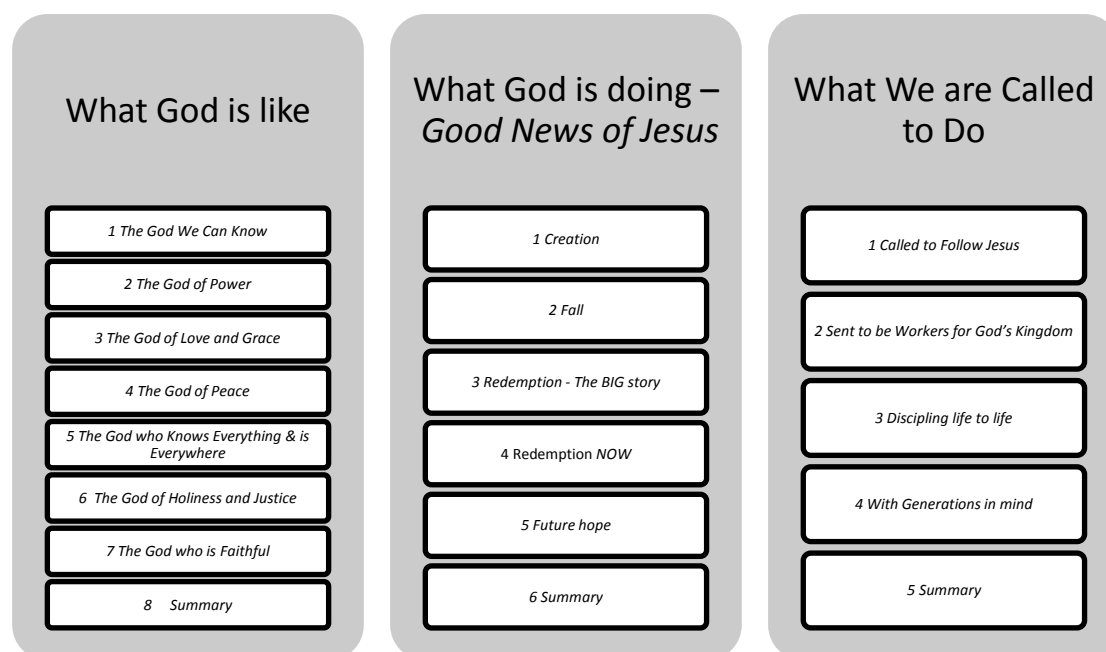
Whatever the case, give this a go, because this journey is just too important to make unprepared.



## Things We Need to know

As the name suggests, this section of the Backpack deals with *things we need to know*. What is the author of our journey – God – like? Where have we come from? Where are we headed? What sort of journey is this? How should we travel? What sort of travellers should we be?

This section is divided into 3 parts, with each part having a number of short studies in it, as follows:



Each study is 2 pages and we would encourage you to spend half the time looking at it by yourself, and the other half talking it through with someone else... because this is a journey in which we really need each others help.

So please read, pray, share your life and open your heart. And let's trust that the LORD of ALL will meet you to encourage, inspire and challenge you in significant ways.

Enjoy!





*Things we need to know:*

# *What God is like*

*“In the beginning God...”*

This is how our story, the Bible, begins. God was already present before anything happened, and He is there at the end of the story calling us into the future. From one end of time to the other, He is the *LORD of ALL!*

Although God is beyond our reach, and we cannot by our own efforts understand who He is, He chooses to reach out to us, inviting us to know and relate to Him, the Maker of everything. He offers us eternity to know Him for only in the pursuit of Him will we find our ultimate satisfaction in life (John 17:3).

Gaining this knowledge of God is worth every ounce of sweat and effort we can give, because more than anything else, it will shape how we see the world, how we see others, how we see ourselves and how we choose to live.

Psalm 46:10 says, “Be still and know that I AM God”. May you enter into these studies with a prayerful expectation that you will encounter the Living God, and as you do so, you will only become more alive yourself.

The studies are as follows:

- 1 *The God We Can Know*
- 2 *The God of Power*
- 3 *The God of Love and Grace*
- 4 *The God of Peace*
- 5 *The God who Knows Everything & is Everywhere*
- 6 *The God of Holiness and Justice*
- 7 *The God who is Faithful*
- 8 *Summary*



# 1. The God We Can Know

You can learn some 'external' facts about a person by using your investigation skills, but to really know someone, they need to be willing to be open with you... they need to reveal who they really are.

The Bible paints a picture of a God who does just that with us. God longs to show us who he really is, and throughout the Scriptures we see a progression of God revealing himself to the world in a way that they can understand, building on the knowledge and experience of the previous generations. The story reaches its highest moment in the Gospels where God himself comes to earth in the person of Jesus, and through his death, resurrection and ascension the Lord gives us free access to know and approach him through his Spirit in us. This is Good News indeed!



## Things to do/ Questions to consider

Read through at least one passage from each bullet point below, and note down the things you observe about how God is revealing himself through:

- ❖ **The Bible** – 2Timothy 3:16-17, Hebrews 4:12, Psalm 119:130
- ❖ **His Creation** – John 1:1-5, Psalm 19:1-4, Isaiah 45:18-19
- ❖ **His Own Chosen People** – Exodus 6:1-8, and Exodus 33:12-34:9
- ❖ **Jesus Christ** – John 1:9-18, Hebrews 1:1-3, John 14:5-14
- ❖ **The Holy Spirit living IN us** – John 14:15-21 and John 16:5-15
- ❖ **Our promised future with God** – Revelation 21:1-7 and 22:1-6

*For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.*  
Jeremiah 29:11-13

*Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.*

Hebrews 4:16

- In what ways has God revealed himself to you thus far in your life?  
When have you felt the most free to approach him?

- Read the additional thoughts in the box on the right. As you consider these points as well as your answers to the questions above, write down any thoughts you have been particularly struck by in terms of how God reveals himself so that we can know him.

- **Spend some time praying:**

*Thank God for what you have learnt*

*Ask God to help you put some of these learnt things into practice*

*Ask God to help some of your friends know him better*

### ***Some thoughts on God's revelation of Himself...***

John 1:3 the message of God is woven into the very fabric of the universe.

Exodus 6:1-8 As God comes and introduces himself to various people throughout the Bible, he continually builds on the knowledge of previous generations' and on what he has already revealed of himself.

Exodus 33:15-23 God wants to be known but there needs to be a humble attitude in approaching the Lord for, in every way, he is more than we can handle.

Hebrews 1:3: In Jesus we see, very tangibly, what God is like. He displays the glory of God and is the exact representation of his being. If we want to know what God is like, we look at Jesus.

By receiving the Holy Spirit, God's peoples' experience of him goes from being an outward or external relationship to an internal knowing and relating, closer than is possible with any other human.

Because of Jesus' death, God's people now have unlimited access to Him. Hebrews 4:16

## ***Thought to finish***

From start to finish, the Bible tells the story of God who searches for lost people (Gen 3:9) and longs for real relationship with us (Rev 3:20). But sadly, the 'noise' in our busy lives regularly stops us from hearing and seeing the Lord of the Universe who is seeking us out. He calls to us, "Be still and know that I AM God" (Ps46:10) but too often our hearts have lost the sensitivity to feel and respond (Mat 13:13-15). Fortunately the Lord is persistent. He who raised Christ from the dead is able to give hearing to our ears, sight to our eyes, and feeling to our hearts so that we can see and know him. So, as the writer of Hebrews tells us:

*"Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts... See to it, brothers and sisters, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called "Today," so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness..."*

*"Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts..." Hebrews 3:7-15*

**Today** is the day to respond to the One who wants to be known by us. How will you respond?





## 2. The God of Power

Power is measured by how much strength, ability, control and authority you have. As we read through the Bible, it becomes clear that God has maximum amounts of all of these, and so we can rightly call Him the All-Powerful, Sovereign Lord. There is nothing that can defeat him or his purposes; he can accomplish whatever he wills to do.

In all of this, however, he is no crazed and oppressive tyrant. Rather, he is motivated by love so that, not only is God all-powerful, but he uses his power for the good of his people!



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### ***Things to do/ Questions to consider***

Read through some of the following passages, noting down anything you see with regards to...

- ❖ The extent of God's power
- ❖ How God chooses to use his power
- ❖ What this power means both for his people and for those who are against him

Psalms 33

Exodus 14:29-15:18

Isaiah 40:12-31

Mark 4:35-41

Ephesians 1:18-23 and 3:14-21

Philippians 2:5-11

*"...for I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand and I will accomplish all my purposes.'"*

Isaiah 46:9-11

*"Ah, Lord God! It is you who have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and by your outstretched arm! Nothing is too hard for you."*

Jeremiah 32: 17

- When I underestimate God's power, how does it affect my thoughts...

- ❖ about me?
- ❖ about others?
- ❖ about life in general?

*"I am the LORD, the God of all mankind. Is anything too hard to me?"* Jer 32:27

*Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God."* Mark 10:27

*I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.* Philippians 4:13

- Taking into account what you've studied here as well as what you already know, write down any thoughts you have that particularly strike you in terms of God and his power.

- **Memorise a verse** to help you remember how the God of power can help you in everyday situations. (For example, Philippians 4:13)

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### ***Thought to finish***

God calls his people to be a part of his plan to free the world, and he gives them access to his power for the sake of this mission. But too often, we don't grasp the reality of this and so we can be extremely limited by our fears.

This was true for Moses. When God called him in the desert and sent him to Pharaoh to free the Israelites from slavery (Exodus 3), Moses first response was *"Who am I (a nobody, desert-wanderer) to go to Pharaoh (the superpower of the world)?"* God replied *"I will be with you"*, and ultimately that would make the difference. Moses got there in the end, but it took him a while to trust God on this.



That was okay for Moses, but what might the Lord say to us? *"All authority on heaven and earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations... And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age"* (Mat 28:18-20). Like Moses, we have been sent on a co-mission with God to free those around us from slavery. Like Moses, we receive the same promise from the God of all power: *"I am with you always"*. If the All-Powerful Lord is really with us and on our side in this, what difference should this make for us? How will you respond?



### 3. *The God of Love & Grace*

God loves people. This love for us is wider, longer, higher and deeper than we can ever get to the end of, and what it's like is well-described in 1Corinthians 13 (see box on the left). This love works itself out in *Grace*:

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonour others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.

*1 Corinthians 13:4-8*

the kind, open-handed, big-hearted, giving to others at a cost to self. Grace is the undeserved gift of God that is motivated by love, and this is at the centre of what God is like. He alone chooses to show love and mercy to those who are undeserving and have no merit, and apart from this grace of God we cannot not be saved. Amazingly, he chooses to show this love and grace to you and me!



#### ***Things to do/ Questions to consider***

Read through some of the following passages, noting down anything you see with regards to...

- ❖ the nature of love
- ❖ some of the ways that God's love and grace are given to people
- ❖ what difference this love and grace makes for his people

Psalms 103

Isaiah 53

Matthew 20:1-16

John 1:14-18

John 15:9-17

Romans 8:28-39

1 John 4:7-21

*The LORD your God is with you, the Mighty Warrior who saves. He will take great delight in you; in his love he will no longer rebuke you, but will rejoice over you with singing."*

*Zephaniah 3:17*

- When I underestimate God's love and grace, how does it affect my thoughts...

- ❖ about me?
- ❖ about others?
- ❖ about life in general?

*"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast."*

Ephesians 2:8-9

*"For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich."*

2 Corinthians 8:9

- In what ways or situations have you felt most connected with God's love and a recipient of his grace?

- Although my conscious mind may agree that God is loving and gracious, does my outward life demonstrate that he is? Take some time to think prayerfully about what I could change in my life to better reflect this reality.

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### ***Thought to finish***

In the business world, the market economy sets the rules, and the most basic rule is that you need to give something in order to get something. As they say, 'There's no such thing as a free lunch!'

But in the bigger reality of God's world, this is not the way. The rules to life are derived from the character of God – of who God is – and the most basic rule is love and grace. God continually takes the initiative to do good to us, not because we deserve it, but because it is in God's nature to love. The grace of God is a form of reckless generosity that doesn't calculate what might be gained in exchange for doing something nice; rather, to be loving and generous is what God does, just because! It may make no sense to the business world, but it makes the world of difference to us. Does this make sense to you?





## 4. *The God of Peace*

Peace is more than just the absence of conflict. It is a total and complete state of well-being, a unity in relationship, a wholeness of fellowship.

At the Creation of the world, the Lord took the formless and empty earth and created order, beauty and meaning out of the chaos. But as the first humans rebelled against God, the Fall sent humanity into a spin of angst, selfishness, war and guilt as they fought against God, against each other and against themselves. Only the God of peace could bring *reconciliation* out of the mess; only he could overcome this state of war with an everlasting peace that truly prevails.



### ***Things to do/ Questions to consider***

Read through some of the following passages, noting down what they tell us about God's peace and reconciliation and any implications this has for the way we relate to...

- ❖ God
- ❖ Each other
- ❖ Ourselves and our inner life

Isaiah 9:1-7 (c.f. Matthew 4:12-17)

Romans 5:1-11

Romans 8:5-11

Romans 12:14-21

2 Corinthians 5:14-21

Philippians 4:4-9

Colossians 1:15-23

*"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid."*

John 14:27

*And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

Philippians 4:7

*For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility*

Ephesians 2:14

- What do you think is the significance of Jesus' death for our experience of peace?
- Are there any recurring moments or situations in your life in which you experience a lack of peace?
- Can you recall some time(s) when God has given you an experience of his peace in your life? What do you believe made it possible for you to experience this peace and how did it make a difference for you?

*In peace I will lie down and sleep, for you alone, LORD, make me dwell in safety.* Psalm 4:8

*The LORD sits enthroned over the flood; the LORD is enthroned as King forever.  
11 The LORD gives strength to his people; the LORD blesses his people with peace.* Psalm 29:10-11

*You will go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and hills will burst into song before you, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands.* Isaiah 55:12

*But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.* Isaiah 53:5

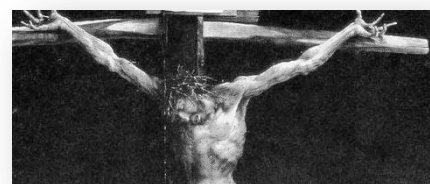
*Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times and in every way. The Lord be with all of you.* 2 Thessalonians 3:16

*Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.* Colossians 3:15

- **Memorise a verse** to help you remember and enter into God's peace, especially during those times you feel a lack of peace. (For example, Philippians 4:6-7, Matthew 11:28-30)

### ***Thought to finish***

Peace is not just the lack of noise; it is the presence of God's rest in our lives. For too long, we spend time busily pursuing things that promise happiness and meaning (money, jobs, clothes, houses...) but that leave us unsatisfied. In an unexpected way, the place where we find lasting contentment and well-being is through an execution: Christ brought us peace by way of his humiliating and excruciating lonely death on the cross... *'by his wounds we are healed'* (Isaiah 53:5). He calls us to not waste our valuable lives chasing smoke and mirrors. Instead, we're invited to lean on him who disperses the fog and cleans up the clutter of our lives as he gives us the very real gift of His peace. But to receive this peace we have to let go some things that are dragging us in the wrong direction. What are you willing to let go of?





## 5. *The God who knows everything & is everywhere*

The opening line of the Bible tells us that God created the heavens and the earth. Not long after, the LORD of All got his hands dirty and created the first human being from the soil and breathed into the man the breath of life (Gen2:7). God's act of creation, however, didn't end at the Beginning. Rather, God continued – *and continues* – to keep everything going, including keeping people alive, moment by moment. He is ever-present with each one of us, whether from the past, the present or the future. He sees us, knows us, and is as close to us as every breath we take.



*"Am I only a God nearby," declares the LORD, "and not a God far away? Who can hide in secret places so that I cannot see them?" declares the LORD. "Do not I fill heaven and earth?" declares the LORD.*

Jeremiah 23:23-24

*"Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory."*

Isaiah 6:3

*Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the duty of every human being. For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil.*

Ecclesiastes 12:13-14

*"Look, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what they have done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.*

Revelation 22:12-13

### ***Things to do/ Questions to consider***

Read through some of the following passages and the ones in the box on the left, noting down what they tell us about what God knows and where God is, and any implications this has for the way we relate to...

- ❖ God
- ❖ Each other
- ❖ Ourselves and our inner life

Job 28:12-28

Psalms 139

John 1:1-5

Acts 17:22-28

Colossians 1:15-20

- What is our response when we realise that God knows the secrets of our hearts?
- Although my conscious mind may agree that God is always with me, does my outward life demonstrate that he is? What specific emotions, attitudes or actions might show that I am aware that God is with me?

*From that time on Jesus began to preach, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near."*

Matthew 4:17

*Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.*

Hebrews 2:18

*Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you." So we say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can human beings do to me?"*

Hebrews 13:5-6

- Given that the Lord is always present and already knows all about me and what is going on in my life, how might this positively affect my prayer life?
- In the busyness of life, it is too easy to forget that the Creator of the Universe is right there with you. **Memorise a verse** to help you remember the Lord's presence with you and his knowledge of you (For example, Hebrews 13:5-6, Isaiah 41:10, Psalm 139:23-24)

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## ***Thought to finish***

The Gospels tell the story of Jesus' life on earth. They regularly show Jesus praying in a variety of settings and they communicate how very closely Jesus experienced the Father's presence right there with him (e.g. John 8:29). So when Jesus cried out from the cross, "*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*" (Mat 27:46), it was a truly Hellish moment of separation from the Father for him.

*Jesus said, "The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what pleases him."*

John 8:29

*But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.*

Ephesians 2:13

That moment, however, opened up the possibility of a new closeness to the Lord *for us*. God sustains all life and so is already ever-present and all-knowing with all of Creation. But through Jesus, we can have a special relationship – a family relationship – with the Lord who is not only 'ever with us', but is also 'ever *for us*'! He knows all the bad we have done, but loves us and stays with us anyway. Let us therefore make the most of this bond with our ever-present, ever-loving Lord. Let's not try to live in secret, on our own without his help and presence, because that makes for a lonely and Hellish life. Instead, let's find ways to help us remember and realise that God is with us and is our Helper. With him on our side, ultimately nothing can go wrong.





## 6. *The God of Holiness & Justice*

The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia describes holiness in a general sense as being the 'separation from all that is human and earthly'. It describes the 'absoluteness, majesty, and awfulness of the Creator in his distinction from the creature.' God really is separate, uniquely '*other*' and beyond anything else we know.



Holiness, however, describes more than just the 'otherness' of God. It is a way of talking about the purity of the character of God, and this is something that the Lord calls us to aim for: "Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy" (Leviticus 19:2). We can't resemble God in His 'otherness', but we can reflect his likeness as loving, righteous and just people.

*"Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts, the whole earth is full of his glory!"* Isaiah 6:3

*"I am God and not man, the Holy One in your midst."*  
Hosea 11:9

*"You are to be holy to me because I, the LORD, am holy, and I have set you apart from the nations to be my own."*  
Leviticus 20:26

*And a highway will be there; it will be called the Way of Holiness; it will be for those who walk on that Way. The unclean will not journey on it; wicked fools will not go about on it.*  
Isaiah 35:8

*Therefore, since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.*  
2 Corinthians 7:1

*Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord.* Hebrews 12:14

*But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy."* 1 Peter 1:15-16

### ***Things to do/ Questions to consider***

- Read through the following passages plus the ones in the box on the left, noting down what they tell us about holiness.

Exodus 3:1-14

Psalms 15

Isaiah 6:3-7

- If fear or reverence is the right response to God's holiness, how might we express that?

*This is what the LORD says:  
"Let not the wise boast of  
their wisdom or the strong  
boast of their strength or  
the rich boast of their  
riches, but let those who  
boast boast about this: that  
they understand and know  
me, that I am the LORD,  
who exercises kindness,  
justice and righteousness on  
earth, for in these I delight,"  
declares the LORD.*

Jeremiah 9:23-24

*"I hate, I despise your  
religious festivals; I cannot  
stand your assemblies. Even  
though you bring me burnt  
offerings and grain  
offerings, I will not accept  
them. Though you bring  
choice fellowship offerings, I  
will have no regard for  
them. Away with the noise  
of your songs! I will not  
listen to the music of your  
harps. But let justice roll on  
like a river, righteousness  
like a never-failing stream!*

Amos 5:21-24

*Yet the LORD longs to be  
gracious to you; therefore  
he will rise up to show you  
compassion. For the LORD is  
a God of justice. Blessed are  
all who wait for him!*

Isaiah 30:18

*Your arm is endued with  
power; your hand is strong,  
your right hand exalted.  
Righteousness and justice  
are the foundation of your  
throne; love and  
faithfulness go before you.  
Blessed are those who have  
learned to acclaim you, who  
walk in the light of your  
presence, LORD. They  
rejoice in your name all day  
long; they exult in your  
righteousness.*

Psalms 89:13-16

*He has shown all you people  
what is good. And what  
does the LORD require of  
you? To act justly and to  
love mercy and to walk  
humbly with your God.*

Micah 6:8

- Justice is a deeply-rooted characteristic of the Holy Lord. Read through the following passages plus the ones in the box on the left, noting down what they tell us about the Lord's interest in justice.

Isaiah 42:1-4

Isaiah 59:1-16

- Although my conscious mind may agree that God is holy and just, does my outward life demonstrate that he is? Take some time to think prayerfully about what I could change in my life to better reflect this reality.

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## ***Thought to finish***

When Moses asked to see God's glory, the Lord said Moses could see his goodness, but said he couldn't see the glory of the Lord's face and live (Exodus 33:18-23). Like staring into the sun, the pure brightness of the Holy Lord would be too much for him – Moses would only be consumed by the overpowering fire.

Like Moses, we too could not survive the overwhelming gaze of the Lord. But through Jesus, we have a mediator who makes relationship with the Lord possible. Through Jesus we enter the family of God and we start to take on the family likeness, with holiness and justice being foundational characteristics. These are not just 'religious' attributes – they are ways of seeing and living that affect every area of life. Yes, we regularly fall short, but this is no reason to give up. The Lord urges us onwards to be more *Holy* and *Just* because we are made for a higher calling; we are made for a better way of living and interacting with others. Therefore, let us not give up! *'Though the righteous fall seven times, they rise again'* (Proverbs 24:16). Let us strive on!



## 7. The God who is Faithful

*‘Many claim to have unfailing love, but a faithful person who can find?’*

(Proverbs 20:6). In our world today, there is no shortage of promises. Whether it’s politicians, advertisers, romantic suitors, ‘how-to’ book authors, ‘we must get you over for dinner’ acquaintances, or many others in between, there are plenty of people promising us something that they don’t always deliver on. In this climate it’s easy for us to become a little cynical and weary.

But when it comes to dealing with issues of eternal and ultimate significance, the stakes are too high; we can’t afford to be let down. The trouble is that we all have to believe something – and someone; there is no ‘fence’ to permanently sit on. So who will you rely on to tell you what is true?

Who will you trust to fulfil what they promise? Joshua confronted the Israelites of his day with a

question which could equally be asked of us: *“If serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve... as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.”* (Joshua 24:15). Let us also positively answer this question and trust him, for ultimately he alone is faithful.

*Joshua said, “Now I am about to go the way of all the earth. You know with all your heart and soul that not one of all the good promises the LORD your God gave you has failed. Every promise has been fulfilled; not one has failed.”* Joshua 23:14

*Solomon said, “Praise be to the LORD, who has given rest to his people Israel just as he promised. Not one word has failed of all the good promises he gave through his servant Moses.”* 1 Kings 8:56

*Balaam said to Balak, “God is not a human, that he should lie, not a human being, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill? I have received a command to bless; he has blessed, and I cannot change it.”* Numbers 23:19-20

*‘the LORD comforts his people and will have compassion on his afflicted ones. But Zion said, “The LORD has forsaken me, the Lord has forgotten me.” “Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you! See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands; your walls are ever before me.”* Isaiah 49:13-16



### **Things to do/ Questions to consider**

- Read through the following passages plus the ones in the box on the left and over the page. As you consider this theme of God’s faithfulness, what are some of the big ideas that come through?

Joshua 21:43-45

2 Corinthians 1:16-22

Hebrews 6:12-20

- God is faithful to what he promises, but does that mean our lives will be trouble-free? Read the following verses and note what is and what isn't promised.

John 12:27-28  
2 Corinthians 4  
Hebrews 5:7

- Read Romans 4:16-25 and Hebrews 11.  
As people realise the reliability and dependability of the Lord, this has an impact on what they do and how they live. As you better understand the Lord's faithfulness is there anything about your life you would like to change?

*If we are faithless, he remains faithful, for he cannot disown himself.* 2 Timothy 2:13

*If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.* 1 John 1:9

*May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it.* 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24

*The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.* 2 Peter 3:9

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## ***Thought to finish***

In our world, there are too many random events happening beyond our control for us to be absolutely certain that we can deliver on our promises. Only someone with ultimate power over all time and space can do that, because they alone have the ability to guarantee outcomes. The Lord God *has* that power.

There are many things he doesn't promise us in this world – for example, being always healthy, wealthy, happy, treated justly and never lonely. Jesus was dearly loved by the Father and yet he never received promises of these things, but instead his life was marked by suffering. Should we who follow him expect any better treatment or different promises?

But the Lord does promise to love us, to be with us, to be on our side, and ultimately to take us home to be with him. He sees the beginning from the end and has the power to deliver on these promises. And so we're invited to say with the Apostle Paul, *"I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."* (Romans 8:38-39). He is faithful and he will do it. Amen!



## 8. Summary

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### ***Things to do/ Questions to consider***

Go back over the studies in this section and briefly note down the main new things you have learnt, or the things you already knew but have been freshly reminded of ...

- About yourself...

- About your world...

God may have got your attention on one or two things you need to do as a result of going through these studies. You will have the best chance of succeeding in these things if you tell someone else about them and, if possible, if you practically plan when you will do these things.

Write these things down somewhere that will help you to act on them!

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### ***Thought to finish***

To be supreme in power, love and grace; to be the ultimate source of peace, holiness and justice; to know everything and be everywhere... this is the Lord, the Maker of all things seen and unseen. It is a humble privilege to begin to know him who with a dogged determination personally seeks us out for relationship. That he should love and care for us seems like too much for us to ask... so it is just as well that we are called to follow the One who chooses to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine (Ephesians 3:20). He is the Lord, and this is Good News.

*For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*

Isaiah 9:6



*Things we need to know:*

# *What God is Doing: the Good News of Jesus*

The life we live and experience is not some random coincidence of time and chance. Rather, we are part of a big story which is dominated by the relationship between God and mankind. Our story has twists and turns and promises a hope-filled future, but we have not yet reached the end – we are somewhere in the middle of the story – and so much hangs in the balance for us.

It starts with God creating beauty, order and meaning out of nothing – including the creation of people made in God’s image. The story takes a tragic turn as these people rebel against God, choosing to go their own way and creating their own ‘world’ – one which is strongly afflicted with pain, separation and destruction. But God loves and cares too much to let things run their natural course at the hands of mankind towards ultimate obliteration. God enters creation through his Son, Jesus Christ. He lives among the people, he reveals God to the people, and he dies for the people. And just when it seems all hope is lost, Jesus overcomes death as he is resurrected to new life as King of all creation, and in doing so he opens a new way back to God. This is the centre of our story: the Good News of Jesus. This new life through Jesus begins now, but it is lived out in the context of a ‘falling apart’ world. One day, however, God will bring it to an ultimate conclusion where there will no longer be death or pain or tears, but rather the dwelling of God will be with people.

In this section of the Backpack, we’ll look at the four main themes or chapters of our story to help us understand where we’ve come from and where we’re going, and to help us interpret our world so that we know how to live today.

The studies are as follows:

- 1 *Creation*
- 2 *Fall*
- 3 *Redemption – the Big Story*
- 4 *Redemption – NOW*
- 5 *Future hope*
- 6 *Summary*



# 1. Creation



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The story we find ourselves in begins a long time ago...

*"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters." Genesis 1:1-2*

The Bible starts out with God – that's where our story begins. We're told the earth was 'formless and empty', and like an artist-architect-engineer, God set about creating beauty, order and meaning out of the chaos. He then crowned off his creation with making people...

*Then God said, "Let us make human beings in our image, in our likeness... So God created human beings in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground." Gen 1:26-28*

The first man and woman lived in peace and harmony with themselves, with each other, with their environment and with God. And *"God saw all that he had made, and it was very good."* Gen 1:31 God called them to work with him, and so although God made the garden, he gave responsibility to his co-workers to 'work it and take care of it' in order to see the growth continue. Although God made the animals, it was his co-workers job to name them (– without names the animals would not be complete). In true power-sharing style, God gives people significant creative work to do that is a part of God's on-going creative acts in the world.

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## ***Things to do/ Questions to consider***

- Read through Genesis chapters 1-2 and Psalm 104.
- Note down anything you see with regards to...
  - The range of activities that God as 'creator' is involved in
  - How power is used
  - diversity and similarity
  - how things are related together

If we are part of a universe that is more than time and chance; if there is a purposeful, loving, awesome (but invisible) creator behind it all, we would expect to have a sense of this from time to time.

- Are there moments in the past when this sense has been particularly powerful for you?
- In your day to day life, when do you most feel like someone created by The Creator?

If we are created in God's image, it is logical that we will have the creative instinct as part of our DNA. Being a 'chip off the old block' we will go about creating things.

- What have you created lately?
- What would you like to create?
- Read the additional thoughts on Creation in the box on the right. As you consider these points as well as your answers to the questions above, note down one or two big ideas that have particularly grabbed your attention from this study. How might these ideas affect the way you live?

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### ***Thought to finish***

We truly are fearfully and wonderfully made! (Ps 139:14) God created us as unique individuals of great value, and he calls us to the significant work of being God's co-workers, participating with God in making a world that is beautiful, functional, well-balanced and relational. Although we now live in a fallen world, with awe and in humility, it is our responsibility to take up our calling of being God's co-workers in Creation. Random acts of beauty and creativity are not wasted! What will you create today?

### ***Some thoughts on Creation...***

- In Gen 1:2, the 'chaos' or 'formless void' is the raw material that God uses to create. When God begins, that chaos ceases to exist.
- God's work isn't just to do with humans; most of Gen 1 shows the creation of non-human entities. And all that God made was 'very good' (1:31) - nothing is intrinsically evil.
- God also uses things already created as a means to bring about further creations: e.g., the earth brings forth vegetation (1:11-12), and man is formed from dust while the woman is formed from the side of the man (2:7,22)
- In 2:7 God 'the potter' works the clay of the ground to form the first person; this is a Creator who gets his hands dirty.
- Being made in God's image is for everyone, not just kings and 'important' people; nor just Christians.
- Rivers flow from Eden to give water to the world outside Eden (2:10-14), so when Adam and Eve are excluded from the garden they don't move from a place full of blessing to one totally without blessing; rather it's from total blessing to partial blessing.
- In 2:15-17 God gives purpose (work the garden and take care of it), freedom (may eat from any tree) and limitation (except *that* tree). Purpose, freedom and limitation need to be held carefully in balance in order to live well.
- male & female were given God's blessing and command to fill, subdue and rule the earth Gen 1:28 – to God this meant working and taking care of it Gen 2:15
- If everything is made by God, then a connection and affinity exists between all parts: people, animals, nature.
- God was at work before the arrival of Israel (and us) onto the scene. Israel didn't bring God with them to a place; rather, God was already there to meet them (and us).
- God is creator; everything else is created; everything and everyone is reliant on God.





## 2. Fall

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When God told Adam and Eve not to eat from one particular tree, there was no explanation that came with it. They weren't told why they would die if they ate the fruit; that was just part of the deal.

Then the snake approached and threw in a doubt. He said to the woman, *"Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?"* He followed this up by saying *"You will not certainly die, for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."* Gen 3:1

In essence, the serpent was asking the question: "Did God really give you that limitation for *your* benefit? Surely he's just keeping something good back from you." The first couple were faced with a dilemma: would they *trust* that God was doing things for *their* best interests or would they 'break free' and determine their own boundaries? They chose to live beyond the God-given limitation, and the consequences were disastrous. They placed themselves in the driver's seat of this thing called 'life' but they didn't have an instruction manual, they didn't know where they were going, and they couldn't drive. They thought they could do it on their own. They were wrong.

As soon as Adam and Eve had eaten the fruit, they knew they had done wrong. Their immediate response was that *"they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden."* (Genesis 3:8). The next 3 chapters of Genesis (Genesis 3-6) tell the story of the falling apart of creation. The beauty, order and meaning that God created in life is marred by guilt, fear, shame, pain, anger, murder, vengeance and separation. Relationships fall apart as people struggle within themselves, with their interaction with others, with their abuse of the world and ultimately with their life with God. This falling apart is what the bible calls 'sin', and once sin got a foothold in the lives of people, there would be no going back.

*"The LORD saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time. The LORD regretted that he had made human beings on the earth, and his heart was deeply troubled."* Genesis 6:5-6

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### **Things to do/ Questions to consider**

- Read through Genesis chapters 3-4 and 6:1-8.
- Note down any negative occurrences following on from the first sin (e.g. fear, sense of exposure, hiding 3:10).

- The New Testament also throws light on the universal effects of the Fall, which it calls 'sin'. Read the following passages and note down some of the big ideas about sin and us...

Romans 6:23

Romans 8:1-8

Galatians 5:16-21

Ephesians 2:1-3

- In what ways or situations do you feel you most experience this 'fallenness'...
  - as someone who creates chaos and brokenness  
(*eg when cutting someone down to size with negative words*)
  - as someone who experiences chaos and brokenness at the hands of others  
(*eg when my boss puts the blame on me for a mistake he made*)
- Read the additional thoughts on the Fall in the box on the right. Note down 1 or 2 big ideas from this and any ways this might affect how you think and act.

### *Extra thoughts on the Fall...*

- Genesis 3 describes a setting whereby options are presented to the humans (by a snake); 'choice' is a God-given characteristic of humanity but it presents the opportunity to lead people away from God.
- In considering what the snake said (3:5-7), they did not consult God or each other, but in silence merely thought about what the tree had to offer without obviously considering God's prohibition.
- The description of the temptation in Genesis 3:6 matches a description of 'worldliness' in 1John 2:15-16: 'the woman saw the fruit was good for food ('cravings of sinful nature'), pleasing to the eye ('lust of the eyes'), and desirable for gaining wisdom ('boasting of what you have').
- The snake said their eyes would be opened (3:5), which they were (3:7), and they now saw themselves and their world differently: naked and in need of external resources. Already they could not handle their new knowledge
- The immediate fallout is broken relationship with God (hiding -3:8), brokenness inside (fear and shame -3:10), broken relationship with each other (blaming -3:12) and broken relationship with their world (cursed is the ground because of you -3:17)
- Gen 3 describes the first sin, but that is not where it ends. The chapters following on from ch3 show the process whereby sin infects everything and everyone: family relationships (conflict between Cain & Abel -4:8), family structure (Lamech marrying two women -4:19), inter-tribe rivalry (Lamech killing a man for wounding him -4:23), the earth (being flooded in judgement -6:7) and the cosmic sphere (the Nephilim 6:1-5).
- The 'fall' is really a falling out and a falling apart.

### ***Thought to finish***

Although mankind was still made in God's image, showing moments of beauty and love, that image was now fundamentally flawed. Regardless of how things looked on the surface, people were like buildings with corrupted foundations that one day would be found out. Sin had entered the world, and death was the ultimate result of sin (Romans 5:12). And even when people wanted to do the right thing, they found it hard to do because sin was proving too powerful a force for them to control or master (Romans 7:15-25).

The Fall – into sin – is a crippling disease that slowly kills us from the inside out. We're all infected, we all need help, and we all need some Good News.





### 3. Redemption- the Big story

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As soon as Adam and Eve ate the fruit, they knew they had done wrong. When they heard God coming they tried to hide... ***“But the LORD God called to the man, ‘Where are you?’”*** Genesis 3:9. From then on, the rest of the bible tells the story of God’s ongoing pursuit of people who in one way or another were running away from him.

God knew it was beyond the ability of humans to fix the problem, so he chose to enter into the world as a person, becoming like one of us, so as to heal and renew the broken humanity himself. Jesus Christ was God himself in human flesh.

Jesus lived among broken people, and through his words, his actions and his presence he showed them that God genuinely loved them with a passion and that God would go to unfathomable lengths in order to restore the relationship with them. As a result, Jesus was killed on a cross by people filled with brokenness, but he passed through death and came out the other side, alive! He died for us and God brought him back to life, opening a new way forward for us. Jesus bore the consequences of our sins so that we could have life – a new life in him – that would begin now and would continue out beyond physical death into an eternal future.

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#### ***Things to do/ Questions to consider***

- Read through some of the following passages and summarise what Jesus says about himself.

**Matthew 11:28-30** “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

**Mark 10:45** “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

**Luke 7:19-23** “John the Baptist sent us to you to ask, ‘Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?’” ... So (Jesus) replied to the messengers, “Go back and report to John what you have seen and heard: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor. Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me.”

**John 6:35** Then Jesus declared, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.”

**John 8:12** When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”

**John 10:11** “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.”

**John 11:25-26** Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Anyone who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?”

**John 14:6** Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

- Read through the following passages and summarise what these New Testament writers say about who Jesus was and what he accomplished...
  - John 1:14,18
  - Colossians 1:9-22
  - 1Peter 2:21-24

## Our response

- Read through the passages in the box on the right and summarise what they say about what we need to do in order to receive this new life in Christ ...
- In your own heart and mind, are you clear what's required in order to become a Christian?

*"Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with them, and they with me." Revelation 3:20*

*Jesus said "Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life." John 5:24*

*"Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God" John 1:12*

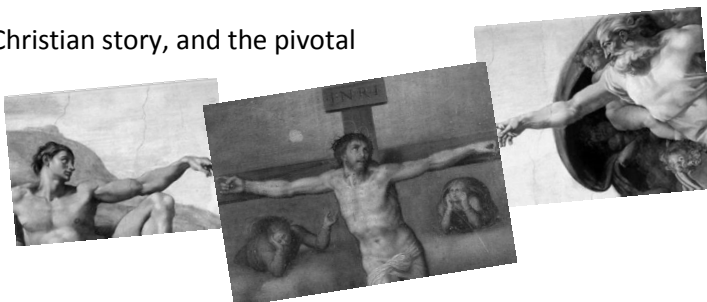
*For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. Ephesians 2:8-9*

*"Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord" Act 3:19*

## Thought to finish

There is no special ceremony, no set words, no specific place you need to be. Rather, it is a heartfelt prayer in which we give up relying on our own efforts to do everything. It is acknowledging that we just can't get there on our own and we need God. It is surrendering to the love of Jesus and allowing God to take his rightful place in our lives.

This is the pivotal moment and centre of the Christian story, and the pivotal moment of our own story. Through Jesus' death and resurrection we come out alive in the Kingdom of God.





## 4. Redemption – NOW

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The world has been lurching and stumbling under the effects of the Fall, but the Good News is that, through Jesus, God has redeemed it. This redemption will reach completion at the end of the world as we know it, but we don't have to wait till then to start seeing the signs of change. Rather the work of redemption has already begun in the world – and in us – right now.

However, one of the difficulties we face is knowing *what* difference this Good News of redemption really makes for us. Intuitively we may know that God is at work and has been changing us for good. However, when we have to pinpoint some of the ways those changes take effect, we can struggle to give details. This is worth exploring further!

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### ***Things to do/ Questions to consider***

- The most crucial change for us as we believe in Jesus is the arrival of the Spirit of God in our lives. Read the following passages and note some of the effects of the Spirit of God living in us...

**Eph 1:13-14** And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory.

**Rom 8:1-16** Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death... Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires... if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ. But if Christ is in you, then even though your body is subject to death because of sin, the Spirit gives life because of righteousness. And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you... For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father." The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.

Over the page is a table which gives some thoughts on different ways the Good News of God's redemption makes a difference. Read through some of these, including looking at the verses mentioned, and consider the following questions.

- For you at present, which aspects of the Good News are particularly meaningful? What makes it good news for you?
- How does this aspect (or aspects) of the Good News make a difference in the way you think, feel, relate and/or act?

## ***In what ways is this Good News for us today?***

<b>Good News is:</b>	<b>Good News is not:</b>	<b>What it means</b>	<b>New Testament examples</b>
<b>Hope</b>	Despair	A better future in this life and the next, where death no longer holds power as the ultimate ending; also, with hope we are able to move towards redeeming what seems hopelessly broken (e.g. relationships)	Luke 23:39-43 John 11:21-44
<b>Belonging</b>	Loneliness	Solitary confinement drives people insane, and yet too many suffer their own personal isolation. Life was meant to be lived in community. God gives us a sense of belonging – we all rightfully belong in this world, it is not owned by the rich and powerful. God’s acceptance of us opens the door for our acceptance of each other – a powerful force for good	Mark 5:24-34
<b>Ability to change</b>	Being stuck in helpless repeating patterns	We all recognise aspects of ourselves that we don’t like, but it is so hard to change things. The good news offers us power to be transformed – slowly but surely, not in surface issues but in deep ways that really matter	John 4:9-26
<b>Contentment &amp; peace</b>	Restless searching for more	We search for meaning happiness and a sense of accomplishment. We spend our lives pursuing the many things that promise (money, job, beautiful house, beautiful clothes...) but ultimately none deliver. The good news offers a contentment that money can’t buy	Luke 19:1-10
<b>A life of value</b>	Worthlessness	People & ‘the system’ have a way of making us feel lowly valued. But we are greatly valued by God: we’re not losers or hopeless – we are special. And that is good news.	Luke 5:27-32
<b>Love</b>	Indifference or hate	Hate is the extreme form, but indifference or apathy is more common – a not caring enough to even get angry	Mark 1:40-42
<b>Meaning &amp; purpose</b>	Chaos	Life without purpose is death; we need to be able to make sense of life, otherwise there appears to be no point to anything. Meaning & order are crucial	Mark 5:1-20
<b>Forgiveness</b>	Guilt	Guilt is a crippling weight that is often unarticulated. We experience the pain of knowing we have done wrong, but are unable to do anything to make that pain go away apart from trying to shut it out (which we can do for a while, but not forever). Forgiveness comes from the One who has ultimately been wronged; if God says we are forgiven then we are truly free from the weight of that burden. Gaining forgiveness is more freeing than being let out of a prison – don’t underestimate its positive effect on us even now.	John 8:3-11 Mark 2:1-12
<b>Healing</b>	Brokenness	We have all experienced brokenness and carry around various forms of pain and handicap. God is able to take our brokenness and make something of beauty and meaning out of it. In the good news the healing process has begun.	John 9:1-7

## ***Thought to finish***

Through the Spirit of God, Jesus miraculously lives in us, to empower us to live a life of reckless generosity and love as strong as death. It is the energy of God that enables us to persevere despite major setbacks. It is the love of God within that is able to absorb the pain, to break the chains of revenge, and to help us walk in freedom to help others out of their chains. In many different ways, the Good News of Jesus is at work within us right now. Let’s regularly take time to reflect on this so that we can be encouraged, we can be thankful, and we can share our Good News with others.



## 5 Future Hope

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Jesus paints evocative pictures of what the future with God holds: growing trees (Mat 13:31), hidden treasure (Mat 13:44) and great banquets (Luke 14:15) all feature. In a proverbial-like way Jesus also gives some thoughts on what we have to hope for in the beatitudes... the poor and persecuted will receive the kingdom of heaven, there will be comfort and mercy and filling with righteousness and peace (Mat 5:3-12). But perhaps one of the most 'hope-filled' passages is in Rev 21:3-4:

*"Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."*

All the pain and angst and fear and brutality and loneliness and poverty will be no more in God's New World Order. Instead there will be love and comfort and belonging and fair justice and partying! And the only tears will be those of joy.

This will be the work of a God rich in compassion and reckless in generosity. Things will be how they always should have been. All our shortcomings will be lost in a great homecoming. Surely this is a day worth looking forward to.

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### ***Things to do/ Questions to consider***

The following passages talk about the return of Christ and life after death. Although it's not completely clear what this will all look like, try to piece together what these passages say about this eternal life.

- 1 Corinthians 15:42-58
- 1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11
- Revelation 21:1-5

## Warnings about rejecting God's offer of life

Being saved through Christ means we move towards a future of eternal life and move away from a future of eternal death or separation from God (which is our default starting place). Although the overwhelming emphasis in the New Testament is on this wonderful salvation, it is good to keep in view that the Bible also gives us warnings about rejecting the life offered to us through Jesus...

### Read

- Matthew 13:36-43, 47-50
- John 3:16-18
- John 5:24-29

## Confidence in our Future

It is normal in life to have doubts about anything and everything! But we can have confidence that God will bring us to His promised eternal life after death. In the box on the right are some reasons why we should be assured of this. Read through these and the *Thought to Finish* below and discuss your thoughts on our *Future Hope* and what difference this might mean for how you live today.

## Thought to finish

This picture of the future places things like fame, money, job titles, new houses, overseas trips and 'winning' in a whole new light; it changes the emphasis on what is and what isn't important.

It also leaves us with some serious questions to consider: Are we currently encouraged by the certainty of our future hope in God? If this future hope in Christ has such an impact on absolutely everything for us, do we spend enough time contemplating it? What would be different for us if we considered it more? How might this change what we see and do in our day? Week? Year?

## Assurance of hope

1. First and foremost it hangs on the belief that **Jesus himself rose from the dead**. He could only rise from the dead if God accepted his sacrifice on our behalf. So if he rose, then so will we who believe...

*But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? ... For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men. But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.*

1Corinthians 15:12-20

2. Secondly, we get the **Spirit** as a down-payment by God, giving us the security of knowing that 'full payment' will be made by God at the end of life...

*For no matter how many promises God has made, they are "Yes" in Christ. And so through him the "Amen" is spoken by us to the glory of God. Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.*

2Corinthians 1:20-22

3. We also have the **Bible**, showing God's dealings with people over thousands of years. As we *carefully* read and *enter into* the stories of old, we get a feel for what God is like - that He won't let us down...

*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.*

Romans 15:4

The Bible also directly reminds us why we should be assured of what God will do...

*11 And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. 12 He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. 13 I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.*

1 John 5:11-13

4. And of course we have **one another** to share stories of what God has been doing with us, and to generally encourage each other on in our way...

*And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage each other with these words... He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him. Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.*

1Thessalonians 4:17-18, 5:10-11





## 6. Summary

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### ***Things to do/ Questions to consider***

Go back over the studies in this section and briefly note down the main new things you have learnt...

- About yourself...

- About your world...

God may have got your attention on one or two things you need to do as a result of going through these studies. You will have the best chance of succeeding in these things if you tell someone else about them and, if possible, if you practically plan when you will do these things.

Write these things down somewhere that will help you to act on them!

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### ***Thought to finish***

Think back to yesterday (– it seems so long ago!) What did you do with your day? How did you decide what to do? Was it a good day? What criteria did you use to decide? These questions all come down to your worldview, or the picture in your head that makes sense of life. We all have a picture (worldview), but we don't often clearly know what our own one is.

The studies you have looked at in this section represent the bare bones of the Christian Story (or worldview) of how life works, where we began and where we are heading.

*Creation, Fall, Redemption* and *Future hope* are the major themes of our story. They outline the big story of all humanity, but these themes are also played out in small ways in our own lives. Each day we experience something of God's good creation while at the same time experiencing some of the frustration and brokenness of things not being as they should. But at the most fundamental level, through Jesus, God has changed us for good. So whatever happens, we know we can look forward to a bright future with God. And we may not be able to put things completely 'right' as they ought to be, but because of what God has done in us we are able to follow Jesus in living and acting redemptively. We do our bit to bring order, beauty and meaning out of the chaos, while trusting that one Great Day, God will bring all this to completion.

This is the story we are a part of. This is our story.



*Things we need to know:*

# *What We are Called to do*

This is the last part of the first section of the Backpack. This first section has been exploring **Things we need to know** in order to help us grow and move forward in our faith journey with God. Thus far we have looked at *What God is like* (looking at some aspects of the character of God) and *What God is doing* (looking at the Big Story that we are involved in with God). Now we turn to the next logical step: given what God is like and what he is doing in the world, *what is it that WE are called to do?*

This part looks at four different aspects of what we are called to do as we seek to thrive - and not just survive - in our walk with the Lord.

The studies are as follows:

- 1 *Called to Follow Jesus*
- 2 *Sent to be Workers for God's Kingdom*
- 3 *Discipling life to life*
- 4 *With Generations in mind*
- 5 *Summary*



# 1. Called to Follow Jesus

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*"The time has come," Jesus said. "The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!"* Mark 1:15

With these words, Jesus announced the beginning of something totally new in the world. The Almighty, All-Powerful God had stepped into human history as a human being: *Jesus Christ*! But rather than majestically arriving with pomp and ceremony as a conquering Caesar, he came as the humble 'Son of Man' who came not to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many. (Mark 10:45)

He lived amongst, and died for, the people. And when he rose from the dead, he showed that there were new rules for life. Everything we used to believe about everything needed to change, because this Jesus had opened the door on a totally new type of life: eternal life with God.

To get this life requires radical change for us. We are called by Jesus to repent, believe and *follow Him*, and this means dying to ourselves...

*Then Jesus said to them all: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it. What good is it for you to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit your very self?"* Luke 9:23-24

It is a free gift of life, but in order to experience this life we need to 'die' to our old ways that lead to death - and we can only do this as we answer Jesus call to follow him as the Lord of our lives. The road to following Jesus is a demanding one! But it's not impossible, for as Jesus said, "Everything is possible for one who believes." (Mark 9:23)

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## Things to do/ Questions to consider

- Read through the following description of Jesus from the Book of Colossians.

*The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.* Colossians 1:15-20

- Note down how Jesus is described in relation to...
  - God
  - Creation
  - Rulers and authorities
  - The church
- To make this more personal (but just as true), substitute your name for the words 'all things'. According to this passage, who is Jesus in relation to you and what has he done for you?

The Apostle Paul had excellent credentials as a religious Jew, and yet we read in Philippians how he changed his view on the worth of these credentials.

- **Read Philippians 3:4-14**
- Why do you think Paul had such a radical change in the way he viewed what was and what wasn't important?
- In practical terms, in what ways did Paul's changed beliefs and values cause a change in the way he lived his life? (see Acts 9:1-30, 20:17-35)

When Jesus said 'repent and believe the good news' (Mark 1:15) the Greek word used for 'repent' – *metanoéō* – carries the idea of turning and changing your opinion or direction. It highlights the fact that there is no neutral place; you're always going somewhere and believing something. There is no fence to sit on! Jesus said the only way to go is in His direction!

- As you look to *follow Jesus*, what might be something you need to change about the way you think and act? It may be...
  - *Things to start doing/stop doing to nurture your walk with God*
  - *The way you relate to other believers*
  - *The way you relate to people who aren't believers*
  - *Something else?*

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## ***Thought to finish***

*"Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts..." (Hebrews 3:7-8)*

The simplest way to keep following Christ is this: when you sense He is asking you to do or stop doing something, then respond and do it straight away. If you don't do it today, the Lord may get your attention on it tomorrow. If you don't do it tomorrow, He may speak to you about it again the next day, but by then you risk no longer hearing God, because you have become used to not responding to His voice. Like the guitar player's fingers, you can develop callouses that deaden your ability to feel. Then you will be in danger of becoming like those Jesus describes in Matthew 13:13-15 who have eyes but don't see, ears but don't hear, and a heart that has become unresponsive. Following Jesus is the most significant thing you can do for your own life and for those around you that you love. So *"Today, if you hear his voice"... act!*

*I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*  
**Galatians 2:20**

*Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God--this is true worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is--his good, pleasing and perfect will.*  
**Romans 12:1-2**

*Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.*  
**Hebrews 12:1-3**



## 2. *Sent to be Workers for God's Kingdom*

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*Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I. Send me!"* Isaiah 6:8



The Bible tells the story of God continuing to reach out to people, showing them love and inviting them onwards into real life. But interestingly enough, one of the most significant ways God communicates with humanity is *not* through miraculous exhibitions of power, nor through loud voices from heaven, nor through grand visions of the future – rather, it's through people. The Lord gets things done and speaks to men, women and children primarily through His messengers – through the people He sends. And this has major implications for us...

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### ***Things to do/ Questions to consider***

Moses was someone who had been brought up for 40 years within the royal political Egyptian system, only to be forced to flee for his life and live out the next 40 years as a desert sheep farmer well away from anywhere important. Then the Lord called him.

**Read** Exodus 3:1-12

- When the Lord speaks to Moses about the Israelites, what does God say He is doing? (note particularly the 'I am' and 'I have' statements in Exodus 3:7-9)
- Given what the Lord says in 3:7-9, what can you conclude about how God gets things done from verse 10?
- Moses doubted his ability to fulfil what God asked him to do. This was true of others that God sent: Gideon (Judges 6:11-16), Jeremiah (Jeremiah 1:4-8), and Jesus' disciples (Matthew 28:16-20). What is God's common promise to the people in each of these situations that ultimately guarantees success in the mission?

*Being sent* as a worker for God's Kingdom isn't just about activity; it's more fundamentally about **identity**. As such, it can be helpful to see how Jesus saw His own identity.

- **Read** through some of the verses listed in the box on the right. These are taken from John's Gospel and show the number of times Jesus refers to Himself as being sent from the Father.
- How do you think Jesus' understanding that He was sent by the Father affected how he spent his time, what He did and with whom?
- Amidst the busyness, the crowds of people and the competing demands, how do you think Jesus maintained his clear sense of being sent by the Father? Consider Mark 1:24-38. What things can we learn from this?

### **'Sent' in John's Gospel**

John 3:34;  
4:34;  
5:23,24,30,36,37,38;  
6:29,38,39,44,57;  
7:16,18,28,29,33;  
8:16,18,26,29,42;  
9:4,  
10:36;  
11:42;  
12:44,45,49;  
13:16,20;  
14:24;  
15:21;  
16:5;  
17:3,8,18,21,23,25;  
20:21

- Think about your own faith journey. Who have been some of the significant people that God has sent to help you?
- As you read the verses in the box on the right and John 1:35-51 (a good example of how the gospel moves among people), prayerfully consider this question: For this season of time, who might the Lord be sending *you* to?

## ***Thought to finish***

When God took hold of our lives, bringing us from death to new life, that was Good News for us. However, we discover soon enough that we we're not called to be just consumers and beneficiaries of this Good News but, like Jesus, we too have been sent to be workers for God's Kingdom, bringing Good News to others.

Being sent by Jesus is not primarily about geography (specifically where we're sent) but rather about our identity and sense of purpose: we are to be intentional workers for God's Kingdom, and the place we've been sent to is right here! (until God tells us otherwise). The work can be incredibly hard, but incredibly significant and eternally rewarding. So today, as the Lord asks 'Whom shall I send?' let us respond like Isaiah: 'Here am I. Send me!'

"Come, follow me," Jesus said,  
"and I will send you out to fish for people."

Matthew 4:19

We are therefore Christ's  
ambassadors, as though God  
were making his appeal through  
us. We implore you on Christ's  
behalf: Be reconciled to God.

2 Corinthians 5:20

"Everyone who calls on the name  
of the Lord will be saved." How,  
then, can they call on the one  
they have not believed in? And  
how can they believe in the one  
of whom they have not heard?  
And how can they hear without  
someone preaching to them?  
And how can they preach unless  
they are sent? As it is written,  
"How beautiful are the feet of  
those who bring good news!"

Romans 10:13-15

When he saw the crowds, he had  
compassion on them, because  
they were harassed and helpless,  
like sheep without a shepherd.  
Then he said to his disciples, "The  
harvest is plentiful but the  
workers are few. Ask the Lord of  
the harvest, therefore, to send  
out workers into his harvest  
field."

Matthew 9:36-38



### 3. Discipling life to life

God's ultimate communication with humanity was not in the form of a DVD, a T-Shirt, a text message, a Facebook page or an App. Rather, God connected with the world through a person: Jesus Christ. After living, dying, and then coming back to life, Jesus' last words to his followers before he returned to heaven were:

*"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."* Mat 28:18-20



Just as Jesus had raised up disciples and had given them the vision and practical skills to follow him, so too he asked them to make disciples of others. But what did this involve and how were they to do it?

#### Things to do/ Questions to consider

Jesus is our model of one who discipless others.

- Read the verses in the box to the right.
- What do you note about the type of relationship Jesus had with his disciples?

*"I no longer call you servants, because servants do not know their master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you."* John 15:15

- Discipling is about helping someone else follow the Lord. What are the advantages of just concentrating on passing on to others what we ourselves have learnt from God? (as opposed to all the theory that exists)
- Jesus spent some time in formal settings preaching in synagogues, but the vast majority of the stories about Him and His disciples come from interactions with people in a wide variety of everyday locations and settings. How might this help us as we think practically about us discipling someone else?

*The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighbourhood. We saw the glory with our own eyes, the one-of-a-kind glory, like Father, like Son, generous inside and out, true from start to finish.*

John 1:14 (Message version)

*"If you really know me, you will know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him." Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us." Jesus answered: "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father."* John 14:7-9

*Jesus went up on a mountainside and called to him those he wanted, and they came to him. He appointed twelve that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach and to have authority to drive out demons.*

Mark 3:13-15

*When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus.*

Acts 4:13

The Apostle Paul was someone who also spent significant time discipling others, and one of the places he spent time doing this was in Thessalonica.

**Read 1Thessalonians 1:1- 2:13**

- From this reading (see particularly 2:7-12), what was the relationship like between Paul and the Thessalonians? (was it organisational, hierarchical, like that of a business consultant, or something else?)
- What were some of the things Paul did as he tried to help the Thessalonians grow as disciples of Jesus? (see particularly 1:2, 5,6; 2:1-2, 8, 9, 12)
- What did Paul leave for God to do in this process? (see particularly 1:4-6, 2:13)

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### ***Thought to finish***

Discipling at its best can only be done by using the most complex, sophisticated, multi-dimensional means known to mankind, using methods far beyond the realms of any other technological approach. In other words, discipling is done best when a person shares not just information, but their life with another.

There clearly is some content that needs to be communicated and skills to be passed on (which we explore in more detail later in the Backpack) but fundamentally when helping someone else grow in their walk with the Lord, the emphasis is on seeing this as a *relationship* rather than a *transaction*. The Good News of Jesus and His Kingdom is passed *from life to life*.

So we don't need to be rocket-scientist experts nor super-relational friends of everybody. Rather, we just have to be ourselves as we share our lives and what we know about the Lord with the people in our world. And we can leave to the Spirit of God the more difficult task of working in the hearts and minds of those we live amongst.

*Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears. "Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified. I have not coveted anyone's silver or gold or clothing. You yourselves know that these hands of mine have supplied my own needs and the needs of my companions. In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: "It is more blessed to give than to receive."*

Acts 20:31-35

(Paul's words to the Ephesians before he left them for the last time)

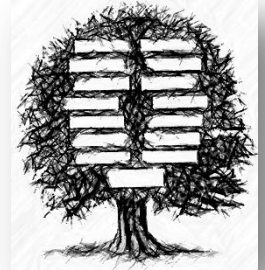




## 4 *With Generations in Mind*

Within us all we have a longing for significance and a sense that our lives count for something, that somehow or other we make a positive difference in the world. That is why we hear stories of the great lengths that many people go to – athletes, business people, explorers, scientists, artists – in order to leave their mark on life, as they seek to go higher, faster, further, longer and win more world cups!

We, however, have been let in on a different type of legacy. The Lord has given us the opportunity to make our contribution in a way that is worth more than all the gold medals, memorial statues, and bulging bank accounts put together. We can be part of the Story of God, making an eternal contribution in God's Kingdom as we simply help one or two people in their walk with the Lord in such a way that they are able to then also help someone else. It does require some focus, vision and commitment, but it isn't rocket science: being a Kingdom Worker with generations in mind is within reach of us all.



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### ***Things to do/ Questions to consider***

In Genesis Chapter 1 and 2, we're told of the beauty, order and meaning that God created out of the chaos. But by Chapter 3 it had all started to unravel, and even the flood couldn't halt the tendency of humans towards evil, so that by Genesis Chapter 11 we see all people united in their evil intent. So, what would be God's grand solution to this enormous problem? It was a promise given to an elderly, landless, childless man and his wife.

- **Read Genesis 12:1-5**

God promised to Abraham that all people on earth would be blessed through him. And yet when he died, the only child Abraham and Sarah had was Isaac. But as Isaac grew, the Lord also spoke to him...

- **Read Genesis 26:2-4** - (*note some of the same words used here as in Genesis 12:1-5*)

Isaac married Rebekah, and they had two children, Jacob and Esau, and the Lord also spoke to Jacob as he grew up...

- **Read Genesis 28:12-15**

Jacob had 12 sons who were founders of the tribes of Israel (*note the same words used again*). The story and the promise then continued through the generations:

Jacob's sons/family tribes → Moses and the Israelites in Exodus → Joshua entering the promised land → the Judges → David and the Kings → the Exile → return from Exile → 400 years of silence, until finally we reach the New Testament.

- **Read Matthew 1:1 and Acts 3:25**

The opening line of the New Testament shows that, although this may be the 'New' Testament, it is still very much connected with the 'Old', and as Peter recounts in his speech, the original promise given to Abraham had found its way to Jesus.

- **Read Galatians 3:7-9**

In Paul's letter to the Galatians, he explains to them that the promise to Abraham (*note the same words used again*) is not just for Jews but for all those who have faith in Jesus.

- **Given the above, what are the implications of this for us?**

- **Read Matthew 28:18-20, John 17:20, 2 Timothy 2:2** (see box on right)

See the connections between the person speaking, the ones they're speaking to, and the 'others'.

- What difference do you think it would make to the way you helped someone in their faith if, when you're helping that person, you're not just focusing on them, but you also have in mind any people that *they* might go on to help?

- As you consider your responsibility of passing on this faith to others, is there someone in your orbit that you can help? Is there someone who can help you as you seek to help this other person?

- It is easy to just concentrate on the details of practically living today. What things can we do that will help us remember we are called to be part of a generation of believers who is to pass this belief on to others?

"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

**Matthew 28:18-20**

"My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message..."

**John 17:20**

"And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others."

**2 Timothy 2:2**




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## ***Thought to finish***

In this Big Story of Humanity, God is redeeming a people for eternity. Beginning small with an unlikely couple, God made a promise of salvation that would be passed from Abraham, through the generations, until Jesus came to fulfil what had been promised. However, it didn't end there. Jesus entrusted the promise to his followers whom he called to carry this through to future generations, from one end of the world to the other.

We are part of this Big Story and we have a very significant contribution to make. Starting where we are, with what we have, we are to pass on what we know of God and this Good News story to someone else – and we are to help them pass it on to someone else.

We may feel that we are the wrong person and that doing this is beyond us. But our storyline tells us that, since we come from a long line of unlikely heroes and heroines who were part of something immeasurably bigger than all they thought or imagined (Ephesians 3:20), we should expect to be no less.



## 5. Summary

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### ***Things to do/ Questions to consider***

Go back over the studies in this section and briefly note down the main new things you have learnt...

- About yourself...

- About your world...

God may have got your attention on one or two things you need to do as a result of going through these studies. You will have the best chance of succeeding in these things if you tell someone else about them and, if possible, if you practically plan when you will do these things. Write these things down somewhere that will help you to act on them!

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### ***Thought to finish***

There is a natural flow to what we have been looking at in this section. First, we explored what God is like, looking at different aspects of His character. Then we turned to the Big Story that we find ourselves in (What God is doing), to help us understand where we've come from and where we're going. Now in this part, we have been trying to answer the next logical question: what do we do with all of the above? How then should we live?

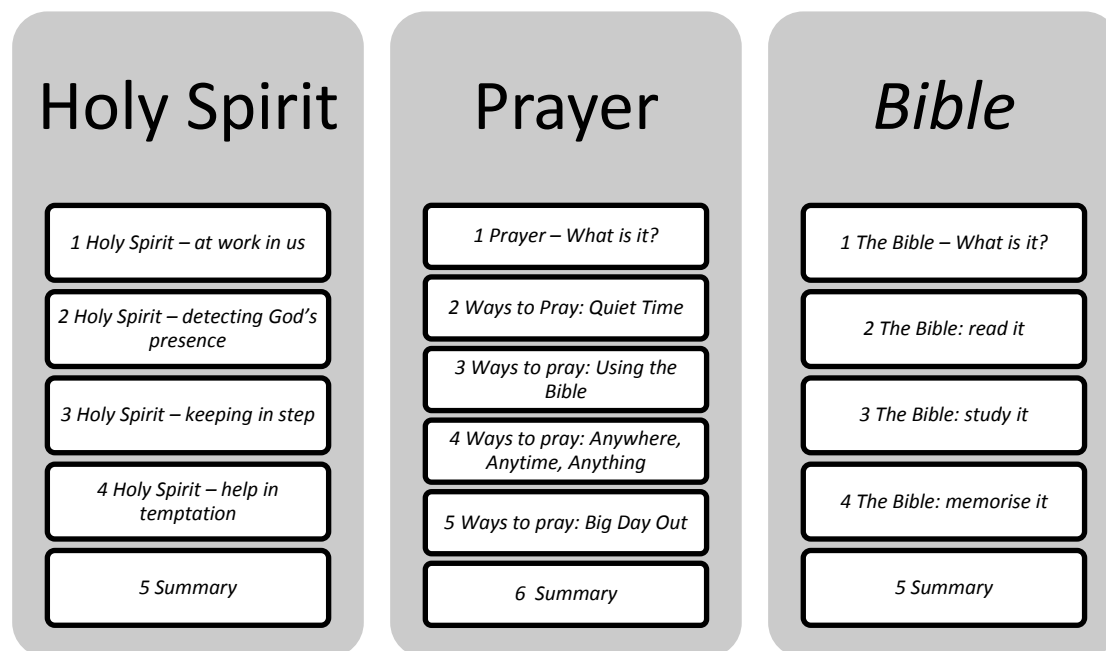
To answer these questions, we've looked at four things that we believe we need to do. First, we must follow Jesus. He is central to everything; without him there is no way forward. Therefore, following him is foundational to anything else. But as we follow Jesus, we quickly find ourselves being sent to help others, just as he was sent to help us. And the way we help them is the same way He helped his disciples: by sharing our whole lives, because we know that the Good News is passed from life to life. In doing this, we take our part in the Big Story of God, because as we help our friends, we also encourage them to help others, so that the Good News continues to pass from one generation to the next. This is what we're called to do, and it's good news for everyone.



## Things to help us relate to God

This section helps us focus on things we can do that will help us relate to God. We look at how the Holy Spirit helps us; we also explore ways of praying and of getting into the Bible. These studies have a more practical bent to them and they include a variety of resources that we encourage you to try. They are not so much designed to bring about more reflection and knowledge; rather, they are designed to bring about more action!

This section is divided into 3 parts, with each part having a number of short studies in it, as follows:



Each study is 2 pages. We would encourage you to look through it first and perhaps try some of the things before discussing with someone else; or alternatively, you could meet to discuss first and then go away to try something. Either way please do try some things!







*Things to help us relate to God:*

# *Holy Spirit*

When we turn and believe in Jesus, God lives in us through the presence of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is a guarantee of God's commitment to us for the future, but this Spirit is also at work in us now. Through God's Spirit in us we have privileged access to communicate with God and can be empowered to live a life of reckless generosity and love as strong as death. This Spirit is the energy of God that enables us to persevere despite major setbacks. It is the love of God in us that is able to absorb the pain, to break the chains of revenge, and to help us walk in freedom to help others out of their chains. This Holy Spirit is the eternal presence of Good News in our lives... and it truly is good news.

In this series of studies we look broadly at what the Holy Spirit does in our lives, what we need to do to keep in step with the Spirit, as well as some practical help on hearing what the Spirit is saying to us and some practical help on positively dealing with temptation.

The studies are as follows:

- 1 *Holy Spirit – at work in us*
- 2 *Holy Spirit – detecting God's presence*
- 3 *Holy Spirit – keeping in step*
- 4 *Holy Spirit – help in temptation*
- 5 *Summary*



## 1. Holy Spirit – at work in us

The Holy Spirit, as one of the three persons of the Trinity, is God. There is no explicit spelling out in the Bible of this doctrine of one God in three persons and the Holy Spirit's role in this; rather, it is just assumed (e.g.

2Corinthians 13:14, Ephesians 2:18; 4:4-6; 5:18-20; 1Thessalonians 1:2-5; 2Thessalonians 2:13) and the emphasis is on talking about how God's

Spirit makes a difference in us.



May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

2 Corinthians 13:14

This Holy Spirit is at work in Christians in numerous ways and is our greatest 'resource' for anything and everything! But what exactly does the Spirit do? Here we will try to answer this question.

### Things to do/ Questions to consider

- Read through the following verses to answer the question: how and when do we receive the Holy Spirit?

Matthew 3:11

Luke 11:13

John 3:5-8, 14:15-17, 7:37-39

Acts 2:17,38-39; 5:29-32

Galatians 3:1-5

Ephesians 1:13-14

Over the page is a table detailing the ways the New Testament talks about what the Spirit of God does. There are a lot of verses! Some of these talk directly to what the Spirit does and some of them mention the Spirit's work in passing.

Begin by reading through the whole table (you don't have to check through all the Bible references).

- Summarise in your own words what God's Spirit does for us.

### ACTION!

- ➔ Spend some time thanking God for his Spirit in us which helps us in so many ways. Use your summary and the bullet points in the table as a starter for your prayer.

## ***What the Spirit of God does***

Convicts us of right & wrong	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Convicts the world of sin, righteousness and judgment (John 16:7-15)</li> </ul>
Is our seal of salvation: God living in us by his Spirit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Causes us to be spiritually born and gives us life (John 3:5-8; 6:63, 7:37-39; 2Corinthians 3:6)</li> <li>Lives in us (John 14:16, 1Corinthians 3:16, 6:19-20, 1John 3:24)</li> <li>Is the seal of our salvation (Acts 15:7-8; Romans 8:9-16; 2Corinthians 1:21-22, 5:5; Galatians 4:6-7, Ephesians 1:13-14)</li> </ul>
Frees us from law	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Gives freedom from the law (Romans 7:6, 8:1-2; 2Corinthians 3:17)</li> </ul>
Transforms us and makes us holy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Transforms us (2 Corinthians 3:18)</li> <li>Makes us holy (Romans 15:15-16; 2Thessalonians 2:13; 1Corinthians 6:11; 1Peter 1:1-2)</li> <li>Enables us to live the Christian life (Romans 8:5-6, Galatians 5:22-25)</li> <li>Changes our heart or inner person (2Corinthians 3:3; Ephesians 3:16)</li> </ul>
Gives us understanding and reveals Jesus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Helps us to understand and explains spiritual truth (1Corinthians 2:10-13)</li> <li>Helps us understand God's love (Romans 5:5, 15:30)</li> <li>Prophesies through people (Acts 1:16, 4:25, 11:28, 21:10-11)</li> <li>Glorifies, testifies and witnesses to Christ (John 15:26, 16:14-15; Acts 5:31-32; Romans 1:1-4)</li> <li>Reveals things to us (Luke 2:25-26; Acts 15:24-29; 20:22-23; Ephesians 3:4-5; 1Timothy 4:1; Hebrews 9:8, 10:15; 1Pe 1:10-12)</li> </ul>
Gives miracles, power, and strength	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Gives us gifts and ministries (1Corinthians 12:7-11)</li> <li>Gives us power (Luke 4:14; Acts 1:8)</li> <li>Enables miraculous things to occur (Luke 1:35; Rom 15:17-19)</li> </ul>
Comforts, encourages, and assures us	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Gives us hope (Romans 15:13)</li> <li>Gives us peace and joy (Romans 14:17; 1Thessalonians 1:6)</li> <li>Assures us of our salvation (Romans 5:5, 8:15-16,23)</li> <li>Encourages us (Acts 9:31)</li> <li>Helps and intercedes for us (Romans 8:26; Philippians 1:19; 2Timothy 1:14)</li> </ul>
Guides and teaches us	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teaches us all things and reminds us of Jesus words (John 14:26, 16:12-15)</li> <li>Gives us words to say when we are brought before people for our faith (Matthew 10:20)</li> <li>Sends or leads us to places (Matthew 4:1; Luke 2:25-32; Acts 8:29; 8:39; 10:19-20; 13:2-4; 16:6)</li> </ul>
Unifies the Body	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Unifies the Body of Christ (1Corinthians 12:12-13; Ephesians 4:3)</li> </ul>

Choose 1-2 areas where you feel currently you would most like to receive more of the Spirit's help. Read through the Bible passages associated with that area.

- What do you expect will be different for you when the Spirit has helped you more in this area? In your partnership with the Spirit, what actions do you think you need to take to receive this help?

### **ACTION!**

- ➔ Talk to someone about these action steps you decide on to get their help on it. Ask the person to keep you accountable to what you propose to do (accountability is our friend).

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### ***Thought to finish***

Without God's Holy Spirit in us, there is no Christian life. For us, the Spirit is both the guarantee of eternal life and the source of our on-going transformation now: he helps us to see the truth and he gives us strength to change for good. Therefore, in everything, let us rely totally on the Holy Spirit AND let us do all in our power to keep in step with the Spirit (Galatians 5:25). In this way, his work of grace becomes complete in us.





## 2. Holy Spirit – detecting God's presence

In 1Corinthians 2:6-16 we are told that through the Spirit living in us, we are able to understand what God has freely given us; we are able to understand Spiritual truths. However, this doesn't mean everything is crystal clear and easy for us to see! Rather, although we know the Lord is committed to communicating with us, for us to receive that communication we must do some work.



This was the Apostle Peter's experience. The Lord wanted to show him that the gospel was not just for Jews, but also for Gentile, non-Jews. It took some time, but through a combination of dreams, experiences and re-telling his story, Peter finally got the message (Acts 10-11). The messages that God wants to communicate to us may not be as earth-shatteringly significant as that one he communicated to Peter, but they will still be vitally important for us. To ensure we hear the Lord speaking to us, we need to develop sensitivity to detecting the Spirit – not just when we're reading the Bible or praying, but in all the moments of our days.

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### ***Things to Do/ Questions to consider***

Up until Acts 10, the gospel had been moving only amongst Jews, because they believed that the Messiah Jesus had only come to save them rather than the Gentiles. For God, however, this good news was meant for everyone and this was the message he wanted to communicate to Peter and the early disciples.

- Read Peter's story of bringing the gospel to the gentiles: Acts 10:1-11:18
- At first Peter rejects God's vision asking him to eat non-kosher food (Acts 10:11-16). He can't make any sense of it at all. But by the end of the story, he had understood that God was also giving eternal life to the Gentiles (Acts 11:17). Carefully look through all that Peter did in the story. What things do you think he did that really helped him understand what was going on?
- What can we learn from his story that might help us make sense of what the Spirit is doing or saying to us?

## ***Detecting what God wants to say to me through my experiences***

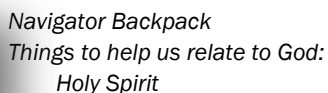
This exercise is to help you make connections between what you experience and what the Lord might be trying to communicate to you.

1. Pick out an experience you've had recently that, for whatever reason, sticks in your mind.
2. Work through the questions below. You may not be able to answer all of them with regards to your event, but try to answer as many of them as possible.
3. As you work through each box, do you sense God talking to you about something in this area? It may be a new thought, a reminder, a memory, a relevant Bible passage, or a recollection of some words from someone else. Write it down.
4. Attempt to summarise what you believe the Lord may have been wanting to communicate to you through the experience. It may be something big or small.
5. Is there something you need to do as a result of this? It may be: things to avoid; promises to claim; examples to reflect on; Commands to follow; or good thoughts to stick in your memory. Write it down, plan (as much as possible) when you are going to act on it, and tell someone about it.
6. Pray, thanking God for revealing this to you. Ask for continued help to see and hear any future messages the Lord may be wanting to communicate to you.

<b>Experiences</b>  Matthew 10:29, 30 Romans 8:28	<b>What Happened?</b> At home, at work, out, etc (e.g. events, incidents, activities, conversations).  ➔ <b><i>Is there an outstanding event or incident?</i></b>	<b>Where was God in this?</b>
<b>Feelings</b>  Romans 9:1 Colossians 3:15	<b>How did it effect me?</b> Reactions, responses, emotions. (e.g. angry/happy, disappointed/encouraged, anxious/relaxed, guilty/proud)  ➔ <b><i>Is there a dominant emotion?</i></b>	
<b>Actions</b>  Philippians 2:12-13	<b>What did I do/say?</b> How was I provoked/tempted to respond? How was I challenged/motivated to act? (e.g. Words, actions, decisions, habits, strategies)  ➔ <b><i>Is there a pattern?</i></b>	
<b>Thoughts</b>  1 Corinthians 2:12	<b>What did I think?</b> What questions and issues were raised in my mind? What ideas came to mind? What insights did I have? What mental arguments took place? (e.g. What was I thinking about God? What did I feel about myself? What did I say to God?)  ➔ <b><i>Is there a theme?</i></b>	
<b>Longings</b>  Romans 8:26,27 Philippians 3:10 2 Corinthians 5:2	<b>What did I want?</b> What longings and desires came to the fore? (e.g. Longings for safety / acceptance, adequacy / significance)  ➔ <b><i>Is there a persistent heart-felt longing?</i></b>	

### **ACTION!**

- ➔ Try out the above exercise this week. It needn't take long to do, but it could be very significant. If possible, arrange to do it with someone else, so that you work on your own experiences separately but then share your findings.



*"Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit"*

The Spirit of God lives within us. Not only has he guaranteed our eternity with God for the future, but he is also at work within us in the present, changing us for good. However, we are not called to be passive recipients of this change, but rather to be active participants in it. We are called to keep in step with the Spirit and here we will look at what it means to cooperate with the Spirit in our own growth and development into Christlikeness.



Romans chapter 8 is one of a number of passages which talks about the Holy Spirit at work within us.

- [illegible]

- Read the verses in the box on the right. What sort of things might we do to grieve the Spirit or quench the Spirit's work within us?

Do not put out the Spirit's fire.  
1 Thessalonians 5:19

Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.  
Ephesians 4:30

Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through prophecy when the body of elders laid their hands on you.  
1 Timothy 4:14

For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands.  
2 Timothy 1:6

- What practical things can we do to avoid this?

- Read Matthew 13:10-15. What is the effect of having hard or calloused hearts?
- Read Hebrews 3:7-15, 4:7. What causes a hard heart and how do you avoid having one?

## **ACTION!**

➔ Try out the **JUST DO IT** exercise.

1. Prayerfully read Psalm 139:23-24. If God brings to mind something you need to do or stop doing, resolve to do something about it as soon as is practically possible.
2. If after doing the above you have a clear conscience, then try the following:
3. Read any of the New Testament letters with a view to finding something for you to do. As soon as you read a verse that you believe God wants you to do something with, stop reading. Resolve and plan to do something about it as soon as practically possible.  
Try this exercise once a week for a few weeks to keep in the habit of responding with action.

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## ***Thought to finish***

God's Spirit is responsible for changing our lives in ways we just cannot do. We are responsible for keeping in step with the Spirit. A crucial part of our role is to respond to what the Spirit asks us to do. If we get used to reading the Bible and hearing the Spirit but not doing anything about it, we will slowly become immune to the Spirit's guidance and our heart will harden. We avoid this by taking seriously and responding immediately to what the Spirit asks us to do. So "today, if you hear his voice"... do something about it!



## 4. Holy Spirit – help in temptation

Temptation today is often thought of as being negative. However, in the Bible it carries the more neutral idea of ‘testing’ or ‘trials’, and whether it is positive or negative depends more on who is doing the testing. For us, in one way or another, temptation is a daily occurrence. Will we act in



Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

James 1:2-4

ways that are consistent with the things we say to be true, or will we allow ourselves to follow a different set of values and move in the direction of a different destination? That is the test of our belief; that is our challenge.

This study looks at this area of temptation and some practical ideas that can help us deal positively with our own personal battles of faith.

### *Things to Do/ Questions to consider*

#### **Testing by God**

In the Old Testament in particular, the Lord tested his people to see if they would keep their side of the covenant (or agreement); he never tested those who weren't his people, and as far as the Bible talks about God testing individuals, it was always aimed at godly individuals rather than ungodly ones. Testing by the Lord isn't always recognisable at the time, but it develops stronger faith and character of the person.

- Read Matthew 4:1-11; James 1:2-4, 12; 1Peter 1:6-7; 1Peter 4:12-13, which describe God's use of testing with people. As you think back over your life, can you recognise any times when the Lord used testing in your life to strengthen you in an area?

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.  
Matthew 4:1

#### **Testing by the Devil**

By contrast, the evil one comes only to steal, kill and destroy (John 10:10). The goal of his tempting is to defeat us, discourage us and separate us from a strong relationship with the Lord.

- Read Genesis 3:1-6; 1 Corinthians 7:5; 1 Thessalonians 3:5; Galatians 6:1. As you think back over your life, can you recognise any times when the evil one has successfully tempted you to do something causing you to move away from God?

## ***Practical help when facing temptation***

<p><b>Eyes, desires, pride.</b></p> <p>Read 1John 2:15-16, Genesis 3:6 and 2Samuel 11:2-4.</p> <p>Note the similar issues at work in the three passages. If you are going to be tested, the temptation is likely to present itself as an issue of pride, a sensual craving, or a lust of your eyes.</p>	<p><b>1Corinthians 10:13</b></p> <p>God promises that any temptation we face is within our ability to handle it. He also promises that there will be a way out of it – we will always have the choice to do what is right. In any tempting situation, we need to look for the way out (- choosing to take that way, however, may be the difficulty!)</p>	<p><b>Pray</b></p> <p>On the eve of his greatest challenge, Jesus prayed for strength (Matthew 26:36-39). Praying is an easy thing for us to do, but it can be an easy thing for us to forget to do. Prayer is crucial. We neglect it at our peril. Hebrews 2:18</p>
<p><b>Avoid difficult situations.</b></p> <p>If you go to a party, decide ahead of time when you will leave (i.e. before that time in the evening when everyone gets drunk and natural inhibitions come down). If you are in a committed relationship, limit the amount of time you spend alone with someone else of the opposite sex (i.e. not your partner). If you are in a relationship with a boyfriend/girlfriend, discuss ahead of time what is appropriate and inappropriate touching (e.g. imagine each other wearing bikinis and speedos and resolving not to touch each other on those parts of the body).</p>	<p><b>Make it easy to do the right things and hard to do the wrong things.</b></p> <p>Do you have sky tv? Put a security code on adult movies and make sure someone else – not you – knows the code. When using your computer at home, work in shared spaces (dining table, lounge) so it's possible for others to see what you are doing. If you struggle with drinking, don't have alcohol in your house. Organise things so that you really have to go out of your way to do what you know is wrong.</p>	<p><b>Fuel your mind with what is right.</b></p> <p>Check your diet. Who do you spend most time with? What do you mostly read and watch? Who do you look to as role models? Answers to these questions will help you see what is shaping your view of right and wrong.</p> <p>“Finally, brothers and sisters, 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.”</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Philippians 4:8</p>
<p><b>Don't do anything when you are tired!</b></p> <p>As much as it depends on you, avoid facing your more difficult temptations when you are tired. Or if you must do so, enlist others to pray for you and help keep you accountable.</p>	<p><b>Memorise helpful verses.</b></p> <p>Jesus responded to the devil's temptations with scripture (Matthew 4:1-11); we can do the same. 1Corinthians 10:13 is a must!</p>	<p><b>Know yourself.</b></p> <p>Everyone has different areas of struggle. Eating issues? Pornography? Envy? Know what your most common weaknesses are. Naming them is the beginning of doing something about them.</p>
<p><b>Confess your sins.</b></p> <p>When you sin, don't try and hide it. Confess first to God then to anyone you have offended. God forgives those ask (1John 1:9).</p> <p>“Those who conceal their sins do not prosper, but those who confess and renounce them find mercy.”</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Proverbs 28:13</p>	<p><b>Get help from others.</b></p> <p>Make yourself accountable to someone you trust. Ask them to check up on you. (James 5:16)</p> <p>As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Proverbs 27:17</p>	<p><b>It's ok to change your mind.</b></p> <p>Sometimes you decide to do something or go somewhere, and then you realise it isn't the best thing to do. It is always okay to change your mind – to excuse yourself and pull out. You may feel embarrassed, but that's better than falling into sin.</p>

## ***Thought to finish***

Even though we fall sometimes, there is no situation that is so bad that God can't redeem it and bring some good out of it. There are always consequences to our actions, but there is also hope; the Lord is able to bring life out of death and richness out of our poverty. We fall, but he is able to pick us up.

The Spirit in us is our greatest help in testing times. He is on our side and can give us the strength we need. We need to take responsibility and do all we can, but we can take heart from the Holy Spirit within, who after all is said and done, is able to make us stand.

Therefore put on the full armour of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.

Ephesians 6:13



## 5. Summary

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### ***Things to do/ Questions to consider***

Go back over the studies in this section and briefly note down the main new things you have learnt, or the things you already knew but have been freshly reminded of ...

- About yourself...

- About your world...

God may have got your attention on one or two things you need to do as a result of going through these studies. You will have the best chance of succeeding in these things if you tell someone else about them and, if possible, if you practically plan when you will do these things.

Write these things down somewhere that will help you to act on them!

*Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you?*

*1Corinthians 3:16*

*And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.*

*Romans 5:5*

*Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.*

*2Corinthians 1:21-22*

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### ***Thought to finish***

The Holy Spirit in us – God in us – is a game-breaker. What was impossible for us in our own strength becomes possible in his strength. We have guarantees of eternal life and access to unlimited resources and help. We become part of God's family and with the Spirit's help we grow to increasingly share the family likeness. Let us not take the Spirit for granted. Instead, let us be very thankful and very responsive to him who lives in us.



*Things to help us relate to God:*

# *Prayer*

Prayer is crucial as we relate to God. In this second part of the section 'Things to help us relate to God' we will first of all look at what prayer is, before moving into a number of studies focused on the practice of prayer. These studies are not designed to bring about more reflection and knowledge; rather, they are designed to bring about more action! They each consider a different aspect of prayer and make some suggestions for you to try.

Please do come to this section with a willingness to try some new things. There is potentially so much to be gained, and so little to be lost. Give it a go!

The studies are as follows:

- 1 *Prayer – What is it?*
- 2 *Ways to Pray: Quiet Time*
- 3 *Ways to pray: Using the Bible*
- 4 *Ways to pray: Anywhere, Anytime, Anything*
- 5 *Ways to pray: Big Day Out*
- 6 *Summary*





## 1. Prayer – What is it?

Prayer is primarily *not* about requests. It's *not* about a collection of sentences followed by an 'amen'. It's *not* about words. First and foremost, prayer is about a relationship – your relationship with the LORD of the universe who is in love with you. In a relationship communication is important, and *this* is what prayer is: the words, requests and 'amen's of communication between you and God. In this respect, prayer is a gauge to the quality of your relationship with God, so it's important stuff!



### ***Things to do/ Questions to consider***

- If we think of prayer at its most basic level as being our attempt to communicate with God, how often do you pray? What sort of things do you pray about? How do you pray?
- Read the following verses to help you answer the question: why is prayer important?
  - ❖ Mark 1:32-39
  - ❖ Luke 22:39-44
  - ❖ John 16:24
  - ❖ James 5:13-16
  - ❖ Psalm 63:1, 42:1-3

"And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

Matthew 6:5-8

- Read the verses in the box on the right. How might these ideas about prayer influence how you pray?
- God values prayer highly. If you were to be faithful in regularly praying for a handful of things over a long time, what might those things be?
- There are a number of barriers to effective praying. These include: unconfessed sin (Psalm 66:18), selfish motives (James 4:1-3), asking for things outside God's will or that don't honour God (1 John 5:14-15) and wavering faith (James 1:5-7). What sort of things can we do to help us not get caught in these traps?

Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up.

Luke 18:1

Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.

Philippians 4:6

(Jesus) has been tempted in every way, just as we are--yet he did not sin. Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

Hebrews 4:15-16

...pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people. Pray also for me, that whenever I speak, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.

Ephesians 6:18-20

Open my eyes to see the wonderful truths in your instructions.

Psalm 119:18 (NLT)

Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.

James 5:16

Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful.

Colossians 4:2

When the servant of the man of God got up and went out early the next morning, an army with horses and chariots had surrounded the city. "Oh no, my lord! What shall we do?" the servant asked. "Don't be afraid," the prophet answered. "Those who are with us are more than those who are with them." And Elisha prayed, "Open his eyes, LORD, so that he may see." Then the LORD opened the servant's eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.

2 Kings 6:15-17

## ***Thought to finish***

However we do it, praying to the Lord is an essential activity for our hearts and minds. The beauty of it is that everyone has equal access; the Lord is available to one and all, without queues, barriers or time limits. All that is required is a humble, soft heart and an authentic desire to meet with him and, of course, the doing of it: actually praying.

The crime is that, despite having unlimited access to the LORD and Creator of everything, we so often fail to take seriously his 'open door' policy. We don't take advantage of all that can be gained in spending time with God, because it's too easy to put aside prayer in exchange for other activities which have more 'visible' results.

Let's not fall into that trap. We're called to walk by faith, not by sight. So in faith, let's make a commitment to pray – often!



## 2. Ways to Pray: Quiet Time

It's nice to have special meals and treats, but to sustain day-in day-out life we need to have a regular diet of basic, healthy meals. For us on the spiritual journey, the most basic 'meal' is what we commonly call the *Quiet Time*.



*'Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.'*

Mark 1:35

The Quiet Time is a daily meeting with God in prayer, Bible reading and contemplation. The length of time spent in this isn't as important as the aim: to meet with the Lord. This 'study' is not so much a study as a collection of practical ideas and ingredients for you to think about, and try, as you develop your own approach to spending Quiet Time with the Lord.

### *Some suggestions for your Quiet Time with the Lord*

1. **Have a default, regular time and place.** It's good to have variety, but for this to become a routine that serves you, start with a set time and place. That way you don't have to think about it; it becomes part of the day like brushing your teeth.
2. **Find a bodily position that will keep you alert.** Lying in bed may be comfortable, but it may not help concentration!
3. **Ask God to speak.** The point of doing this is not so much to learn things *about* God as to *meet with* God. For this to happen you need to slow down your heart and head, and you need spiritual help to encounter the Lord of the Universe.
4. **Mark your Bible/make a note in your Bible App as you read.** This may help you keep track of what you have done in the past and help you focus on what you believe the Lord is trying to communicate to you. It's also helpful to have a plan of where you want to read so you don't have to decide again every day. If you're not sure where to start, Psalms and the Gospels are good places to begin.
5. **Keep a notebook.** This will help you clarify and remember what the Lord is saying to you.
6. **Choose a favourite verse to be the basis of your prayer, meditation, and application.** It can be easy for your mind to wander. Use a verse that particularly stands out as a springboard for thinking and praying.
7. **Balance Bible reading and prayer.** As in any conversation, keep the balance between speaking and listening.
8. **Use a prayer list.** There are people and things that are important to us and that we want to bring before the Lord, but as humans, we can also easily forget what some of these are in the moment! A list helps us remember, and we can look back on it to see what God has done.
9. **Maintain variety.** In balance with point No.1, variety can help keep things from going stale.
10. **Develop an expectant attitude.** The Lord wants to communicate with us. Expect him to do it.
11. **Every now and then, have a Quiet Time with someone else.** This can be very encouraging and you can learn from each other.

#### **A Sample Plan for a Quiet Time**

- Be still for a moment before God (Psalm 46:10).
- Ask God to search my heart and guide my time (Psalm 139:23-24).
- Read a section of Scripture slowly, several times.
- Meditate on the passage, and perhaps choose a verse to memorise.
- Write down what God has shown me.
- Take time to praise God for who He is.
- Tell God about any sins I'm struggling with, and ask for forgiveness and for His power to abandon them. Ask what I should do.
- Pray for the needs on my list.
- Commit myself and my day to the Lord.

## Prayer Frameworks

There are no set rules when it comes to communicating with God – the emphasis is on speaking and listening from the heart. That said, Jesus’ disciples asked him to teach them how to pray (Luke 11:1), so clearly there can be some useful things to learn. Here are two frameworks to help us in our praying.

*Come and hear, all you who fear God; let me tell you what he has done for me. I cried out to him with my mouth; his praise was on my tongue. If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened; but God has surely listened and has heard my prayer. Praise be to God, who has not rejected my prayer or withheld his love from me!*  
Psalms 66:16-20

### 1. A way to pray: ACTS

When you pray, make sure that you include the following elements...

- ❖ **A**doration – focus on who the Lord is and on what he has done. It will help you praise him.
- ❖ **C**onfession – ask forgiveness from the Lord for anything you know that you’ve done wrong, or something you should have done that you haven’t done.
- ❖ **T**hanksgiving – remember what God has done for you in big and little ways, and give thanks.
- ❖ **S**upplication – ask the Lord to meet your needs and the needs of others you know.

### 2. A way to pray: the Lord’s Prayer

In Luke 11:1-4 Jesus gave his followers some straightforward and profound guidelines in their praying. They are like five doors to enter through into the world of prayer. Most, if not all, prayers in the Bible are expressions of one or more of these areas.

Lord’s Prayer Luke 11:1-4	Area	Prompts to pray	Practical ideas
<i>Father, hallowed be your name,</i>	Praising and honouring God.	What am I thankful to God for? What aspects of God’s character am I noticing in people, nature, situations?	Find a Bible passage that describes God and use this to help you thank and praise God. Start any prayer with thanks.
<i>Your kingdom come.</i>	Growth of God’s kingdom in people’s lives.	What is God doing in the lives of those I know? What do I long to see God do?	Pray for the people on your relational map (see Backpack resource on <i>Sharing Faith</i> ). Use prayers in the Bible to pray for others (see 2.2.3 Ways to Pray: Using the Bible).
<i>Give us each day our daily bread.</i>	Our needs.	What do I (or friends) need? What am I (or friends) anxious about?	Write down what you are anxious about, need, or long for as a prayer to God. Pray for friends’ needs too.
<i>Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us.</i>	Forgiveness for sin.	In what ways have I sinned against God and others recently? What areas do I desperately need God to help me with? Are there people I need to forgive?	When you are aware of sin in your life use Psalm 51 or 1 John 1:9 to ask for forgiveness from God.
<i>And lead us not into temptation.</i>	Help when tempted.	What am I struggling with currently?	Talk to God about this. Read and/or memorise 1Cor 10:13. Share with a close friend and pray for each other.

## ACTION!

- ➔ This week, try the sample Quiet Time plan on the previous page
- ➔ At least once this week, try praying using the ACTS approach
- ➔ At least once this week, try praying using the Lord’s Prayer as a framework



### 3. Ways to Pray: Using the Bible

In the previous study we looked at the Quiet Time as a basic way to meet with the Lord, and we considered two frameworks (ACTS and the Lord's Prayer) to guide us in our praying. Here we are looking at actual prayers and passages in the Bible that we can use as a springboard to our own praying, using the words and thoughts of those who have gone before as a starting place to help us connect with God.

So whether we are personally struggling, giving thanks, claiming promises or wanting to pray for others, these prayers can help us stand in solidarity with the generations of believers who have gone before us, as we seek to communicate from the depths of our heart with the Lord.



*I will exalt you, LORD, for you lifted me out of the depths and did not let my enemies gloat over me. LORD my God, I called to you for help, and you healed me.*

Psalms 30:1-2

#### ***Praying the Psalms***

The Book of Psalms in the Bible is a collection of musical poems that came from the life of Israel, and they are particularly designed to appeal to the emotions.

Some were written for personal use while others were to be used corporately in more formal settings. They also have a variety of purposes: lament, thanksgiving, praise, celebration, wisdom, trust and as a reminder of the saving work God has done.

Here, we will look at Psalms of lament, thanksgiving, praise and trust to help us pray in our personal setting.

Type	What these Psalms express	Example of Psalms to try
Lament	Struggles, suffering, or disappointment to God	Psalms 3, 22, 42, 139
Thanksgiving	The joy of the Lord because circumstances were good, people had reason to thank God for his faithfulness, protection or benefit	Psalms 30, 66, 116
Praise	Praise for who God is as Creator and Lord of all	Psalms 8, 19, 103
Trust	God is good and cares for his people; he can be trusted even in tough times	Psalms 16, 23, 27, 121

#### **ACTION!**

- ➔ Read at least ONE of each of these types of psalms to become familiar with the style.
- ➔ At least once this week, use ONE of these psalms as a starter for prayer. As you go through the psalm, read a verse or two then use those words or thoughts to speak with God; then go on to the next few verses doing the same, until you have completed the psalm.

#### ***Praying the Promises of God***

The Bible contains numerous promises that the Lord has given to his people throughout history. Some of these were specific for certain circumstances and others were general for all time. Some were unconditional while others required some action by those who received the promise. Many

printed Bibles have a reference section on some of the promises of God, and these are worth looking at. Mike Treneer, International President of The Navigators, said this about the promises of God:

*"The promises declare the purposes of God. They reveal His intentions and express what He is doing and will do in our world. When we reflect and pray over the promises of God, it is not our faith that brings them to life as we 'claim the promises.' Rather, it is the promises that ignite our faith and shape our lives as they 'claim' us, drawing us into their fulfilment."*

*So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.*  
Isaiah 41:10

Here is a sample of promises that we can read, meditate and pray over as we let God's purposes start to shape and 'claim' us:

Promise	Bible verses
Eternal life	John 5:24, John 3:16
Forgiveness	1John 1:9, Ps 103:8-14
Help in temptation	1Cor 10:13
Peace	Phil 4:6-7, Isaiah 26:3
God on our side	Jer 29:11-13, Rom 8:28-33
Guidance	Jer 33:3
God's Power with us	Isaiah 41:10, Eph 3:20
We can be part of God's blessing	Gen 12:1-3, Mat 28:18-20

## ACTION!

→ Choose ONE of the passages above to read and think over, and use this as fuel for prayer, talking to God about what he has promised.

## ***Praying the Prayers of Paul***

The Apostle Paul wrote a number of letters in the New Testament and in those letters he often told the recipients of those letters about some of the things he was praying for them.

These can be great examples for us to be praying for the people in our world. Here are a number of Paul's prayers:

- Eph 1:15-17
- Eph 3:16-21
- Phil 1:3-11
- Col 1:9-12
- Col 4:2-4
- 2 Thes. 1:11-12
- 2 Thes. 3:1-2
- Philemon 1:4-6

## ACTION!

→ Choose ONE of the passages above. Note the things Paul prayed for and use this as a basis to pray for someone in our world.

Feel free to try some of these prayer approaches with someone else.

*What we need to learn to do, we learn by doing.*

Be diligent in trying some of these ways of praying and you will not regret it!

*For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all his people, I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better.*

Ephesians 1:15-17



## 4. Ways to Pray: Anywhere, Anytime, Anything

*"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all people."* John 1:1-4



So begins John's Gospel. In his introduction we are reminded that through Christ, the Living Word, all things were made, and that Word is the source of life for us all. He is everywhere sustaining everything. There is no place on earth where he is not! If we were to meet the leader of our country, we would probably need to go to where they are and we would have a set meeting time with a definite end. By contrast, amazingly we can meet with the LORD of the Universe anytime, anywhere and we can talk with him about anything! This is a mind-blowing privilege that many of us fail to really take advantage of as much as we should.

This study has some suggestions for things we can try that might help us integrate prayer into all the 'nooks and crannies' of our lives.

### ***From the Bible: anywhere, anytime, anything***

The Bible includes a number of stories of people in history who prayed in a variety of settings for a variety of things. Here are some examples:

- **Neh 2:1-5** Nehemiah prayed mid-conversation with the king
- **Gen 24:10-15** Abraham's servant prayed for very practical, specific guidance in finding a wife for Isaac
- **2Chron 6:14-39** Solomon asked the Lord to hear the prayers of people in whatever situation they were in (when a man wrongs a neighbour, when Israel has been defeated by an enemy, when there is no rain, when famine or plague, when foreigners pray, when people go to war, when people sin then repent.)

The king said to me, "What is it you want?" **Then I prayed to the God of heaven, and I answered the king.** "If it pleases the king and if your servant has found favour in his sight, let him send me to the city in Judah where my ancestors are buried so that I can rebuild it."

Nehemiah 2:1-5

- **Mat 14:28-31** Peter prayed a three word prayer while sinking in the middle of the lake, after having initially walked on water
  - **Acts 16:25** Paul and Silas prayed at midnight in prison
- There are no limits! In every area of our lives we need to acknowledge the presence of the Lord and seek his help.










Then he prayed, "LORD, God of my master Abraham, make me successful today, and show kindness to my master Abraham. See, I am standing beside this spring, and the daughters of the townspeople are coming out to draw water. May it be that when I say to a girl, 'Please let down your jar that I may have a drink,' and she says, 'Drink, and I'll water your camels too'--let her be the one you have chosen for your servant Isaac..." Before he had finished praying, Rebekah came out with her jar on her shoulder.

Genesis 24:10-15

About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them.

Acts 16:25

## *Ideas for Praying anywhere, anytime, about anything*

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Pray NOW!</b></p>  <p>Often we get asked to pray for someone or something. If we wait until a more convenient time, chances are we will forget to do it. SO, when you're asked to pray, do it <i>immediately</i> (even if it's just in your head). If you do pray again later for that request, that is great, but at least you have prayed once for it.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Sacred Places</b></p> <p>Identify the 2 places you spend most time in a day. When you first arrive there in the day, pray, committing your time in that place to the Lord. This will help remind you that God is everywhere.</p> 	 <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Prayer hand</b></p> <p>Assign a name to each finger on your hand. Choose a regular event (eg washing your hands) to remind you to pray for each of these people.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>On the go</b></p>  <p>If you regularly travel by foot, bus or car, choose to spend the first 2 minutes of the journey praying. (You can always pray longer, but if your goal is 2 minutes every time, then it becomes very achievable). You could use the prayer hand or a memory verse as a starter to pray.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Conversational prayer</b></p> <p>When sharing prayer requests with someone, you can often end up just talking and never get around to praying. Change the way you think about this. Begin by being aware that God is with you as you share information. End by praying 'Lord you have heard all of this. Please hear and answer our prayers' (or similar). Doing this regularly can also increase your expectation that God will guide your conversation.</p> 	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Turn off the iPod</b></p> <p>Constant noise can take all of your headspace. Turn it off for a while and pray. Or at least choose to pray for a few minutes before turning on your iPod (or other noise making device). Likewise, before you turn your phone on in the morning (please do turn it off at night) take a few minutes to pray, committing your day to the Lord</p> 
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Light</b></p>  <p>In the Bible, light is an image that is often used to communicate God's help to seeing things as they are. Whenever you switch on a light anywhere pray 'may I be a light for you in this place', or if you're by yourself there, ask God to be a guiding light in your own life.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Social Media</b></p> <p>When you use social media (eg facebook) to look at a person's photos or details, spend a few moments praying for that person <i>before</i> you leave their page.</p> 	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Planes and other triggers</b></p> <p>Attach reminders to some semi-regular things in your world. For example, whenever you see a plane take a moment to pray for someone you know overseas. Or if you're watching a sporting event on TV, pray for someone you know who plays that sport.</p> 



### **ACTION!**

- ➔ Don't try and do all of these things or you will end up doing none of them! Choose one or two to try this week, and if it's a helpful practise work hard to cement it as a habit. Only then, try another one.
- ➔ Remember: these prayer ideas should not be used as a substitute to spending unhurried quality time with God; they are a complement.





## 5. Ways to Pray: Big Day Out

It's good to keep some daily disciplines going that help you stay connected with the Lord, but it's also good to have some seasonal disciplines of spending extended time out with God in prayer. The Bible gives us a few stories of people who did that at various times: Moses spent forty days and nights with the Lord more than once (Ex 24:18, Ex 34:28); Nehemiah prayed and wept before the Lord for some days when he heard the plight of Jerusalem (Neh 1:4); and Jesus spent whole nights praying (Luke 6:12) as well as 40 days in the desert during his temptation (Luke 4:1-13).



Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.  
Mark 1:35

Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, Jesus said to them, "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest." So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place.  
Mark 6:31-32

Yet the news about him spread all the more, so that crowds of people came to hear him and to be healed of their sicknesses. But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.  
Luke 5:15-16

One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God. When morning came, he called his disciples to him and chose twelve of them, whom he also designated apostles  
Luke 6:12-13

(After John the Baptist had been killed):  
When Jesus heard what had happened, he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place.  
Matthew 14:13

Lorne Sanny, a previous International Director of The Navigators, was a great advocate for spending extended time away with the Lord in prayer and he suggested a few reasons why we might take time out from our busy lives to do this:

- For extended fellowship with God
- For renewed perspective
- For catching up on our prayers for others
- For prayerful consideration of our own lives
- For preparation for what the Lord might have us to next

This is well worth trying. You have so much to gain from it, and so little to lose!

### *A suggested approach for a Big Day Out with God*

- **Put a date in your diary.** Setting aside three or more hours of time is not easy. Get it in the diary so that you can plan around it. And assuming you find this practice helpful, when you get to the end of your Big Day Out, make sure you put another date in for the next one. Fail to do this and it may well be a long time before you get back to it.
- **Choose a venue.** You may like to get out into nature or you may prefer to sit in a café or two in town. Whatever the case, choose somewhere that you won't be disturbed by others and where you won't be distracted. For this reason, it's probably not good to do this at home.

- **Take some resources with you.** Make sure you have a Bible, some paper and a pen. If you have a journal that you write any spiritual insights in, take that with you so that you can continue to note down anything that God gets your attention on. You may also want to bring an inspirational book you're reading and music that helps you connect with the Lord.

### **Divide the time into 3 parts:**

- **Waiting on the Lord.**  
This is where you slow down and seek God. To do this you may find it helpful to read a Psalm or some other part of the Bible that you have found inspiring in the past. Here, in an unhurried way, you are just trying to realise the truth that you are in God's presence.
- **Praying for others.**  
Think through some of the people in your world. Pray for them. You may want to use some of the other prayer ideas from the previous studies as a guide. Some questions that may help you as you think particularly about any people close to you are:
  - Where is this person now in his or her walk with Christ?
  - What is he or she ready for?
  - What is most urgent?
  - How can I help?
- **Praying for yourself.**  
If you have a habit of writing reflections in your journal about your relationship with God and what you've been learning, you may want to read back over any of these since the last time you had extended time out with God. You might also write what you sense the Lord has been getting your attention on.  
Two important questions that the Apostle Paul asked at his conversion were:  
*'Who are you, Lord?'* and  
*'What shall I do, Lord?'* (Acts 22:8-10)  
These are good questions to keep in mind as you allow the Lord to guide your time with him.

### **A few final thoughts...**

- **Action Points.** Before you leave your Big Day Out, make a note of any action points you need to follow up on.
- **Calendar.** Before you leave, you may also want to look ahead at the coming month (or whatever period suits) so that you can do some planning in light of anything the Lord has got your attention on.
- **Finish in praise.** It's good to end by thanking the Lord and praising him for who he is!

You needn't feel as though every Big Day Out will bring amazing insights, but as you experiment with what works best for you, you will find this to be a refreshing, helpful and enjoyable discipline to make time for!



## 6. Summary

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### **Things to do/ Questions to consider**

Go back over the studies in this section and briefly note down the main new things you have learnt or the things you have tried as you have sought to integrate more prayer into your life.

God may have got your attention on one or two things you need to do as a result of going through these studies. Perhaps it is to make a long term commitment to incorporating a particular prayer practice into your everyday life.

Whatever it is, you will have the best chance of succeeding in these things if you tell someone else about them and, if possible, if you practically plan when you will do these things.

Write these things down somewhere that will help you to act on them!

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### **Thought to finish**

The great reformer, Martin Luther, once said, “If I fail to spend two hours in prayer each morning, the devil gets the victory through the day. I have so much business I cannot get on without spending three hours daily in prayer.” Such was his large view of reality. We may not yet feel we are up to this ‘Olympic’ standard, but we do need to continue to grow in our appreciation and practice of prayer. Little by little, step by step, as we call to God we can be assured he will answer us and tell us great and unsearchable things we do not know (Jeremiah 33:3) and as we do this, like Luther, our view of reality will grow. It’s worth the effort. Pray today!

*I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge--that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.*

Ephesians 3:16-21



*Things to help us relate to God:*

## *The Bible*

The Bible is a crucial resource for our faith journey with God. This book has a diversity of content including history, poetry, proverbs, law, prophecy, and letters, which all in one way or another tell the story of how people from history have encountered and come to know the Lord of Heaven and Earth.

This is not just a history book, however. There is life in these pages as we, too, seek to encounter and walk with this Lord. Reading the Bible with an open heart and mind, we can meet with the Author of life who wants to meet with us!

The following studies do include some things to get you thinking, but more of the emphasis is on practically helping you get into the Bible, as you read, study and memorise portions of the book. The skills and ideas here really are worth trying. This will take time and effort on your part, but when the aim of all this is a growing experience of eternal life with God, we really do believe it's worth the effort.

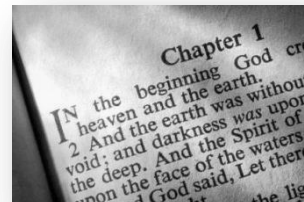
The studies are as follows:

- 1 *The Bible – What is it?*
- 2 *The Bible: read it*
- 3 *The Bible: study it*
- 4 *The Bible: memorise it*
- 5 *Summary*



## 1. The Bible – What is it?

The bible is the world's bestselling book. It is the most translated book of all time. Western language and culture, in particular, have been deeply influenced by its many stories and ideas. Allusions to the Bible just keep on popping up all over the place. But despite this, many people do not find it an easy read. In a fast-paced, highly interactive, multimedia age, reading a very large, old book will understandably require some thought and commitment. We need a little help if we are to join the millions of people have learned to make reading the Bible an indispensable part of their everyday lives. But the rewards can be great! It is no exaggeration to say that the bible has changed more lives for good than any other book on the planet and its most profound effect is to bring people into a living, personal, on-going relationship with God.



### Things to do/ Questions to consider

- How should we approach the Bible? Read the following verses to see some of the ways we can think about the Bible, how we can approach it, and how it can help us.

	What it is. What it is like.	How to approach it.	What it does. How it helps.
Psalm 1:1-3			
Psalm 19:7-11			
2 Timothy 3:15-17			
Psalm 119:97-105			
Matthew 4:1-10			
Joshua 1:8			

- Now consider the following passages which identify some potential problems we may have with the Word. What sorts of things can get in the way when it comes to reading the Bible?

James 1:22-25

John 5:39-40

2 Corinthians 3:12-18

- Read through the descriptions of the Bible from the box on the right. Which description(s) best describe the way you approach the Bible when you read it?  
For an exercise, try reading while focusing on an approach that you don't normally use and note how it makes a difference to your reading.

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## ***Thought to finish***

The Bible is a collection of stories of real people living in real situations experiencing God and each other in their own different worlds over a few thousand years. And through this collection of stories we start to see a big story emerging: of God relentlessly pursuing people to develop a relationship of love with them and to help them find the beginnings of life as it was always meant to be lived. It is a great story. Now you and I can find *our* place in that story as we encounter the living God through the Bible and it can shape our life. But to do this, we must first open the book. And we must do it regularly. There is a wealth of resource available to us in the Bible. The question is, will we use it?

## ***What is the Bible?***

### **The Bible is a Large Unfolding Story.**

Opening the Bible randomly and beginning to read is a bit like dropping in half-way through a Harry Potter or Lord of the Rings movie. It takes a while to figure out what is going on. You need to be patient and let the picture build. But there is an overall plot, repeated themes and main characters. Someone has likened the Bible to a musical symphony where the same melodic themes are re-expressed over and over. Picking up on these big "notes" is a key to understanding the story of God and the human race.

### **The Bible Is 'The Story We Find Ourselves In'.**

We are not detached readers. As we begin to read it will dawn upon us that we are characters in the story. What began with Genesis in the distant past and will end with the book of Revelation is going on here and now. We discover how previous generations advanced the story so we can find our place, and with God's help move the story along. It's our turn now! In this sense it helps us "find ourselves". It is the "authorised story" of the human race that answers the big 'world-view' questions: 'Who am I?', 'Where am I', 'Why am I here?', 'What is God like?', 'What is wrong?' 'What can be done about it?'

### **The Bible is a very Personal book.**

Reading the Bible is to be a "café experience" rather than a "library experience". We don't merely study and analyse it. We listen to it – or rather, we listen to God speaking through it. It is designed to be a place to encounter God. So when I pick up the Bible it is not just me and the Bible; it is me in conversation with God over an open Bible.

### **The Bible is a Spiritual book.**

By this we understand it has a special character that no other book has. Although written by human authors it claims to be inspired by the Holy Spirit. Not only so, but it claims it can only be truly understood with the help of the Holy Spirit (See 2 Peter 1:21 and 2 Cor 2:14). The bottom line is we need to be open to the Spirit of God working in our inner hearts and minds as we read. Attitudes like humility, trust, expectancy and responsiveness are important here.

### **The Bible needs to be Interpreted.**

It is a middle-eastern book translated from Greek and Hebrew. It is set in unfamiliar historical and cultural contexts. It is written by scores of different authors employing a variety of literary forms, from poetry through to personal correspondence. This doesn't mean we cannot take much of it at face value, but we need to treat it according to the different literature styles used, and our reading will be greatly enhanced by referring to the excellent background notes and introductions found in many modern translations.



## 2. The Bible – read it

The Bible can be a difficult book to read, especially given that it was written a few thousand years ago, over a long period of time, in a variety of cultural settings, and using three different languages. It is useful to have access to devotional notes, commentaries and the thoughts that others have gleaned from the scriptures, but we should have confidence that we can actually come to the Bible to hear from God ourselves; we don't always need to hear second hand from others we consider to be experts. The Lord wants to speak to us and a significant way he does this is speaking through our reading of the Bible.



### ***Reading the Bible: habits, skills, questions***

Here are some ideas that can help us listen carefully for what the Lord might be wanting to say to us as we read the Bible.

#### **Whenever reading the Bible...**

- Ideally, find a space in your day when you are alert and undistracted.
- Begin by inviting God to speak to you. Ask him to “open your eyes (and heart) so that you might see wonderful things in his word” Psalm 119:18
- As you read, notice what parts of the passage most catch your attention.
- Select a phrase or sentence that seems particularly meaningful. Read it slowly several times, each time emphasising a different word. Note down your thoughts.
- Write down any feelings, memories, relationships, issues or situations that come to mind.
- Take time to talk to God about these things.
- Read the passage through a second time. This time pray your way through the passage. Read a sentence or two then stop and pray about whatever comes to mind. Invite the Holy Spirit to direct your heart and mind as you pray. If you don't have time for a full second reading, go back over the section you read, pulling out a main idea and use that as the basis to pray.

#### **Some Good Questions to keep in mind when reading...**

- What does this say about God's character, purposes and relationship with people?
- What does this say about my inner life – my character, heart, attitudes, my identity and purpose?
- What does this say about my relationships with other people, my friends, family, 'neighbours'?
- What does this say about my outer world – my work, my studies, health, money, possessions? What does it say about the world I live in – the government, environment, justice, arts...?

Where you sense some connection, talk to God more about your specific situation and re-read the important sections, perhaps even taking notes of any new insights or perspective. These might come from:

- ➔ *Warnings...*on things to avoid
- ➔ *Promises...*to claim
- ➔ *Examples...*to reflect on
- ➔ *Commands...*to follow
- ➔ *Good thoughts...*to stick in your memory

## *Some different ways to read the Bible*

- Find some people you can read the Bible with. Read separately and agree to meet regularly to talk about what you are learning or organise to read the Bible together and discuss as you go.
- Blitz reading: try taking an extended time (perhaps 30-60 minutes) each week to read great chunks of the Bible in one go
- Daily reading: reading for 15-20 minutes each day should allow you to read the Bible in a year
- Put yourself into the story: think what it would be like to be there, to hear the words spoken, to experience what happened
- Read from a variety of versions/translations: this will bring new insights, variety and fresh impact
- Put the passage in your own words
- Keep a journal of your thoughts and reflections
- Take time; don't rush. Enjoy quiet moments of reflection in God's Word.
- Listen to music that has incorporated portions of the Bible
- Pray over a passage; turn each verse into a response to God
- Keep the balance between the "intellectual" (mind), the "devotional" (emotions) and the "practical" (will). Allow God to speak to your whole being. Allow God to speak to every area of your life.
- Listen to God's word: find copies of the Bible on CD or as mp3s.

## *Extra Reading resources*

- **God's Unfolding Story.** The following pages map out the books and main characters of the Bible in the context of what else was happening in world history at the time.
- **Bible Reading Log.** The page following 'God's Unfolding Story' has a box for every chapter of every book of the Bible. Take this page and leave it with your Bible. Once you've read a chapter mark it off on the sheet until you have read it all! Alternatively, you can sign up to an online reading plan that can help you read through the Bible in a year.
- **Online resources.** Go online and look at some of the Bible resources such as [www.bible.org](http://www.bible.org) or [www.biblegateway.com](http://www.biblegateway.com), or download free software such as e-sword. These can be very helpful giving you instant access to different Bible versions, notes and articles.

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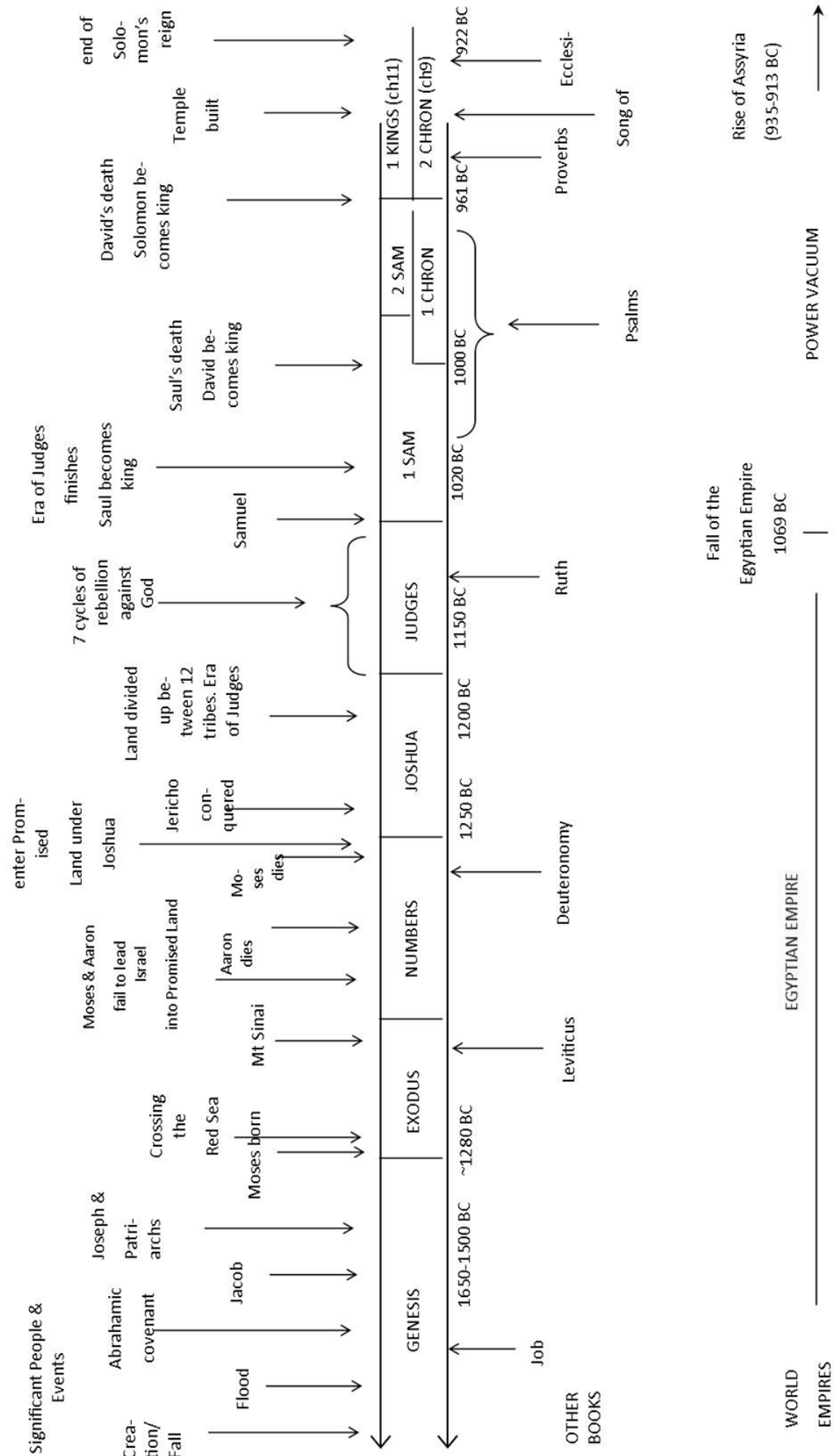
## **ACTION!**

- ➔ From the ideas that you have read in this study, choose 2 or 3 that you will do something with this week. Tell someone about what you intend to do, and once you've done it, tell them how it went.
- ➔ Have the 'Good Questions' section (over the page) with you at least once this week when you read. Use it to help you engage with the passage you are reading.
- ➔ There is no one thing you can do that will guarantee lifelong reading of the Bible, but do spend some time praying, asking God to help you develop consistent habits that will allow the regular intake of God's word in your life.

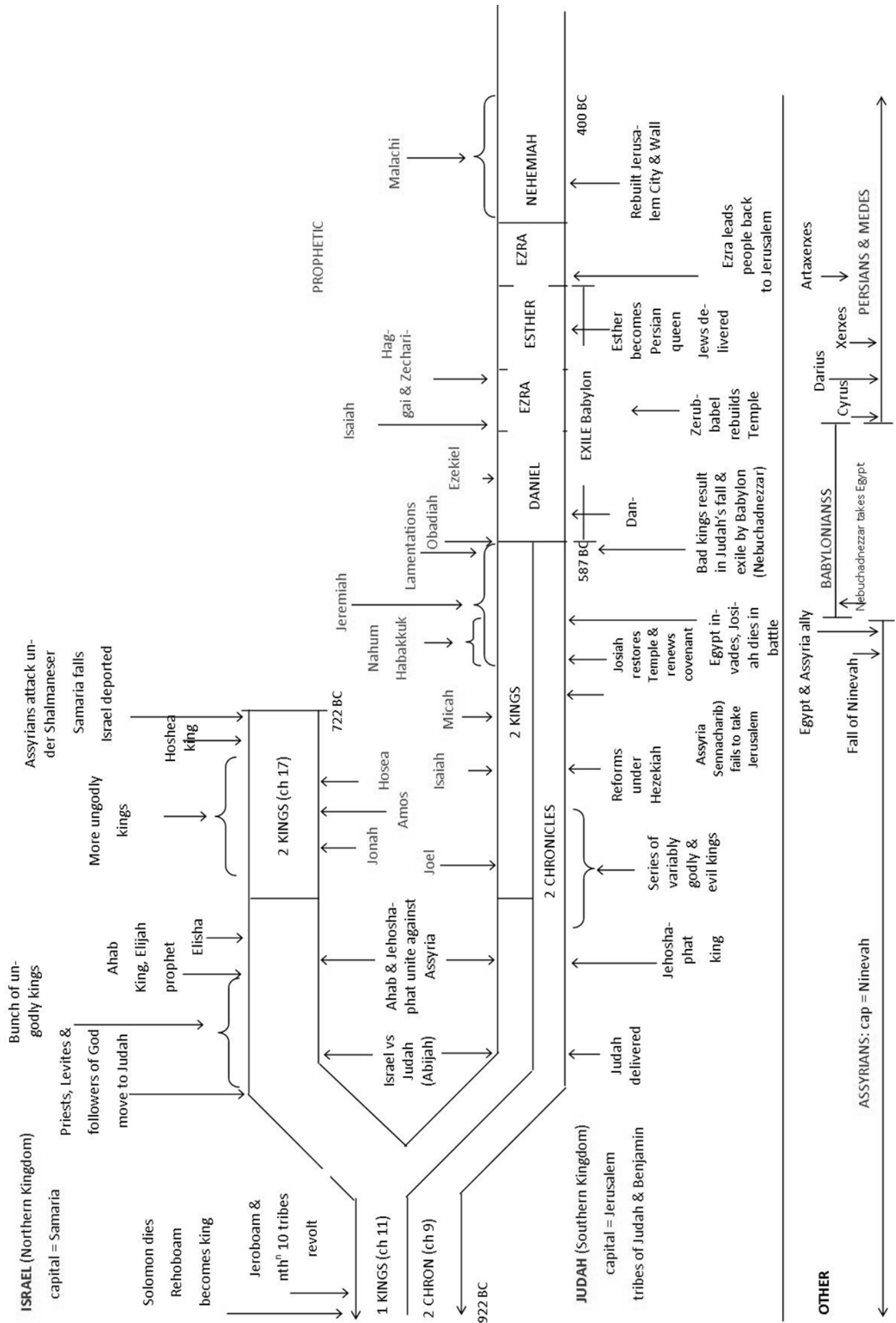


# Old Testament Part 1

## GOD'S UNFOLDING STORY



## Old Testament Part 2



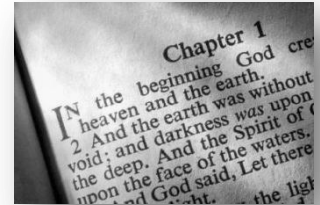
Bible: Page 75





### 3. The Bible – study it

An opinion is something you hold. A conviction is something that holds you. The only way to get solid convictions is by doing your own thinking and testing it out. Studying the Bible is vital because it is an important way to help us do our own thinking. When we study, we don't begin by knowing all the answers; we don't have predetermined outcomes. Rather, this is open,



Now the Berean Jews were of more noble character than those in Thessalonica, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.

Acts 17:11

original study. Together, with our fellow travellers and with the help of the Holy Spirit, we get to figure things out for ourselves. And that is very exciting!

#### **Basic study: Observation, Interpretation, Application**

At the most basic level of studying the Bible, there are three things we need to become good at:

1. Observation – what does this passage say?
2. Interpretation – what does this passage mean in its original setting?
3. Application – what does this passage mean for me today?

Whether we're studying a book of the Bible, a chapter, or a topic, these are important skills...

<p>1. <b>Observation</b> – reading a passage for the first time, it is easy to focus in on what we don't understand, what puzzles us, or what interests us. But this causes us to narrow in on a few things; it limits our ability to take in <i>all</i> that is being said. Observation asks the question, <b>What is being said?</b> It is the art of noticing and appreciating as much as possible in the passage, even the obvious things. It is amazing how much more we will see in a passage if we just take a little time.</p>	<p><b>Observation</b></p> <p>Note key ideas, words, arguments, instructions, illustrations, emotions, attitudes, actions. Gather info about people, relationships, and events.</p>
<p>2. <b>Interpretation</b> – once we have a good grasp of what is actually there, we can focus on what it means. Interpretation asks the question, <b>What does this mean?</b> Or, more particularly <b>What did this mean when it was written 2000 years ago?</b> One danger is that we move too quickly to 'What does this mean to me?' (That comes later, in the "Responding" step). Here, in particular, we are trying to come to grips with things we don't understand. Interpretation involves stating our questions, gathering information and drawing conclusions.</p>	<p><b>Interpretation</b></p> <p>Note words to define, ideas to clarify, questions to answer. Gather relevant info from the passage itself, cross-references and background sources. Suggest answers and conclusions</p>
<p>3. <b>Application</b> - the key questions are, <b>What does this mean to me? What does this mean to us?</b> Here, we track the things that the Holy Spirit is stirring in us. This is the really exciting part because God is in the process of transforming us, making us more and more like Jesus in how we think, feel and act (2 Corinthians 3:18). In this step, we need to identify where we are at present and where we believe God wants us to be.</p>	<p><b>Application</b></p> <p>What does this passage stir in you – ideas, longings and desires? What situations, people, experiences, issues, come to mind? How could you respond? Is there a command to obey? A promise to claim? An error to avoid? An example to follow? A principle to apply?</p>

## ***Method for Studying a Topic in the Bible***

If you would like to learn what the Bible says about a particular topic (e.g. success, time, money, marriage, work, conflict resolution,...) here is a study method to help you.

### **Part ONE**

#### **1. Define your Topic clearly**

- State in one word what you are studying.
- Write out the main questions you have regarding the topic (two or three at the most).
- In the light of your questions, write a short sentence stating the purpose of your study.
- Choose the boundaries of your study - a book, a section of the Bible, the whole Bible.

#### **2. Locate your references**

- List any synonyms for your topic (e.g. if looking at the topic of 'work' you might also look at 'call', 'ministry', or you may try and find all occasions where God is described as a worker – gardener, potter, shepherd,...)
- With your topic and synonyms, locate references using Concordance, Cross reference column, Skim reading, Bible software
- Set a limit on the number of verses you can handle, choosing those that seem to be most relevant.

#### **3. Make observations**

List verses you have chosen down one side of paper or word doc, and set up the following columns.

Verse	Observations	Questions	Applications	Key Thought
	Note any detail. Bombard the references with questions such as Who? What? Where? When? Why? How? Note the nouns, verbs and other key words	Write down what you do not understand, or things that could be a problem to someone else.	List possible applications.	Summarize the main idea in the verse that relates to your topic

### **Part TWO**

#### **4. Arrange The Verses In Categories**

- The 'Key Thoughts' from Part One will help you select your categories. Ask yourself Questions like "What are the main categories suggested by these verses?" or "How would I outline this subject to another person?" Alternatively you may simply use the Questions "What? Why? How? When? Who? Where?" Some verses may fit under more than one category.
- For each category write a summary paragraph using as many of the key thoughts of the verses as possible.

#### **5. Derive A Personal Application**

- Review the list of possible applications in Part One and select the most relevant and needful.
- Write out a personal application using the following outline:
  - The TRUTH to apply - state in a single sentence.
  - The NEED in my life in relation to this truth.
  - My PLAN to meet this need.

#### **6. Prepare For Sharing With Others**

- Look back at Part One, Section 1, in light of your stated purpose for the study, draw one or more conclusions.
- For your conclusion(s)
  - select the verse(s) that most clearly support(s) it
  - develop an illustration(s) that helps explain or reinforce it
  - state how your conclusion should affect our lives
- Rework the above into a short conviction talk to share with the others.

### **ACTION!**

- ➔ Find some friends to do this with: choose either a topic study using the above method for a small, limited topic study OR choose a chapter or book of the Bible to study using the observation, interpretation, application skills over the page. (To do this second option, you could download a New Testament book study from [www.navigators.org.nz](http://www.navigators.org.nz).)

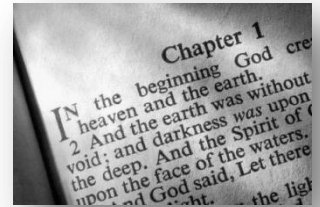


## 4. The Bible – memorise it

Life is complex. It seems that we increasingly have more opportunity to do things and go places, and so we do! But with our more densely packed lives comes more densely packed heads, and we can find it hard to remember that the Lord is with us in every moment, in every place, and that he wants to help us live the life to the full that he called us to.

Memorising some portions of the Bible can help us with this. In the process of memorising a verse, we are forced to think about the individual words, and this can help our meditation and thinking about what they might mean. Currently memorising something also means it is somewhere in the short term memory (rather than the distant past) and so is more likely to 'pop up' in our day, and we are more likely to make connections between the verse and our everyday life. Memory verses can also act as a great starter for prayer, giving us some ideas on things to pray about wherever we are, whatever time of day. This can also help us in our decision-making, as the verses remind us of important values or ways of looking at our decisions, especially when we have to make decisions on the spot without time to refer to the Bible.

Many, many people can testify to the enormous benefits of memorising Bible verses. It requires on-going work but the dividends are huge. It is absolutely worth the effort... give it a go today!



### Memorising Bible verses

#### Step 1: Choose the verses

- One way to choose your verses is to start with passages from the Bible that you have found meaningful. In this case, it would be good to make a list of at least three or four passages so that once you have learned the first one you can go onto the next one without having to think too hard about it (this is a potential obstacle that can slow you down). It would be good to make sure you always had a few extra ready to learn once you've completed the current one.
- Another way is to use a framework as a guide to learning verses on set topics. For example, you could use the 'What God is Doing' framework from the Backpack to choose verses. This might be as follows:

Topic	Possible verses	Your choice on these themes
Creation	Genesis 1:26-27, Genesis 2:15-16	
Fall	Genesis 6:5-6, Romans 3:23	
Redemption – Big Story	John 5:24, Ephesians 2:8-9	
Redemption – NOW	Romans 8:1-2, John 10:10	
Future hope	Revelation 21:3-4, 1Corinthians 15:55-57	

You could then also go on to memorise verses based on other parts of the Backpack.

Another framework that you could use is the original verses used for the Navigator Topical Memory System. These are in the box on the right.

## Step 2: memorise

- As you start to memorise the verse, read the Bible context in which it is written to help you understand what it means.
- When you start trying to memorise, include the verse reference and topic (if you have one) as this will help you find the verse in a Bible or remind you of the context and theme of the verse.
- After saying the reference and topic, learn the verse phrase by phrase, including more and more of it as you go. Always start at the beginning.
- Say the verse out loud as much as possible as this will help. Try to regularly use the verse as a starter for prayer, and ask God to help you see how it might be relevant in your life.
- Write the verse out, either on paper or electronically so that it's easy for you to keep working on learning it as you go throughout your day.

Navigator Topical Memory System verses		
LIVE THE NEW LIFE		
Christ the Center	2 Corinthians 5:17	Galatians 2:20
Obedience to Christ	Romans 12:1	John 14:21
The Word	2 Timothy 3:16	Joshua 1:8
Prayer	John 15:7	Philippians 4:6,7
Fellowship	Matthew 18:20	Hebrews 10:24,25
Witnessing	Matthew 4:19	Romans 1:16
PROCLAIM CHRIST		
All Have Sinned	Romans 3:23	Isaiah 53:6
Sin's Penalty	Romans 6:23	Hebrews 9:27
Christ Paid the Penalty	Romans 5:8	1 Peter 3:18
Salvation is not by Works	Ephesians 2:8,9	Titus 3:5
Must Receive Christ	John 1:12	Revelation 3:20
Assurance of Salvation	1 John 5:13	John 5:24
RELY ON GOD'S RESOURCES		
His Spirit	1 Corinthians 3:16	1 Corinthians 2:12
His Strength	Isaiah 41:10	Philippians 4:13
His Faithfulness	Lamentations 3:22,23	Numbers 23:19
His Peace	Isaiah 26:3	1 Peter 5:7
His Provision	Romans 8:32	Philippians 4:19
His Help in Temptation	Hebrews 2:18	Psalms 119:9,11
BE CHRIST'S DISCIPLE		
Put Christ First	Matthew 6:33	Luke 9:23
Separate from the World	1 John 2:15,16	Romans 12:2
Be Steadfast	1 Corinthians 15:58	Hebrews 12:3
Serve Others	Mark 10:45	2 Corinthians 4:5
Give Generously	Proverbs 3:9,10	2 Corinthians 9:6,7
Develop World Vision	Acts 1:8	Matthew 28:19,20
GROW IN CHRISTLIKENESS		
Love	John 13:34,35	1 John 3:18
Humility	Philippians 2:3,4	1 Peter 5:5,6
Purity	Ephesians 5:3	1 Peter 2:11
Honesty	Leviticus 19:11	Acts 24:16
Faith	Hebrews 11:6	Romans 4:20,21
Good Works	Galatians 6:9,10	Matthew 5:16

## Step 3: Review!

- Once you have learnt the verse, that is not the end of it... only the beginning! You will need to regularly review the verses you are learning because every time you add a new verse to learn, it becomes that much easier to forget the ones you have learnt in the past.
- Find a regular time in your day or week in which you can go back over the verses you have already learnt. For this, you will need a good system ( e.g. written somewhere on small cards, in a notebook, or electronically on your computer or phone,...)
- Ask a friend to review your verses with you, and you can encourage them by helping them with theirs

## ACTION!

- ➔ This week, memorise a verse. Don't wait until you have everything in place. Just start with something, and experience the benefits of it.
- ➔ If you would like to keep doing this, tell someone! Accountability is our friend. Ask the person to help you review the verses you are learning, and encourage them to memorise as well. Don't wait... do it today!





## 5. Summary: Bible

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### ***Things to do/ Questions to consider***

Go back over the studies in this section and briefly note down the main new things you have learnt, or the things you already knew but have been freshly reminded of ...

- About yourself...

- About your world...

God may have got your attention on one or two things you need to do as a result of going through these studies. Perhaps it is to make a long term commitment to memorise verses or to regularly study the Bible or to start a reading plan to read the Bible in a year. Whatever it may be, you will have the best chance of succeeding in these things if you tell someone else about them and, if possible, if you practically plan when you will do these things.

Write these things down somewhere that will help you to act on them!

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### ***Thought to finish***

If we really want God to inspire us, we need to think deeply about what is in the Bible, because this is a significant medium through which the Lord has chosen to communicate with us. With the Bible, we can't afford to be superficial. We have to move beyond seizing upon a few random words and phrases here and there, lazily making them mean what we want them to mean. We don't need to be rocket-scientists, but we do need to have an open heart, to be faithful and to be willing to put a bit of work in. The rewards are there, but effort is required! What next steps are you willing to take?

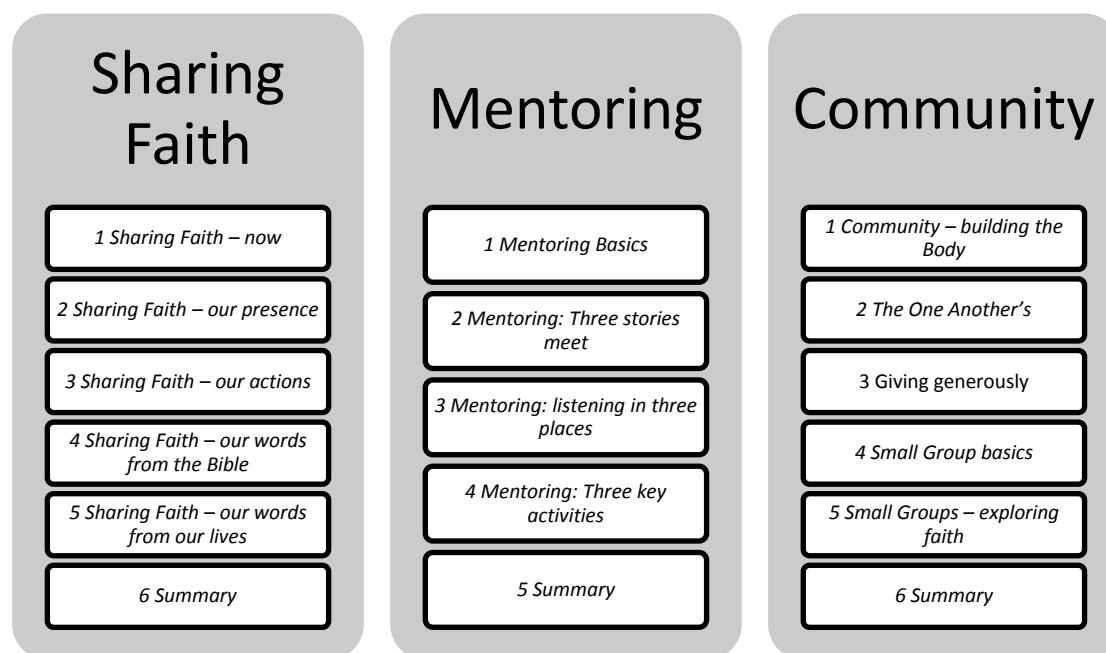
For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.  
Hebrews 4:12



## Things to help us relate to others

This section focuses on strengthening our relating to others. On this faith journey we will encounter other travellers. Some have yet to start the journey, others are a few steps behind us, while others are further on ahead of us. We can help some of these people, and some of them can help us. To keep us all moving forward, we look at sharing our faith, discipling or mentoring another person, and the significance of how we travel together in community.

This section is divided into 3 parts, with each part having a number of short studies in it, as follows:



Each study is 2 pages. Some of these are jam-packed with information and ideas, some of which you won't be able to use immediately. We would encourage you to become aware of everything that is here, and even though you can't implement it all at once, please do at least try something. There is potentially so much to be gained, and so little to be lost. Give it a go!







*Things to help us relate to others:*

## *Sharing Faith*

“Very truly I tell you, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen.” John 3:11

Everybody lives by faith – whether it’s faith in God for eternity or faith in a job, or fame to give you a great life, we all act now with a future in mind, and that requires faith.



This series explores practical ways to help us share our Christian faith with those around us, and because we believe that the Good News is passed from life to life, we look at a number of different ways that we can communicate with others: our words, our actions and our presence. They all make a difference. These studies are not primarily designed to bring about more reflection and knowledge; rather, they are designed to bring about more action!

They each consider a different aspect of sharing faith and make some suggestions for you to try.

Please do come to this section with a willingness to try some things. There is potentially so much to be gained, and so little to be lost. Give it a go!

The studies are as follows:

- 1 *Sharing Faith – now*
- 2 *Sharing Faith – our presence*
- 3 *Sharing Faith – our actions*
- 4 *Sharing Faith – our words from the Bible*
- 5 *Sharing Faith – our words from our lives*
- 6 *Summary*



## 1. Sharing Faith – now

The Pharisees had a narrow view of the command to “love your neighbour” and using their own version of logic invented the inverse command to “hate your enemy”. But Jesus flatly disagreed with this. He called his followers to actively seek the best interests of those we don’t like, of those

"You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbour and hate your enemy.' But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children 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?

Matthew 5:43-46

we find obnoxious and selfish, even of those who try to make our lives a misery (see Mat 5:38-42).

Why should we act this way? Jesus says because you will then be following the example set by your Father in heaven, who gives sunshine and rain to both the good and the evil. Lots of people hate God and rage against him in total defiance. But God is so patient with them. He continues to keep their hearts beating, giving them fun and laughter as well as hard times. In fact, the way God treats those who hate him appears to be no different from the way he treats those who love him. They have the same lot given to them. If we stop to think about it, this seems utterly ridiculous. But this is not bad news to those who love God;

rather it is good news to those who rebel against him and who fail him. We often talk about the unconditional love of God. Well, this is what it means. God doesn’t wait to see how evil people like us will respond before he loves us. *He just goes on and does it.* As far as love is concerned, God goes on the offensive: “*For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life*” John 3:16

This is the Good News we believe. This is the message the world desperately need to hear. This is the faith we must share.



### Things to do/ Questions to consider

- If you dared to believe that God could love you so recklessly and unconditionally, how might it make a difference to the way you lived out an average day?
- As you think of one or two of your friends who don’t yet know Christ, how do you think it might make a difference for them to know that God loves them so recklessly and unconditionally?

"Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!"

Romans 10:13-15

- Read the three passages in the box on the right. Why do you think the people in Matthew and Mark's stories respond so differently to the ones in John's story?
- Read John 1:35-50 a few times through. How did news of this Messiah spread and what were the connections of the people who passed it on? (See also John 4:28ff in box below.)
- These early believers were content to bring people to Jesus and let them discover who Jesus was for themselves. As you think about yourself, do you tend to do less (not try to bring people to discover Jesus) or more (attempt to do ALL the convincing that Jesus is God)?

Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, "Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah?" They came out of the town and made their way toward him....

Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I ever did." So when the Samaritans came to him, they urged him to stay with them, and he stayed two days. And because of his words many more became believers. They said to the woman, "We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Saviour of the world."

John 4:28-30, 39-42

A man with leprosy came to him and begged him on his knees, "If you are willing, you can make me clean." Jesus was indignant. He reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!" Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cleansed. Jesus sent him away at once with a strong warning: "See that you don't tell this to anyone. But go, show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for your cleansing, as a testimony to them." Instead he went out and began to talk freely, spreading the news. As a result, Jesus could no longer enter a town openly but stayed outside in lonely places. Yet the people still came to him from everywhere.

Mark 1:40-45

When he had gone indoors, the blind men came to him, and he asked them, "Do you believe that I am able to do this?" "Yes, Lord," they replied. Then he touched their eyes and said, "According to your faith let it be done to you"; and their sight was restored. Jesus warned them sternly, "See that no one knows about this." But they went out and spread the news about him all over that region.

Matthew 9:28-31

Yet at the same time many even among the leaders believed in him. But because of the Pharisees they would not openly acknowledge their faith for fear they would be put out of the synagogue; for they loved human glory more than the glory of God.

John 12:42-43

### ***Thought to finish***

Hope, belonging, contentment, love, healing, forgiveness, meaning and purpose. This is the gift of God to us; surely this is good news! And yet, we too easily seem to get lost in the busyness of life and forget – or take for granted – all this goodness. When this happens, it becomes a slippery slope to losing perspective on the cars, clothes, toys and bank accounts of those around us. At that point we can more easily resemble the fearful believers in John 12 who felt they had much to lose rather than the free speaking healed people of Matthew and Mark who laughed and laughed because it must have felt like a dream come true.

Let us not lose our first love; let us work hard to remember. Yes, we still make mistakes and fail, but just think how far we have come... and the only way is up! This is news worth sharing. So let's do it. Now.



## 2. Sharing Faith – our presence

The Good News is passed from life to life. It's not just a matter of words or actions, but our very presence really does make a difference. In this study we have an article (below) which talks about a way of seeing ourselves as *Insiders*. This is followed by an exercise – the relational map – that aims to help us understand where we are and who the Lord might want us to be sharing faith with. Enjoy!



### *Insiders*

In New Zealand, every Sunday morning more than 80% of our country stays at home; they don't head off to a church. Is God interested in them? Without a doubt! So how will God become "accessible" to this huge majority?

'When they came to Jesus, they saw the man who had been possessed by the legion of demons, sitting there, dressed and in his right mind... As Jesus was getting into the boat, the man who had been demon-possessed begged to go with him. Jesus did not let him, but said, "Go home to your own people and tell them how much the Lord has done for you"'

Mark 5:15-19

If many people won't go to church to find God, then God chooses to come to people to find them – and one of the key ways he does this is through the *Insider*.

Insiders are not all the same. Some live in the suburbs, others flat in the city; some work for a big corporate, others work looking after kids at home; some play rugby, others play lead guitar in a band. There are as many different types of Insiders as there are people. The critical thing is that each Insider is a Christian who is a message-bearer to their unique group of friends and acquaintances. Because you are *in* the company or *in* the neighbourhood or *in* the mothers' group, you are an *Insider*.

John 1:14 tells us 'The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighbourhood.' (Message version). Jesus was an Insider to the Jewish world of his day – and particularly to the agricultural Galilean Jewish world. God knew that the best way for him to communicate his good news of hope and love for people would be to do it through a message-bearer, whose words and actions and whole

life would communicate what God is on about. As an Insider to the world he lived in, that's exactly what Jesus did.

Now God has invited us to join in the task of being Insiders, carrying the message of hope to those around us who we know and love and sometimes hate!

For the most part, the job is very unspectacular and slow. After all, sharing life is not all about bullet points and mission statements; it's about having coffee together, offering a lift into town, joining in birthday parties, collecting mail, listening to relationship hassles. This is the stuff of life. But as we stay close to the God of all Good News, and as we risk sharing ourselves with those around us, then our message of hope is passed from life to life, through our words and actions and presence, to those who need to hear it.

So what? If this is true, then there are a couple of things we need to remember:

First, each one of us has a crucial role as an Insider: we are co-workers with God to a lost generation; no-one is superfluous. He has entrusted us with an important responsibility – to carry the message to those in our immediate world. So we need to take up the challenge and count ourselves in, because this work is more important than you could ever imagine.

Secondly, we have already arrived at the place God has sent us to. We just need to stay here! A bit like street lights in the city. If all the street lights were to pick themselves up and head down to the Sports Stadium, that would be great for everyone at the Stadium, but it would leave the city and suburban streets totally in the dark. As Insiders, we cannot afford to abandon the post that is uniquely ours. Our presence really counts!

"My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one... As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world."

John 17:15-18

Nevertheless, each of you should live as a believer in whatever situation the Lord has assigned to you, just as God has called you...

Each of you should remain in the situation you were in when God called you...

Brothers and sisters, all of you, as responsible to God, should remain in the situation in which God called you.

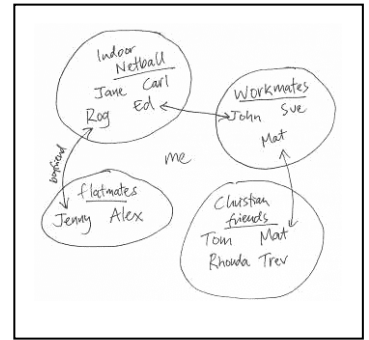
1 Corinthians 7:17, 20, 24

## ACTION!

### Our Relational Map

Let's get concrete! A good way to see where God has placed you is to draw a map of your world. On a large sheet of paper, write (or diagrammatically draw) the names of people in your world: family, workmates, neighbours, friends, and so on. As you think about who to include in your map, start with the people who are important to you and people you see most frequently, and work your way out from there.

Here's a simplified example 😊➡



On your map, the chances are that there will be a number of different circles that people on your list are a part of (e.g. some are workmates, others family, others sports team mates) but hopefully there will be some overlap between the circles (e.g. you are in a sports team *with* a workmate).

Now:

1. Note down any faith connections that your friends (who aren't Christians) have with others e.g. your friend may have a mother who is a Christian, or their good friend's girlfriend is a Christian, or they went along to a youth group when they were younger.
2. Note down any Christians who have some connections with your friends who aren't Christians. These would be fellow-Christians who already know your friends or have something in common with them or who you imagine would just get along well together. Use a highlighter pen to identify those you feel you could team with.
3. Relationships often have a seasonal nature, where for a period of time you connect with some of your friends more than others. Prayerfully consider which of your non-believing friends God may want you to be particularly relating to and praying for in this season. Use a different coloured highlighter pen to identify these people. Limit yourself to just a few people, otherwise you risk spreading yourself too thinly.
4. Identify the next step. As you pray over the relational map you have been creating and the people you believe God would have you be more involved with, ask the Lord to give you a practical idea for what is the next action to take with this person.

## ACTION!

- ➡ At least once this week, as you spend time with the Lord, use your relational map as an aid to help you in your prayers for others.
- ➡ Share your relational map with a Christian friend. Having to explain the people and the connections may help you see things differently, and your friend may also have some good practical ideas that you hadn't thought of. Letting them know of your intended action steps can also help you stay accountable to follow through.





### 3. Sharing Faith – Our actions

Life itself is a risk because there is always the possibility of things going wrong. In fact, throughout the world's history things have continued to go horribly wrong, moving towards total destruction. God set out to put things right through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, but the "saving strategy" God chose to use was a risky one. Jesus' birth in a cowshed to a rural teenage girl set the tone for his life to come – his would be a life without the "comforts" of an overprotective Father in heaven. Instead, Jesus' life was very human, complete with difficulties, dangers and temptations. The way God chose to redeem the brokenness of the world was through the power of love. This, however, was not a theoretical, well-wishing, good-feeling sort of love. Rather, it was a practical, costly, love-in-action that required the taking of great risks. And just as Jesus did for us, so he calls us to do for others.



#### ***Love in action***

Each one of us needs to look after the good of the people around us, asking ourselves, "How can I help?" That's exactly what Jesus did. He didn't make it easy for himself by avoiding people's troubles, but waded right in and helped out. "I took on the troubles of the troubled," is the way Scripture puts it.

Romans 15:2-3 (Message version)

The apostle Paul worked with many different people to take the good news out into the world. As he went into different cities, he also encouraged the local believers there to work together in order to see the gospel expand into their worlds.

Read the following passages and note down the type of things Paul asked the believers in Rome and Philippi to do.

- Rom 12:9-21
- Phil 1:27-2:16

- In the light of these passages, are there one or two specific things that you and your Christian friends can be putting into practise as you relate to your friends who aren't Christians?

Dear children,  
let us not love  
with words or  
tongue but with  
actions and in  
truth.

1 John 3:18

*This exercise is adapted from the work of Liz MacClure.*

- Read the story of the Good Samaritan in the box on the right.
- Each of the three men saw the injured person, but only one took pity and acted. What might be some of the reasons the other two chose not to get involved?

- As you think about you in your world, what might be one or two big barriers that might stop you from seeing the needs around you and taking a second thought to get involved?

- Take a moment now to think again. Ask the Lord to help you answer this question: who in my day-to-day world is there that the Lord would want me to help in some way? Perhaps you can also refer to your relational map to help answer this.

On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" "What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?" He answered, "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind'; and, 'Love your neighbour as yourself.'" "You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live." But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbour?" In reply Jesus said: "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he travelled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.'" "Which of these three do you think was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?" The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him." Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."

Luke 10:25-37

- The Samaritan did what he could with what he had on his donkey. As you think about the resources you have (skills, assets, networks of relationships) what might be some of the things you could do to help the person identified above? What is one thing you could do this week?

Each of you has been blessed with one of God's many wonderful gifts to be used in the service of others. So use your gift well.

1 Peter 4:10 CEV

- Accountability is our friend! Who can you share this with to help make sure you follow through on what you believe the Lord would have you do?



## 4. Sharing Faith – Our words from the Bible

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*'Preach the gospel always; when necessary use words'*

St Francis of Assisi



Before Jesus went up to heaven, he told his followers to wait in Jerusalem for the arrival of God's special gift: the Holy Spirit. So the Apostles waited together, until one day the Spirit arrived, with a sound like a violent wind, and what looked like tongues of fire landing on them. The Apostles immediately went out from there and started speaking to the people in different languages so that all the people could understand them.

God's powerful life-giving Spirit had arrived on the scene in a totally new way; this was the beginning of a new era.

And what was the reaction of the people to all this? Not what you might expect. In Acts 2 it tells us that some people were amazed and perplexed, asking 'what does this mean?' while others went into straight-out ridicule, assuming the Apostles had been drinking too much!

The thing is, the Spirit in their midst wasn't self-evident. The people needed someone to explain what was going on. When Peter got up to do that, then they understood and many were moved to believe.

This can help us think about today. God is at work all the time, but as in the days of the Apostles, God's activity in the world – and in us – can be misunderstood, misinterpreted, and go totally over people's heads. For a variety of reasons we can be quite reluctant to talk directly about Jesus and faith, but people need help to connect... the... dots. Like an outline, our words can help bring definition to what is otherwise a blurry picture for people. A little explanation can go a long way.

St Francis of Assisi spoke well when he said 'preach the gospel always; when necessary use words'. Well, there was a time for Peter when those words were necessary, and there is a time for us too... so why not try and connect a few dots for someone today.

Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: "Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say... let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah." When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit... about three thousand were added to their number that day.

Acts 2:14-41

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### ***Sharing Faith using words***

'Sharing faith using words' has been split into two parts. This first part aims to help us explain the content of our story – what exactly is the Gospel message? The second part aims to help us explain the Gospel from the content of our lives – how God's Good News is at work in us.

To begin, think back to a few specific occasions when someone has asked you about what you believe (note: they may not have stated it as explicitly as 'what do you believe?' but this was their intention.)

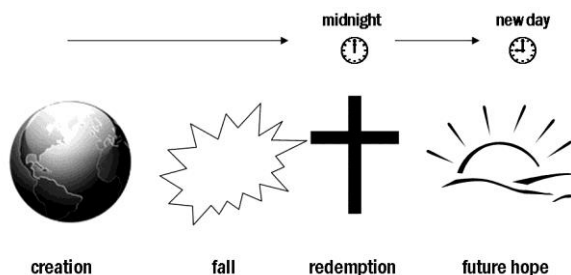
- How easy did you find it to describe what it is you believe?
- Did you describe your faith in the same way on the different occasions? Why or why not?
- What do you think are some important beliefs to communicate about your faith in Jesus?

It is ideal to get people into the Bible over an extended period of time with someone, so they can understand the message more fully. However, it is also good to have a succinct description of what it is that you believe.

Over the following pages, we have included four different ways of talking about the Gospel. They are all slightly different, as each illustration emphasises various aspects of the Bible story.

- Read through the four illustrations below.
- Try communicating the gospel message to a Christian friend. You may use one of the illustrations below, you may have your own way of doing it, or you may use a combination of the two. Whatever the case, as clearly as possible, practise telling the story of Good News. This is important because we can't expect to communicate this clearly if we don't practise.
- Pray that the Lord would give you an opportunity to share this soon!

## 1. Major Themes of the Christian story



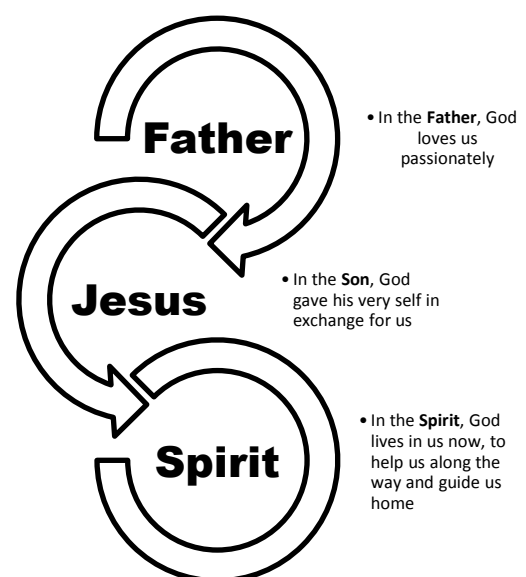
**Creation:** out of nothing God created beauty, order and meaning. People – all people, not just the 'important' ones – were made in God's likeness and so are infinitely invaluable. And God retains a connection with all creation.

**Fall:** could the first people trust that the God who told them some things but not everything actually had their best interests at heart? No; they broke trust and they broke the relationship with God. Quickly this brokenness spiralled to affect relationships with self, others and the world. Everything was falling apart.

**Redemption:** this fundamental fall required life-saving surgery. God stepped in, sending Jesus - God himself – to bring about the process of saving, recycling, healing, ransoming, reconciling, re-creating, and bringing peace to us! As we follow this Jesus who lived, died and came back to life, we too find a new life. Jesus changes everything; through him we have hope for the future.

**Future hope:** the arrival of the coming Day of the Lord. In this new day "He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." (Rev 21:4)

## 2. Major Characters of the Christian story



### 3. The Bridge Diagram

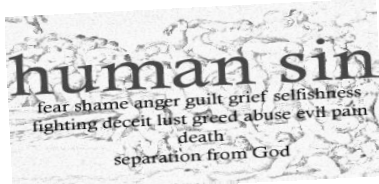
#### Step 1:

God created us to be in a relationship with Him



#### Step 2:

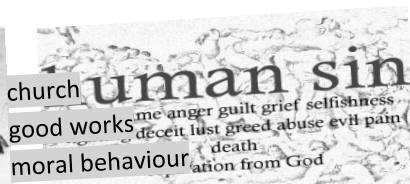
But we turned our backs and hearts on Him, going our own way and ignoring God. This caused a great divide between God and us. The Bible calls this sin.



Romans 3:23

#### Step 3:

Mankind tries to bridge that divide through works of their own. However none of these can bridge the gap because God is pure and holy and can have nothing to do with any wrong.



Romans 6:23a

Romans 8:1

Hebrews 9:27-28

#### Step 4:

There is only one way that the divide can be bridged; by Christ dying on the cross. Christ's death is the only way to bridge the gap between people and God, caused by sin. Because he was completely perfect, his death paid the penalty for my rebellion from God.



Romans 6:23b

John 14:6

John 10:10

Colossians 1:20-23

#### Step 5:

The only way to cross the bridge is by Faith. We must turn from our life of rebellion and believe in what Jesus has done for us. When we place our faith in him we bridge the gap and gain relationship with God as it was always meant to be.

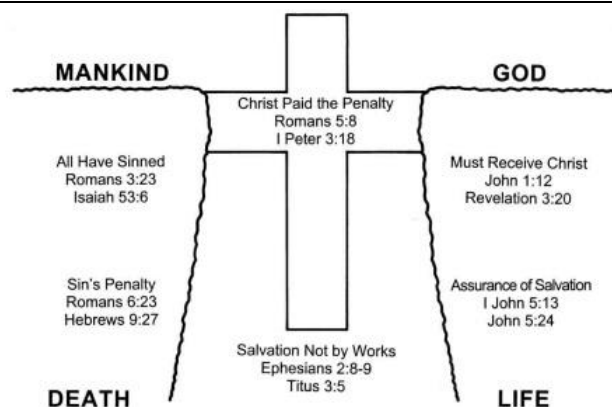


Acts 3:19

Rom 10:9

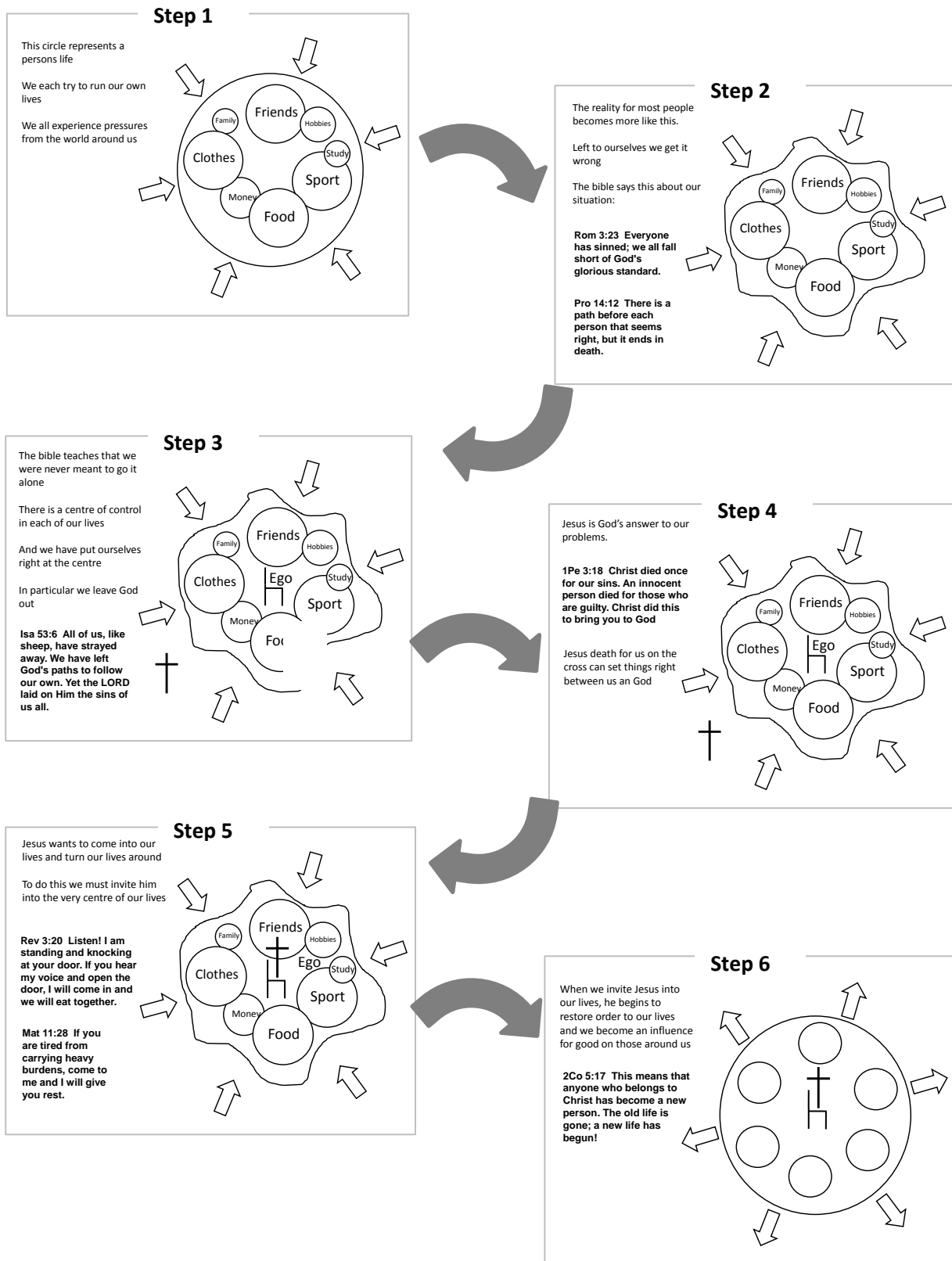
John 1:12, John 5:24

1 John 5:11-13, Rev 3:20



## 4. The Circles Illustration

Particularly appropriate for a person who is already aware all is not well with them. Highlights Jesus power to heal and renew. Focuses on the need to invite Jesus into the very centre of one's life.





## 5. Sharing Faith – Our words from our lives

‘Jesus once said, “*I* am the light of the world” (John 8:12); then on another occasion he said to his followers, “*You* are the light of the world” (Matthew 5:16). Amazing! We may be comfortable with the first statement, but what



But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect

1 Peter 3:15

about the second? Clearly God wants to speak, not just through Jesus, nor just through the Bible, but through us! If this is the case, it is inescapable that the words we use in sharing the Good News must move beyond being merely propositional facts to being personal story. Sharing some truths divorced from our own lives is surely not what Jesus has in mind. He wants us to be able to talk about the Good News at work in us. For our part, this will require openness and courage. Even before this, however, it will require that we are aware how God is at work in us and that we are able to communicate it in ways that our friends will understand. Here we will use three exercises to help us with this.



### **ACTION!**

### **Good News for us today**

One of the difficulties we face is knowing what difference God has made in our lives. Intuitively we may know that, through the Good News, God has been changing us for good. However, when we have to pinpoint some of the ways those changes take effect, we can struggle to give details.

- First, go to the Backpack study 1.2.4 ‘Redemption – NOW’. Read through the table that lists a variety of aspects of Good News that we may experience. No two people are alike! Given our different personalities, life experiences, and stages of life, we should not be surprised to find that we each place slightly different values on the various aspects of Good News and feel some things more poignantly than others.
- Try to answer the following questions:
  - What is one big need the Good News has addressed in my life?
  - How did this need show up in my life? Can you cite an incident that illustrates this?
  - When and how did God begin to meet this need through the Good News? Can you recall specific events?
  - What has changed since? Can you cite an incident that illustrates this?
- Using your answers above, tell a Christian friend how the Good News of God is changing your life. Ask for their feedback on whether it made sense and how you might improve the telling of it. Just saying it out loud will help make it clearer.
- Now you have a personal Good News story that you are able to share. Pray for an opportunity, and be ready to ‘give a reason for the hope you have’! (1Pet3:15)

A second time (the Pharisees) summoned the man who had been blind. "Give glory to God and tell the truth," they said. "We know this man (Jesus) is a sinner." He replied, "Whether he is a sinner or not, I don't know. One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!"

John 9:24-25



## Our own stories of the Kingdom

Jesus chose to tell lots of stories to illustrate what the Kingdom of God is like, and he used images that his audience could understand (e.g. mustard seed, lost sheep, hidden treasure). We need to do the same for our setting. If we use technical words (e.g. redemption, holiness) we risk having our audience either not understanding, or attributing a different meaning to the words than what we intended. So we need to think hard and work hard to come up with a few images that communicate something of what God is calling us to.

### Try this:

1. Pick **an object from your everyday world** that reminds you of some aspect of following Jesus. Meet up with a fellow believer and explain its meaning. Seek feedback on how understandable the symbol and explanation are.



EXAMPLE: CD. A physical CD is small and two dimensional and yet there is much more to it than meets the eye (music, information, photos). In the same way, there is much more to us than meets the eye. God made us to

live lives of great depth; to live superficial lives – focusing on the externals of how we look and what stuff we have – is to miss out on the purpose of living.

2. Choose **a film or book or event** you've been to recently that give some insights into following Jesus. Again, explain to your friend how the book/film/event sheds light on the good news.



EXAMPLE: A birthday party. Heaven is like a family birthday party, because it's a celebration of who you are as a member of the family, not what you have or haven't achieved.

My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on human wisdom, but on God's power.

1 Corinthians 2:4-5



## The inside story in non-religious language

At the heart of our belief is our relationship with God and our experience of him. BUT when we talk with others about faith we often resort to talking about the context of where we experienced God rather than what was going on inside of us. For example, we say 'I went to Navs' or 'Church', or 'I went to a Bible study' rather than 'I had an interesting discussion with some friends about what sort of things we can hope for in life...' etc. Although it's true that we go to these events or do these things, it doesn't actually communicate anything to an outsider. For them, our 'Christian faith' can be like an old church building: a large solid object with very small windows so you can't see what's going on inside!

- Try answering these questions to help give your friends the inside story of what's going on for you, in language that they can understand

Question	What is true for you in your own words?	How would you say this to someone else?
What are you praying about?		
How is God helping you with a problem?		
What are you reading in the Bible?		
What are you learning from others?		





## 6. Summary

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### ***Things to do/ Questions to consider***

Go back over the studies in this section and briefly note down the main new things you have learnt or the things you have tried as you have sought to integrate more prayer into your life.

God may have got your attention about one or two things you need to do as a result of going through these studies.

Whatever it is, you will have the best chance of succeeding in these things if you tell someone else about them and, if possible, if you practically plan when you will do these things.

Write these things down somewhere that will help you to act on them!

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### ***Thought to finish***

Here are some thoughts to keep in mind as we look to share this faith that is shaping our lives:

- **Authentic is good.** The Good News is passed from life to life. God can become visible in and through our lives in the good, the bad and the ugly moments
- **Incomplete is OK.** You can be in the middle of an experience without complete answers and that's okay to talk about. That is just a part of sharing the journey.
- **Connect the dots.** People looking at our life just see results; they don't see the internal workings of our heart and mind. We can help them understand how God influences us by sharing things like how our praying made a difference in a situation, or how we were influenced by reading something in the bible, or how we sensed God working circumstances in our favour, or how we were encouraged by other believers. Sharing the internal workings will help them make sense of things.
- **A Jesus story is great.** If you can find a story from the Bible – especially a Jesus story – to link to your experience, thought, feeling or action, that is particularly helpful. It can show how the Bible helps us, and by implication how reading it could potentially help them too.
- **Being subtle can be too subtle.** People unfamiliar with an active spirituality may struggle to know what you are talking about. Often (but not always) it's better to be more obvious and up-front then to leave them to pick up subtle nuances of your faith experience.



*Things to help us relate to others:*

# Mentoring

*The LORD had said to Abram, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."*

Genesis 12:1-3

This promise that the Lord gave to Abraham is woven like a thread right through the Bible, as it is passed from one generation to the next. In the Old Testament the promise is passed through physical generations, but with the arrival of Jesus the emphasis shifts to spiritual generations, so that

*When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field."*

Matthew 9:36-38

all who have faith in Jesus – regardless of culture – are considered to be children of Abraham (Galatians 3:7).

Jesus modelled how the promise would be passed on. He taught the crowds, he sent the 72 out in mission, *but* he lived with and explained everything to his 12 disciples; and even then he had 3 among the disciples that he was particularly close to. Rather than going broad with many, his emphasis was on going deep with a few. We too are called to be disciples of Jesus and to help others do the same – not helping the hundreds or the dozens, but helping the few within our reach.

We have called this topic 'mentoring', because as well as talking about 'discipling' (– someone helping a person younger in the faith) we also wanted to include peer mentoring and the seeking of help from those who are older. The models we talk about here are relevant to all three.

The studies are as follows:

- 1 *Mentoring Basics*
- 2 *Mentoring: Three stories meet*
- 3 *Mentoring: listening in three places*
- 4 *Mentoring: Three key activities*
- 5 *Summary*



## 1. Mentoring basics

We see mentoring in the world around us. In the workplace a new employee may have a mentor to teach them how to carry out their new role. On the sports field an athlete usually has a coach to train and motivate them to perform to their best. Life coaches enable people to achieve personal and business goals and personal trainers help people achieve their physical goals. So, what should mentoring be like between believers?

Mentoring in the Christian context is all about discipleship: helping people grow as disciples of Jesus, with the goal of becoming increasingly more like Christ. And



Just as a nursing mother cares for her children, so we cared for you... we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well... we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory.

1 Thessalonians 2:7-12

as we look into the way people in the New Testament mentored others, we see this was not just a matter of passing on information or skills; it was also a matter of sharing of lives. This was Jesus approach, as well as that of the early believers; we should not be surprised to discover that this is also what we are called to do.

### Things to do/ Questions to consider

The Apostle Paul uses the analogy of parenting to help us understand what it means to be a mentor. He talks about helping new believers just like a “mother caring for her little children” or like a father dealing with his children “encouraging, comforting and urging” them to live lives worthy of

God. In the book of 1 Thessalonians we are given a window into the way Paul, Silas and Timothy helped the new believers at Thessalonica.

- Skim read the book of 1 Thessalonians (only about 3 pages long ☺) noticing the *attitude* and *actions* of Paul, Silas and Timothy towards the Thessalonians. Write your reflections below.

Attitude toward the Thessalonians	Actions to help the Thessalonians	What might these practically look like in your own mentoring relationships?

## Some mentoring principles

- **We influence people with our lives**, not only with information. Take your mentoring beyond meeting in a cafe. Look out for practical ways you can serve your friend, or opportunities to serve others together.
- **God is at work in your friend's life** completing the work He started. We are junior partners with God. This means prayer and listening to God are an essential part of mentoring.
- **Recognise the unseen spiritual realities.** There are spiritual forces working against the purposes of God in people's lives and there is a battle between the Spirit in us and our own sinful desires. We all need encouragement and help to live by the Spirit and not for ourselves.
- **Jesus and Paul had a clear purpose** when they helped others. "Follow me and I will make you fishers of people" (Matthew 4:19). "We want to present them to God, perfect (mature) in their relationship to Christ" (Colossians 1:28). What is the purpose of your mentoring relationship?
- **Jesus and Paul prayed for those they were helping.** Prayer will come from the realisation that helping people to become mature in their faith requires a lot of things that only God can do.
- **Jesus had a finish point.** There was a time when his role ended and he handed things over to the Spirit (John 16:7). We need to have beginning, review, and end points.

If we think of our Christian life as a journey there will be people around us at a similar place in their faith journey (peers), there will be those who are further along in their faith journey (potential mentors) and also people just starting out on their faith journey (people we could mentor). If possible, we should be looking for mentoring relationships with each of these types of people, even if some of these relationships involve less frequent meetings than others.

Getting started in mentoring is a step of faith. We may question our ability or experience, especially if we are looking to help someone else grow in their walk with God. But we really don't need to be experts to do this; we just need to be one small step ahead. Helping someone a little is much better than leaving them to work it all out for themselves.

We may also question whether the person we want to ask will be interested. However, the potential benefits of doing this are exponentially so much greater than the risk of them saying 'no'; the only failure is not asking.

- What experiences have you had of mentoring?  
How have these experiences shaped your view of mentoring?

### ACTION!

➔ Prayerfully think about the people you know. Write down the names of potential people you could initiate a mentoring relationship with...

Someone newer to faith who you could encourage and help:

A peer for mutual encouragement:

Someone you would like to learn from :

➔ After more prayer, decide on someone to ask... then go for it. You will both have so much to gain from it!

### How do I decide who to mentor?

- Pray! Ask God to lead you by putting people He wants you to help on your heart, and bringing these people across your path.
- Ask yourself and others you are teaming up with: "Who is around and is keen to grow?" "Who is young in their faith and would benefit from some personal help?"
- Look for signs of an open heart and a learning attitude. Signs to look for in other people might include: asking questions, listening to others' views, talking about knowing God, excitement about sharing their faith with others, serving and helping others...
- Since mentoring requires a relationship between yourself and the person you mentor ask; "Who am I developing rapport with? Who seems to be responsive to talking with me about spiritual things?"



## 2. Mentoring: 3 stories meet

Nobody is ever a blank slate; we all have history and experiences and personality that have shaped us. If we are going to be an encouragement to someone else in their walk with the Lord, it will be really helpful to understand as much as possible their story and what has been happening for them. However, this is not enough, because we also have to take into account two other stories that have a significant part to play in our interaction: our own story and the Bible story. We need to be listening carefully for how all three of these stories interact so that we can understand what the Lord might be saying to us and to the person we are trying to encourage.



### Three stories



#### 1. Understand your friend's story

- **Step into your friend's shoes.** Imagine how things are from your friend's point of view. What are they thinking and feeling? Putting yourself in their shoes requires you to suspend your own natural judgement of their experience and perspective. Try to just understand their thoughts and feelings rather than judging them. As you do this, you will have more empathy and a better understanding of them and their world; but this will take time.
- **Listen for underlying interests and concerns.** Jesus was a masterful listener and observer. He often responded to people's underlying concerns or patterns of thinking (For example, with Martha and Mary (Luke 10:38-42) and with the rich man (Mark 10:17-22)). As you listen to your friend describe an incident or an experience they have had, try to understand what's going on beneath the surface for them with their emotions and responses. As human beings we are complicated! It takes effort and time to work out the longings and deep issues that people are really wrestling with.



#### **ACTION!**

- ➔ For effective understanding you need to listen well. Some people are better at this than others but regardless, we all need to do it. Make sure you work through the next mentoring model: listening in 3 places to get help in improving your listening.

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## 2. Relate your own story

- As you listen to your friend, your own stories and experiences will come to mind. What have you experienced in this area? What has God taught you in this area? What Bible passages have been particularly helpful to you? One warning: be careful of just looking for opportunities to get your own experiences into the conversation and shifting the emphasis to you. The most helpful thing to do will be to listen to your friend first before trying to recall your own stories.



### ACTION!

- ➔ Keep a journal of what God teaches you. Life and experiences can move along so quickly that we don't have time to reflect on what God has taught us. Old lessons and experiences get buried beneath new ones. Journaling is one way of slowing down and reflecting on what God is doing and teaching us. These life lessons are then more accessible to share with others.

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## 3. Connect the Bible story

- **The Big Picture.** As a whole the Bible is a big story that speaks to us about who we are, where we have come from, what's wrong with our world and where we are headed. The big themes of creation, fall, redemption and future hope can be related to many of the issues we face in life. When talking about an issue we can consider how these big themes are reflected in what we are facing and how we might respond. (For more detail on this, refer to the Backpack section 'What God is doing'.)
- **Individual Stories.** The Bible also contains many little stories of how people tried to follow God or follow their own way. These stories are recorded to help us learn from the good and bad choices of others. God will often bring to mind a story in the Bible or something that we have read recently that relates to what our friend has shared. This is one of the mysteries of living with God: how God by His Spirit is able to make use of what we have learned and recently read in the Bible. One good reason for staying in the Bible regularly is that it gives the Holy Spirit some good raw material to work with as we seek to help others.

### ACTION!

- ➔ On a piece of paper, write down the issue you are discussing at the top of the page, and then down the left side write: creation; fall; redemption; future hope. Together with your friend think through how these themes and any relevant passages might shed some light on the issue.
- ➔ Once you have done the above exercise, consider:
  - Are there any stories of people in the Bible that had to wrestle with this issue?
  - What lessons or principles did they apply?
  - What can you learn from their example to practically apply to your issue at hand?



### 3. Mentoring: listening in 3 places

Following on from the previous model which involved trying to find connections between your friend's story, your own story and the Bible story, this model focuses on something that's needed if we are to make those links: listening. It will really help you grow as a mentor if you can keep getting better at listening in three places when meeting with someone: listening to your friend, listening to yourself, and listening to the Holy Spirit.



#### Listening in three places

##### 1. Listening to your friend.

Truly listening to someone is like standing beside them and looking out at the world through their eyes. Listening like this communicates value and respect for our friend and their perspective.

Think about times when someone has really listened to you. What did this feel like? How did this help you?

Listening like this is rare. A danger for mentors is giving advice before properly understanding what is happening for your friend – and in fact whether or not they actually want to hear your advice! Your friend may simply, yet profoundly, want you to listen; and perhaps with some occasional questions you may be able to help them figure out for themselves the best way forward.



#### ACTION!

When listening to your friend, try these things:

- ➔ **Be fully present.** People reveal what they really think and feel when they believe the person they are talking to is genuinely interested in them. Maintain good eye contact and suspend your own thoughts and judgements in order to create space to hear and fully understand what your friend is experiencing.
- ➔ **Reflect back** to your friend what you understand they are saying and feeling. To help you get started, try using the formula: “You feel (say the feeling word) because (say the event or content that is associated with the feeling).” “You feel...because...” is not intrusive in conversations and helps us to remember to reflect feelings and content.
- ➔ **Ask occasional questions.** It can be easy to rely on questions and use them excessively and inappropriately. Often questions focus on the concerns and perspective of the listener rather than those of the speaker. This causes a barrier to communication by dictating the direction of the conversation. Ask fewer questions (many questions can be expressed as statements and this can be more productive in a conversation). Use open rather than closed questions, asking only one question at a time and allowing periods of silence.

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## 2. Listening to yourself.

We each carry out an inner conversation while talking with someone. During a conversation we experience judgments, questions, concerns, daydreaming and preoccupation with our own thoughts (- thinking about what we will say next). This internal conversation can promote conversation with our friend, or it can hinder our conversation by distracting us from truly listening. To be used positively, we need to suspend judgment and let our internal conversation reflect on our friend's expression and our response to this.



### Suspending Judgment

When you suspend judgment you are able to recognise your own judgments as they occur in conversation. This helps you reflect and respond in ways that promote true dialogue. It's not possible or helpful to stop judging all together; the judging process helps us form our own opinions and evaluate ideas. The aim of *suspending* your judgment is to create space between your judgment and your automatic response in the conversation. This space allows you to evaluate your judgment and consider other possibilities. Reacting to your judgments in a 'knee jerk' way stops you from seeing alternative perspectives, shuts down your listening and will prevent you from understanding your friend.

On-the-spot reflection involves stopping the automatic flow of thoughts in your thinking so that you can ask yourself questions about what has been happening so far in the conversation. During reflection you are trying to better understand your own and others thinking and reasoning, and secondly to make connections between your friends story, your story and the Biblical story.

### ACTION!

#### → Try reflecting on these questions during a conversation:

- How am I responding to what my friend is saying?
- How is my heart responding?
- Are any experiences of my own coming to the surface?
- What is God impressing on me?
- Would it be helpful to share this?

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## 3. Listening to the Holy Spirit.

When we believe in Jesus, God's Spirit comes to live inside of us. Jesus told his disciples how the Spirit would help them once Jesus returned to be with the Father (see John 14 and 16). Jesus tells us that the Spirit will be our teacher and our guide, and will even bring things to mind that we have learned. This is a great encouragement when we meet with someone. We are not on our own; God is present with us by His Spirit and will bring things to mind as we seek to help our friend.

In John 10 Jesus tells us that his sheep (followers) listen to His voice, know Him and follow Him. Recognising Jesus' leading is part of growing as a follower of Jesus. As we get involved in mentoring others we will need this help and guidance from Jesus to ensure the help we offer is from God and not just our own good ideas.

### ACTION!

- Pray before you meet with your friend. Ask God to guide your time together and give you wisdom so that you will know how to respond.
- Pray silently to God while you are meeting your friend. "What are you doing in my friend's life Lord?" "How would you like me to respond?" "What would you like me to say or ask?" "What passages in the Bible might speak to my friend's situation?"





## 4. Mentoring: 3 Key activities

When you get together with someone to help them grow in their walk with God, there are many different things you could do together. Although some of these things may change over time, we would like to suggest three things that are foundational and will always be good to include: sharing your lives, reading the Bible, and praying together.



### Three key activities

#### 1. Sharing our lives

Mentoring is not primarily a matter of transferring information about following Jesus to another person. If this was so, a good book or DVD would do the job. Rather, the Christian faith is all about relationship: relationship with God and relationship with one another. An important way we learn about the Christian faith is from what we see in others. To be a good mentor we need to open our lives to others by sharing things about ourselves and by letting our friend see our life in action.



Part of this sharing includes sharing our struggles. Like all people, we struggle with sin, we struggle to relate well with some people, we struggle under the pressure of work or study and we sometimes struggle with sickness. It can really help those we are mentoring if we are honest about our struggles, bringing them into the light. As we do this we can help one another to bring our lives and struggles honestly to God for His help and truth.

#### ACTION!

- ➔ Ask how things are going in your friends important life areas e.g. workplace (relationships with workmates), family, flat mates, sports team etc. Often God teaches us about ourselves and becoming more like Christ through our interactions with the people we see regularly. Often it's when things are not going well with others that we potentially learn the most. Processing these challenges with faith in God in mind can help us learn and change through these experiences. Sharing your experiences in this helps.
- ➔ Look at each other's relational world, especially friends and acquaintances who do not know God yet. Ask each other; "Is there someone God is putting on my heart? What is God doing in my friends' lives? What would be good news to these friends? Is there something God is prompting me to do with 1-2 of my friends?" Pray for the people God has brought to mind, and the ideas God had given you.

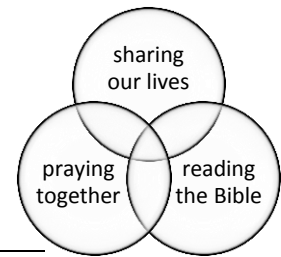
Because we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well.

1 Thessalonians 2:8

Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.

1Peter 4:8

- ➔ Ask your friend how their walk with God is at present. What is helping them to know God better? What are the barriers? How could they address these? Share your experience as well.
- ➔ Ask about what you discussed together last time when you met. It can be helpful to write a few notes after meeting to help you pray for your friend, follow up on questions or areas where more help is needed, and to help you remember what you talked about when you next meet.



## 2. Reading the Bible together

In his book *Lifestyle Discipleship*, Jim Peterson makes the comment that “Books might fill their heads with good ideas, but only the Scriptures can fill their hearts with Christ.” Being in the Bible together ensures we get God’s perspective on the things we talk about. We also give God the opportunity to speak into each other’s life.

### ACTION!

- ➔ Work through a Navigator Backpack section. Ideally prepare personally beforehand and share what you have learned when you meet together.
- ➔ As you share what’s been happening in your lives with each other, think about Bible stories or passages that relate to what you have been talking about. Read and discuss the Bible passage together. The Bible should be our first port of call when addressing an issue or question.
- ➔ Review memory verses you have each been learning. Encourage each other in this way of getting the Bible into our lives.
- ➔ Read passages in the Bible that address a question or topic your friend wants to learn about. You may have to do some homework to find passages or stories in the bible that will help your friend in this area.

They said to each other, "Didn't our hearts burn within us as He (Jesus) talked with us on the road and explained the Scriptures to us?"

Luke 24:32

## 3. Praying together

Praying together not only involves God in your learning and growth, it models to the person you are meeting with that prayer is vitally important. As with most practical skills, people learn as much from example as from other means. If you would like to help your friend to pray, then praying with them is probably the best way to achieve this.

### ACTION!

- ➔ If you meet in a cafe, finish 15 minutes early and go for a walk and pray together.
- ➔ Before meeting with someone make time to pray for your friend, your time together, what is happening in their life and for their friends who don’t know God yet.
- ➔ Every 4-6 weeks find a place where you can pray together. Instead of talking spend the time together praying for one another and the people in your relational worlds.
- ➔ Every 3-6 months set aside some time personally to pray for the people you are meeting with. Use the questions on the right to guide your prayer

#### Reviewing with God your mentoring relationships

##### Ask God:

- Where is my friend in their walk with Christ?
- What is he or she ready for?
- What is most urgent? What will most help the person go on to the next level of maturity, or break through a barrier in their life?
- How can I help?



## 5. Summary

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### Things to do/ Questions to consider

Go back over the studies in this section and briefly note down the main new things you have learnt, or the things you already knew but have been freshly reminded of ...

#### 3 Stories



#### Listening in 3 places



#### 3 Activities



God may have got your attention on one or two things you need to do as a result of going through these studies. You will have the best chance of succeeding in these things if you tell someone else about them and, if possible, if you practically plan when you will do these things.

Write these things down somewhere that will help you to act on them!

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### Thought to finish

Mentoring is crucial for passing the Gospel on to the next generation. Regardless of how well-equipped we feel for this, it is a task given to us all. Jesus' last words in Matthew's gospel were spoken to all those present, *including* the doubters: 'Go and make disciples...' In one way or another, it is something we all must do for, if we don't do it, who will? The Lord has generously given us a significant part to in building his kingdom, but we can also take great comfort that we are junior partners in this venture; he is the one who brings life from death, transforming people from the inside out. So let's leave the lion's share of the work to God, but let's be diligent in doing what we are called to do: make disciples!



*Things to help us relate to others:*

# Community

Repeatedly through the Genesis creation story we find the statement, “and God saw *it was good*”. However, this changes once the Lord creates the first human being. Then God himself says, “It *is not good* for the man to be *alone*”. The first negative statement in the Bible has to do with human ‘aloneness.’

We are fundamentally social beings. We need deep satisfying relationships with others to be fully human. This should not surprise us because God himself is a social being, a trinity – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. A ‘small group’ or community, if you like. And in the Trinity we see the members of the Godhead nurturing, celebrating and enjoying their wonderful shared life, from all eternity. We are created in the image of this divine ‘small group’ and naturally we long for deep satisfying relationships with a few friends. It is coded in.

This section on community explores the issues: what should Christian community look like and feel like in order for it to be sustainable? We also delve into the practical details of what ingredients will help you be part of a successful small group, whether with other believers or with those exploring faith.

This section does have a mixture of ideas to consider as well as practical things to try in small group settings. Be willing to try some new things. There is potentially so much to be gained, and so little to be lost. Give it a go!

The studies are as follows:

- 1 *Community – building the Body*
- 2 *The One Another’s*
- 3 *Giving generously*
- 4 *Small Group basics*
- 5 *Small Groups – exploring faith*
- 6 *Summary*



# 1. Community – building the Body

After Jesus had risen from the dead, he met with his disciples and said to them: “you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). After he said this, he was taken up into heaven.

From the Book of Acts onwards, we can clearly see that the Holy Spirit did fill them with power and propel this movement forward... increasingly from one end of the earth to the other, all the way to the present day. To make this happen, everyone had a part to play.



## *Gifts from God for service*

No two people are alike! God has given us all different gifts and strengths so that we can all make our unique contributions to build up the body of believers.

- Read the following passages which talk about the gifts that God gives to his people through the Spirit. Summarise what they say.  
What is the function of God’s gifts to us in the growth of the body?

Romans 12:3-8

1 Corinthians 12:1-11

Ephesians 4:7-16

1 Peter 4:10-11

There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work... All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines.

1 Corinthians 12:4-7,11

- From what you know of yourself, what do you believe are your strengths or gifts that you could use to build up the Body?

## ***Keeping the Gospel moving***

In the New Testament, from a big picture point of view, we see four inter-connected contributions made by people that kept the gospel moving in a place as well as through that place to elsewhere...

- **Pioneers** – who brought the gospel to a new place, including preaching and taking risks amongst people they didn't yet know (Acts 13:1-4).
- **Local labourers** – who lived out their Christian life amongst family, friends and acquaintances.
- **Local leaders** – who shepherded, envisioned and taught the local labourers (Acts 20:28-36).
- **Mobile alongsiders** – who moved between cities to build up local leaders and labourers and to keep them connected with and learning from those outside their local context (Acts 16:1-5).



### ***Local labourers***

Regardless of our involvement in the other roles, we all have some settings in which we are local labourers. Read through a selection of the verses below and summarise; these give insight into how the gospel was to penetrate the society of the day through the lives of the local labourers. In light of these passages, are there any things you need to start or stop doing?

Romans 12:14-21

1 Corinthians 5:9-13

1 Corinthians 14:22-25

Galatians 6:9-10

Ephesians 6:5-9

Philippians 1:27-30

Philippians 2:14-16

Colossians 4:5-6

1 Thessalonians 4:11-12

1 Timothy 2:1-4

1 Timothy 3:1-7

Titus 2:2-10

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## ***Two questions to consider***

For some Christians, they believe that as long as you attend a Sunday morning church service you are fine. This, however, misses the point. As we can see from this study, we all have unique contributions to make and we all need the contributions of others so that the Body of Christ – the Church – can be built up and expanded. Two good questions to ask yourself are:

- For you, what practical support do you think you need in order to sustain a life of faith and mission? If these needs are not currently being met, who do you know who could help you with this?
- Given your strengths and gifts, in what ways do you think you could practically support and build up any other believers that you know so that the gospel keeps moving forward?

Talk to someone about this and start doing what you can, because we are all better off when each of us makes our own unique contributions to the Body.



## 2. The One Another's

It doesn't take long reading the New Testament to realise that when it comes to relationships, the emphasis is on quality rather than quantity. Given the model of who God is and how he relates to us, the believers are frequently encouraged to put into practise the 'one anothers'. Practising these not only help to continually improve how we relate with each



"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."  
John 13:34-35

other, but they also make the gospel visible to anyone looking in as the good news is shared from life to life.

### ***Things to do/ Questions to consider***

- On the next page is a collection of New Testament verses describing how we should treat one another. Underline or write in the margin the key 'one another' idea from each of the verses listed.
- Taking your list of ideas from above, describe the big 'flavours' of New Testament community – the things that would have characterised the relationships amongst these groups of believers.

### **ACTION!**

- Think about some of the believing friends you regularly relate with. Given the 'one anothers' above, what ONE thing could you do this week to deepen one or some of these relationships?
- Thinking more broadly, are there others outside your regular group of Christian friends that you could improve in the way you relate to them? What initiative can you take to do this?

## ***‘One Another’ verses in the New Testament***

<p><b>John 13:34-35</b> "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."</p> <p><b>Romans 12:10</b> Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honour one another above yourselves.</p> <p><b>Romans 12:16</b> Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.</p> <p><b>Romans 14:13</b> Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother's way.</p> <p><b>Romans 15:7</b> Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.</p> <p><b>Romans 15:14</b> I myself am convinced, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, complete in knowledge and competent to instruct one another.</p> <p><b>1 Corinthians 1:10</b> I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought.</p> <p><b>Galatians 5:13</b> You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love.</p> <p><b>Galatians 5:15</b> If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.</p>	<p><b>Galatians 5:26</b> Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.</p> <p><b>Ephesians 4:2</b> Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.</p> <p><b>Ephesians 4:32</b> Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.</p> <p><b>Ephesians 5:21</b> Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.</p> <p><b>Colossians 3:9</b> Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices</p> <p><b>Colossians 3:13</b> Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.</p> <p><b>Colossians 3:16</b> Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.</p> <p><b>1 Thes. 3:12</b> May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you.</p> <p><b>1 Thes. 5:11</b> Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.</p> <p><b>1 Thes. 5:13</b> Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work. Live in peace with each other.</p> <p><b>1 Thes. 5:15</b> Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always try to be kind to each other and to everyone else.</p> <p><b>Hebrews 3:13</b> But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness.</p>	<p><b>Hebrews 10:24-25</b> 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.</p> <p><b>James 5:9</b> Don't grumble against each other, brothers, or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door!</p> <p><b>James 5:16</b> Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.</p> <p><b>1 Peter 1:22</b> 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.</p> <p><b>1 Peter 3:8</b> Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble.</p> <p><b>1 Peter 4:8-9</b> Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling.</p> <p><b>1 Peter 5:5</b> Young men, in the same way be submissive to those who are older. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, 'God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.'</p> <p><b>1 John 1:7</b> But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.</p> <p><b>1 John 4:11-12</b> Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.</p>
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NOTE: Additional "one another" verses include: Mark 9:50; John 5:12, 15:17; Romans 13:8, 16:16; 1 Corinthians 11:33, 12:25, 16:20; 2 Corinthians 13:12; Ephesians 5:19; Philippians 4:2; 1 Thessalonians 4:9, 4:18; 2 Thessalonians 1:3; Hebrews 13:1; James 4:11; 1 Peter 5:14; 1 John 3:11, 3:23, 4:7; 2 John 1:5. Many of these are about loving one another.





### 3. Giving generously

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*'There are three conversions necessary to every man; the head, the heart and the purse.'*

Martin Luther

Money itself is neutral as a store of value, but people can really crave the value it brings, and how we handle money can be a test of what we believe to be true and important.

In today's world, many Christian and charitable organisations work hard at marketing their various projects. For the individual believer, they can be inundated with good causes to give to, with letters, emails, and telemarketers all promoting the worthiness of their projects. This can be very confusing. Certainly, the Bible talks a lot about money – and particularly the dangers of loving it too much – but what does it say about giving?



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#### **Things to do/ Questions to consider**

In 2Corinthians chapters 8-9, Paul gives us some great principles in the area of Christian giving.

- Skim read 2Corinthians chapters 8 and 9.
- Note from these chapters some of the following principles:

#### **Principles of Christian giving**

- Jesus is the model of Christian giving (2Corinthians 8:9).
  - It is a 'grace' of the Spirit (2Corinthians 8:7).
  - Our financial giving should be a reflection of us first giving ourselves to the Lord (2Corinthians 8:5).
  - It is to be done voluntarily rather than out of compulsion (2Corinthians 8:8-12; 9:1-2,5,7) .
  - It is to be done by everyone, whether rich or poor (2Corinthians 8:1-3, 12-15).
  - The amount given is to be in proportion to income (– not necessarily the 10% tithe amount found in the Old Testament) (2Corinthians 8:12-14).
  - The giving is to be generous (2Corinthians 9:5-6)
  - Christian giving results in thanks to God, with both the Lord and the gospel glorified (2Corinthians 9:12-14).
- 
- How does the above picture compare with what, if anything, you thought Christian giving should include and be motivated by?
  - How does the way you currently give match up to these criteria?

Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share.

1 Timothy 6:17-18

## Give to what?

Generally speaking, within the context of the 'one anothers', we should be using our financial resources to show love to one another in our world of relationships.

Two other categories of people that are mentioned in the New Testament with regards to giving are:

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### 1. The Poor

Luke 11:37-41; 14:12-14; 18:18-22

Acts 11:28-30

Romans 15:26-27

Galatians 2:9-10

One of them, named Agabus, stood up and through the Spirit predicted that a severe famine would spread over the entire Roman world. (This happened during the reign of Claudius.) The disciples, as each one was able, decided to provide help for the believers living in Judea. This they did, sending their gift to the elders by Barnabas and Saul.

Acts 11:28-30

- What criteria do you currently use to give money to the poor?
- Taking into account the verses above and the principles of giving listed on the previous page, are there any changes to where or how or how much you give to people in need?

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### 2. People ministering in the gospel

Luke 8:1-3

Philippians 4:15-19

Galatians 6:6

1 Corinthians 9:3-14

1 Timothy 5:17-18

After this, Jesus travelled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. The Twelve were with him, and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases... These women were helping to support them out of their own means.

Luke 8:1-3

- What criteria do you currently use to give money to people involved in Christian mission?
- Taking into account the verses above and the principles of giving listed on the previous page, are there any changes to where or how or how much you give to people working in service of the gospel?

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## ACTION!

Here are some possible action steps you could take:

- ➔ Make a budget. This will help you see how much you are earning and what you believe the Lord would want you to give to others.
- ➔ Prayerfully ask yourself: how well does my giving align with the things I believe to be important? Does my giving bring glory to the Lord and the gospel? You can't say 'yes' to everything, but being able to say 'yes' to something you believe in will make it easier to say 'no' to others promoting good causes (but ones that ultimately may not align as well with your values).
- ➔ Be proactive. If you resolve to give a certain amount of money, do it! Make it easy to make it happen (e.g. set up an automatic payment).

Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

James 2:15-17



## 4. Small Group basics

It is common to meet Christian friends socially, but our relationship with Jesus rarely gets mentioned in these conversations. We need to get together in ways that are more intentional if we really want to grow in our walk with God, as we seek answers to the same questions that the Apostle Paul asked Jesus at his conversion: 'Who are you, Lord?' and 'What shall I do, Lord?' (Acts 22:8-10). Being part of a small group can help us in this quest. The small group has a vital role, sitting between the more intense and personal one-to-one discipling and the more general, less interactive church or large group meetings. Small groups are great places for honest interaction, accountability and for the exercising of the various gifts that God has given people in the group.



This study looks at some important ingredients that need to be considered as for a successful small group to operate. They are important things to bear in mind if you are leading the group, but they are also invaluable for all members of the group to be aware of, because ultimately all group members are responsible for how well the group goes.

### Starting a Small Group

A good first step is to meet with a few interested friends to pray and decide how you can love and encourage one another, and how you can serve and show Jesus to those in your world.

3 Purposes for a Small Group	Good Questions to Consider as you start
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>Worship</i> – a focus on God, and a deepening of our appreciation of Him. (Colossians 3:16)</li><li>• <i>Transformation</i> - nurturing and celebrating our shared life and encouraging one another to grow to be more like Jesus Christ. (Hebrews 10:24,25)</li><li>• <i>Mission</i> - praying for and reaching out to others. (see Matt 18:19-20, John 20:21)</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What are our expectations and desires for the group?</li><li>• What commitments will we make to one another? (confidentiality, preparation, attendance,...)</li><li>• How often shall we meet?</li><li>• When and where shall we meet?</li><li>• What shall we do when we get together?</li></ul>

Essential Ingredients Of A Small Group Get-Together
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• A relaxed social setting. It is not business; it is friendship. See if you can find a way to include food and drink, a meal even!</li><li>• Praise and thanksgiving. You are meeting together in God's presence. Celebrate that! This will bring joy and a growing confidence in God.</li><li>• Time in the bible together. This should not be superficial, nor should it be dominated by a few. Everyone should be encouraged to dig in for themselves and share what they have found.</li><li>• Honest sharing. It will feel risky to say what is really going on but it will be worth it. We will never get anywhere if we are not real with one another. Confidentiality is important here.</li><li>• Prayer for one another's needs, desires, aspirations and action steps. We need healthy accountability. We need to help one another to follow through on the things God is putting on our hearts.</li><li>• An outward focus. This is "a group for others". It will ultimately stagnate unless it sees itself existing for people outside the group as well as those in the group. This involves praying for one another's friends and finding ways to team together to reach and serve others.</li></ul>

## Components of a Small Group meeting

The primary outcomes for the believers should be *transformation* and involvement in *mission*. What happens in the group should result in the development of a walk with God that transforms every aspect of our daily lives. The group time should connect with our real life situations and result in “love and good deeds” (Hebrew 10:24-25). The group time will benefit from including the following:

Component:	Worship (Believers to God)	The Word of God (God to Believers)	Mutual Ministry (Believer to Believer)	Mission (Believer to Unbeliever)
<b>Definition</b>	Praising God by focussing on his nature and character	Receiving heart-level input from God	Building loving, helpful relationships	Reaching out with the good news of Christ's love
<b>Goal</b>	To bring joy to God and assurance to believers	To grow in mind and spirit toward the image of Christ	To Knit us together in love and build us as whole people	To help people outside the group know God and become like Jesus
<b>Examples</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Praise</li> <li>•Reading worshipful passages from the bible</li> <li>•Reading poetry</li> <li>•Singing or listening to music</li> <li>•Lord's supper</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Discussing passages in the Bible</li> <li>•Memorising Bible statements</li> <li>•Reading books</li> <li>•Videos and Tapes</li> <li>•Meditation exercises</li> <li>•Prior study</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Conversational prayer</li> <li>•Eating together</li> <li>•Identifying/developing/using gifts</li> <li>•Recreation</li> <li>•Weekends away</li> <li>•Praying/Processing situations together</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Praying for non-Christian friends</li> <li>•Helping one another find ways/ideas for reaching friends</li> <li>•Teaming together in mission activities</li> </ul>

### Some additional thoughts...

- Generally the flow of the meeting should move from left to right in the table above. However, time should be given at the beginning for relaxed relating and catch-up.
- Each person should feel welcome and at ease with the other members of the group. Something to drink and maybe to eat provides an informal gathering point as people arrive. An ice-breaker that gets every person saying something is very helpful. The simplest way to ask people to share something significant that has happened during the week.
- Also, people should feel welcomed by God. The Spirit of God loves to use the Bible to warm our hearts to God. Reading a short passage and sharing an encouraging thought or giving people the opportunity to comment on it is a simple way to do this.
- Always conclude the meeting with an outward focus. This is ‘a group for others’. It will ultimately stagnate unless it sees itself existing for people outside the group as well as those in the group.

preparation	Resources	closure
The better the preparation by everyone – and especially the leader – the better your group time will be. More time can be spent on extracting key truths from the passage and possible practical implications for us, and less time on some of the more obvious ideas. By focusing on the scriptures being studied we are less likely to spin off into unrelated personal opinions or being dominated by ‘collective ignorance’. Make sure you do at least the agreed minimum preparation time, but don't let that limit you!	<p>Look through the Bible section of the Backpack for general ideas on how to get into the Bible, especially: ‘3. The Bible –study it’.</p> <p>Look through the resources section of the website for downloadable guided Bible studies on books of the Bible as well as topical studies:  <a href="http://www.navigators.org.nz">www.navigators.org.nz</a>.</p> <p>The resources section also has more detailed information on running a small group in a paper called: ‘Small Group Leading’</p>	Don't assume a group will go on indefinitely; it is good to review each year. The group may end all at once, or two or three of the members may split off to be involved in a new small group initiative. Whatever the case, when closure comes, leaders can help group members reflect on what God has done. Sometimes things happen so gradually that we forget to notice growth. Reviewing helps us rejoice in the good that has taken place. It is also a time to appreciate the individuals in our group and give thanks together for the strengths God has given each of us, praying for each other as we move on to new small group involvements.



## 5. Small Groups- exploring faith

The previous study described a basic approach to starting and sustaining a small group with a focus of helping people grow in discipleship.

This study also has a focus of helping people along the journey of discipleship, but in this case some or most of these people are starting the journey from a long way back. In other words, in a group setting, the emphasis here is helping people who don't yet believe in Jesus.



### Group for exploring faith: Who does What?

WHAT needs to happen for a person to believe in Jesus?	WHO does WHAT in a person's life?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Understand the message:</b> A person needs to understand the Gospel: who Jesus Christ is, why he did what he did and what he wants from us in response. However, ignorance is not the real obstacle to faith. Take care to focus on the main truths of the Gospel and not get lost on tangents.</li><li>• <b>Submit their life to God:</b> The real problem is rebellion. Sin is "everyone turning to his or her own way" (Isaiah 53:6). Coming to faith in Jesus is ending the rebellion; it is coming out with your hands up, into the arms of the Lord who loves you greatly.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>The Bible:</b> The Bible speaks the truth. Truth from the Bible can heal spiritual blindness and reveal our thoughts and attitudes (see Hebrews 4:11-12). God can use the Bible to do this even when a person is undecided about what they think of this Book.</li><li>• <b>The Holy Spirit:</b> The Spirit is the one who convicts a person. He convinces us of our sin, of what is right and that we all face consequences for our wrong doing. The Spirit gives people new life. (See John 16:4-11).</li><li>• <b>Our Part:</b> We share our lives and how the message has transformed us. We also pray. We love people and help them understand what is written in the Bible (see 1John 1:2-3). It's good to remember that it's a team effort: "one person sows and another person reaps" (John 4:37-38). This helps us to be patient and to trust God who oversees everything.</li></ul>

Our tendency is to overstep our role and try to do the work of the Holy Spirit and of the Bible. This leaves us attempting to do the impossible, and frustrates us and those who we seek to help.

We need to go into the discussion as a *learner amongst learners*. That's what we are! There is always more to learn about Christ and becoming like Him. We need to realise that we are on the same journey as our friends. They need to submit to Christ and follow him. So do we.

### Things to do before the faith discussion

- **Pray!** There is a spiritual battle over the lives of people. Prayer is one of the key weapons God has given us. Expect some opposition along the way. There will be times you don't feel like turning up to the discussion. Thank God for the people and opportunity he has given you.
- **Be prepared for the discussion**
  - Understand the chapter you are going to discuss. Think about it and let it speak to you first.
  - Prepare a few questions that will direct people into the big ideas of the Bible passage.
  - Be prepared to simply and succinctly explain the critical ideas of the chapter. Use these explanations only if necessary.
  - Meeting with another person to discuss the passage ahead of time helps you to understand the main truths, and for these to come alive in your own life.

### Things to do when you meet for your faith discussion

- **Create a welcoming environment.** Be a great host. What could you do to help make people feel at ease? Realise you are doing this for your friends, not to make you feel more important.
- **Give people the space they need to think.** People need room to doubt, to wrestle with the truths they encounter and to weigh the cost of their decision to submit to Christ. You need to create an environment that says: 'thinking is encouraged here!' This means as a facilitator you should listen more than talk and ask questions more than give answers.  
Remember the real issue for people is submitting to Christ. The temptation to try to win every point in the discussion can actually work against that happening. Our need to win can generate resistance – against us, and consequently the Gospel!
- **Keep the discussion on track.** A rambling discussion meets no one's needs and frustrates everyone. Your job is to consistently bring the discussion back to the biblical text. Keep in mind that you're together to help each other understand what is written in the Bible.
- **Allow the Bible to speak for itself.** You don't need to defend it. Remind yourself that your security rests with God, not on how your friends view you or what you believe. Resist the temptation to defend or prove things in the Bible.
- **Don't be afraid of silence.** People need time to think.
- **Occasionally summarise the truths you have covered.** Sometimes a summary is a good occasion to give a succinct explanation of the Gospel. This can help clarify the fact that this message calls for a response.

### Some practical suggestions

- The ideal group size is between 6-8 people. Larger groups make discussion more difficult.
- Limit the number of Christians in the group and choose Christians who will listen more than talk. You want people who will facilitate discussion rather than preach their views. It can be good to have someone who has recently come to faith with you in the group. Their excitement for Jesus and understanding of life without God can give them good insights and credibility with others in the group.
- Have clearly defined start and finish times, and stick to these.
- End on a high note. This encourages your busy friends to return next time.
- Have the discussion in a good environment – warm, free of distractions and interruptions.
- Recruit people to pray for you while you are having your discussions.

### Resources

- If you are unsure about what part of the Bible to read, it's always a good idea to start with a Gospel.
- Go to the [navigators.org.nz](http://navigators.org.nz) website for extra study resources to help e.g. Mark's Gospel Reading group material, Encounters with Jesus, Jesus I AM statements



## 6. Summary

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### **Things to do/ Questions to consider**

Go back over the studies in this section and briefly note down the main new things you have learnt and/or the things you have tried as you have sought to integrate some of these ideas into your life...

God may have got your attention on one or two things you need to do as a result of going through these studies. Perhaps it is to try some different skills in your small group, or to ask some friends to start a small group. Alternatively, it may be to improve in the way you live out the one-anothers, or to be more intentional about using your gifts and strengths to build up the Body.

Whatever it is, you will have the best chance of succeeding in these things if you tell someone else about them and, if possible, if you practically plan when you will do these things.

Write these things down somewhere that will help you to act on them!

*Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ...*

*if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. 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? But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body...*

*God has put the body together, giving greater honour to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honoured, every part rejoices with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.*

*1 Corinthians 12:12-27*

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### **Thought to finish**

It is not good to be alone. God has created us to be in community and he has given each of us a mix of strengths and weaknesses, so that we need others and they need us. In the Body of Christ, there are no redundancies; we all have an important contribution to make. We miss out and so do others when we are just consumers; we also need to be contributors. So don't sit back; take the initiative today to do what you can, where you are, with what you've got. And by faith, none of us will be disappointed.