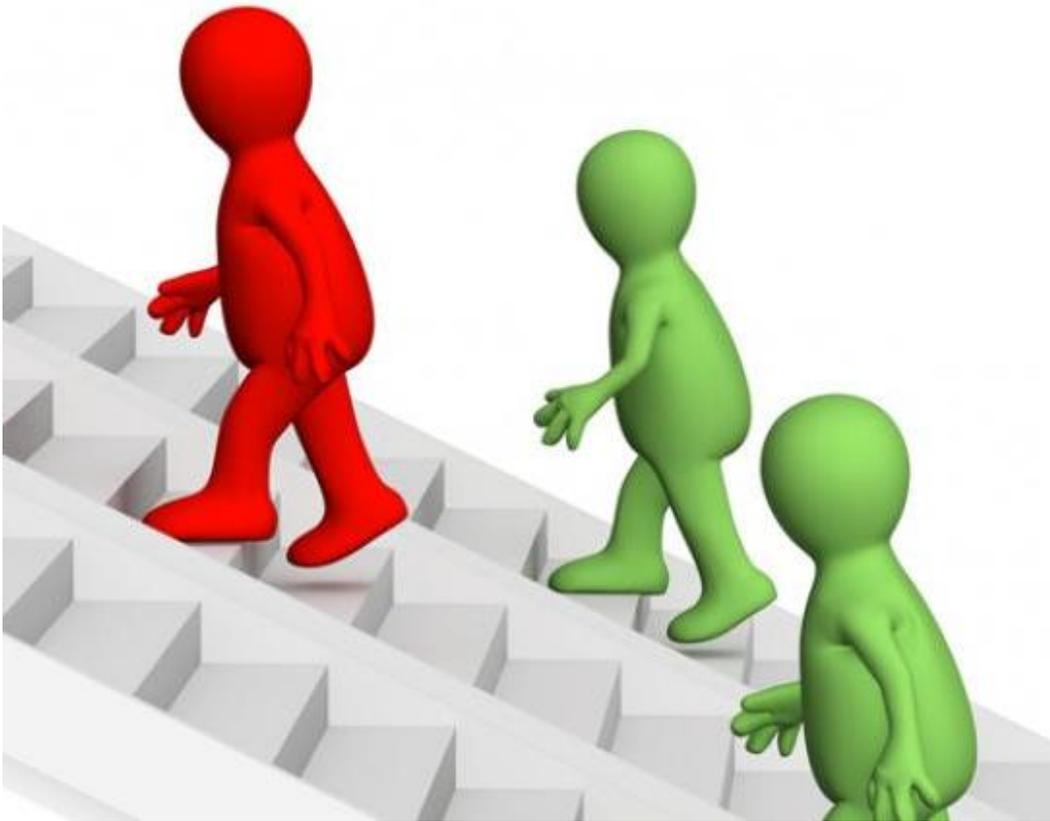


# First Steps



# in the faith

*Six weeks of material for new and growing Christians*



*by Paul Coulter*

# Contents

|  |         |
|--|---------|
| <b>Introduction</b>  | Page 2  |
| <b>How to use this material</b>  | Page 2  |
| <b>Week 1: New Life</b>  | Page 4  |
| <i>The Good News • A new identity • What difference will it make? • How can I be sure?</i> |         |
| Pointers from the Word #1  | Page 7  |
| Daily Readings #1  | Page 8  |
| <b>Week 2: New Relationship</b>  | Page 12 |
| <i>Prayer – talking to God • What to do about ... doubts ... temptation ... sin</i>        |         |
| Pointers from the Word #2  | Page 15 |
| Daily Readings #2  | Page 16 |
| <b>Week 3: New Direction</b>   | Page 20 |
| <i>The Bible – God reveals Himself to us • Knowing God’s will</i>                          |         |
| Pointers from the Word #3  | Page 23 |
| Daily Readings #3  | Page 24 |
| <b>Week 4: New Power</b>   | Page 28 |
| <i>The Holy Spirit – God at home in our lives • Spiritual Warfare</i>                      |         |
| Pointers from the Word #4  | Page 31 |
| Daily Readings #4  | Page 32 |
| <b>Week 5: New Family</b>  | Page 36 |
| <i>Love one another • Why bother with Church? • The New Covenant • The Lord’s Supper</i>   |         |
| Pointers from the Word #5  | Page 39 |
| Daily Readings #5  | Page 40 |
| <b>Week 6: New Purpose</b>   | Page 44 |
| <i>The End of the World is Near! • Our Mission • Water Baptism</i>                         |         |
| Pointers from the Word #6  | Page 47 |
| Daily Readings #6  | Page 48 |
| <b>Books of the Bible</b>  | Page 51 |
| <b>Recommended Resources</b>   | Page 52 |
| <b>Index of Bible References</b>   | Page 53 |
| <b>Index of Topics</b>   | Page 54 |
| <b>About the Author</b>  | Page 54 |

# Introduction

Becoming a Christian is the beginning of a new relationship with God and a new journey. God's destination for your life is for you to be like Jesus! How will you get there? The same way you became a Christian – through faith in God. Faith means accepting that what He says is true and then living your life by obedience to it, depending on Him to give you the wisdom and strength to do what He wants. Your faith in God will grow as you get to know Him more and you will get to know Him more in three ways:

- **Obedying His words** – that is why this material is designed to help you to engage with the Bible and to develop a good habit of reading, applying and obeying it. You will get to know and trust God more by understanding what He has said and seeing that it works as you put it into action!
- **Sharing life with His people** – that is why this material is designed to be discussed in a small group or one-to-one with other Christians. You can get to know God more by seeing the difference He has made in other people's lives and learning what it means to be part of the Church.
- **Facing everything with Him** – that is why this material constantly encourages you to turn to God in prayer, asking Him to teach you and lead you in every aspect of your life. You will grow in your experience of God and your trust in Him as you talk to Him, listen to Him and do what He wants.

The Christian life is a relationship with God, and it is an amazing adventure of surrendering to Him, obeying Him and depending on Him. This course is all about helping you to walk by faith!

*Walking by faith means **trusting** that what God says is true, **obeying** His commands and **depending** on Him to provide what you need to do it*

## How to use this material

This booklet is intended to help new Christians to find a firm grounding in their faith and to develop a healthy habit of reading the Bible and applying it to their lives. It is structured in six parts, covering core issues. Ideally, the material should be used over a period of six weeks in two contexts:

- A discussion group led by a more experienced Christian meeting once per week** – here you can ask questions and share experiences together, as well as applying the material into your local context.
- On an individual basis throughout the remaining days of the week** – the booklet includes Bible studies and daily readings that you can use daily at home throughout the week.

The material can also be used by individuals without a supporting discussion group or by a group of new Christians who do not have a more mature Christian to guide them, but it will usually be helpful for new Christians to have the opportunity to discuss the issues covered in the material together.

Material for each of the six weeks contains four elements:

- **Discussion Session Notes** – a blank page that you can use to write down questions you want to ask at the discussion group or to make notes based on what the group discusses.
- **Food for thought** – three pages of teaching on the topic.
- **Pointers from the Word** – a Bible study for you to do at home (ideally the day after the discussion group meets). There is also a suggested Bible verse for you to memorise.
- **Daily Readings** – five days of daily readings including a Bible reference, a summary of the passage's message, space for notes, three questions to help you apply the passage and pointers for prayer. There is also a glossary of terms you may not be familiar with from the week's passages.

# Discussion Session 1

# Notes



# Food for Thought #1

## New Life



### The Good News

The gospel, meaning ‘good news’, is the true story of God and humankind told in the Bible. It can be summarised in five movements, beginning with God’s purpose in creation and ends with God’s action in our lives:

#### **GOD reigns – God, the king, made us to know and love Him (Romans 1:20)**

God has always existed and does not depend on or need help from anyone else. He made the universe from nothing and is the rightful ruler over it. God is always truthful and always good. He made men and women to know Him and to care for His world under His direction.

#### **WE rebelled – human beings rejected and disobeyed God (Romans 3:23)**

Human beings decided that they would not live under God’s rule. This rejection of God and rebellion against Him is what the Bible calls sin, and it affects every human being. We think we can live without God and we end up serving and worshipping things that are not God. The result is that our actions, even some that seem right to us, hurt other people, harm our own bodies, and anger God. Sin has consequences. It causes suffering and pain in this life and it is because of sin that our bodies will die, but it also brings us under God’s just judgement.

#### **GOD rescues – God spoke to us through the Bible and sent Jesus to save us (Romans 5:8)**

Even though humankind rejected God, He didn’t give up on us. He worked out a plan in history through the nation of Israel that eventually led to His Son being born into the world. Jesus was God living as a man – showing us what He is like (always true and always good), teaching us what life under His rule is really like, and demonstrating that reality through miraculous signs. Jesus, the only sinless man, chose to die in our place. His death defeated every power that set itself against God and paid the full price for our sin. He rose to life, proving that He had defeated sin and death itself and that the day is coming when God will put all things right. God offers us the free gift of forgiveness and a part in His plan for the world.

#### **WE respond – we must turn away from our sin and trust in Jesus (Romans 10:9)**

To receive God’s forgiveness and be part of His present and future plan in His world, we must respond to God’s call in repentance and faith. To repent means to acknowledge that you cannot live without God, that God was right all along, and that you need His forgiveness. Faith means to depend on God to forgive your sin and to entrust your life into His hands – trusting that He knows better than you do what you need and where your life should go. It is like a key that opens your life up to let God’s love and forgiveness in.

#### **GOD restores – God gives new, eternal life through the Holy Spirit to those who believe (Romans 8:1-4)**

If you turn to God, He will accept you, forgive your sin and will make you His child. He will begin to work in your life to make you into a new person, a person like His perfect Son, Jesus. The Holy Spirit will make your life His home, giving you power to live the kind of life God wants you to live. God will start to work out His purpose for you now, and this new life He gives you will not end even when your body dies.

### A new identity

The Bible uses many rich word pictures to describe what God has done for us. He has:

- **Saved us** (Acts 2:47; Romans 10:9; Ephesians 2:8-10; Titus 3:5) from the consequences of our sin.
- **Forgiven us** (Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 2:13-14; 1 John 2:12) for our sinful rebellion against Him.
- **Justified us** (Acts 13:39; Romans 3:23-28; 5:1-9; Titus 3:7) – we have been restored into right standing with God, proclaimed ‘not guilty’ because Christ died in our place.

- **Redeemed us** (Galatians 3:13; 4:4-5; Titus 2:14; 1 Peter 1:18) – meaning that, through His death, Jesus has paid the price to buy us back from our slavery to sin and death so that we now belong to God.
- **Adopted us** (Ephesians 1:5) – God has brought us into His family as His children.
- **Given us new life** (John 3:3; Titus 3:5; 1 Peter 1:23) – just as we were born physically and received physical life from our parents, so we have now been born spiritually (‘born again’) and have received a new, eternal life from our Father God.

The result of what God has done for us is that we now have a new identity. We do not cease to be who we were (our culture, personality and physical appearance remain the same) but we have a new kind of life which is centred on Jesus and this is now our source of identity and security. You are now:

- **A Believer** (1 Peter 2:17) – Christians used this name from an early stage to distinguish themselves from the people around them who did not believe in Jesus.
- **A Christian** (1 Peter 4:16) – this term was first used by non-Christians to describe believers (Acts 11:26). It is based on the title of Jesus (‘Christ’) and means literally a ‘Christ-follower’. It was readily accepted by the early believers but today it can be misleading as it means different things to different people.
- **A Disciple** (Matthew 28:19) – Christians are called ‘disciples’ because they are followers of Jesus who learn from Him and obey what He tells them. This term reminds us that we cannot just have Jesus as our Saviour (to forgive our sins) but must also recognise Him as our Lord (ruling in our lives).
- **A Child (son) of God** (Galatians 3:26) – this is a beautiful picture of our new relationship with God. God is a loving Father, teaching and correcting us and giving us what we need. As His children, we should grow every day to become more like Him. We will inherit everything that He possesses.
- **A Saint** (Ephesians 1:1) – in the Bible a saint is not a special person who is particularly good. The word means a person who is set apart by God to belong to Him and is used to describe all Christians.

## What difference will it make?

*from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view... Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! (2 Corinthians 5:16-17)*

Becoming a Christian is the beginning of a new life. The old way of living has gone – you are free from the guilt of your past and you have said goodbye to the values and standards that you used to live by. God has now begun a new creation in you and as you grow in your faith God will continue to make a new you through the work of His Spirit. This new life leads to a new attitude – no longer thinking from a “worldly point of view” but with God’s wisdom. This changes your approach to every aspect of life, for example:

- **Work** – for Christians, work takes on a new significance. We have a new perspective – that we are ultimately working for Christ and that He will reward us for our service. That frees us to be thankful rather than complaining, and to work hard even if our boss does not appreciate it (see Colossians 3:22-25; 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15). We work to serve God and to benefit other people.
- **Family relationships** – following Christ should make us a better son or daughter, husband or wife, father or mother, but our values and decisions will ultimately be motivated by a desire to serve God rather than the attitude of our family. In extreme situations this shift of loyalty may even mean that our family disowns us (Matthew 10:32-39; Colossians 3:18-21).
- **Sex** – God intended sex to be enjoyed between one man and one woman in the context of the life-long public commitment of marriage (see 1 Corinthians 5:16-17). This is His plan and it is also best for us.

Christians do not live by following rules in these or other areas of life, but by serving Christ, motivated by the grace we have discovered in Him. We live for God’s Kingdom (under His rule), by the standard of His righteousness, trusting Him to supply our needs. This dependence on God changes our fundamental approach to life – we can be free from anxiety and can live each day as a gift from Him (Matthew 6:25-34).

## How can I be sure?

### God's promises to us

Some Christians struggle to be confident that they really are saved. There are many promises in the New Testament that help us to be sure of what God has done in our lives, for example:

- **We have been given eternal life** – Eternal life is God's gift to us (John 3:16; Romans 6:23). Paul reminds us in Titus 1:2 that eternal life was promised by God to us and that He cannot lie. The Christian claim that we can be sure of eternal life is not presumptive – it is based soundly on God's promise.
- **Salvation is a gift from God, not something we earn** – Our salvation is a gift from God and does not depend on what we have done (Ephesians 2:8-9). We did not earn our salvation, since we could never be good enough, and we can never be good enough to keep it ourselves. It does not depend on us to keep our salvation, but on what God has done in us. God saved us so we could do good works for Him (Ephesians 2:10), not because we had already done good works to earn His favour!
- **Our life is in God's hand and He will not let it go** – Jesus said that no one can snatch His people out of His hand and also that no one could snatch them from His Father's hand (John 10:28-29). God is more powerful than anyone or anything else, so nothing has the power to snatch us away from Him.
- **Nothing can separate us from God's love** – in Romans 8:28-39 Paul gives us many amazing promises that are intended to convince us that God will carry through His plan for His people. No one else can get in the way of what God has done because He chose us, forgave us and Jesus lives for us.

### Our perseverance in the faith

At the same time as giving us these amazing promises, the Bible also challenges us to continue in our faith and expects our lives to change. This is a common theme throughout the New Testament:

- **Paul** challenges us to continue to live in Christ (Colossians 2:6-7) and to test our faith (2 Corinthians 13:5). He expects us to press on to greater things in our faith (Philippians 3:12-14).
- **James** warns that faith that does not lead to a changed life is not real faith at all (James 2:26).
- **Peter** (2 Peter 3:3-12) expects that real faith, which depends on God's promises (v4) will lead on to a changed, productive life (v5-8) and that this is how we can be sure of our calling by God (v10-11).

The Christian life is one of perseverance (Hebrews 10:36) and the ultimate proof of true faith in God is that it will stand the test (James 1:4), so we should run the race of the Christian life that God has set in front of us. As we do this we need to keep trusting in God and focusing on Jesus (Hebrews 12:1-3).

### What about "worldly Christians"?

Some people claim to be Christians but do not appear to be living for Jesus or to be any different from non-Christians. How can we explain this? There are two possibilities:

- The person was never a true Christian to begin with** – Jesus warned that some people would claim to follow Him and would even do wonderful things in His name, but that in the end He would say that they never really knew Him (Matthew 7:21-23). It is impossible to say that someone who claims to know God but denies it by their actions is truly saved (see Titus 1:16, 1 John 3:9). This does not mean that Christians cannot sin (see 1 John 1:8-10), but that they cannot be completely sinful. True Christians will produce fruit (Matthew 7:16), including a change of lifestyle and character. No human being is qualified to make the judgement about whether another person is truly saved, but God knows (2 Timothy 2:19).
- The person is a true Christian who has grown cold** – if a Christian stops living in dependence upon God their relationship with Him can grow distant. This person will never actually that Jesus is Lord (1 John 2:23) and they will never be completely happy living a life of sin, as the Holy Spirit in them will make them uneasy. They will often come back to walk with God eventually. They will often tell you that Christianity is true but that they were not good enough or that they messed things up. They need to confess their sin and return to God in repentance.

# Pointers from the Word #1



## Read John 10:24-33

What evidence that He is the Messiah does Jesus point to (v25)?

---

What two things do Christians (Jesus' sheep) do according to v27?

1) \_\_\_\_\_ 2) \_\_\_\_\_

What gift does Jesus give to His sheep (v28)? \_\_\_\_\_

What will never happen to Jesus' sheep (v28)? \_\_\_\_\_

Can anyone take our eternal life from us (v29)? \_\_\_\_\_

What claim does Jesus make in v30 about His relationship to the Father?

---

What did the Jewish leaders believe He meant by saying this (v33)?

---

## Read Hebrews 6:16-20

Why is it important for us to know that God's purpose is unchanging and that it is impossible for God to lie (v17-18)?

---



---

What picture of our confidence is used in v19, and how is this a helpful image?

---



---

Why is it encouraging to know that Jesus is now in Heaven (v20)?

---



---

In the Old Testament the High Priest was the person who entered God's presence representing the people and bringing a sacrifice for their sins. Why is it significant for us that Jesus is a high priest forever (v20)?

---



---

### MEMORISE THIS

[2 Timothy 1:12]

I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day.

# Daily Readings #1



Romans is the longest letter in the New Testament. It was written around AD 56 by the apostle Paul to the church in the city of Rome and contains Paul's fullest explanation of the gospel message.

This set of readings focuses in on five different passages of Romans that together tell the gospel story. Read one passage each day and make notes in the space provided about anything that stands out to you, anything you learn and anything you realise you need to change as a result of what you learn.

## Words you might need to know:

|                       |   |
|-----------------------|---|
| <b>Atonement</b>      | A sacrifice that turns away God's wrath from us – the idea is that Jesus died in our place, paying the price for our sins and taking the punishment we deserve (Romans 3:25). |
| <b>Glorify</b>        | To give God the recognition He deserves – to recognise how great He is and to speak about Him and live our lives accordingly (Romans 1:21).                                   |
| <b>Grace</b>          | God's undeserved love that motivates Him freely to give us His life and blessings (Romans 5:2).   |
| <b>Justify</b>        | To make right; to declare a person not guilty (Romans 3:26).  |
| <b>Reconciliation</b> | Bringing two people who were enemies into a new relationship with each other (Romans 5:10).   |
| <b>Redemption</b>     | The act of paying a price to set a slave free (Romans 3:24).  |
| <b>Repentance</b>     | The act of admitting our sin before God, turning away from it and asking for His forgiveness (Romans 2:4).  |
| <b>Righteousness</b>  | Being right with God or doing what is right (Romans 3:23).  |

## Day 1: Romans 1v18-2v5

The Christian message is all about salvation. We need to be saved, or rescued, from something that we can't rescue ourselves from. If we don't understand what we need rescued from, the whole message doesn't make any sense. That's why Paul begins his letter by explaining what our problem is – sin and God's wrath against it.

- What does Paul say about sin? How did it start, why is God angry about it, how does it show up in our society?
- What do we learn about God's judgement? What is it based on? Who will face it?
- What response should people make when they realise that God will judge sin?

*Give thanks for God's kindness and patience and that He gave you an opportunity to repent and so to be forgiven.  
Ask God to help you know Him more and to glorify Him.*

## Day 2: Romans 3v20-31

The problem of sin affects everyone, and we are helpless to solve it ourselves. The great news is that God put a plan into action to rescue us. The Old Testament Law and Prophets include promises that a Saviour would come, and Jesus fulfilled them. He died as a sacrifice of atonement for our sins – God could now make us right with Himself!

- Why is it so important that God's righteousness can come to us apart from the Law?
- Why did Jesus have to die?
- On what basis can people be made right with God?

*Take some time to thank God for what He has done for you through Jesus' death.*

*Praise God that you are now right with Him, not by anything you can boast about but simply because of Jesus!*

## Day 3: Romans 5v1-11

Being made right with God (justified) is only the beginning of a new life with God. The Christian life is meant to be one of peace, hope and love, but Paul is also brutally honest that it will involve suffering too and that there is a sense of waiting patiently for Jesus to return. For now, we stand in grace, but soon we will see Him face to face!

- What is the basis of peace and how is it connected with the idea of taking a stand on God's grace?
- How is it possible for us to rejoice in the sufferings we have to endure in this life?
- What do we learn from this passage about God's love?

*Take time to reflect on God's love for you – think about how much He loves you and how undeserved it is.  
Ask God to help you persevere in any difficulties you are facing and to continue to develop character.*

## Day 4: Romans 6v1-14

God loves us even though we do not deserve it and He acted out of love for us before we ever cared about Him or even existed, but that doesn't mean that we are free to live however we like. If we have really grasped God's grace, then it is as if we have died to our old sinful life. We need to keep on putting sin to death and living for God.

- Is it possible for a person to experience God's grace without any change resulting in his or her life?
- What does this passage say about baptism and why does Paul point these Christians back to their baptism?
- What determines whether or not a Christian sins when he or she is facing temptation?

*Praise God that you have been set free from sin so that it cannot be your master anymore.  
Take time to ask God to help you have victory over sin and offer your life to Him again.*

## Day 5: Romans 6v15-23

It isn't possible for human beings to be completely free – we're always going to be slaves to something! We start out as slaves to sin and it is a terrible, cruel master. Jesus sets us free, but if we do not make ourselves slaves to obeying God it's like being set free but then continuing to serve our old evil master. How crazy would that be?

- Why is sin such a bad idea for the Christian? According to this passage what are its negative effects?
- What is the teaching to which you have entrusted your life (v17)?
- What benefits are there from being a slave to God? Why can't we just be entirely free to be our own masters?

*Thank God that you have been set free from slavery to sin and that it is now possible for you to do what is right.  
Ask God to teach you how to offer yourself as a slave to righteousness through obeying Him.*

# Discussion Session #2

# Notes



# Food for Thought #2

## New Relationship



### Prayer – talking to God

*“Lord, teach us to pray”*

**Matthew 6:5-15** tells how Jesus taught His disciples to pray and includes the famous ‘Lord’s Prayer’. Jesus did not mean that we should always use these words when we pray, but the prayer is a good example of the kind of things we should pray about. Jesus taught His disciples seven vital truths about prayer:

1. **Prayer is to God, not men (v5-6)** – if we pray only to impress other people, their admiration will be our only reward. We must realise that it is God’s opinion and so pray in private as well as in public.
2. **The effectiveness of prayer depends on God’s power, not our words (v7-8)** – we should not think that prayer will be more effective because we use more words or repeat ourselves often. God already knows what we need before we say it. It is His power that makes our prayer effective, not our passion.
3. **Remember who God is (v9)** – we pray to God as our Father. This is a unique privilege for Christians. We realise that God is greater than we are and so we want to honour Him by giving Him the first place in our lives, but we also know that He is also our loving Father who is near to us.
4. **Pray for God’s will to be done (v10)** – prayer is not about us trying to change God’s mind to make Him do what we want, but about asking Him to change us so that we do what He wants. When we pray our greatest desire should be for God to do what He wants to do in our lives and through us.
5. **Ask God for the things you need (v11)** – God cares about our feelings and desires. As our loving Father, He always wants to give us what is best for us. We should ask Him for what we want, but we must understand that He will not always give us what we want if it is not good for us (Matthew 7:7-11).
6. **Confess your sin (v12)** – we should ask God to forgive our sins so that we can stay close to Him, but we must realise that this depends on us forgiving other people who wrong us.
7. **Prayer brings God’s power into our lives (v13)** – when we pray, God gives us His power to say no to temptation and to stand firm against the Devil.

Jesus’ teaching on prayer shows that it is about much more than us asking for what we want. Prayer is the expression of our relationship with God, and it deepens that relationship. That is why it is a central part of the Christian life and is vital to helping us grow towards maturity in our faith. Someone came up with the following easy-to-remember advice about what things we should include in our prayers:

|                     |  |
|---------------------|--|
| <b>Adoration</b>    | take time to simply tell God how great He is;                                    |
| <b>Confession</b>   | confess your sins, asking God to forgive you and help you overcome evil;         |
| <b>Thanksgiving</b> | remember to thank God for what He has done for you and given you;                |
| <b>Supplication</b> | this simply means to bring your requests to God, asking for His will to be done. |

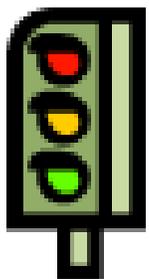
### Practical advice for prayer

- **Use familiar words and comfortable posture** – you may want to begin your prayer by saying ‘Dear Father’, ‘Our Father’ or ‘Heavenly Father’, but the attitude of your heart before God is more important than the specific words you use. The word ‘Amen’ means ‘let it be so’ or ‘that is true’. When in a group listening to another Christian praying you may want to say ‘Amen’ to show that you agree and that their prayer is your prayer too. There no correct posture for prayer, and the Bible contains examples of many different postures. You could try different postures to find what helps you stay alert and focused.

- **Keep a list of what you pray about** – it might help to have a notebook to record what you pray for as a reminder and so that you can look back and see how God has answered your prayers.
- **Pray for a range of people and issues** – one helpful way to think about this uses your fingers:
  - *Thumb* (closest to your body) – for the people closest to you (family, friends, work colleagues);
  - *Index finger* (for pointing) – for those who are in authority over you (boss, church leaders);
  - *Middle finger* (biggest) – for the “big people” (politicians, world leaders) and big issues;
  - *Ring finger* (weakest) – for those who are weak (sick, in hospital, in trouble);
  - *Little finger* (smallest) – lastly pray for yourself!
 One thing to add (a sixth finger?) is that you should pray for Christian workers and missionaries.
- **Make a special time for prayer in a quiet place** – this can be any time of day and can last any length of time (it might be a good idea to start out with a short time and build it up). Do not worry if you miss this one day (it is not a rule!) but you will find it helpful to develop a habit of taking time quietly to focus on God and to bring your thoughts and feelings before Him for His guidance.
- **Make your whole life a prayer to God** – prayer should not just be something we do once a day. Our whole lives can become a prayer to God if we are always thinking about Him and wanting to do what He wants. Every thought can be a prayer to God if we are always aware of His presence with us.
- **Send up short prayers when you have a special need** – it is good to pause to say a short prayer to God when you are in a difficult time. For example, when you are tempted pray for strength to resist or when someone asks you a difficult question pray for wisdom to answer them clearly.
- **Pray with other Christians** – as well as praying privately it is good to pray together with other Christians. It helps to keep God at the centre of our relationships with each other.
- **Use the words of the Bible in your prayers (e.g., Psalms)** – the Bible is full of prayers that other people prayed to God, and these can show us how to pray and what to pray for.
- **Use songs in your worship** – Christian songs may help you to find words to express to God how you feel. You might want to sing some songs during the “worship” part of your prayer.

### How will God answer prayer?

God always answers the prayers of His children but not always the way we want or expect. He may answer in one of three ways, which can be represented by the colours of a set of traffic lights:



**RED (no)** – God will say no if we ask for something that is not good for us or not part of His best plan for us (for example, Paul’s prayer in 2 Corinthians 12:7-10).

**AMBER (wait)** – Sometimes God will ask us to wait if it is not the best time for us to have something (for example, Zechariah’s prayer for a son in Luke 1:5-13).

**GREEN (yes)** – Often God will give us what we ask for if it is also His will for us (for example, Hannah’s prayer for a son in 1 Samuel 1).

The way in which God works through our prayers is complex. On one hand the Bible calls us to be persistent in prayer (Luke 18:1) and Paul spoke of things happening “through” the prayers of God’s people (Philippians 1:19), but on the other we are told to pray for God’s will to be done (Matthew 6:10). How can we hold these two truths together? God invites us to join with what He is doing and prayer is our cry of availability. As we pray, He includes us in His plan, and we see how He works in response to our prayers. This does not mean that we can take the credit for what happens – all glory belongs to God for every good thing He does – but it does bring us great joy to know that we were used by Him and it can be a great encouragement to our faith. Equally, though, when we pray in dependence on God and do not get what we ask for, we are confident that God knows best and has answered our prayer according to His will. As a loving Father He gives us what we need, not necessarily what we want (Luke 11:11-13).

## What to do when ...

### ... you have doubts

Doubts are not sin – they are a common part of Christian experience. They can either lead us closer to God or away from Him – it is what we do with our doubts that really matters.

- **Through doubts God can lead you to greater faith** (e.g., Thomas – John 20:24-31) – Thomas initially doubted that Jesus was risen, but he stuck with the other disciples and waited for Jesus to appear to him. When he finally saw Him, he made one of the greatest statements of faith in the whole Bible.
- **Keep doing what you know you should do** – make sure you turn to God for the answers through prayer, reading the Bible and meeting with other Christians. Ask other Christians to pray for you.
- **Remember what God has done for you in the past** – this can help to reaffirm your faith.
- **Remember God's promises and ask Him to help you** (e.g., Mark 9:23-24) – when our faith is weak, we should ask God to help us. Doubts are often greatest when we are tired, weak or feeling down. At those times it is helpful to remind ourselves of God's promises in the Bible, which are a sure foundation for our faith. Remember that it is God's power, not the strength of your faith, which keeps you safe.

### ... you are tempted

Temptation is not sin, but it can lead on to sin if we give in to it, so we must take it seriously. Remember:

- **God does not tempt us** (James 1:13-15) – God can test our faith by leading us through difficult situations, but He will never tempt us to do what is wrong! We cannot blame God or anyone else for our sin!
- **You should try to avoid situations of temptation** (1 Thessalonians 5:22) – the easiest way to triumph over temptation is to learn to walk away from situations where you know you will be tempted.
- **God will not allow us to be tempted beyond our ability to resist** (1 Corinthians 10:13) – when we are tempted we should look to God for the strength to stand up against it without giving in. There is never a time when we must sin as a Christian since the Spirit sets us free from the power of sin.
- **Jesus understands our weakness** (Hebrews 4:15-16)

*“He faced all of the same temptations we do, yet He did not sin. So let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive His mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it.”*

Jesus knew what it feels like to be hungry, tired, under pressure, sad, but He never sinned. When we feel too weak to stand up we can be encouraged that Jesus understands how we feel.

- **Prayer helps us to stand up to temptation** (Matthew 26:41)

*“Keep alert and pray. Otherwise temptation will overpower you.”*

We must always be watching for temptations and aware of our weakness. If we want to be ready to stand up to temptation, we must keep close to God every day, depending on His power.

### ... you sin

Christians can still sin. In fact, the Bible tells us that we can never say we are completely free of sin (1 John 1:8). When we give in to temptation and commit sin, we must remember that:

- A true Christian cannot lose their salvation because of sin** – you have already been forgiven by God and there is no condemnation for those who belong to Jesus Christ (Romans 8:1).
- A true Christian cannot keep on living a lifestyle of sin** – it is impossible for someone to truly come to faith in Christ but for there to be no change in their attitude to sin (1 John 3:6).

**So, we should be quick to confess our sins to God and to each other.** If we want to maintain a close relationship with God, we must be aware of sin in our lives and do what John tells us in 1 John 1:9:

*“if we confess our sins to Him, He is faithful and just to forgive us and to cleanse us from every wrong.”*

To confess our sins means to admit them in humility before God. This verse says that if we do that Christ can and will forgive us and that he will cleanse us from the results of our sins. He can put things right! If our sin has hurt another person, we should also confess it to them and ask for forgiveness. Once we have confessed our sins, we should realise that God has forgiven us and not allow guilt to hold us back.

# Pointers from the Word #2



## Read Jude v20-25

What does Jude mean by the following things he tells us to do, all of which are vital if we are going to grow in our relationship with God?

- *Build yourself up in your most holy faith* (see also Jude v3, Philippians 1v27, Colossians 2v7, 1 Timothy 3v9)

---



---

- *Pray in the Holy Spirit* (see also Romans 8v26, Ephesians 6v18)

---



---

- *Keep yourself in God's love as you wait* (see also John 15v9-10)

---



---

How should we treat people who doubt (v22)?

---

How should we respond to people who fall into sin (v23)?

---

How do the words of v24-25 inspire you in your faith?

---

Based on the following verses, what things can you do to stop temptation leading you into sin?

**Matthew 6:9, 13**

---

**Psalms 119:9, 11**

---

**Hebrews 4:16**

---

**James 4:7**

---

## Read Proverbs 28:13

When you confess your sins what must you also do?

---

### MEMORISE THIS

**[Matthew 6:32-33, NLT]**

Your Heavenly Father already knows all your needs, and He will give you all you need from day to day if you live for Him and make the Kingdom of God your primary concern.

# Daily Readings #2



Matthew Chapters 5-7 is often called the ‘Sermon on the Mount’ because it was on a mountainside that Jesus spoke these words. In these chapters He describes the Kingdom of God and how its citizens should live. 1 John was written to encourage Christians who had seen people leaving their church because they followed false teaching. It says a lot about how we can be sure that our faith is real.

These readings are taken from these two parts of the Bible which inspire us in our relationship with God. Read one passage each day and make notes in the space provided about anything that stands out to you, anything that you learn and anything that you realise you need to change as a result of what you learn.

## Words you might need to know:

|                      |  |
|----------------------|--|
| <b>Atoning</b>       | A sacrifice that turns away God's wrath from us – the idea is that Jesus died in our place, paying the price for our sins and taking the punishment we deserve (1 John 2:2).                   |
| <b>Blessed</b>       | To be blessed means to find true meaning and satisfaction despite, not because of, our circumstances. It means more than simply happiness as blessing comes from God alone (Matthew 5:3).      |
| <b>Meek</b>          | Meekness is <b>not</b> weakness – it is an attitude that recognises its need of God and that willingly surrenders its own rights. Someone has called it “strength under control” (Matthew 5:5) |
| <b>Righteousness</b> | Being right with God or doing what is right (Matthew 5:6,10)   |
| <b>Synagogue</b>     | A place where Jews meet to pray and read the Old Testament (Matthew 6:2)   |
| <b>Hallowed</b>      | “Holy” – our prayer is that God's name will be respected and honoured (Matthew 6:9)  |

## Day 1: Matthew 5:3-12

God's Kingdom is radically different from the way our world works. It is a spiritual kingdom that we are included in when we become Christians. God's Kingdom rule can begin in our lives when we recognise our sin and need of Him, mourning because of it and crying out to Him for His righteousness.

- How can a person enter the Kingdom of Heaven and what should its citizens live for?
- What promises do these verses contain for those who are part of God's Kingdom?
- What kinds of opposition can we expect if we live for God and what makes this worthwhile?

*Give thanks to God for bringing you into His Kingdom and for the fulfilment you can have as a result.  
Ask God to teach you increasingly how to live for His Kingdom and to do what is righteous.*

## Day 2: Matthew 6v1-18

The Christian life is a relationship with God. It is not a dead religion that is based on earning God's favour or impressing others through doing good deeds. Christians do "acts of righteousness" because we need to grow in our relationship with God and that makes a huge difference in what we do and how we do it!

- What attitudes and ideas do we need to avoid in our "acts of righteousness"?
- What does this passage teach us about the nature of God and our relationship with Him?
- What can you learn from this passage about how you can grow in your relationship with God?

*Thank God for His love for you and for the intimate relationship you now have with Him as your Father.  
Ask God to teach you how you should put this passage into action through giving, praying and fasting.*

## Day 3: Matthew 6v19-34

Living for God's Kingdom is the best life possible, but it is easy for us to be distracted from this goal by the things that surround us. We need to remind ourselves that God's Kingdom is what really matters and to live more by faith in God rather than depending on other things for security. That is the key to a life free from worry!

- What purposes for living are mentioned in this passage and how does your life measure up to them?
- What promises does this passage contain for those who live for God's Kingdom and His righteousness?
- How can living by faith in God change your attitude and free you from anxiety?

*Thank God for the purpose and eternal significance of a life lived for His Kingdom.  
Ask God to increase your faith and help you to live for His Kingdom and righteousness, storing up eternal treasure.*

## Day 4: 1 John 1v5 – 2v2

Jesus has done everything that was needed to deal with our sin. He died as the atoning sacrifice for us and He lives to speak to God in our defence. If we simply own up and admit that we're guilty, He is able to forgive us without acting unjustly, and to cleanse us. We are set free and the record of our sin is wiped out.

- What do we learn about God's character and the nature of sin from this passage?
- Why does sin damage our fellowship with God and with other Christians?
- On what basis is God able to forgive us for our sins? What was done for us and what must we do?

*Praise God for Christ, who died for you and lives to intercede for you.*

*Take time to confess your sins to God – ask Him to forgive and to cleanse you, giving you strength to avoid sin today.*

## Day 5: 1 John 2v3-17

A Christian is a follower of Jesus Christ, and following Him means obeying His commands and living the same kind of life He lived – one of constant faith in God our Father, listening to Him and obeying Him as His Spirit gives us strength. Living like that makes God's love complete in us – it makes our relationship with Him full and complete.

- What evidence that a person is a true Christian does John point to in this passage?
- Make a list of all the things this passage says about the nature of our relationship with God.
- What sources of temptation does John mention and how can you learn to cope with these temptations?

*Ask God to help you to continue to learn what His commands are and to be obedient to them.*

*Pray that you will be aware of the opportunities God is giving you to obey Christ's command to love others.*

# Discussion Session #3

# Notes



# Food for Thought #3

## New Direction



### The Bible – God reveals Himself to us

#### What is the Bible?

The word 'Bible' comes from the Greek word for 'book'. Christians also often call the Bible the 'scriptures', which means 'writings'. There are two distinct parts of the Bible:

- a) *Old Testament* – the story of God's relationship with the nation of Israel
- b) *New Testament* – the story of Christ and the beginnings of the Christian Church

'Testament' means 'covenant' and the two parts of the Bible describe two different covenant relationships between God and people. Although there are 66 books in the Bible, they all add together to tell one great story of how God cares for and speaks to mankind throughout history and especially His plan to rescue us from sin and to restore the world through Jesus. **The Old Testament looks forward to Jesus, and the New Testament reveals Him.** For a description of the different types of books in the Bible see page 51.

#### How did God give us the Bible?

Although the Bible contains the words of God, He gave them to us through men. This process was not 'word for word' dictation, but rather God worked through their minds, hearts, language, culture, feelings and experiences. More than 40 people – kings and poor people, scholars and manual labourers – gave us the Bible over a period of 1500 years. They lived in many different places and wrote in three different languages (the Old Testament was mainly written in Hebrew and the New Testament mainly in Greek).

*no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation ... men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:20-21)*

The Bible is different from other books that claim to be from God because it is honest about our sin. The stories it tells about people include their weaknesses and the things they did wrong. This is not a book written to fool people into believing lies! **The Bible is also honest about the world we live in – when you read it, it is very true to life, not like a "fairy tale".**

#### The usefulness of the Bible

In **2 Timothy 3:15-17** the apostle Paul writes to Timothy about the scriptures and their usefulness. He reminds Timothy that **all** Scripture is breathed by God and then reminds him of its usefulness:

- a) **to give us wisdom to receive salvation through faith (v15)** – through the Bible we can discover the message about Jesus and the Holy Spirit will use the words of the Bible to challenge us about our need for God. The whole point of the Bible is to introduce us to Jesus so we can be saved (John 5:39-40).
- b) **to equip us to do every good work (v16-17)** – Paul says that **ALL** scripture is useful to equip us. We cannot choose some parts of the Bible to believe and choose other parts to ignore. Equally importantly, **only** Scripture is the word of God. **No** other book, church, system, experience or person can rival the Bible's authority as the word of God and we should test everything else we hear against the Bible. Paul speaks of four stages in how God's word works in our lives:
  - 1) **Teaching** us what is true
  - 2) **Rebuking** us where we're wrong
  - 3) **Correcting** us so we come into line with God's truth
  - 4) **Training in righteousness** (keeping us walking God's way)

It is important to understand that it is not the Bible itself that changes us – you could memorise the whole Bible and still not even know God – but the Spirit of God applies it into our lives and changes us as we obey.

## How to read and understand the Bible

To grow spiritually you need the good food that is found in the Bible (Matthew 4:4). The Bible is God's **living word** (Hebrews 4:12), and when we read it, it speaks in new ways into our lives. The same Holy Spirit who inspired it works in our lives to show us God's truth, so **the first rule for understanding the Bible is to ask God in prayer to help you understand as you read**. There are three important questions to ask:

- 1) **What does it say?** There are two important aspects to this. Firstly we must read the Bible carefully to notice what it actually says, not what we think it says. Secondly, we should try to make sure that the version we are reading is an accurate translation of the original languages. Three good versions are:
  - *English Standard Version (ESV)* – probably the most accurate English version available.
  - *New International Version (NIV)* – the most commonly used English version; also fairly accurate.
  - *New Living Translation (NLT)* – slightly less accurate but using words that are easier to understand.
 It may help to compare the same passage in different versions to get different angles on the meaning.
- 2) **What does it mean?** Some parts of the Bible are difficult to understand because they refer to the culture of the time or they apply to a specific situation. Two principles will help you understand:
  - **Context** – where do these verses fit into the book they are part of? Who wrote the book, when, to whom and why? Don't be distracted by the chapter and verse, section or paragraph divisions, as they weren't there in the original (they were added later to help us find specific passages).
  - **Comparison** – Compare difficult verses with other verses about the same topic. Allow the verses that are easy to understand to help you understand the difficult verses.

You may also want to read a **commentary** on the passage or ask a more mature Christian to help you understand it. You could use a **concordance** or online site to help search for similar verses.

- 3) **What is God saying to me through it?** When you read the Bible each day spend some time thinking about what it means. Ask questions and maybe write down your answers. For example, is there:
 

|   |   |
|---|---|
| ... some <b>truth</b> that I need to learn?             | ... a <b>promise</b> that God wants me to hold on to? |
| ... a <b>sin</b> that I need to repent of?              | ... a <b>warning</b> I need to listen to?             |
| ... a <b>command</b> I need to obey?                    | ... an <b>example</b> I should follow?                |
| ... something I need <b>to share</b> with someone else? |   |

Finally, pray for God's help to put it into action (James 1:22-25). Two practices will help you to do this:

- **Meditation** – think about it often and let it fill your mind and shape your thoughts (Psalm 1:2)
- **Memorisation** – this will help when you face temptation or a question about your faith (Psalm 119:11)

## Knowing God's will

God wants us to know how to live for Him in a way that pleases Him. The key to guidance is to walk closely with God every day, submitting to Him and depending on Him to lead us through life.

*“Trust in the Lord with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding. Seek His will in all you do, and He will direct your paths.” (Proverbs 3:5-6)*

God seldom tells us where we'll be in several years' time, but He does want us to keep trusting Him and walking step by step in His path each day as the Holy Spirit leads us (Galatians 5:25). If we do this, and seek His will in every area of our lives, He will continue to direct us.

The starting point for realising how God is leading us is often a feeling, thought or desire. The closer we are to God the more likely that our desires will be in line with His (Psalm 37:4-5). People who delight in God and commit everything they do to Him have only one great desire, which is to please Him. God wants to transform your mind so that you can know His will, which is the best way to live, but to know His will we must use our minds to “*test and approve*” what God really wants (Romans 12:2). Desires, thoughts and feelings can mislead us, so we need to ask two questions (see 1 Corinthians 10:23):

- a) **Is it right?** God never wants us to sin – He won't lead us to do something that is morally wrong.
- b) **Is it beneficial?** Many decisions are not a simple issue of right or wrong, but of wisdom or foolishness. We need to consider the results of our decision for three people:
- *God* – does it honour Him and help others to see how great He is?
  - *Myself* – does it help me to become more like Christ and to serve Him more?
  - *Others* – is it really in their best interests and will it help them to know God?

To answer the second question we need to develop **wisdom**. In the Bible, wisdom begins with a recognition of who God is (Psalm 111:10). With Him always in mind we must develop 'sanctified reason' – the ability to test our thoughts. There are six helpful tests (easily remembered by the word *wisdom*):

**W – what does God's Word (the Bible) say about it?** (Psalm 119:105)

If the Bible says it it's wrong, then it's wrong! Even if the Bible doesn't give a yes or no answer it will help you to know how God thinks and to learn principles of wisdom to apply to every decision in life.

**I – am I the right person?**

God has made you a unique individual. No one else has your unique mixture of gifts, talents, experiences, and personality. If you see that something needs to be done you should ask whether God has given you what is needed to carry that desire through or if you need to work with someone else to make it happen.

**S – Surrender it to God in prayer**

When faced with a difficult decision, pray that God will lead you by His Spirit. Surrender yourself fully to God to do His will and ask Him to make His way clear in His time.

**D – Don't Rush**

God often guides us through circumstances in our lives. If God is leading you to do something, He will give you the opportunity in His time. Don't rush ahead on a major decision if you are not sure of God's will.

**O – what do Other wise Christians say?**

When you have a decision to make, it often helps to take advice from a more mature Christian who knows you well. They may also see weaknesses, temptations and wrong motives in your life that you do not see.

**M – what is my Motivation?**

If your motivation is only for your own good or for selfish reasons then you should reconsider your decision. Our hearts can easily deceive us, so this is always a great question to ask.

## **Holiness – counter-cultural living**

The basic idea of the word 'holy' is to be 'separate'. Too often, 'holiness' has been seen as negative – as if it is about all the things that Christians don't do – but the biblical idea is positive. We are to be separate from sin, but that does not happen by focusing on sin and trying to avoid anything that might weaken us. The best way to deal with sin is to keep close to God. We are to be separated **to** Him – devoted to Him. If we love God, we will hate sin. There **are** things the world says are fine that Christians should not do, but we gladly choose not to do them because we realise they are not honouring to God, harmful to us or unhelpful for others. Our different way of living is not a slavish adherence to rules but a joyful response to God's grace.

We are surrounded by the values and message of our society. At a fundamental level, human society is hostile to God (James 4:4). We must be careful to not love the world – not giving in to its way of thinking – and remember that the world and what it desires (possessions, pleasure and power without God) is passing away, but that everything done in obedience to God is of eternal value (1 John 2:15-17). God wants us to live in the world and to witness for Him in it, but we are not to live by the world's values. In a prayer to His Father, Jesus said that we do not belong to the world and then prayed that we would be protected and would show the world through our unity that He truly came from God (John 17:15-16, 23). God's wisdom is different from the world's wisdom and the message of the cross, which confounds the world's desire for power and self-protection, is what brings God's salvation to the world (1 Corinthians 1:18-25).

# Pointers from the Word #3



## Read Colossians 1:9-14

What two things do we need if we are going to be able to know God's will, and how can we have them (v9)?

---

---

What is the goal of knowing God's will? What kind of life does He want us to live (v10a)?

---

What qualities will mark a life that is pleasing to God (v10-12)?

---

---

---

---

What has God done for us that should cause us to be thankful and live for Him (v13-14)?

---

---

What do you learn from the pictures of God's word found in the following verses?

**James 1:23-25** God's word is like a \_\_\_\_\_

---

---

**Psalms 119:9, 11** God's word is like a \_\_\_\_\_

---

---

**Hebrews 4:16** God's word is like a \_\_\_\_\_

---

---

**James 4:7** God's word is like a \_\_\_\_\_

---

---

### MEMORISE THIS

[Proverbs 3:5-6, NLT]

Trust in the Lord with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding. Seek His will in all you do, and He will direct your paths.

# Daily Reading #3



The Bible is not a textbook of rules and principles for life. It is God's word to us through which we can discover how we can know Him and how our lives can be changed so that we can live the best way possible – the way that God intended us to live – in relationship with Him and in obedience to His ways.

This week's readings are from five different books but they all share one theme – how we can learn God's truth and live out His will. This is a common concern for the writer of Psalm 119, for Paul and for James. Read one passage each day and make notes in the space provided about anything that stands out to you, anything that you learn and anything that you realise you need to change as a result of what you learn.

## Words you might need to know:

|                          |  |
|--------------------------|--|
| <b>Blessed</b>           | To be blessed means to find true meaning and satisfaction despite, not because of, our circumstances. It means more than simply happiness and blessing comes from God alone (Psalm 119:1,2).   |
| <b>Living sacrifices</b> | The contrast here is between the Old Testament way of worshipping God by bringing dead animals as a sacrifice to Him and the New Testament way of bringing our living bodies and offering them to God with the desire to live for Him (Romans 12:1).                                   |
| <b>Religion</b>          | When he uses this word James doesn't mean what we often mean by religion – a way of making ourselves right with God. For him religion is simply a lifestyle that reflects the truths that we believe. Pure religion is the actions that flow from loving and obeying God (James 1:27). |
| <b>Sanctify</b>          | God wants to sanctify us. This means that He wants to make us holy and pure – to change us so that we become more like His perfect son Jesus (1 Thessalonians 5:23).   |
| <b>Scripture(s)</b>      | Another word for the Bible – the writings of human beings that were inspired by God (2 Timothy 3:15).  |

## Day 1: 2 Timothy 3:10-17

God doesn't want you to be an ineffective Christian. He wants you to have everything you need to do the things He wants you to do and the Bible is His way of giving you what you need. Our lives need to be grounded in God's truth so that we can recognise what is false and follow what is true.

- What reasons does Paul give Timothy for being confident in the message he has learned and trusted?
- What is the first thing we must learn from the Scriptures?
- What is the ultimate goal of all reading and study of the Bible and how does it help us achieve that goal?

*Give thanks to God for the salvation you have through Christ and for the Scriptures, which reveal Him to us. Ask God to help you to continue to understand the Bible and apply it to your life so that you can know how to serve Him.*

## Day 2: Psalm 119v1-16

Psalm 119 is the longest chapter in the Bible and its theme is the word of God. The writer's sense of joy and delight in being able to know God's word and his constant commitment to obey it are infectious. In a world of confusion we need the certainty and direction that God's truth gives. We need to be people who delight in God's word!

- How can a person know real blessing and live a pure life?
- What commitments does the writer of this psalm make to God?
- What helpful ways of interacting with the Bible are mentioned in this passage?

*Take time to meditate on this passage and to praise God for the truth and goodness of His word.  
Ask God to help you to learn, obey and share His word with others (you could even pray these verses to God).*

## Day 3: James 1v19-27

Imagine you wake up with a huge spot on your nose – one that's ready to squeeze! You look in the mirror and the spot stares you in the face. You think "I better sort that!" Then you turn away and walk out the door without doing anything about it. How stupid? That's like reading the Bible and then doing nothing about what it says.

- What barriers to hearing the word does James mention (in our attitude and lifestyle)?
- What does this passage tell us about what we should do with the Bible?
- What examples of the impact of obeying the Bible on our lives (religion) does James mention?

*Ask God to help you to make time to look intently into the Bible and to give you strength to act on what you learn.  
Ask Him to show you what things you need to "get rid of" and what you should do to live out "pure religion".*

## Day 4: Romans 11v33-12v2

Let's face it, we're never going to know everything about God or understand Him fully – He's just too awesome for us to get our tiny minds around – but God has shown us mercy by rescuing us from sin and He wants us to know His will for our lives. We've got to surrender to Him and learn how to recognise His leading. Let the adventure begin!

- What does this passage tell us about God – what He is like, His character and His desire for us?
- What kind of worship does God want us to give to Him?
- Why do our minds need to be transformed (from what and towards what)?

*Take time to read over Romans 11:33-36. In light of it, give thanks to God for the mercy He has shown you through Christ. Ask God to continue to transform you into a person who can know and obey His will. Offer yourself to Him again.*

## Day 5: 1 Thessalonians 5v12-22

We tend to get obsessed with knowing God's will for us as individuals and sometimes we can miss the fact that God has already spelt out for us a lot of what it means to obey Him. Maybe if we focused more on living the way God has told us to live we would be in a better place to hear how He is leading us in the choices we have to make.

- What principles are there in these verses for the way Christians should relate to one another in the church?
- List the seven things that Paul says are part of God's will for us (v16-22). Make sure you know what these mean.
- What is God's ultimate purpose for our lives?

*If you are feeling anxious about your failures, ask the "God of peace" to give you His peace in your heart. Ask God to fill you with His joy and thankfulness and to help you to become someone who can discern what is good.*

# Discussion Session #4

# Notes



# Food for Thought #4

## New Power



### The Holy Spirit – God at home in our lives

#### Who is the Holy Spirit?

Many people find the Holy Spirit difficult to understand. There are some important things to realise:

- **He is a person, not just an impersonal power or ‘force’** – the Spirit can feel love (Romans 15:30) and sorrow (Ephesians 4:30). We should never think of Him as a ‘thing’ that we can ‘get more of’, but as a person who we can get to know better.
- **He is God** – to lie to the Spirit is to lie to God (Acts 5:3-5). As one of the three persons of God He is eternal (Hebrews 9:14) and is present everywhere (Psalm 139:7-10).
- **He is present with all Christians, living in them** – when a person becomes a Christian the Holy Spirit comes to make His home in their life. This is clear in Romans 8:9:

*those who do not have the Spirit of Christ living in them are not Christians at all*

- **He is a COUNSELLOR like Jesus** – In John 14, Jesus told His disciples that the time was coming when He would leave them (v2). Later He would come again for them (v3) but during the time when He would not be with them He promised not to leave them like orphans (v18). He promised them:

*I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Counsellor to be with you forever – the Spirit of truth ... He lives with you and will be in you. (v16-17).*

The Holy Spirit now does the same things for every Christian that Jesus did for His disciples when He was on earth. Jesus’ return to Heaven allowed the Holy Spirit to come to earth to represent Jesus in every place (John 16:7). As ‘Counsellor’ the Holy Spirit represents Christ, speaking to us on His behalf and also encourages and helps every Christian. Without Him we could never live as Christians!

#### What does the Holy Spirit do?

- **He shows people their sin**, convincing them that God is right and making them realise that judgement is coming (John 16:8). He does this even before people become Christians.
- **He brings us into relationship with Christ by creating new spiritual life in us through new birth** (John 3:5; Titus 3:5 – the word translated “renewal” in the NIV actually means regeneration / rebirth).
- **He gives us power to live the Christian life** (Ephesians 3:16; 2 Timothy 1:7) **and to witness for Jesus** (Acts 1:8) – He helps us not to sin and to do what God wants.
- **He makes us more like Jesus** (2 Corinthians 3:18) – The Holy Spirit starts to make us more like Jesus as we allow Him to produce the fruit of Christ-like character in our lives (Galatians 5:22-23).
- **He teaches us God’s truth** (John 14:26; 1 Corinthians 1:9-14) – He inspired the people who wrote the Bible (2 Peter 1:20-21) and He also enables us to understand it and apply it into our lives.
- **He includes us in the body of Christ** – when a person becomes a Christian they are baptised in the Spirit and given the Spirit to drink (1 Corinthians 12:13). They come to live in the Spirit (they are included in the body of Christ) and the Spirit comes to live in them. This baptism in the Spirit is a great source of unity for all Christians and the point of entry into Christ’s body, the church.
- **He gives each Christian gifts to serve God and others in the church** (1 Corinthians 12:4,11).
- **He helps us to know God’s love** (Romans 5:5) **and to be sure that we are God’s children** (Romans 8:16).
- **He prays for the things God wants for us** (Romans 8:26-27) – it is as if the Holy Spirit translates our imperfect prayers so that they match up with God’s will for our lives.
- **He seals us and guarantees our inheritance** (Ephesians 1:13-14).

## ***Being filled and led by the Spirit***

The Bible says that we need to be “*filled*” with the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 5:18). When you become a Christian the Holy Spirit comes to live in your life, but after this it is possible to shut Him out of some of areas of your life. **To be filled with the Spirit means to open up all the doors to every part of your life – to allow Him to influence and teach you in every aspect of who you are.** The idea is about being more available to the Spirit, not having more of Him. It is all about relationship with the three persons who are God. Being filled with the Spirit means the same as bringing your whole life under Christ’s Lordship (Colossians 2:6-7) and surrendering your life to God as a living sacrifice (Romans 12:1-2).

**There is an ongoing struggle between the sinful nature and the Spirit in our lives** which will continue until the day Christ returns, when we will finally be free of sin forever. **We can have victory over sin because the Holy Spirit lives in us.** The Spirit does not seek to ‘control’ us, but if we surrender ourselves to Him and depend on His power to help us then He will lead us, showing us what is true and enabling us to do what is right. He produces self-control in us so we can say ‘no’ to the sinful nature. As we follow in step with Him He will lead us to do what God wants. If we allow the flesh to control us it will lead to sin in our lives, but if we allow the Spirit to lead us, and are filled by Him, we will do good works for God (Galatians 5:16-26).

## **Spiritual Warfare**

There is an ongoing, unseen spiritual war in the world. The spiritual powers that are against Christ will also be against people who belong to Him. We must stand up and fight for Jesus against His enemies. We must be well trained soldiers, obeying our Lord’s command and equipped with the correct equipment to fight. There are many unseen spiritual beings that were created by God. We must avoid unhealthy speculation about these beings but should know what God has said about them.

### ***Angels and demons***

- There are many, many thousands of angels (Hebrews 12:22, Revelation 5:11).
- They do not marry or have children (Matthew 22:30)
- They are servants of God, sent by Him to help and protect Christians (Hebrews 1:14).
- They are more powerful than sinful human beings (Hebrews 2:7; 2 Peter 2:11), but will be lower than perfect redeemed human beings (1 Corinthians 6:3)
- They watch God’s plan for mankind unfolding and want to understand it (1 Corinthians 4:9, 1 Peter 1:12)
- They form a powerful army that will fight with Christ on His return (Matthew 16:27)
- They must never be worshipped or prayed to (Revelation 22:8; Colossians 2:18)

Some angels have fallen by disobeying God and have now become known as **evil spirits** or **demons**. They are busy in our world, working through false religions, traditions and ideas to trap people in fear and to keep them apart from God. In extreme situations, evil spirits can even take control of the life of an individual person (‘possess’ them) to harm them and to hurt other people through them.

### ***Satan (the devil)***

The evil spirits are led by **Satan** (meaning ‘the opponent’ because he is against God and His people), also known as **the devil** (meaning ‘accuser’, because he loves to accuse God and His people of doing wrong). It seems that Satan was originally a powerful angel who rebelled against God and so was cast out of Heaven with his followers (2 Peter 2:4; Jude 6; Revelation 12:7-9).

Satan is in no sense equal to God, and there are limits to his power. He can only do what God allows him to (Job 1:12), but, he does have great power to do evil in this world. This is why the Bible calls him “*The prince of this world*” (John 14:30) and the “*mighty prince of the power of the air*” (Ephesians 2:2). He is always busy influencing the hearts and minds of people, leading to greater immorality and crime in society, and sin and false worship in the lives of individuals. He has been doing this from the very beginning (1 John 3:8).

## ***The war is already won***

One of the reasons why Jesus came into the world was to destroy the work of the devil (1 John 3:8), and during His life on earth, every time Jesus faced the devil (e.g. when he tempted Jesus in the desert – see Matthew 4:1-11) or demons, He defeated them. Evil spirits recognised who He was and were afraid of Him. They spoke about “*God’s appointed time*” when they would be punished for their rebellion (Matthew 8:28-31). The book of Revelation tells us that Jesus will ultimately triumph over Satan. After Satan’s final attempt to lead the world in rebellion against Jesus fails, he will be thrown into a lake of fire forever (Revelation 20:10). Satan is trying to lead as many people as he can with him to destruction.

## ***Satan’s tactics***

Satan’s goal is to destroy people’s lives. In 1 Peter 5:8, Peter warns us that:

*Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.*

Satan lost out when you became a Christian. He knows that he can never destroy your life eternally (because you now belong to Christ your life is secure in Him), but he wants to destroy your life on earth by stopping you living for God and making you live as if you weren’t a Christian. Most of all he doesn’t want you to influence other people to follow Christ. He has three tactics, all of which are based on lies. No wonder Jesus called him the “*father of lies*” (John 8:44):

- **Accusation** – Satan wants to remind us of our sins and weaknesses and to accuse us of being sinners and failures. He wants to fill our hearts with doubts, guilt and insecurity so that we stop believing that God can really forgive us and make us clean.
- **Deception** – Satan subtly twists good things God has given, deceiving us into believing false teachings and following false desires. He affirms the wrong thoughts we have about God, ourselves and others.
- **Temptation** – Satan is quick to recognise our weaknesses and he will try to lead us towards sin by making it seem attractive to us, or at least less serious than it really is.

## ***Winning the battle now***

Although the war is won, the battle with Satan continues. God’s word tells us:

*Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you (James 4:7)*

To win victory in the battle we need to stand strong in God’s power and to be firm in our faith. In **Ephesians 6:10-18**, Paul talks about our battle, which is spiritual not physical. We do not take up physical weapons to fight for a Christian state here on earth, but we fight against Satan and whatever other spiritual powers are hostile to God (v12). Paul speaks about God’s armour that can protect us against the devil’s attacks (v13-18). None of the items he describes are things we produce in ourselves – they are all gifts from God to us. It is God’s armour, but we can put it on as we stand in dependence on Him. As with soldiers in any army the key question is our loyalty to the cause.

**Our only weapon** for the fight against Satan is the word of God (the “*sword of the Spirit*”). Since all three of Satan’s weapons depend on lies, the only way for us to fight back is with the truth of God’s word:

- When Satan **accuses**, we need to know the truth about how God has saved us and how secure we are in His love and His promises to us (e.g. Romans 8:31-39).
- When Satan tries to **deceive**, we need to know God’s truth so that we can recognise Satan’s lies and expose them with the truth of God’s word.
- When Satan **tempts** us, we need to know the truth about what sin really is and how destructive it is so that we can reject it and depend on God instead.

**Our power for the battle comes from prayer in the Spirit.** The word of God is the Spirit’s sword (v17) and we need His help to use God’s word effectively as we face Satan’s attacks, just as Jesus did when Satan tempted Him in the desert (see Matthew 4:1-11). We must keep on praying so that, by His Spirit, God can work through us to win the battle. We must also pray for “*all Christians everywhere*”, our fellow soldiers in God’s army. We are one family, one body, one army and we stand together in Christ’s victory.

# Pointer from the Word #4



## Read Romans 8:1-17

Before studying this passage we need to understand that some Bible translations are unhelpful in their choice of words. There are two different realities being described by Paul in these verses:

- v1-11 describe what we **are** – we **are** either according to the sinful nature or according to the Spirit (the phrases “live according to the” and “live in accordance with” in v5 and “controlled by the” in v6,8,9 are misleading, and should simply read “are according to” and “in the”). The person who is in Christ has the Spirit of Christ (v9), and **is** therefore according to the Spirit. That is what we are, but it may not be how we live. Paul is contrasting this reality with those who are not Christians. They **are** according to the sinful nature since they don’t have the Spirit.
- v12 onwards describes how we choose to **live** – we **are** now according to the Spirit, but we can decide to **live** according to the Spirit (living out the reality of what we are), led by Him or according to the sinful nature, following its leading.

What has God done for you and how did He do it (v1-4)?

---



---



---

What do we learn from verses 5-8 about the sinful nature and the mind that is led by it?

---



---



---

How does Paul describe the present reality of the Christian life and our future hope (v9-11)?

---



---



---

What duty do we have and what choice should we make given what God has done for us (v12-14)?

---



---



---

What else does the Holy Spirit do for us and enable us to do (v15-17)?

---



---



---

### MEMORISE THIS

[2 Timothy 1:7]

For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline.

# Daily Readings #4



The Spirit of God makes His home in our lives. He is always with us and He represents Christ's presence in us. We can always depend on His power in our struggle with the sinful nature and our battle against the powers of darkness.

The passages we'll be looking at this week will help you to learn more about the Holy Spirit (from Jesus' teaching to His disciples recorded in John Chapters 14 and 16), to think through the struggle between the sinful nature and the Spirit (from Paul's letter to the Galatians), and to be better prepared for the spiritual warfare we are engaged in (from Paul's letter to the Ephesians and Peter's first letter). Read one passage each day and make notes in the space provided about anything that stands out to you, anything that you learn and anything that you realise you need to change as a result of what you learn.

## Words you might need to know:

|                      |   |
|----------------------|---|
| <b>Counsellor</b>    | The Greek word is <i>parakletos</i> . It is a rich word that can have a range of meanings including comforter, advocate (lawyer) and advisor. Jesus was all of these things to His disciples, and the Spirit is all of them to us. As comforter, He is always with us to encourage and help us. As advocate, He speaks God's word to us and helps us to speak to God. As advisor, He shows us what way we should go (John 14:16). |
| <b>Righteousness</b> | What is right in God's judgement (John 16:8) or the position of being right with God (Ephesians 5:14).  |
| <b>Mystery</b>       | The "mystery of the gospel" is not some deeper, hidden level of God's truth that we need to discover. It is Paul's way of describing the core truth of the message about Jesus. It is a mystery because it was hidden in the past, and is still not understood by those who don't know God, but it is an open secret because God has revealed it to us and we proclaim it to the world (Ephesians 6:19 and Ephesians 3:1-13).     |

## Day 1: John 14:15-27

The three persons of the trinity work together in their plan for us – the Father as our Father, the Son as our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ and the Spirit as the Counsellor who makes His home in our lives. Jesus did not abandon His disciples when He left this earth; the Spirit continues His work now in our lives.

- What do the names "Counsellor", "Spirit of truth" and "Holy Spirit" teach us about the work of the Spirit?
- How does the Spirit relate to the world (how does the world think about Him) and to the believer?
- What does Jesus expect us to do and what does He promise to give us? Why do we need the Spirit for these?

*Thank God for the gift of the Spirit and ask for a deeper relationship with Him (to be filled by the Spirit). Ask God to help you, by His Spirit, to obey Christ and to know His peace as you face the world's opposition.*

## Day 2: John 16:5-16

The Holy Spirit is often misunderstood. People struggle to connect with Him, but that's a shame. Just think of what Jesus was like and that is what the Spirit is like. In fact, it is better to have the Spirit here than to have Jesus physically on earth. Jesus could only be in one place at a time, but the Spirit can be with all Christians all the time.

- Why was it good for the disciples, and for us, that Jesus went away?
- What does the Holy Spirit do, and why is His work so important?
- How does the Spirit relate to Jesus and why is this important for us?

*Ask God to continue to show you, by His Spirit, the sin in your life and what is right. Repent of any sin He shows you. Ask God to fill your life with the Spirit so that you can know God's truth, obey it and glorify Jesus in the process.*

## Day 3: Galatians 5:16-26

The sinful nature and the Holy Spirit are both part of your life, but the two of them just cannot get on. They are bitter enemies, but they share the same home (your life). That's why being a Christian can feel like a struggle, but be encouraged – the struggle means the Spirit is working in you! Keep listening for Him and following His lead!

- How do the sinful nature's "acts" affect God, ourselves and others? How can you overcome it?
- The Spirit produces a fruit (singular) in the lives of those who follow Him. What is that fruit like?
- How should we respond to the Spirit according to these verses (what word pictures does Paul use)?

*Ask God to help you to put the desires of the sinful nature to death by listening to and following His Spirit. Think about the characteristics of the Spirit's fruit. Which do you need more of? Ask God to produce character in you.*

## Day 4: Ephesians 6:10-18

Christians aren't supposed to live in fear of the evil spirits that are at work in our world! We are supposed to realise that Jesus has won the war and to stand strong in His victory. Satan is defeated, but if we are going to stand strong against him we need the armour of God and the sword of the Spirit, God's word.

- What does this passage teach us about the battle we're in – its nature; the two sides; the tactics of each side?
- How is our armour designed to help against the enemy and how is our weapon helpful against Satan's tactics?
- What role does prayer play in the battle and why is this significant?

*Ask God to help you to recognise the battle in this world and to put on the armour He has given us.  
Do what verses 18-19 tell us to do (pray for the Christian teachers and preachers you know).*

---

## Day 5: 1 Peter 5:6-11

The devil may seem kind of scary – roaring like a lion, trying to devour us – but God is the source of all grace and the one who has all power, forever. In His power and through faith in Him we can stand firm. We need to keep on surrendering our lives to Him in humility, confident in the knowledge that we can be strong in Him.

- What must we do if God is going to be able to use us and if we are going to be able to resist the devil?
- What do we learn about God in these verses, and why are these truths important in our spiritual warfare?
- What does God promise to do for us and what should we do for Him now?

*Thank God for His plan for you and for the certainty you can have in His purposes and His grace.  
Take time to cast your anxiety on God – whatever is troubling you, ask Him to take control of it and trust in Him.*

# Discussion Session #5

# Notes



# Food for Thought #5

## New Family



### Love one another

People talk about love all the time, but what do they really mean? Often it seems to be just a romantic feeling that comes and goes. The New Testament uses an unusual Greek word, *agape*, to describe God's love and it defines for us what it means. God's love is unique – it is deeper and stronger than any human love. This love is a key aspect of God's character, so much so that John could say that God **is** love (1 John 4:8). *Agape* is not a feeling, but an act of the will. It is a commitment to seek what is best for the other person whatever the cost. In 1 Corinthians 13:4-7, Paul describes *agape* love in some detail:

- It **IS** Patient and kind
- It is **NOT** envious, boasting, proud, rude, self-seeking or easily angered
- It keeps no record of wrongs
- It does **NOT** delight in evil but rejoices with the truth
- It **ALWAYS** protects, trusts, hopes and perseveres

This is the kind of love Christians should have for one another. Jesus gave us a “new commandment”:

*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. (John 13:34-35)*

Although this is a “new” commandment, Christ was actually taking His followers back to the very heart of what all the commandments God ever gave were all about: love! On another occasion, Jesus explained that the Old Testament Law was an explanation of what it would look like for the nation of Israel to love God with their whole being and their neighbour as themselves (Matthew 22:34-40). Now Jesus commands us to love one another by the standard of His love for us, and says that this kind of love is the greatest demonstration to the world that we have really been changed by Jesus.

**How can we have this kind of love?** It is not something we can produce in ourselves. We can learn to love simply because we have experienced God's love for us (1 John 4:19). Earlier in John Chapter 13 we read of Jesus demonstrating “*the full extent of His love*” to His disciples (v1). This was on the night when Jesus was arrested just before He introduced the Lord's Supper. He took upon Himself the role of the lowest slave in a household of those days – to wash the filth from the feet of the disciples who had walked through the streets with their open sewers. Jesus was acting out the love that led Him to leave heaven and become a servant, and that would lead Him the following day to die on the cross for this bunch of men. God's love was perfectly demonstrated to us in the cross. In Romans 5:6-8 Paul explains the extent of this love – it was “*while we were still sinners*” that Christ died for us. God's love is pure and sacrificial. The fact that we were sinners meant that we had nothing to offer to God in return for His love and we had actually declared ourselves to be His enemies by rebelling against Him in sin. ***Agape* love is selfless and sacrificial – it doesn't ask for anything in return, but gives the most precious thing it has for the other person.**

After He had finished washing the disciples' feet (despite Peter's protests), Jesus said to them:

*Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. (John 13:14-15)*

Jesus is our perfect example of sacrificial love, and we should demonstrate this same kind of love to one another in appropriate ways. The wonderful thing is that Jesus didn't just tell us to love and to follow His example, but He gave us the power to do it through the Holy Spirit, whose fruit is first and foremost love (Galatians 5:22). ***Agape* love comes only from God and it is produced in our life by His Holy Spirit. This kind of love is the evidence of His work in our lives, but we need to choose to love this way.**

## Why bother with church?

### *The Church, the body of Christ*

Jesus' command to love one another is not supposed to happen only in the spontaneous opportunities in our daily lives. He spoke about His plan to build His "church" (Matthew 16:18). The Greek word translated "church" simply means a gathering and it is often used in the Bible to describe all Christians everywhere. One of the most significant pictures of this reality in the Bible is the "body of Christ" (Romans 12:4-8; 1 Corinthians 12:12-31; Ephesians 4:16). This image captures several important truths:

- *The church is united by our relationship to Christ despite our different backgrounds and cultures*
- *The church is a living organism, filled with spiritual life, not a dead organisation*
- *The head of the church is Christ – the church exists on earth to do Christ's work as He directs*
- *Different members of the body have different functions (spiritual gifts) but all are needed*

### *The Local Church*

The New Testament also uses the word "church" to refer to what we might call 'local churches'. Acts describes how, as the gospel spread, Christians in each locality gathered together as a local body of believers. The Christians were devoted to doing certain things together (Acts 2:42):

- Teaching, hearing and obeying God's word (found in the teaching of the apostles);
- Sharing their lives with one another, meeting each other's needs (being "the fellowship");
- Breaking bread to remember Jesus as He had commanded them;
- Praying together – this also extended to singing songs with thanksgiving to God (Ephesians 5:19).

The natural result was that people were attracted to this new community and as people became Christians they were added to it (Acts 2:47). The New Testament also speaks of churches being organised with leaders, known as elders, shepherds (pastors) or overseers, who have a responsibility to teach, protect and care for the members. It was clear who belonged to a particular local church and who did not (an identifiable membership) and one way in which local church leaders were to protect the church was by discipline – challenging people who are wrong in their teaching or lifestyle and, if necessary, putting them out of the fellowship. Every Christian should be part of a local church as this is the primary context where we obey Christ by loving one another, learn and use our spiritual gifts, and find support and care.

### *How to find a good local church*

The problem with choosing a church in a Western country is there are so many to choose from. There is no such thing as a 'perfect church', but some principles might help you make a decision. Other factors, such as the style of praise or age group should be less important, although they may influence your decision:

- **The Bible should be central** – the Bible should be the only authority for what we do in our churches. A healthy church will put importance on teaching and obeying the Bible rather than traditions or the decisions of a leader (if there is one leader who is overly dominant you should be concerned).
- **All members should be expected to have personal faith in Christ** – the gospel should be preached with the expectation that people will respond personally and this should be necessary for membership.
- **People should be valued** – you should feel welcome and that people are interested in you. This sense of fellowship is important if you are going to find your spiritual home in that church.
- **Prayer should be important** – a healthy church will be a praying church. You should be able to see that the church is depending on God for its future and for its activities.
- **The Lord's Supper and baptism of believers should be central to church life** – these are the two things that Christ specifically asked us to do and they are important for the health of the church.
- **Reaching out to others should be important** – a healthy church will see the needs of other people in the community around it and will reach out practically and with the gospel message, as well as having an interest in what God is doing in other parts of the world.

## **A good attitude to church membership**

It is important that you have the right attitude in joining a church. Do not join because of what you can get out of it, but with a commitment to give whatever you can for the sake of Christ and His people:

- **Give generously** – by sharing our resources in the church, more can be done for God’s Kingdom. There is no set amount that you should give, but give freely and generously (2 Corinthians 9:6-8).
- **Serve in love** – be ready to serve in the church with whatever resources God has given you as you have opportunities (Romans 12:6-8). Try to volunteer rather than having to be asked!
- **Submit to the leaders** – local churches have different patterns of leadership, but you should support those who take responsibility. They may not always be right, but they have a responsibility given by God to lead the church so you should at least listen to and respect them (Hebrews 13:17).

## **The New Covenant**

A covenant is a special relationship between God and a group of people based on promises that He has made. The Old Testament is the story of the Old Covenant that God made with the nation of Israel. In Hebrews 8:10-12 we discover that God has made a new covenant through Jesus Christ – a new kind of relationship with a new group of people who come from many different nations and ethnic groups. This covenant contains three amazing promises:

- 1) **God’s laws in our minds and hearts** – this is a reference to the work of the Holy Spirit, who transforms us from the inside out, changing our hearts and minds so we want to do what is right.
- 2) **All of us will know God personally** – every Christian has a personal relationship with God through Christ. We don’t need another human being to stand between us and God (like Old Testament priests).
- 3) **He will never again remember our sins** – the death of Jesus was the perfect sacrifice for all our sins, and so they have been forgiven once and for all. We don’t need another sacrifice!

Throughout history churches have been confused by not realising how different this new covenant is from the old one God made with Israel. As a result of this confusion some people have wrongly thought that:

- we need specially ordained clergymen to stand between God and us;
- church buildings are ‘God’s House’ or holy places (in the same way as the Old Testament Temple);
- we need to pay something for our salvation through our works;
- the Church should be united with the State to rule in Jesus’ name (like in the nation of Israel);
- baptism is similar to circumcision, with babies becoming part of the covenant community;
- the Lord’s Supper is a repeated sacrifice of Jesus for us.

## **The Lord’s Supper**

The idea of Christians taking bread and wine together began with Jesus, and He explained that it was the sign of God’s new covenant with His people which was paid for with His sacrificial death (Luke 22:19-20). Exactly how it is practiced varies from church to church (for example, some churches have one cup that is passed around every individual whilst others have many small cups) but the basic principle is that every person who takes part shares in the bread and the cup. For this reason some churches call this celebration ‘communion’, because we all share together and it is a great sign of our unity in the body of Christ.

In **1 Corinthians 11:17-34**, Paul teaches the church in Corinth about the significance of the Lord’s Supper:

- The command to celebrate the Lord’s Supper came from the Lord Himself (v23).
- The bread and cup are taken in remembrance of Jesus (v24-25) – He is the centre of our faith and He is our living Lord and Head of the body. We need to be reminded of these truths.
- The ceremony is a picture of the Lord’s death (v26) – it proclaims Jesus death, which is the basis of the New Covenant. The bread and wine are physical images of the body and blood of Christ.
- We only practice the ceremony until the Lord returns (v26).
- We must use the opportunity to examine ourselves and refresh our commitment to Christ (v28).

# Pointer from the Word #5



## Read 1 John 3:11-20

John speaks of the message we heard from the beginning, meaning Jesus' command to love one another (John 13:34).

What has our love for one another got to do with the world hating us (v13)?

---



---

How, in practical terms, can we live out this command to love one another (v16-18)?

---



---



---

Why is our love for our brothers important for ourselves (v14, 19-20)?

---

## Read 1 John 4:7-21

What is the source of *agape* love and how does it become part of our lives (v7, 19)?

---



---

What is the measure of God's love for us (v9-10)?

---

How can we make the presence of the invisible God clear for all to see (v12)?

---

How could verses 14-15 help you answer a person who asked: "If a person is kind and loving won't that mean they're acceptable to God even if they're not a Christian"?

---



---

What are the implications of verses 16-18 for the way in which you relate to God?

---



---

Why is it nonsense to say that we love God if our lives don't show love for other Christians (v19-21)?

---

### MEMORISE THIS

[John 13:34-35]

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.

# Daily Reading #5



God intends His children to live together in His family, the church, as brothers and sisters. To do that we need to have the right relationship with Him, the right view of ourselves and the right attitude to our fellow-Christians.

These readings mainly focus on what it means to be the church. There are two readings each from Ephesians and from Romans 12, with an opportunity in the middle reading from Hebrews 8 to be reminded about the wonderful New Covenant relationship that brings us together in the Church. Read one passage each day and make notes in the space provided about anything that stands out to you, anything that you learn and anything that you realise you need to change as a result of what you learn.

## Words you might need to know:

|                          |   |
|--------------------------|---|
| <b>Circumcision</b>      | The sign of God's Old Covenant with Israel. On the eighth day after birth the foreskin of every male child had to be cut off. This was a physical picture of a spiritual reality that was also meant to be true for those who believed in God – that their sinful nature could be “cut off” (Ephesians 2:11). |
| <b>Gentiles</b>          | Non-Jews. Every other nation on earth other than the descendants of Abraham's grandson, Jacob (Ephesians 2:11).   |
| <b>Living sacrifices</b> | The contrast here is between the Old Testament way of worshipping God by bringing dead animals as a sacrifice to Him and the New Testament way of bringing our living bodies and offering them to God with the desire of living for Him (Romans 12:1).  |
| <b>Wrath</b>             | God's justified anger with human beings because of our sin (Romans 12:19).  |

## Day 1: Ephesians 2:11-22

The Bible never uses the word ‘church’ to mean a building – the church is made up of people – but it does use the image of a building to describe the reality of what God is doing through the Church. He is building different people together in unity to become the place where He lives by His Spirit. That's what we're here for!

- What difference has Christ's death made for us? Why is this especially precious for non-Jews?
- The two (Jews and Gentiles) have been made one in Christ. How did this happen?
- Why is it important for local churches to reflect the unity that Christ has won for the Church?

*Take time to simply thank God for the wonderful plan that He has made you part of through Jesus. Pray for wisdom to express the reality of the unity of the church in the local church you are part of.*

## Day 2: Ephesians 3:1-21

When you became a Christian you probably did not realise the full significance of what happened. It wasn't just a matter of you getting a new personal relationship with God, but of Him including you in the church, which He has planned as a demonstration of His wisdom to unseen spiritual powers! Who says you're insignificant?

- What was God's special gift of grace to Paul (His special calling on Paul's life)?
- What do these verses say about the purpose of the church?
- What does God want to do in your life and the life of your local church? How will He do it?

*Take time to thank God for the freedom and confidence you have to approach Him in prayer as your Father.  
Pray through Paul's prayer for the local church you are part of.*

## Day 3: Ephesians 4:1-16

Unity is already a fact for the church because we share one Lord, one Spirit and one Father, but we need to live in a way that reflects this unity. We start out like wobbling infants, but God wants us to grow towards maturity so we can reflect the unity He has given us and the character of Christ. This can only happen through the church!

- How can we make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit? Think of practical examples.
- What things unite us as Christians? How is the "body of Christ" a helpful way of describing this unity?
- How can the church grow towards maturity? What does maturity look like? What will try to stop it happening?

*Ask God to help you grow to maturity and play your part in bringing the church to maturity as you do your work.  
Give thanks for the people God has given the church who can teach His truth and so equip the church.*

## Day 4: Romans 12:1-8

You may remember the first couple of verses from a previous reading, but they're certainly worth reading again!

God wants to transform our minds as we offer ourselves to Him as living sacrifices. This new way of thinking changes our perspective on ourselves and on other Christians. If we want to serve God, we must surrender to Him.

- How does God want us to worship Him and what does He want to do in our lives?
- People usually live by comparing themselves with others. How does worshipping God change that?
- Why did God give different gifts to different people? How should spiritual gifts be used in the church?

*Pray for grace to be honest in your assessment of yourself and to see others as being equally valuable.  
Ask God to continue to confirm what your spiritual gifts are and to show you how to use them well.*

---

## Day 5: Romans 12:9-21

Every time Paul talks about spiritual gifts and their use in the church he mentions love (see also Ephesians 4 and 1 Corinthians 12-14). Love for others is the only reason we should desire a spiritual gift and the only way we should use them. Being in the church isn't about taking, but giving – it's about loving others as Christ loved me!

- Whose responsibility is it to maintain your spiritual passion? How can you keep it fresh?
- How does the love described here compare with the idea of love in the world around us?
- How would this kind of love change your relationships with other people?

*Read over these verses again and ask God to show you where your own life falls short of this standard.  
Ask God to help you let go of the things that stop you loving like this and to fill you with His love for others.*

# Discussion Session #6

# Notes



# Food for Thought #6

## New Purpose



### The End of the World is Near!

#### The Future is Certain

God's plan for us isn't complete yet, but the future is certain because it has already begun – it started when Jesus rose from the dead! That's why Peter could talk about *“the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time”* (1 Peter 1:5). The end of this age is tied up with the return of Jesus, which He promised:

*In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am* (John 14:2-3)

When Jesus left this earth (His ascension to Heaven), two angels appeared to His disciples and said:

*This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven* (Acts 1:11)

Christians live with the hope that one day Jesus will come again. This is not only a possibility – it is certain! God does not lie and He has promised eternal life for those who believe in Jesus (Titus 1:2).

#### Jesus will return in glory to judge

When Jesus lived on earth, some people recognised who He really was – God's Son, the Messiah – but others did not. When He returns, it will be in glory (Titus 2:3) – everyone will see His true power and majesty. Then, He will judge every human being – those who are living and those who have already died (Acts 10:42; 2 Timothy 4:1; 1 Peter 4:5). The final judgement is described in Chapter 20 of Revelation, the final book of the Bible. The results of this judgement depend on what decision we have made about God during this lifetime (Hebrews 9:27). Although Revelation 21 talks about God having a record of all of our deeds (v12), the thing that will decide whether or not we face punishment is whether our name is in the *“book of life”* (v15). The question is whether or not we have received God's gift of eternal life through faith in Him. Revelation ends with a promise from Jesus Himself that He is coming soon (Revelation 22:20). We need to be ready!

#### Two destinations – ‘Heaven’ and ‘Hell’

The Bible speaks of only two possible destinations for our lives – it is one or the other and there is no ‘in between’. We often speak about these places as ‘Heaven’ and ‘Hell’, but what does that mean?

- **‘Heaven’ (a new world).** When a Christian dies their ‘soul’ continues to live although their body is dead. The ‘soul’ is immediately present with Jesus (2 Corinthians 5:8). When He returns these people will return with Him (1 Thessalonians 4:14). Both they and those believers who are alive on earth at Christ's return will receive new resurrection bodies, which are still made of physical matter, but are not prone to sickness, decay or death like our current bodies (1 Corinthians 15:42-44). There will also be a transformation of our character so that the old sinful nature will be done away with and we will be made like Christ, unable to sin and ready to live with God (1 John 3:2). Christians will be judged, but there is no fear of being condemned, it is a judgement of our service for Christ (the Bible calls this the *“judgement seat of Christ”* – 1 Corinthians 3:10-15; 2 Corinthians 5:9-10). The reward for faithful service will be the opportunity to serve God in greater ways. The ultimate destiny for believers is not to sit around on clouds playing harps (as cartoons may suggest), but to serve God and to live with Him forever in a brand new universe (*“a new heaven and a new earth”*) where the results of sin have been finally removed (2 Peter 3:13). This is described using figurative language in Revelation 21:1-22:6.

- **‘Hell’ (the lake of fire)** – Jesus talked more about Hell than He did about Heaven! Hell is described in Revelation as a “*lake of fire*” (Revelation 20:15). It is the place where the devil will be tormented forever (Revelation 20:10) and all people who have not responded in faith to God will also end up there. Hell is the end result of our rejection of God – the final expression of His anger and judgement on sin. This judgement is necessary if the new earth is going to be free of sin and its results.

In Luke 16:19-31 Jesus speaks about two men who died. The story makes it clear that the destiny of the two men was decided in this life. One was suffering and the other was being comforted as they both waited for the future resurrection and judgement. There was no opportunity to cross from one place to the other.

### **How should we respond?**

The prospect of Christ’s return is often mentioned in the New Testament as a challenge to Christians. For those who believe in Jesus, the idea of His return should bring great hope, but it should also remind us that when we see Him we must answer for how we have used our lives and that those who do not know Him will be lost. For now we live in a world of darkness, but the day will soon break. This thought should challenge us to live in a way that pleases God and to shine His light in the darkness (Romans 13:11-14).

## **God’s Mission**

We may wonder why there has been such a long delay since Jesus left this earth before His return. What purpose does God have in this period of waiting? The Bible gives us two important answers:

- a) God is preparing us to serve Him** – the process of living in this world with the challenges it throws at us, including opposition we face for being Christians, is creating in us purer faith (1 Peter 1:3-7) and strength of character (Romans 5:1-5). This is God’s way of preparing us to serve Him forever in the new world.
- b) God is giving an opportunity for more people to come to know Him** – God is waiting in patience because He does not want people to be lost and He wants to give the greatest possible opportunity for people to return to Him in repentance (2 Peter 3:9).

Human history is moving forward to a day that God has fixed when Christ will return. In the meantime, Jesus has given His people a mission here on earth, as He told His disciples shortly before His ascension:

*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. (Matthew 28:19-20)*

There are a few important things to realise about this ‘Great Commission’ from Jesus:

- **The command is to make disciples** – the emphasis in the original Greek is on the verb “*make*”. We should be making disciples everywhere, all the time. Mission begins where God has placed you with you simply sharing your faith with others as God gives you opportunity. God may also call you to go overseas for a short time or a lifetime to share the gospel message, and you should be interested in what He is doing in other countries, but whether you stay or go, you can still be part of His mission.
- **Making disciples includes baptism and teaching** – we must witness through our lifestyles, and especially our loving attitude and actions, but we must also share the message about Jesus. People cannot become Christians unless they know about Jesus – who He is, what He taught, why He died and that He is alive today, calling us to obey Him. We want people to trust in Jesus, to demonstrate their faith publicly through baptism and to continue to obey Christ and live with Him.
- **Mission is done by and through the church** – obedience to Jesus means to love other Christians, and that can only happen in the church. Jesus was speaking to His disciples as a group. The goal is not just to bring individuals to faith in Jesus but to see them becoming active members of local churches.
- **Jesus promises to be with us** – this is Jesus’ mission and He is present with us as we go. The power to change lives is His. We simply seek to be faithful in showing Him to others and we can be confident that He will never leave us as we witness for Him. We never need to be ashamed of the gospel! We should take the opportunities God gives to tell people our story of faith and God’s good news.

# Water Baptism

## Why be baptised?

Christ commanded His disciples to baptise people (Matthew 28:19). Baptism is not part of salvation – salvation is something God does for you, whereas water baptism is something that other people do to you. A person could be saved and not baptised, although every Christian should be baptised in obedience to Jesus. Baptism doesn't save you, but it is a great opportunity to stand in public to identify with Jesus and tell everyone else that He is the only Lord of all and the Lord of your life. That's why in Acts 2:41 baptism marked people's acceptance of the gospel and their addition to the church.

## How should you be baptised?

There are differing ideas amongst Christians surrounding two aspects of baptism. I will simply present what I understand to be true to Scripture, but I do so with respect for other Christians who disagree:

- **Who should be baptised (believers or babies)?** The New Testament only speaks of people who had already believed being baptised (see Acts 2:41; 8:12; 10:47-48; 16:33-34; 19:5) and the biblical descriptions of baptism only make sense if the person being baptised has already responded to the gospel in faith. The baptism of babies came into churches later in history through confusion with circumcision and the desire for a fully 'Christian society'. If you were 'baptised' as a baby, even if your parents had good intentions in arranging it, you need to ask whether that was baptism in the biblical sense.
- **How should people be baptised (immersion or sprinkling)?** In the New Testament the means of baptism was always by **total immersion in water** (see, for example, Acts 8:37-38, where it clearly says that both people went down into the water). In fact, our English word 'baptism' is taken directly from the Greek verb *baptizo* which means, 'to immerse.' This should be how we practice baptism today.

## What does baptism symbolise?

Baptism is an **outward picture of important spiritual realities**. The water is only water. It doesn't change you, but your obedience to Christ will be another step towards the Holy Spirit changing you. In baptism the person is acting out in a visible way the invisible spiritual action of God in his or her life. There are two pictures used in the New Testament to explain the meaning of water baptism:

- Sins washed away** – in Acts 22:16, baptism is connected with the idea of our sins being washed away. We are now washed clean before God and the water of baptism represents this reality.
- Buried and raised with Christ** – Paul uses this image when he reminds Christians in Rome and Colosse about their baptism (Romans 6:1-14; Colossians 2:9-15). The idea is captured in this verse:

*For you were buried with Christ when you were baptised. And with Him you were raised to a new life because you trusted the mighty power of God, who raised Christ from the dead (Colossians 2:12)*

We cannot live under water and being immersed symbolises the fact that we have joined with Christ in His death. The person that we were before we knew Christ is now dead and buried. When we come up out of the water we return from the place of death into the place of life. This symbolises the fact that we have been raised with Christ and so we now have a new life with Him. From now on we will live as a new creation led by the Spirit (2 Corinthians 5:17). So, baptism expresses two things:

- That we are dead to sin and alive to Christ.
- That we are now united with Christ and have been made complete in Him.

**Baptism is something that every new Christian should undergo to identify with Christ and as a picture of what God has done in his or her life.** It is a step of obedience to Christ, identification with Christ and witness for Christ. It should be done publicly as a witness to everyone else that you now belong to God.

***If you want to know more about baptism or you want to be baptised, you should speak to one of the leaders in your local church.***

## Pointer from the Word #6

As you study these two passages, consider what differences there are between the two judgements they describe.

Especially consider who is the judge, what is judged and what are the possible outcomes for those who face the judgement?



### Read 1 Corinthians 3:10-15

Look back at v9. Of what did Paul lay the foundation (v10)? \_\_\_\_\_

What is the foundation that He laid (v11)? \_\_\_\_\_

What makes the difference between whether our work for God is like wood, hay and stubble or gold, silver and precious stones? Look at these verses and also 1 Corinthians 3:21-23; 4:1-5.

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

When and how will our works be judged (v13)?

\_\_\_\_\_

What will be the outcome for people whose work survives (v14)?

\_\_\_\_\_

What will be the outcome for people whose work fails the test (v15)?

\_\_\_\_\_

### Read Revelation 20:11-21:4

Who will face this judgement (v12)? \_\_\_\_\_

Who is the judge (v10)? \_\_\_\_\_

What evidence will be produced (v12-13)? \_\_\_\_\_

What decides the destination of those who are judged (v15)?

\_\_\_\_\_

What is the destination for those who are not saved (v15)?

\_\_\_\_\_

What is the destination for those who are saved (21:1)?

\_\_\_\_\_

What blessings are there for those who enter the new universe (21:3-4)?

\_\_\_\_\_

### MEMORISE THIS

### [Hebrews 10:24-25, NLT]

Think of ways to encourage one another to outbursts of love and good deeds. And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage and warn each other, especially now that the day of His coming is drawing near.

# Daily Readings #6



Paul's two letters to the church in Thessalonica are full of references to the return of Jesus. There was confusion among the Christians there about the details of Christ's return – when and how it would happen and exactly what it would look like. Concern about the nature and the timing of the return of Christ was also a major issue for the Christians to whom Peter wrote his two New Testament letters.

In this series of readings we will look at three passages from Paul's letters to the Thessalonians and two from Peter's letters. Each passage speaks about Jesus' return and challenges us to live expecting it. Read one passage each day and make notes in the space provided about anything that stands out to you, anything that you learn and anything that you realise you need to change as a result of what you learn.

## Words you might need to know:

|                  |   |
|------------------|---|
| <b>Asleep</b>    | Paul uses this word to describe Christian people who have died (he's not talking about people who got bored and nodded off during a church service!) The idea is that these people are resting, waiting for the day when Christ returns when they will awake and live again in their new bodies (1 Thessalonians 4:13). In 1 Thessalonians 5:6 Paul uses the same word to mean something different – here it is about whether or not we are alert and watchful, waiting for Christ's return, or whether we have dozed off and grown lazy. |
| <b>Glorified</b> | Christ will ultimately be glorified in us when we are made like Him and we reflect His glory. For now, we can glorify God by reflecting to the world something of how great He is so that people recognise that the good they see in us is not to our own credit but to His (2 Thessalonians 1:10).   |
| <b>Deluged</b>   | Flooded. A reference to Flood of Noah's time spoken about in Genesis 6-8 (2 Peter 3:6).   |

## Day 1: 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

Death is the ultimate enemy of humanity. Modern medicine fights hard to prevent and postpone it, but in the end it catches up with everyone. The resurrection of Jesus and the promise of His return make all the difference to how we think of death. It is still painful, but it will not have the ultimate victory.

- What is the basis for our hope, which changes the way in which we grieve for Christians who die?
- What things that give us a basis for confidence does Paul present in this passage?
- What does this passage teach us about what the return of Christ will be like?

*Praise God for the death and resurrection of Jesus, which have given us the hope of future resurrection and life.  
Think about who you could encourage with these words and how you could do that.*

## Day 2: 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

People love to speculate. Christians are no exception, and even Christian preachers can have a tendency to stray beyond what the Bible says. God has made some things known to us and He has chosen not to tell us other details, especially concerning the ‘end times’. Speculation just disappoints, rather than strengthening our faith in God.

- What do the illustrations of the “*thief in the night*” and the pregnant woman tell us about Christ’s return?
- How does Paul’s image of light and darkness describe the reality of the Christian life in this present world?
- What things does this passage challenge us to do as we wait for the salvation we will receive?

*Give thanks to God that Christ died for you so that you can live with Him.*

*Ask God to increase your self-control so that faith, hope and love will guard your life as you shine for Him.*

## Day 3: 2 Thessalonians 1:3-12

The return of Jesus will mean very different things for those who are Christians and those who are not. It will mean both salvation and judgement. Both are necessary. Without the final judgement of sin there can be no new world free from sin and its effects. We need to be convinced about what God’s judgement is and why it must happen.

- What will Christ’s return mean for those who are enemies of God?
- What will Christ’s return mean for Christians?
- How does this passage inspire you to live (and if necessary suffer) for the kingdom of God?

*Pray that God might fulfil by His power every good purpose you have for His kingdom.*

*Pray that the name of our Lord Jesus might be glorified in your life and your local church.*

## Day 4: 1 Peter 3:8-16

We have been called to inherit the blessing of eternal life with God, but in the meantime He has left us here on earth for a purpose. We're meant to make an impact on others as we live for Christ. Our conviction that Christ is Lord gives us confidence to explain to others the difference that God has made in our lives (assuming they can see it!)

- Why are our love for fellow Christians and our response to those who do us wrong so important?
- Why is setting “*apart Christ as Lord*” in our hearts the antidote to fearing those who oppose us?
- What does this passage say about how we can spread the message about Jesus to others?

*Ask for forgiveness where you haven't lived up to what verses 8-9 describe and strength to do so in future.  
Take time to focus again on Christ who is **the** Lord and Lord of your life so that you can be strong to speak for Him.*

## Day 5: 2 Peter 3:1-14

We live in an instant society (fast food, instant coffee and instant gratification). If the people in Peter's day thought that 30 years or so was a long time to wait for Christ's return, how much more might people today think that 2000 years is? Yet the hope we have depends on God's word, and He has promised that Christ will come. We can be sure!

- What does this passage say about the word of God and why is that important for Peter's readers?
- What does Peter say about what will happen after Christ returns?
- How should the promise of Christ's return affect how we live our lives?

*Thank God for the certainty of His promises and for His plan ultimately to put the world right.  
Ask God for the wisdom and strength to live as you should in light of Christ's return.*

# Books of the Bible

## OLD TESTAMENT (39 books)

**The Books of Moses**            5 books            Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy

- The story of mankind from the creation of the world until the call of Abraham (Genesis 1-11)
- The story of Abraham's family ending with Israel and his family in Egypt (Genesis 12-50)
- The story of the people of Israel leaving Egypt and receiving God's Law (Exodus to Deuteronomy)

**Key People** – Adam, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses

**History**                            12 books            Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 & 2 Samuel, 1 & 2 Kings, 1 & 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther

The story of the nation of Israel from the time when they entered the land of Canaan until they were taken away in captivity to Babylon.

**Key People** – Joshua, Gideon, Samuel, David, Solomon

**Poetry**                            5 books            Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon

Wisdom, prayers, songs of praise and philosophy from the experience of different people.

**Key People** – Job, David, Solomon

**“Major Prophets”**            5 books            Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel

The five longest prophetic books, containing a mixture of history and prophecy.

**Key People** – the five authors and the Kings they spoke to

**“Minor Prophets”**            12 books            Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi

Similar to the Major Prophets, but shorter.

**Key People** – the authors

## NEW TESTAMENT (27 books)

**Gospels**                            4 books            Matthew, Mark, Luke, John

Four accounts of the life, words, death and resurrection of Jesus written by people who were eyewitnesses to the events or who interviewed eyewitnesses.

**History**                            1 book            Acts of the Apostles

An account of the spread of the gospel throughout the Roman Empire and the development of the Church under the leadership of the apostles and the power of the Holy Spirit.

**Paul's Church Letters**            9 books            Romans, 1 & 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 & 2 Thessalonians

Letters written by the apostle Paul to local churches he knew answering questions they had asked and giving advice, encouragement, correction and teaching. These books are named after the churches.

**Paul's Pastoral Letters**            4 books            1 & 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon

Letters written by the apostle Paul to give encouragement and advice to individuals he knew. These books are named after the recipients.

**Other Epistles**                    8 books            Hebrews, James, 1 & 2 Peter, 1, 2 & 3 John, Jude

Letters written by other Christian leaders to groups of Christians known to them. These books are named after the authors.

**Prophecy**                            1 book            Revelation

Messages to local churches and a vision of the future given by Jesus to the apostle John.

# Recommended Resources

## By this author

There are websites where you can find further materials written by Paul Coulter:

- |                                   |   |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| www.paulcoulter.net               | contains a number of articles on topical issues and teaching notes on a range of Bible passages.  |
| www.understandingchristianity.org | a series of 24 studies following the story of the Bible from Genesis to Revelation and explain the Christian faith along the way. Also includes helpful study materials providing background information to help you study further. |

## Online resources

Two websites that are fantastically helpful for personal Bible study are:

- |                      |  |
|----------------------|--|
| www.biblegateway.com | allows you to search the Bible in many different English versions and a large number of other languages  |
| www.biblos.com       | this site's Lexicon allows serious Bible students to look into the original Hebrew and Greek texts of the Bible and to understand the meaning of the original words better. It also carries a range of other useful resources. |

There are also a large number of helpful resources on a whole range of issues on the following sites:

- [www.bethinking.org](http://www.bethinking.org)
- [www.bible.org](http://www.bible.org)

## Books for Bible Study

**Commentaries:** Some series that are particularly helpful are:

- *Surface level* – Warren Wiersbe's "Be" series (*Bible Exposition Commentary*)
- *Middle level* – IVP's *Bible Speaks Today* series; *NIV Application Commentary* series
- *Deeper level* – Eerdman's / *Apollos Pillar Commentaries*; Nelson's *Word Biblical Commentary* series

**Bible Study technique** – two excellent books that will help you understand how to study Scripture are:

- *How to Read the Bible for all its Worth* by Gordon D, Fee & Douglas Stuart, published by Scripture Union
- *Getting the Message* by Gilbert Lennox, available from [www.feedtrust.org](http://www.feedtrust.org)

**Bible Background / Reference** – IVP's *New Bible Dictionary* and *The Lion Handbook to the Bible*

## Books about Christian belief and living

All Christian books should be read with discernment. Good places to start are:

- *Theology and apologetics* by C.S. Lewis, Alister McGrath, J.I. Packer or John Stott;
  - Biographies including *No Compromise* (M. Green), *The Shadow of the Almighty* (E. Eliot);
  - Inspiration for life – authors including Ronald Dunn, Bill Hybels, Max Lucado, A.W. Tozer, Rick Warren;
- Books from the following publishers will often be helpful: Authentic, IVP, Mentor, Paternoster, Zondervan.

# Index of Bible References

|          |             |              |                 |            |             |            |             |         |
|----------|-------------|--------------|-----------------|------------|-------------|------------|-------------|---------|
| Psalms   | 1:2         | 21           | 8:1-17          | 4,14,28,31 | 3:10-17     | 20,24      |             |         |
|          | 37:4-5      | 21           | 8:26-39         | 6,28,30    | 4:1         | 44         |             |         |
|          | 111:10      | 22           | 10:9            | 4          | Titus       | 1:2        | 44          |         |
|          | 119:1-16    | 15,21,23,25  | 11:33-12:2      | 22,26,29   | 1:16        | 6          |             |         |
|          | 119:105     | 22           | 12:1-8          | 37,40,42   | 2:3         | 44         |             |         |
|          | 139:7-10    | 28           | 12:9-21         | 42         | 2:14        | 5          |             |         |
| Proverbs | 3:5-6       | 21           | 13:11-14        | 45         | 3:5         | 4,28       |             |         |
|          | 28:13       | 15           | 15:30           | 28         | 3:7         | 5          |             |         |
| Job      | 1:12        | 29           | 1 Corinthians   | 1:9-14     | 28          | Hebrews    | 1:14        | 29      |
| Matthew  | 4:1-11      | 21,30        |                 | 1:18-25    | 22          | 2:7        | 29          |         |
|          | 5:3-12      | 16           |                 | 3:10-15    | 44,47       | 4:15-16    | 14,15,23    |         |
|          | 6:1-34      | 5,12,15,17   |                 | 4:9        | 29          | 6:16-20    | 7           |         |
|          | 7:16-23     | 6            |                 | 5:42-44    | 44          | 8:10-12    | 38          |         |
|          | 8:28-31     | 30           |                 | 6:3        | 29          | 9:14       | 28          |         |
|          | 10:24-39    | 5,7          |                 | 6:12-7:7   | 5           | 9:27       | 44          |         |
|          | 16:18       | 37           |                 | 10:13      | 14          | 10:24-25   | 47          |         |
|          | 16:27       | 29           |                 | 10:23      | 22          | 10:36      | 6           |         |
|          | 22:30-40    | 29,36        |                 | 11:17-34   | 38          | 12:1-3     | 6           |         |
|          | 26:41       | 14           |                 | 12:1-31    | 28,37       | 12:22      | 29          |         |
|          | 28:19-20    | 5,45,46      |                 | 13:4-7     | 36          | 13:17      | 40          |         |
| Mark     | 9:23-24     | 14           | 2 Corinthians   | 3:18       | 28          | James      | 1:4         | 6       |
|          | 9:48        | 45           |                 | 5:8-10     | 44          | 1:5        | 44          |         |
| Luke     | 1:5-13      | 13           |                 | 5:16-17    | 5,46        | 1:13-15    | 14          |         |
|          | 11:11-13    | 13           |                 | 9:6-8      | 40          | 1:19-27    | 21,23,25    |         |
|          | 16:19-31    | 45           |                 | 12:7-10    | 13          | 2:26       | 6           |         |
|          | 22:19-20    | 38           |                 | 13:5       | 6           | 4:4        | 22          |         |
| John     | 1:12        | 6            | Galatians       | 3:13       | 5           | 4:7        | 15,23,30    |         |
|          | 3:5         | 28           |                 | 3:26       | 5           | 1 Peter    | 1:3-7       | 45      |
|          | 3:16        | 6            |                 | 4:4-5      | 5           | 1:12       | 29          |         |
|          | 8:44        | 30           |                 | 5:16-26    | 21,28,33,36 | 1:23       | 5           |         |
|          | 10:28-29    | 6            | Ephesians       | 1:1        | 5           | 2:11       | 29          |         |
|          | 13:1-17     | 36           |                 | 1:13-14    | 28          | 2:17       | 5           |         |
|          | 13:34-35    | 36,39        |                 | 2:2        | 29          | 3:8-16     | 50          |         |
|          | 14:1-27     | 28,32,44     |                 | 2:8-10     | 6           | 4:5        | 44          |         |
|          | 14:25-31    | 28,29        |                 | 2:11-22    | 40          | 4:16       | 5           |         |
|          | 16:5-16     | 28,33        |                 | 3:1-21     | 28,41       | 5:6-11     | 30,34       |         |
|          | 17:15-16,23 | 22           |                 | 4:1-16     | 37,41       | 2 Peter    | 1:3-11      | 6       |
|          | 20:24-31    | 14           |                 | 4:30       | 28          | 1:20-21    | 20,28       |         |
| Acts     | 1:8         | 28           |                 | 4:32       | 4           | 2:4        | 29          |         |
|          | 1:11        | 44           |                 | 5:18-19    | 29,37       | 3:1-14     | 45,50       |         |
|          | 2:41        | 46           |                 | 6:10-18    | 30,34       | 1 John     | 1:5-2:2     | 6,14,18 |
|          | 2:47        | 4,37         | Philippians     | 1:19       | 13          | 2:3-17     | 4,18,22     |         |
|          | 5:3-5       | 28           |                 | 3:12-14    | 6           | 2:23       | 6           |         |
|          | 8:12        | 46           | Colossians      | 1:9-14     | 23          | 3:2        | 44          |         |
|          | 8:37-38     | 46           |                 | 2:6-18     | 4,6,29,46   | 3:6        | 14          |         |
|          | 10:42-48    | 44,46        |                 | 3:18-25    | 5           | 3:8-9      | 6,29,30     |         |
|          | 13:39       | 5            | 1 Thessalonians | 4:13-18    | 44,48       | 3:11-20    | 39          |         |
|          | 16:33-34    | 46           |                 | 5:1-11     | 49          | 4:7-21     | 36,39       |         |
|          | 19:5        | 46           |                 | 5:12-22    | 14,26       | Jude       | 6           | 29      |
|          | 22:16       | 46           | 2 Thessalonians | 1:3-12     | 49          | 20-25      | 15          |         |
| Romans   | 1:18-2:5    | 4,8          |                 | 3:6-15     | 5           | Revelation | 5:11        | 29      |
|          | 3:20-31     | 4,5,9        | 2 Timothy       | 1:7        | 28,31       | 12:7-9     | 29          |         |
|          | 5:1-11      | 4,9,28,36,45 |                 | 1:12       | 7           | 20:10-22:6 | 30,44,45,47 |         |
|          | 6:1-23      | 6,10,46,46   |                 | 2:19       | 6           | 22:8       | 29          |         |

# Index of Topics

| Topic                 | Lesson(s) | Topic                   | Lesson(s) |
|-----------------------|-----------|-------------------------|-----------|
| Agape                 | 5         | Heaven and Hell         | 6         |
| Angels                | 4         | Holiness                | 3         |
| Armour of God         | 4         | Holy Spirit             | 4         |
| Assurance             | 1         | Inspiration             | 3         |
| Baptism in the Spirit | 4         | Justification           | 1         |
| Baptism in water      | 6         | Lord's Supper           | 5         |
| Bible                 | 3         | Love                    | 5         |
| Body of Christ        | 5         | Mission                 | 6         |
| Breaking of Bread     | 5         | Perseverance            | 1         |
| Christ-like character | 4         | Prayer                  | 2         |
| Church                | 5         | Purpose for living      | 3, 6      |
| Community             | 5         | Redemption              | 1         |
| Communion             | 5         | Resurrection of Jesus   | 1         |
| Confession            | 2         | Salvation               | 1         |
| Covenant, New         | 5         | Satan                   | 4         |
| Cross of Christ       | 1         | Scripture               | 3         |
| Decisions             | 3         | Second coming of Christ | 6         |
| Demons                | 4         | Security                | 1         |
| Devil                 | 4         | Service                 | 5         |
| Doubts                | 2         | Sex                     | 1         |
| End times             | 6         | Sin                     | 1, 2      |
| Eternal security      | 1         | Sinful nature           | 2, 4      |
| Evangelism            | 6         | Spiritual warfare       | 4         |
| Evil spirits          | 4         | Temptation              | 2         |
| Family                | 1         | Will of God             | 3         |
| Fellowship            | 5         | Wisdom                  | 3         |
| Giving                | 5         | Witnessing              | 6         |
| Gospel                | 1         | Work                    | 1         |
| Guidance              | 3         | World (influence of)    | 3, 6      |

## About the Author

Paul Coulter was born and raised in Northern Ireland, where he lives with his Malaysian Chinese wife and their two young children. His background is in medicine, but he also holds degrees in theology and genetics. He is passionate about the word of God, the local church and relating the Bible's message to contemporary culture. Nothing excites him more than seeing Christians growing in their faith and living lives of total surrender to Christ in the freedom of God's grace and truth.

If you would like to contact Paul or find out more about his writing or his Bible teaching please visit his personal website: [www.paulcoulter.net](http://www.paulcoulter.net)



# **First Steps** in the Faith

Revised edition © Paul B Coulter, 2021

[www.paulcoulter.net](http://www.paulcoulter.net)