

Why in the world does the church exist?

1

Aim of study: to see that our church is part of the larger body of Christ in the world and exists for two main purposes – building up the body & reaching out

Hand out cards and pencils.

Launching question: Jot down the first thing you think of when you hear the word – ‘church’. Collect in cards, and read them out. We’ll see how what we’ve said matches up with what we read about God’s purposes for the church.

Ask someone to read the passage, and paragraph following before distributing the notes.

1 Peter 1: 1-2; 2:4-12

Some of the churches to whom Peter is writing grew up as the first Christians were forced to flee Jerusalem, due to persecution after the stoning of Stephen. The believers were *scattered* throughout Asia Minor (1:1), and so were able to carry the good news of Christ with them. At the same time, they were *gathered* together for worship and building up one another (2:5). Peter’s letter addresses both Jewish and Gentile Christians. Each church was the body of Christ in miniature, and also part of the whole body of Christ. In the same way, our church is both the local body of Christ, and part of the global, universal church.

Divide into two groups & each write down their observations

- How does Peter describe the believers? (1:1-2; 2:5,9,10) *List phrases under these two columns*

once you were...	now you are...
In darkness	In light / chosen by God
Not belonging to God	A holy nation / Royal priesthood / Living stones
Had no mercy	/Belonging to God / received mercy / strangers in the world

Collect contributions

- What does it mean to be a spiritual house made of living stones? (see also Ephesians 2:19-22)
- What activities might contribute to becoming a healthy spiritual house?

Think about our church. What do we do that builds up the local body of believers? For the moment, don’t include outreach activities. Write your ideas in the *gathered* column. [The *gathered* aspect of church life refers to how we help one another grow as Christians.] You could also look up Acts 2:42-47.

Give time for groups to fill in the *gathered* section then get input.

Gathered - collect these answers at question 3	Scattered – you will collect these answers at Question 9
Worship / breaking bread / giving / praising God / pastoral care / church-wide fellowships / teaching / prayer times / meeting together / home groups / house-parties, weekends / music group / equipping in practical living / etc	equipping for outreach / some teaching, preaching / giving to non-church causes / personal witness – word & life / involvement in social concerns / proclaiming the story of Jesus / outreach events, missions / supporting missionaries / Jesus video / evangelistic community magazine / etc

- To whom is Peter referring when he says, “You are a royal priesthood”? (2:9) see also Rev 1:5b-6 & Exodus 19:5-6

All believers. God designated all the Israelites, not just priests & Levites, to be a kingdom of priests.

- What do the words *royal priesthood* suggest to you? See Malachi 2:7 for a good description of the Old Testament priest. How can we relate to this today?

Old Testament priests represented men to God through the sacrifice system, and represented God to men, conveying his laws, wisdom and guidance. Now that the perfect sacrifice has been made, we no longer need to

MAKING HIM KNOWN STUDY 1: WHY IN THE WORLD DOES THE CHURCH EXIST? LEADER'S NOTES

approach God through an intermediary. With God indwelling each believer with his Spirit, we are to represent him directly to men and women – both fellow believers and those as yet outside his family.

Apply- Ask group to write down their thoughts to both questions; then ask someone to share what they have written.

- | | |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are some implications for me personally if God views me as a living stone, part of a royal priesthood? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are some areas in which I would like God to produce growth? |
|---|--|

6. As royal priests, what is our responsibility to the world? (2:9b, 11-12)

Declaring the praises of God (Acts 26:17) / Living exemplary lives – abstaining from sinful desires. Peter is implying that God's worth is also to be declared to those outside God's family.

7. How does Peter describe followers of Jesus? (1 Peter 1:1; 2:11)

Aliens & strangers in the world

8. What does it mean to be a stranger in the world? How does this fit in with declaring the praises of God? see John 17:14-18

John 17 – 'in the world but not of it'. We are not to live in isolation, but keep ourselves from evil so we can influence those under its control.

The church is not only to be *gathered* - for building itself up, but also *scattered* - to influence the world.

9. What church activities contribute to 'declaring the praises of God'? (write your answers under *scattered* in the box under question 3) List activities that are actually & effectively declaring God's praise to outsiders.

- Is there any overlap with our original thoughts about 'church'?

Get group into 3s to brainstorm on the following question. Hand out two cards per group for them to record gathered & scattered ideas. After a few minutes, get feedback of one idea from each category from each group. Give the best ideas to church leaders.

10. What could our church improve on, or start doing, that would contribute towards greater effectiveness in the *gathered* or *scattered* aspect of the church's purpose?

Summary – read out this summary

Though there are many aspects of *gathered* that we could discuss, the focus of 'Making Him Known' is on the *scattered* task – to take the message of God's love and forgiveness to those who have, as yet, no relationship with Jesus.

Then ask everyone to write down their responses to this question in the Apply box.

Apply – Write down your own activities and relationships under *gathered* and *scattered*

gathered	scattered
Eg: home group; music group;	Eg: conversation at work / drink with neighbour

Pray – encourage group to express aloud what they have discovered and to pray about the 'scattered' task of the church

Before next time...

Read Luke 5:27-32

Think about: Why did Jesus come to earth?

Why in the world does the church exist?

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- How does Peter describe the believers? (1:1-2; 2:5,9,10) *List phrases under these two columns*

once you were...	now you are...

- What does it mean to be a spiritual house made of living stones? (see also Ephesians 2:19-22)
- What activities might contribute to becoming a healthy spiritual house?

Think about our church. What do we do that builds up the local body of believers? For the moment, don't include outreach activities. Write your ideas in the *gathered* column. [The *gathered* aspect of church life refers to how we help one another grow as Christians.] You could also look up Acts 2:42-47.

Gathered	Scattered

- To whom is Peter referring when he says, "You are a royal priesthood"? (2:9) see also Rev 1:5b-6 & Exodus 19:5-6
- What do the words *royal priesthood* suggest to you? See Malachi 2:7 for a good description of the Old Testament priest. How can we relate to this today?

Apply

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are some implications for me personally if God views me as a living stone, part of a royal priesthood? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are some areas in which I would like God to produce growth? |
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7. How does Peter describe followers of Jesus? (1 Peter 1:1; 2:11)

8. What does it mean to be a stranger in the world? How does this fit in with declaring the praises of God? *see John 17:14-18*

The church is not only to be *gathered* - for building itself up, but also *scattered* - to influence the world.

9. What church activities contribute to 'declaring the praises of God'? (write your answers under *scattered* in the box under question 3)
 - Is there any overlap with our original thoughts about 'church'?

10. What could our church improve on, or start doing, that would contribute towards greater effectiveness in the *gathered* or *scattered* aspect of the church's purpose?

Apply – Write down your own activities and relationships under *gathered* and *scattered*

gathered	scattered
eg: home group	Eg: conversation at work / drink with neighbour

Pray

Before next time...

Read Luke 5:27-32
 Think about: Why did Jesus come to earth?

What is God's heartbeat for the world?

2

Aim of study: to see God's heartbeat for lost people through the words and actions of Jesus

Launching question: Think of a time you mislaid something of great value to you. What did you do?
Ask 2 or 3 people to share.

Hand out member's notes and ask someone to read this paragraph that is in their notes.

Luke 5 begins with Jesus calling his first three disciples: Simon Peter, James, and John. He challenges these fishing partners to join him in catching men instead of fish (v 9-11). Some time passes; Jesus goes from town to town, healing the sick and attracting a large following. He restored many to physical health (v15), confronted the religious system of the day (v20,21), demonstrated God's power and filled many with a sense of awe (v26). As Jesus chooses his fourth disciple, we can begin to see what lies behind his actions.

Read Luke 5:27-32

1. How did Levi respond to Jesus' invitation?

(Levi was later called Matthew – he wrote one of the gospels.)

2. Do you think Levi had come across Jesus already? Why, or why not?

3. What was the Pharisees' complaint against Jesus and why do you think they complained?

Pharisee' means separated one. A strict religious sect of ordinary Jews, the Pharisees stuck rigidly to the Jewish laws, often making them harder to keep. Such strict rulings led many to become so concerned for the details that they lost sight of the spirit behind them. Some Pharisees were godly men, but many tended to despise those who did not or could not keep their burdensome laws referring to them as 'sinners'. Jesus often argued with them, condemning their self-righteous legalism.

4. How did Jesus handle the problem?

5. In what way were Levi's friends *sick*?

6. In what ways might your neighbours or colleagues be *sick*?

Draw out that there are cultural differences between our neighbours and Levi's friends, but no heart difference. Ask someone to read Romans 3:9-12

7. To what extent was Jesus suggesting that the Pharisees were *healthy* or *righteous*?

Refer to Galatians 2:21

8. Why do you think Jesus went out of his way to attend a banquet for Levi's friends?

That was the only way to reach them – to go where they were. These may not have been the kind of people who would have come to the synagogue.

9. What can we learn from Jesus' attitude to Levi and friends?

See behind a person's status or position to identify his real need / expect criticism if you are actively fishing for men / go to where people like Matthew's friends are comfortable – don't expect them to take the initiative to come to an unfamiliar uncomfortable setting like a church building.

Assign the 3 short Luke passages following to three groups and Before they read the passages aloud in their small groups, ask someone to read this introductory paragraph:

Luke 15:3-7; 8-10; 11-24

Jesus is still annoying the Pharisees by welcoming and eating with sinners (15:1,2). In response, Jesus tells them three parables about a lost sheep (v3-7), a lost coin (v8-10) and a lost son (v11-24).

Ask everyone to discuss the two parts to question 1 for their particular passage. Get feedback after 5 minutes.

1. In each story, what trouble or risk did the person go through in order to get back what was lost?

- What emotions are expressed after the lost item is found?

2. Who is represented by the lost sheep, lost coin and lost son?

vs. Sinners (self-centred men and women) who want to go God's way

- Who is the seeker?

Here it means God, who takes the initiative to search out and rescue people who are estranged from him, and to offer forgiveness and life through relationship with Jesus.

3. What do these parables show us about Jesus' attitude towards the lost?

Lost people are Jesus' main focus and concern. He will go to endless time and trouble to find them - ultimately giving up his life for them.

- Why did Jesus come to earth? (see Luke 19:10)

He had a compulsion to seek and save the lost and says that is why he came.

4. What happens to *the lost*? John 3:16-20,36; Matthew 13:42; Revelation 20:10-15

Ask someone to read the passages

It isn't God who refuses people, people choose their own way instead of God's. Rejecting Jesus is a choice.

5. Why do we tend not to see those around us as truly lost for eternity?

Seem such nice people / seem to be faithfully practising their religion / it's too horrible to contemplate close relatives being separated from God / people don't seem to have a spiritual need (lostness doesn't necessarily show itself - having no hope and without God) / the concept of hell seems so remote and unreal.

6. What would help us to have Jesus' perspective?

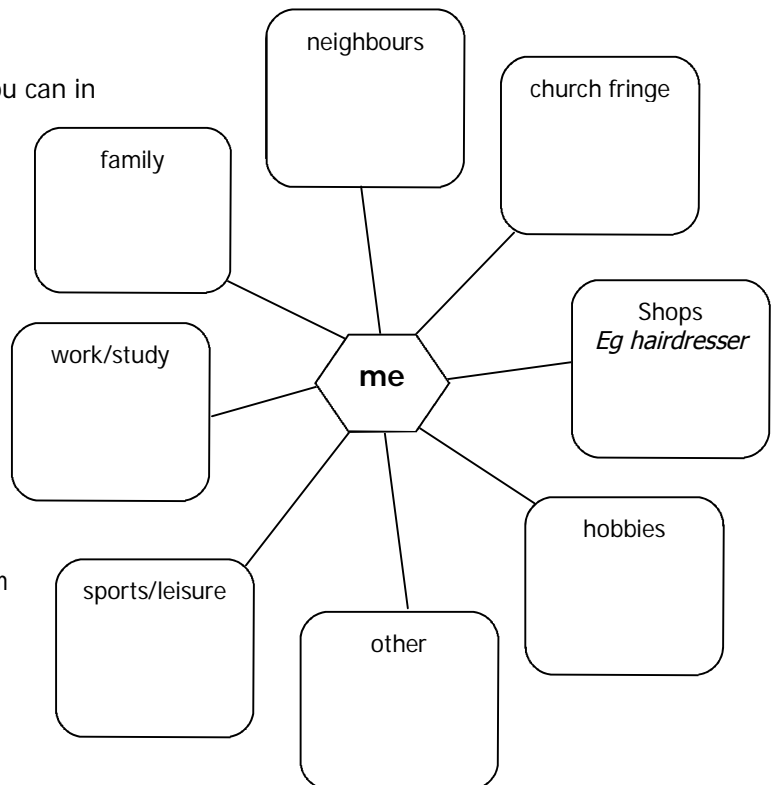
Discussing the topic openly with other Christians / praying for people we are concerned for / becoming more familiar with Jesus' heart, priority and purpose / remembering that God sees into our hearts.

Apply - Give 5mins for everyone to start filling in.

Write down as many names of acquaintances as you can in this diagram. Don't include people you know are followers of Jesus, and don't just write the names of people you know well, but anyone you come in contact.

Write the names of five people you want to pray for regularly here or on a 'Five in Focus' card

- 1 _____ 2 _____
 3 _____ 4 _____
 5 _____



Pray - that we would understand better God's heartbeat for the world, to help us view others as Jesus did, and to allow him to change us. Encourage everyone to pray for the people they have written down.

Before next time...

Read Acts chapters 1-15

What is God's heartbeat for the world?

2

Aim of study: to see God's heartbeat for lost people through the words and actions of Jesus

Luke 5 begins with Jesus calling his first three disciples: Simon Peter, James, and John. He challenges these fishing partners to join him in catching men instead of fish (v 9-11). Some time passes; Jesus goes from town to town, healing the sick and attracting a large following. He restored many to physical health (v15), confronted the religious system of the day (v20,21), demonstrated God's power and filled many with a sense of awe (v26). As Jesus chooses his fourth disciple, we can begin to see what lies behind his actions.

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2. Do you think Levi had come across Jesus already? Why, or why not?
3. What was the Pharisees' complaint against Jesus and why do you think they complained?
4. How did Jesus handle the problem?
5. In what way were Levi's friends *sick*?
6. In what ways might your neighbours or colleagues be *sick*?
7. To what extent was Jesus suggesting that the Pharisees were *healthy* or *righteous*?
8. Why do you think Jesus went out of his way to attend a banquet for Levi's friends?
9. What can we learn from Jesus' attitude to Levi and friends?

Luke 15:3-7; 8-10; 11-24

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1. In each story, what trouble or risk did the person go through in order to get back what was lost?
 - What emotions are expressed after the lost item is found?

2. Who is represented by the lost sheep, lost coin and lost son?
 - Who is the seeker?

3. What do these parables show us about Jesus' attitude towards the lost?
 - Why did Jesus come to earth? (see Luke 19:10)

4. What happens to *the lost*? John 3:16-20,36; Matthew 13:42; Revelation 20:10-15

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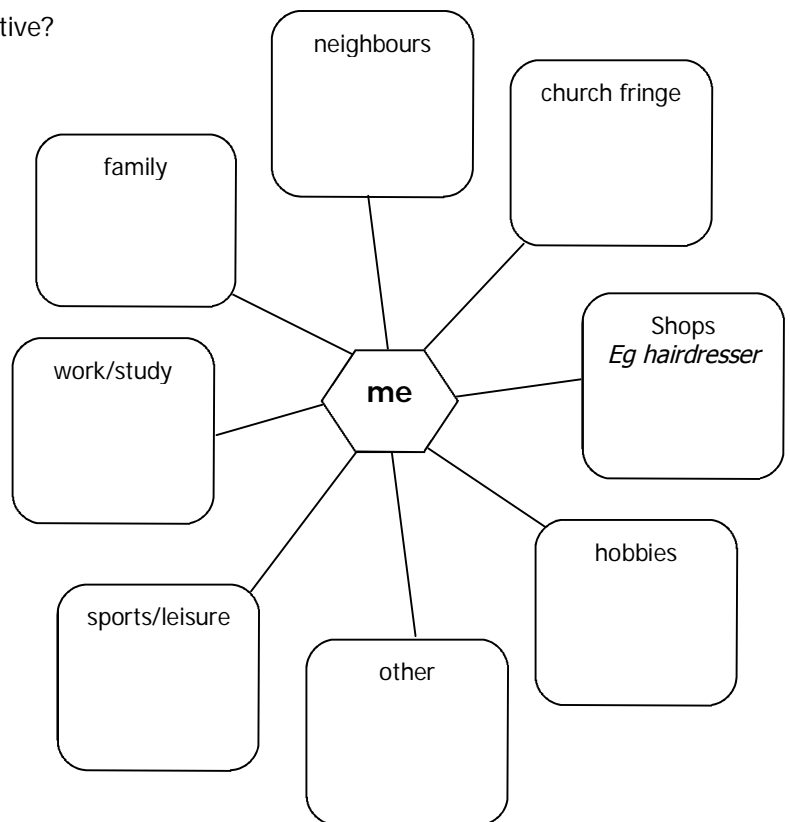
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Apply

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- 1 _____ 2 _____
 3 _____ 4 _____
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Prayer

Before next time...

Read Acts chapters 1-15

Does God have a plan for reaching lost people?

Aim of study: to see that God uses ordinary individuals in his family to reach lost people

Launching Question: Do you think there is a certain type of person who is more effective in reaching outsiders?

Distribute notes and ask someone to read the following:

"I find it amusing, indeed almost ironic, that the Western church, with its hierarchies, its pomp and circumstance, was brought into being by a bunch of nobodies who were all lay people. Of course, the distinction between laity and clergy, which has so distorted Christianity, was quite unknown in those far off New Testament days. Christianity was entirely a lay movement. The Antioch church not only gave vast scope to laymen: it was founded by laymen. The nearest thing to clergy was the apostles: and not one of them was to be seen at Antioch. They were all keeping their heads down in Jerusalem. But the wandering refugees who had hazarded their lives for the Lord Jesus brought this exciting church into being. Surely there is something for us to learn here." *Evangelism through the Local Church* by Michael Green

A Character Study of Barnabas

Barnabas belonged to the Jerusalem church. He is first mentioned in Acts 4:36.

Ask someone to read

Acts 4:31-37

'Traditionally true apostles were those men who were eyewitnesses of Jesus and particularly chosen for bringing the church into being. Although Luke calls Barnabas an 'apostle' it is because of his role as a leader.' *Adapted from Sharpening the Focus of the Church: S Getz*

1. According to this passage, what sort of character was Barnabas? (Start filling in the table)

What kind of person was Barnabas?

From question 1:	From question 3:	From question 4:	From question 5:
an encourager / generous - giving from his resources	broad-minded / not afraid of new ideas / courageous / inclusive of others / a bridge-builder	good / available / trustworthy / full of faith / controlled by the Holy Spirit / influential / adaptable / people brought to God through his witness / knew his limitations and involved others to help/ took initiative to share his faith	Barnabas could express God's message / was persuasive in his speech / gave God the credit instead of seeking personal recognition / was available to go where he was needed

Barnabas was not one of the leaders in the Jerusalem church; nor was he one of the seven deacons appointed in Acts 6:1-6.

Ask someone to read passage and sentences below.

Acts 9:26-28

Barnabas meets Saul, a zealous Jew who was going to Damascus to persecute Christians. He was interrupted on his journey by a brilliant light - a vision of Jesus - that changed his life. (Acts 9:1-19)

2. What did Barnabas have to overcome in order to help Saul?

Fears about Saul and the negative mindset of the Jerusalem church.

3. What did this episode show about Barnabas' character? (write these ideas in the box above)

Then the story of Jesus spread to Antioch, and Greeks, not just Jews were turning to God.

Assign the next passages to two groups, each read the text then list the character qualities in the box above.

Acts 11:19-26; Acts 13:2-3

4. What qualities of Barnabas' character are shown here? (add to table at question 1)
Get feedback from whole group.

Assign these passages to the two groups

Acts 13:4,5; Acts 14:1,21,22; 15:12

5. What qualities do we learn about Barnabas here? (add to table)
Get feed back after a few minutes group research.

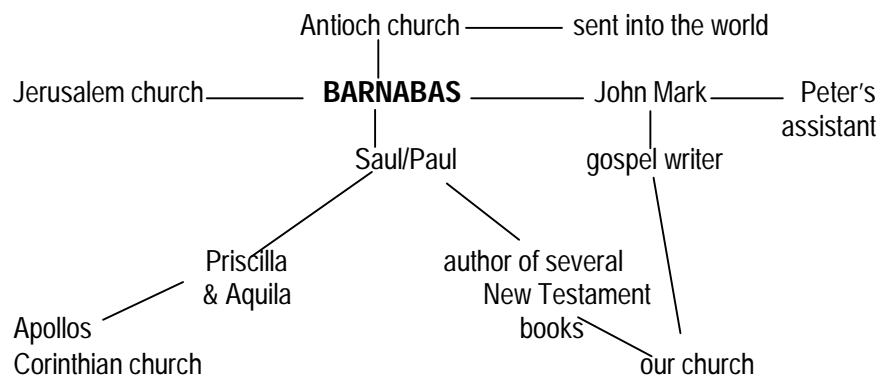
6. In what ways might **you** be able to team up with another believer or group of believers in order to share the message of Jesus?

evangelistic coffee morning with special speaker / bring & share supper for neighbours with 10 minute discussion starter / invite Christian friend for lunch with a work colleague to talk about spiritual things

The influence of one man

Barnabas was the oil in the mechanism that connected and influenced several leaders in the 1st century church. His availability to be used by God continues to affect us today.

This diagram shows how God uses an ordinary person, Barnabas, to influence a vast network, even our own lives, through Mark's gospel today! Priscilla & Aquila were tentmakers like Paul, who instructed Apollos in Ephesus.



Summary

How is Barnabas like or unlike the person we imagined in our initial discussion?

He was ordinary, not a 'professional', not an apparent extrovert / had a concern for the lost that came from his heart - not from a zealous, dogmatic personality.

What implication does this have for us?

We are unique people with unique gifts, not all extroverts, but God can use each of us to reach lost people, if we are strongly connected to and supported by God's family.

Apply

- Is there someone in the church I could encourage?
- In what way?
- What stops me from doing this?

Barnabas' greatest ability was his **availability**.

- Am I available for God to use me to reach lost people? How?
- What would strengthen my effectiveness and willingness to share my faith with others?

Pray

How does Barnabas challenge us?

Each pray for one of your Five in Focus names

Before next time...

Finish working through the Apply questions, and pray regularly for your Five in Focus.

Does God have a plan for reaching lost people?

Aim of study: to see that God uses ordinary individuals in his family to reach lost people

"I find it amusing, indeed almost ironic, that the Western church, with its hierarchies, its pomp and circumstance, was brought into being by a bunch of nobodies who were all lay people. Of course, the distinction between laity and clergy, which has so distorted Christianity, was quite unknown in those far off New Testament days. Christianity was entirely a lay movement. The Antioch church not only gave vast scope to laymen: it was founded by laymen. The nearest thing to clergy was the apostles: and not one of them was to be seen at Antioch. They were all keeping their heads down in Jerusalem. But the wandering refugees who had hazarded their lives for the Lord Jesus brought this exciting church into being. Surely there is something for us to learn here."

Evangelism through the Local Church by Michael Green

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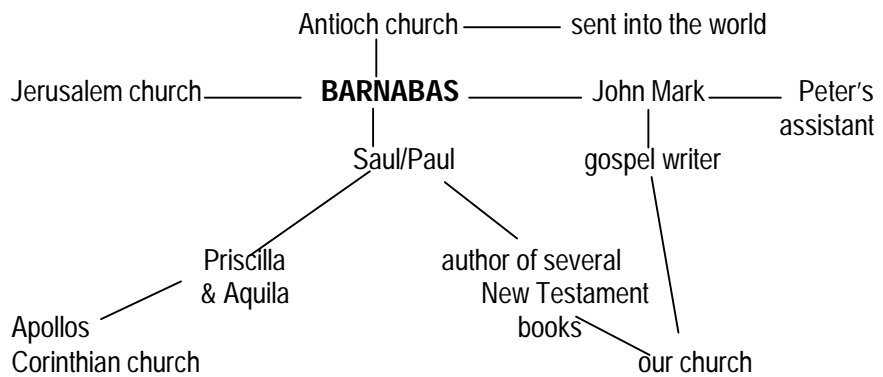
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What implication does this have for us?

Apply

- Is there someone in the church that I could encourage?
- In what way?
- What stops me from doing this?

Barnabas' greatest ability was his *availability*.

- Am I available for God to use me to reach lost people? How?
- What would strengthen my effectiveness and willingness to share my faith with others?

Pray

How does Barnabas challenge us?

Each pray for one of your Five in Focus names

Before next time...

Finish working through the Apply questions, and pray regularly for your Five in Focus.

What kind of church can God use to make Jesus known?

Aim of study: to see that the church needs to be open to change, open to the initiative of ordinary people open to risks and open to speak about Jesus

Review: Is anyone willing to share their homework reflections?

Launching question: Do the terms 'churchgoer', 'believer' and 'disciple' all mean basically the same? If not, what is different?
Hand out notes. Ask someone to read the first paragraph.

The early church was contagious. At one point they could count 5000 men who had come to faith in Christ, probably content to remain in Jerusalem. The persecution that followed the stoning of Stephen forced many to leave town. Our church can learn from what happened when the Jerusalem church was scattered.

The Gospel spreads to Greeks

Summarise Acts 8:1-4: key verse – "those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went." Then ask someone to read the following passage.

Acts 11:19-26

1. Why did some of the believers go to Antioch?
2. What type of people made this journey to Antioch? (v19-21)
Ordinary people - not clergy or 'professionals'
3. How would you explain the good news about Jesus?
Ask group to suggest and read any Bible verses which summarise the gospel
You might find it helpful to assign the following passages to read out: John 3:16 / 1 Cor 15:1-4 / 2 Cor 5:17-19, 21
4. What was the response of the Jerusalem church when they heard that Greeks were becoming Christians?
They sent Barnabas.
 - Why?
5. What would it have meant if the Jerusalem church leaders had clung to their traditions?
If the Jerusalem church had refused to give up the naturally Jewish character of the church, the gospel would not have spread to the gentiles - nor to us!
6. These Christians were open to change and took risks. As a result, *a great number of people turned to the Lord* (v 21). What are some risk-taking activities happening in and through our church?
 - What would make our church more contagious to outsiders?
7. What one change would you recommend our church made in order to help more people come to faith in Christ?

'The only thing that does not change is a cemetery. Every living thing changes and so will a living church.'
Michael Green: Evangelism through the local church

Apply - give time for writing down answers to the two questions.

- In a sense, all members of our church are *scattered* during the week. Jot down some ideas of possible 'risk-taking activities' you could do in order to become a more contagious Christian.

open to change / open to the initiative of lay people / open to taking risks / open to speak up about Jesus

- What might be a suitable first/next step?

Pray that God will open up a conversation with someone this week / think about a question I could ask someone

Would anyone like to share what you have written?

Divide group into clusters of 3; assign a passage to each. After a few minutes ask for feedback on the first two parts of question 1.

Matthew 28:19-20 & 2 Timothy 2:2

1. What is needed to make sure the message is passed on?

- What does it mean to make disciples?

Matthew 18:19-20 - make disciples, not 'decisions' / a command not optional / go to all nations - ie people groups / Jesus is with us

2 Tim passage - multiplication effect / look for faithful people / work through groups

- What is the relationship of 2 Timothy 2:2 to making disciples?

2. Who were the *faithful men/women* who passed on the good news of Jesus to you? How did they do it?

3. In what ways could we *avoid* passing on the infection of the gospel?

Summary

What are some next steps we could take as a result of today's study?

Pray

Thank God for the people who passed the good news about Jesus to each of us. Ask God to help us to do the same for others.

Reflect back in prayer to God the challenges of this study.

Each pray for one of our Five in Focus names.

Before next time...

Continue to pray for your Five in Focus

Give some further thought to the Apply box

Read Luke 7:36-50 - what do you read about forgiveness?

What kind of church can God use to make Jesus known?

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3. How would you explain the good news about Jesus?
(John 3:16 / 1 Cor 15:1-4 / 2 Cor 5:17-19, 21)

4. What was the response of the Jerusalem church when they heard that Greeks were becoming Christians?
 - Why?

5. What would it have meant if the Jerusalem church leaders had clung to their traditions?

6. These Christians were open to change and took risks. As a result, *a great number of people turned to the Lord* (v 21). What are some risk-taking activities happening in and through our church?
 - What would make our church more contagious to outsiders?

7. What one change would you recommend our church made in order to help more people come to faith in Christ?

'The only thing that does not change is a cemetery. Every living thing changes and so will a living church.'
Michael Green: Evangelism through the local church

Apply

- | | |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">In a sense, all members of our church are <i>scattered</i> during the week. Jot down some ideas of possible 'risk-taking activities' you could do in order to become a more contagious Christian. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">What might be a suitable first/next step? |
|---|---|

Matthew 28:19-20 & 2 Timothy 2:2

- What is needed to make sure the message is passed on?
 - What does it mean to make disciples?
 - What is the relationship of 2 Timothy 2:2 to making disciples?
- Who were the *faithful men/women* who passed on the good news of Jesus to you? How did they do it?
- In what ways could we *avoid* passing on the infection of the gospel?

Summary

What are some next steps we could take as a result of today's study?

Pray

Thank God for the people who passed the good news about Jesus to each of us. Ask God to help us to do the same for others.

Reflect back in prayer to God the challenges of this study.

Each pray for one of our Five in Focus names.

Before next time...

Continue to pray for your Five in Focus

Give some further thought to the Apply box

Read Luke 7:36-50 – what do you read about forgiveness?

How will the world recognise us, the church, as disciples of Jesus? 5

Aim of study: to show that the way we love and forgive each other as Christians has a powerful effect on outsiders

Review: Would anyone like to share how you got on with the homework last time?

Launching question: When asked how he could be a Christian and have a less-than-perfect life style, tennis star Andre Agassi replied, "That's why I need God." How would most people respond to that answer, do you think?

Ask someone to read these verses from John, and then someone to read the introductory paragraphs

John 13:34,35

Although love was commanded in the Old Testament, Jesus gave a new command that we should love each other as he has loved us. This love would stand out, so that everyone who saw it would say, "those people must be disciples of Jesus" - "those people must be churchgoers".

The next two studies focus on this sort of love and how it works out day by day in the local church. Study 5's focus is forgiveness, the underpinning of love. Study 6 will cover issues of identifying and resolving conflict in God's family - forgiveness made practical.

The main point of this study is to accept our own forgiveness and be able to extend it to others. Questions 1-7 should take no more than 10 minutes. Ask someone to read...

Luke 7:36-50 God forgives me

This woman was able to wash Jesus' feet because the table was near the floor & the guests reclined on cushions. Normally the host would provide water to wash his guests' feet, anoint his head with oil and give a kiss of greeting. Simon did none of these, showing he had little respect for Jesus.

1. What was the woman's reputation in the town?

She lived a sinful life.

2. Why do you think she interrupted the dinner?

She felt guilty, wanted forgiveness, she loved Jesus and that caused her to disregard the opinion of others.

3. How did the woman's attitude about herself change during the course of her encounter with Jesus?

She presumably left with the sense that she was forgiven and accepted completely by Jesus. She probably felt her burden of guilt had been removed.

4. What do you think was going on in Simon's mind?

The Pharisees saw themselves as righteous, not needing to be baptised by John. Simon presumably was no exception.

5. What might the woman have told others about her experience?

I don't know what made me do it. Afterwards he told me I was completely forgiven - that's what he said. It's as though my life has started again. Then he told me as I was leaving that my faith had saved me.

Jesus makes the issue clear - the bad news of sin (self-centredness) and the good news of forgiveness. It must have sounded so presumptuous to Simon's other guests to hear Jesus say, "Your sins are forgiven". But Jesus knew that he was going to put things right between us and God by dying for us.

6. How could Jesus' death affect us today when we had not even been born then?

You may find it helpful to look at Hebrews 10: 1-4; 9-12; 17,18

Ask different people in the group to look up the verses, read aloud and suggest an answer to the question

7. In light of this, how does God view me now? (see how the following verses describe a Christian)

Colossians 2:13; Ephesians 1:3,4; 1 Corinthians 6:11; Romans 8:1; Isaiah 43:25

8. If Christ has forgiven us completely, how does God want us to deal with our failures - disobedience, sinful thoughts and actions? (Read 1 John 1:9)

Confess our sins as soon as we become aware of them. To confess means 'to say the same as'.

Ask - What do you think God says to us, as his children, about our sin and self-centredness?

"I love you. My instructions are for your protection and your provision, not to harm you. You harm yourself. Your way of living is wrong, it's already forgiven, it's unacceptable. I long for you to ask me to help you live right."

9. If my forgiveness is already sorted, why do I need to confess my self-centredness? Read Isaiah 59:2

Un-confessed sin breaks my fellowship with God. My father/child relationship is secure, but my experience of the blessing and benefit of the relationship is interrupted, making me feel cut off or estranged from the one who still loves me.

Now I can forgive others

Jesus rebukes Simon for his self-righteousness (v 44-47), contrasting the woman's act of repentance with Simon's lack of it. His final words are 'he who is forgiven little, loves little'. It must follow that 'he who has been forgiven much, loves much'. Experiencing God's love and forgiveness provides the basis for loving and forgiving others. (1 John 4:11 'Since God loved us so much, we ought to love one another'.)

- Does this mean that I have to be a great sinner in order to love God much?

Divide into three groups and assign one passage to each to discuss. After 5 minutes, get brief summary from each group.

Luke 17:3-5; Colossians 3:12-14; Ephesians 4:30-32

1. From each passage, make a note of what are we told to do.

Luke 17:3-5	Colossians 3:12-14	Ephesians 4:30-32

Then ask

- Is this realistic when my grievance is fair?
- Are there any exceptions?
- How does my own up-to-the-minute experience of God's forgiveness help me to forgive others?

We can be tolerant and gracious with others when they sin, knowing that we suffer the same weaknesses and are capable of the same actions.

2. What can happen if, as Christians, we do not forgive one another genuinely? Why?

God's commands are for our protection and provision. Our fellowship with God is broken when we disobey his command. Our relationship with a fellow Christian is cut off if our grievance is against them. Our example to others (including those who are not Christians) is diminished if we are unable to even love and forgive those in our spiritual family. If we are to share the gospel of forgiveness with others, we have to embrace and practise it in our own lives and local church.

An example; if your child disobeys you, he/she is still fully a member of the family; the relationship hasn't changed. But if there is no apology or confession, the family fellowship is broken and needs to be restored. It is similar in our relationship with God: by agreeing with God that he is right about my utter self-centredness, and that he has dealt with it by the blood of Christ, I can once again experience harmony. 1 John 1:7 & 9 refer to being cleansed. Although I am not forgiven all over again; through honest confession, I make real what is already mine and surrender again to his control of my life.

Apply Give a few moments for thinking through these questions.

- Is there something in my life that is hindering my fellowship with God?

Read 1 John 1:6-10. Ask God to search your heart. Confess whatever he brings to mind by (1) acknowledging that it is wrong; (2) thanking God that he has already forgiven you and (3) deciding to turn away from it. Then once again, God's love and forgiveness can be a reality

3. What else (from personal experience or from reading the Bible) might help us forgive those who have wronged, hurt or offended us?

Knowing that God is at work to change our wants so that we will be willing to fully forgive (Philippians 2:13). Pray, claiming this promise, for his Spirit to work on our wills to give us an attitude of willingness to forgive. Realise that the more serious the offence, the more time it might take for our attitude to be brought into submission to God's desire for us – for his good pleasure. God puts up with our imperfect Christian lives. Can we trust him to give us grace for others who offend us?

Apply and Pray - allow a few minutes for quiet reflection on the following:

If we are followers of Jesus who freely offers grace and forgiveness, then we must be showing grace and forgiveness in our own lives. Is there someone I have not totally forgiven?

Ask God what the next step should be.

Some grievances need talking through. The focus of study 6 will be dealing with resolving conflict.

Before next time...

Make sure you have completed the personal application in the Apply sections

Read Acts 15:35-41. Why did this disagreement arise?

Continue praying for your Five in Focus

How will the world recognise us, the church, as disciples of Jesus?

5

Aim of study: to show that the way we love and forgive each other as Christians has a powerful effect on outsiders

John 13:34,35

Although love was commanded in the Old Testament, Jesus gave a new command that we should love each other as he has loved us. This love would stand out, so that everyone who saw it would say, "those people must be disciples of Jesus" - not "those people must be churchgoers".

The next two studies focus on this sort of love and how it works out day by day in the local church. Study 5's focus is forgiveness, the underpinning of love. Study 6 will cover issues of identifying and resolving conflict in God's family - forgiveness made practical.

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1. What was the woman's reputation in the town?
2. Why do you think she interrupted the dinner?
3. How did the woman's attitude about herself change during the course of her encounter with Jesus?
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Jesus makes the issue clear - the bad news of sin (self-centredness) and the good news of forgiveness. It must have sounded so presumptuous to Simon's other guests to hear Jesus say, "Your sins are forgiven". But Jesus knew that he was going to put things right between us and God by dying for us.

6. How could Jesus' death affect us today when we had not even been born then?
7. In light of this, how does God view me now? (see how the following verses describe a Christian)
Colossians 2:13 / Ephesians 1:3,4 / 1 Corinthians 6:11 / Romans 8:1 / Isaiah 43:25
8. If Christ has forgiven us completely, how does God want us to deal with our failures - disobedience, sinful thoughts and actions? (Read 1 John 1:9)
9. If my forgiveness is already sorted, why do I need to confess my self-centredness? Read Isaiah 59:2

Now I can forgive others

Jesus rebukes Simon for his self-righteousness (v 44-47), contrasting the woman's act of repentance with Simon's lack of it. His final words are 'he who is forgiven little, loves little'. It must follow that 'he who has been forgiven much, loves much'. Experiencing God's love and forgiveness provides the basis for loving and forgiving others. (1 John 4:11 'Since God loved us so much, we ought to love one another'.)

- Does this mean that I have to be a great sinner in order to love God much?

Luke 17:3-5; Colossians 3:12-14; Ephesians 4:30-32

1. From each passage, make a note of what are we told to do.

Luke 17:3-5	Colossians 3:12-14	Ephesians 4:30-32

- Is this realistic when my grievance is fair?
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2. What can happen if, as Christians, we do not forgive one another genuinely? Why?

An example: if your child disobeys you, he/she is still fully a member of the family; the relationship hasn't changed. But if there is no apology or confession, the family fellowship is broken and needs to be restored. It is similar in our relationship with God: by agreeing with God that he is right about my utter self-centredness, and that he has dealt with it by the blood of Christ, I can once again experience harmony. 1 John 1:7 & 9 refer to being cleansed. Although I am not forgiven all over again; through honest confession, I make real what is already mine and surrender again to his control of my life.

Apply

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3. What else (from personal experience or from reading the Bible) might help us forgive those who have wronged, hurt or offended us?

Apply and Pray

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Ask God what the next step should be.

Some grievances need talking through. The focus of study 6 will be dealing with resolving conflict.

Before next time...

Read Acts 15:35-41. Why did this disagreement arise?
 Make sure you have completed the personal application in the Apply sections
 Continue praying for your Five in Focus

Guidelines for resolving conflict

No matter who started it, **I** have the responsibility to take the initiative to seek reconciliation, either by offering forgiveness, or apologising and asking for forgiveness. This remains true, no matter how embarrassing or awkward it may seem. Here are some Biblical principles:

Philippians 4:6,7 Matthew 6:6	Pray before taking any action at all.
1 Peter 5:6,7 Romans 8:28	Bring your negative feelings to God first. Thank him that the good that he desires will come from the situation.
Acts 24:16 Proverbs 28:13	Pursue a clear conscience and expect God to show his mercy and blessing.
Matthew 5:23,24	Only confess to the one(s) you have upset or offended.
Matthew 5:24 Philippians 2:2-4	Make loving reconciliation your goal, not proving you were right all along.
Titus 3:2 Matthew 7:3-5	Before going, identify & confess your own wrong attitudes, and ask God to give you his attitude & perspective.
Philippians 2:3 James 2:3,4	Go with a humble spirit, not an air of moral superiority.
Philippians 2:4 Mark 10:42-44	Try to see the matter from the other's perspective, to understand and serve their interest as much as possible.
2 Corinthians 6:3 1 Cor 8:9	Do not refuse to admit that part of the blame might be yours. Acknowledge your own failures in the matter.
Eph. 4:29-32 Proverbs 14:29	Describe your negative feelings honestly and kindly, without a bitter, or accusing spirit, but also without lying to the one who offended you about how you really feel.
Romans 12:17-21	Incorporate an act of kindness to highlight your genuine desire for reconciliation.
James 5:16	Pray with the other party before ending the conversation.
Matthew 18:16 1 Timothy 2:5	Consider the role that a neutral third-party might play as mediator if the initial caring confrontation was fruitless.

Stepping stones to conflict resolution

In her book, *Conflict: Friend or Foe?* Joyce Huggett lists irreplaceable stepping stones to conflict resolution. The following questions have been adapted from that list. If God is putting someone on your heart, take time to think through your answers before going to them.

1. What am I expecting from this relationship?
2. Are my expectations realistic? Are they mutual (shared by the other party)?
3. What do I appreciate about the person with whom I am in conflict?
4. What is it about me that does not want to support him/her?
5. What is it about me that needs to change? (Matthew 7:3-5)
6. Are we for each other or against each other?
7. Do we want this relationship to glorify God?
8. Is there something in me that is disrupting the unity of God's people?

What will convince the world that our love and unity come from God?

Aim of study: to show that the way Christians handle differences and resolve conflicts powerfully affects their witness to the world

Review: Did anything come up from your homework?

Launching question: Can you think of a recent example in our church or in your experience, where a disagreement was properly handled and resolved?

The need to forgive someone arises as a result of being hurt or offended by him/her, often through a disagreement or conflict. The main study passage looks at a conflict between two leaders in the first century church in Antioch about handling a church member who had let them down significantly. Such a sharp disagreement could have happened in our church.

Download & print the extra sheet 'Guidelines for resolving conflict' for each person before this session.

Acts 15:35-41

1. What caused the disagreement between Paul and Barnabas and why? (v 36, 37)

Paul was goal-orientated, with a hard-driving personality. His mind was on getting the message of Jesus out. He thought that Mark had let them down before and probably will again, which will drain the team. Barnabas saw the potential in Mark. He wanted to take him under his wing.

- With whom would you have sided?

2. What was the final outcome of the disagreement?

- What do you think of the way Paul and Barnabas handled the situation?

3. How did Paul and John Mark feel about one another later on? (Colossians 4:10 & 2 Timothy 4:11)

- What does this show about how they originally handled the matter?

4. What positive results came out of this conflict?

Two missionary journeys resulted instead of one. John Mark benefited from Barnabas' encouragement.

Ask someone to read this paragraph:

Unresolved conflicts can cause people to become bitter. When Biblical guidelines for dealing with sharp disagreements are ignored, Christians begin avoiding those they feel have wounded them. Hurt feelings can be the real reason someone leaves the church. What is needed is *caring confrontation*. It takes courage to care enough about the other person to speak with them kindly concerning the matter. In Ephesians 4:15, Paul describes this Christian approach to confrontation as 'speaking the truth in love'. For it to be a genuine attempt to resolve the disagreement, forgiveness must be included.

Divide into two groups, each taking a case study. Each group should read the Bible passage, read the case study and then discuss questions. After 10 minutes, get the two groups to summarise their discussion in the whole group. Matthew 18 is given as a guideline for discipline among believers. Dealing with a brother who sins is developed in 1 Corinthians 6:1-8; 2 Thessalonians 3:6, 14-16 & James 5:19-20. Matthew 18:15 (if your brother offends you) is the corollary of Matthew 5:23,24 (sensing you have offended your brother). *Dealing with a sin requiring church discipline is outside the scope of this study.*

Case study 1: Matthew 5:23,24

Mary was sitting down to write out her monthly cheque to the church, but a scene kept popping into her mind. She had been leaving the service last Sunday and was waiting at the door. Sue was coming up from the side aisle and, when she saw Mary, immediately turned and headed in the other direction. "Was it my imagination?" Mary wondered. But no, she had seen the look on Sue's face; a look of suppressed irritation. 'This is silly – I'm sure it was nothing to do with me,' Mary told herself. But the uneasy feeling wouldn't go away. Sue and Mary had been co-leaders of the Social Committee last year, and they hadn't always got on with each other. With summer now well underway, the committee was no longer meeting, nor had they been in contact with each other. It was true that Mary's ideas were implemented far more often than Sue's. 'But my ideas were better,' she thought. 'Surely she can't be annoyed over that?' Just then the telephone rang. It was Mary's close friend, Janice. Mary felt a need to unburden herself about the problem. Janice was a good listener, even if she did pass on what she heard sometimes. Now seemed a good time to talk about it...

Case study 2: Matthew 18:15-17

Robert spent much of his free time visiting new students in his hall of residence. He seemed to have a talent for making people feel welcome and wanted, and many of those he met started coming to the university Christian group. One of these was John, who had only been a Christian for about a term. Robert had been glad he'd had a part in seeing John get involved. But now Robert has been told by another Christian student that John has openly made fun of Robert behind his back, saying things like, "He's such an odd chap, I'm glad we didn't let that put us off coming to this group." Robert's feelings are hurt, but he thinks it best to forgive and forget. He's an easygoing person, who tries to avoid confrontation. Still, he has heard from a few others that John has made cutting remarks about them, as well.

[These questions are printed under each case study on members' notes. Here they apply to both case studies]

- What should be done in this situation?
- Who has caused the problem?
- Who should take the initiative to resolve the conflict?
- To whom does the initiator go?
- Should anyone else be involved and at what point?
- What can go wrong if problems between these people are not handled promptly and properly?

5. How can I know if my hurt feelings represent a problem that needs caring confrontation?

Eg. If a person in the church is under great stress, he/she might wound others unintentionally. This needs loving acceptance rather than caring confrontation.

If I find myself consistently avoiding another church member, I need to ask myself if caring confrontation is needed. It's my responsibility to go to him/her. If I am dwelling on the incident, or developing resentment towards that person even after confessing my wrong attitude to God, it is probably God's way of showing me I have not yet been obedient to follow the guidelines in his word.

Ephesians 4:22-27, 30-32 Ask someone to read the passage. If there's time, discuss these two issues.

6. What are some ways our witness will be hindered if we refuse to speak the truth in love and resolve conflicts? (v27 & 30)

We will give the devil a foothold and grieve the Holy Spirit. This will inevitably have a dampening effect on our witness to outsiders.

Summary

Get group to state some of the principles/guidelines for resolving conflict covered so far. Ask if anyone can think of any other Biblical guidelines. Then look at the sheet 'Biblical Guidelines for resolving conflict', and if time, get different group members to look up the verses stating the principle. Read out the questions that follow 'stepping stones for conflict resolution' adapted from Joyce Huggett's book 'Conflict, friend or foe?'

Apply - give a few moments to think through these questions.

"But if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin." (1 John 1:7)

- Am I *walking in the light* in my relationships?
- Is there someone I am avoiding or someone I sense is avoiding me?
- Do I need to go to him/her and 'speak the truth in love', either telling them that they have hurt me or confessing where I have hurt them?
- When and what do I need to do to put things right?
- What is my first step?
- Is there something in my life that's hindering my fellowship with God?

Pray - for anything that has come up as a result of this study. For God to search our hearts to keep us walking close to him. Each pray for one of your Five in Focus names. Pray for our personal and corporate witness to Jesus.

Before next time...

Review the principles in this study, including the 'Guidelines for resolving conflict' page. Think of one good thing God has done in your life (big, small or ordinary) to share next time. Continue praying for your Five in Focus

What will convince the world that our love and unity come from God?

Aim of study: to show that the way Christians handle differences and resolve conflicts powerfully affects their witness to the world

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 - With whom would you have sided?
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 - What does this show about how they originally handled the matter?
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Unresolved conflicts can cause people to become bitter. When Biblical guidelines for dealing with sharp disagreements are ignored, Christians begin avoiding those they feel have wounded them. Hurt feelings can be the real reason someone leaves the church. What is needed is *caring confrontation*. It takes courage to care enough about the other person to speak with them kindly concerning the matter. In Ephesians 4:15, Paul describes this Christian approach to confrontation as 'speaking the truth in love'. For it to be a genuine attempt to resolve the disagreement, forgiveness must be included.

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5. How can I know if my hurt feelings represent a problem that needs caring confrontation?
Eg. If a person in the church is under great stress, he/she might wound others unintentionally. This needs loving acceptance rather than caring confrontation.

Ephesians 4:22-27, 30-32 **Ask someone to read the passage**

6. What are some ways our witness will be hindered if we refuse to speak the truth in love and resolve conflicts? (v27 & 30)

Summary

Apply

"But if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin." (1 John 1:7)

- Am I *walking in the light* in my relationships?
- Is there someone I am avoiding or someone I sense is avoiding me?
- Do I need to go to him/her and 'speak the truth in love', either telling them that they have hurt me or confessing where I have hurt them?
- When and what do I need to do to put things right?
- What is my first step?
- Is there something in my life that's hindering my fellowship with God?

Pray

For anything that has come up as a result of this study.
For God to search our hearts to keep us walking close to him.
Each pray for one of your Five in Focus names

Before next time...

Review the principles in this study, including the 'Guidelines for resolving conflict' page.
Think of one good thing God has done in your life (big, small or ordinary) to share next time.
Continue praying for your Five in Focus

How can we speak up for Jesus?

Aim of study: to realise that we can all be an everyday witness for Christ even though our approaches will vary

Review: Does anyone have any further reflections on last time's study? Or the 'Guidelines for resolving conflict'?

Launching question: Have you recently got into a conversation about your faith with someone who doesn't go to church? How did it happen? How did you get on? How did you feel about it afterwards?

How did the early believers speak up for Jesus?

The first followers of Jesus were much like us. They did not all have the gift of eloquent speech; neither did they know all the answers. This did not stop them playing their part in helping others hear the story of Jesus. Here are four different people who spoke up for Jesus: Levi, man in the tombs, Philip and the woman at the well.

Luke 5:29; Mark 5:15-20; Acts 8:26-35; John 4:27-30, 39-42

Divide into 4 groups and assign one passage to each group. Ask groups to read the passage in their group, and record their observations for the first five questions. After 5 minutes or so, get feedback. Then discuss questions 6 and 7 together.

1	How did this opportunity for speaking up come about?	
2	Who took the initiative?	
3	What did they do and say?	
4	For/to whom?	
5	What was the result?	
6	How could this approach work in my community/workplace?	<i>Levi - evangelistic entertaining; man - personal story; Philip - shared the gospel; woman - personal story.</i>
7	What kind of preparation would be helpful?	

What motivates Christians to speak up for Jesus?

1. What had happened to these four people that made them want to tell others?

They experienced Christ's forgiveness/acceptance; he had given them a new purpose/occupation in life; Jesus had known and said things about them that showed that he was someone special (the Messiah), more than a mere man. In some cases the motivation is not known.

2. What are some of the good things God has done in your life?

You may want to prompt the group with these sorts of suggestions: Was it an experience that demonstrated to you that God was alive / a change in your thinking / a need in your life that made you realise your need to put your trust in Jesus Christ / an experience of God's forgiveness, hope or purpose?

Encourage group members to share some of these experiences, including what helped to bring them to trust in Christ.

This should encourage us to tell others what God has done for us.

Pray – encourage several group members to thank God for what he has done in each other's lives

Are you ready to speak up? 1 Peter 3:15; Colossians 4:2-6

Read both passages then the text that follows.

Not many of us think we are good at speaking or answering people's questions. But we can be prepared. Some questions require homework before they are asked. For example, when a four year old asks, "Where do babies come from?" it's helpful to have an immediate, clear answer. That means deciding before the question comes up what you will say. In a similar way, you will miss opportunities to speak up for God if you are not prepared.

1. Jot down the main points mentioned in these two passages, rephrasing them in your own words. Ask group members to make their own notes before group sharing. Half the group concentrate on 1 Peter and the others on Colossians passage.

Submit your heart to Jesus – make him number 1 / prayer (talking to God) should be like breathing / pray for open doors to talk about Jesus / anticipate another's questions – be ready to answer them / speak clearly about Jesus – who he is and why he came / act wisely towards outsiders – think about what you are going to say to make them think about life and why they do things / stir up interest and curiosity by the comments you make.

2. What does it mean to 'season your conversation with salt'?
This should be a good springboard to a wide-ranging discussion

Do you have anything to declare?

[You will need to print one worksheet for each group member.]

Peter encourages us, 'always be prepared to give an answer...'

"I cannot by being good, tell men of Jesus' atoning death and resurrection, nor of my faith in his divinity. The emphasis is too much on me, and too little on him. Our lives must be made as consistent as we can make them with our faith; but our faith if we are Christians, is vastly greater than our lives. That is why the word of witness is so important."
The Christian Persuader by Leighton Ford.

Hand out worksheets for this study. Explain the idea –

We live in the world of the sound bite. We need to be ready with some short, pithy statements from our own experience and viewpoint to answer key questions as and when they come up.

Read out some of the examples on the sheet. Give a few minutes for everyone to make a start at writing two or three short sentence answers to the 'Anything to declare?' questions. Each sentence should stand alone and should encourage interest and possible further questions. Your answers should be in ordinary language, no jargon and easy to understand.

[If reference is made to Matt 10:19,20, the context relates to direct persecution, not a day-by-day spoken witness.]

Pray

Ask God to help us express our answers simply and clearly, and give us an opportunity to share them in a conversation this week. Each person pray for one of your Five in Focus names.

Before next time...

Continue working on your answers to 'Anything to Declare?' Be ready to share these next time!
Pray for your Five in Focus names

How can we speak up for Jesus?

Aim of study: to realise that we can all be an everyday witness for Christ even though our approaches will vary

How did the early believers speak up for Jesus?

The first followers of Jesus were much like us. They did not all have the gift of eloquent speech; neither did they know all the answers. This did not stop them playing their part in helping others hear the story of Jesus. Here are four different people who spoke up for Jesus: Levi, man in the tombs, Philip and the woman at the well.

Luke 5:29; Mark 5:15-20; Acts 8:26-35; John 4:27-30, 39-42

1	How did this opportunity for speaking up come about?	
2	Who took the initiative?	
3	What did they do and say?	
4	For/to whom?	
5	What was the result?	
6	How could this approach work in my community/workplace?	
7	What kind of preparation would be helpful?	

What motivates Christians to speak up for Jesus?

1. What had happened to these four people that made them want to tell others?
2. What are some of the good things God has done in your life?

This should encourage us to tell others what God has done for us.

Pray

Are you ready to speak up? 1 Peter 3:15; Colossians 4:2-6

Not many of us think we are good at speaking or answering people's questions. But we can be prepared. Some questions require homework before they are asked. For example, when a four year old asks, "Where do babies come from?" it's helpful to have an immediate, clear answer. That means deciding before the question comes up what you will say. In a similar way, you will miss opportunities to speak up for God if you are not prepared.

1. Jot down the main points mentioned in these two passages, rephrasing them in your own words.

2. What does it mean to 'season your conversation with salt'?

Do you have anything to declare?

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We live in the world of the sound bite. We need to be ready with some short, pithy statements from our own experience and viewpoint to answer key questions as and when they come up.

"I cannot by being good, tell men of Jesus' atoning death and resurrection, nor of my faith in his divinity. The emphasis is too much on me, and too little on him. Our lives must be made as consistent as we can make them with our faith; but our faith if we are Christians, is vastly greater than our lives. That is why the word of witness is so important."
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Pray

Ask God to help us express our answers simply and clearly, and give us an opportunity to share them in a conversation this week. Each person pray for one Five in Focus name.

Before next time...

Continue working on your answers to 'Anything to Declare?' Be ready to share these next time!
Pray for your Five in Focus names

Do you have Anything to Declare?

Write 2 or 3 short sentence answers to these questions. See the examples. Your phrases should stand alone, encourage interest and possible further questions. Use ordinary language, no jargon and make it easy to understand!

What was my attitude before I took Jesus Christ seriously? (eg. attitude to life, ambition, religion) or, **What were one or two things that used to characterise my view of life/God?**

eg. I got to the age of 21 and thought, is this it? / I never got on well with my mother in law / I wanted to do something significant / I considered myself as having high moral standards

Why did I say 'Yes' to Christ? or, Why do I still want to put Christ first in my life?

eg. I discovered Christianity was about a friendship, not about do's and don'ts. / I met some people who cared for me in a way I'd never experienced before / My dad's death brought me up short.

How did I say 'Yes' to Christ? or, Were there any particular points in my life when I reinforced my earlier decision to say 'Yes' to Christ?

eg. I asked God to become number One in my life, above everything else. / I admitted to God that I had been going my own way / I realised that God forgave me even if I couldn't forgive myself

What difference does Christ make to my day-to-day life?

eg. I try to believe the best of people, instead of always trying to criticise / I find I worry less about our teenage son / I am less bothered about making money and more interested in people

What is a Christian?

eg. someone who realises that trying to live life on our own terms is an insult to God / discovering a friendship with God through admitting that I need his forgiveness and asking him to be number one in my life / being a Christian is not being religious, it's a relationship with God because of what Jesus has done / religion says 'DO', Jesus says 'DONE'

How do we get the confidence to speak up?

Aim of study: to show that boldness to share our faith only comes through the Holy Spirit and we need to yield our lives to his leadership. Fear hinders us from speaking up for God.

Review: Ask two or three to read their Anything to Declare answers. Encourage honest helpful critique. Is it clear? Is there jargon phrases in it? Would it encourage the listener to ask more questions?

Launching question: What hinders us from being more definite and open about our faith?

Distribute notes and read the following:

All your life you have wanted to try skydiving. You have a close friend who has tried it and waxes lyrical about the experience. Everything about the challenge motivates you. You finally decide to go for it. You phone the flying centre; find out how much it will cost; save up the money; complete a course of instruction on how to prepare, how to jump, how to fall, how to pull the cord. You investigate the reliability of the equipment, the instructor and the safety procedures. The day comes; you turn up at the airport. Now the hour has arrived, you're quaking in your boots. Fear in this situation is normal.

What is the best way for this person to handle his fear?

Trust safety of parachute / take step of trust / will only experience benefit of parachute if he takes that step of faith / not to trust feelings

Divide group into 4 & give each small group one passage to read and answer the 3 questions. Get feedback after a few minutes.

John 14:16-18; John 14:25-27; John 15:26-27; John 16:8-11

In John 14-16, Jesus teaches the disciples more about this vital, personal resource he promises to send.

- How will the Holy Spirit help us?
- How does Jesus describe the Holy Spirit?
- How will the Holy Spirit help others?

Counsellor, companion, guide – to us just as Jesus was to the disciples. Christ's replacement / with and in believers / divine tutor / brings truth / convinces people of the truth of the message of Jesus

Remind the group that the Holy Spirit is God, not an 'it'. He is the Spirit of Jesus. God is Father Son & Spirit. [H₂O is a liquid, solid and vapour – which one is H₂O?] The Spirit takes up residence in the believer at the moment of conversion.

John 15:1-17

1. How does Jesus describe the relationship between Christians, himself and his Father?

Jesus – the vine (the main stem), the Father the vineyard keeper, us the branches

2. What is to be the outcome of this relationship? (15:1-8,16)

Fruit / on the increase / takes time / involves transforming our lifestyle to be more like Jesus / involves relationships – how we look after others' needs / should be lasting benefit to others

3. In what way could *lost* people who come to faith in Christ be classed as 'fruit that lasts'?

A product of our witness who will be with Christ for eternity

4. What is God's part in the process of producing fruit? (v 1-8)

It's God's business to produce fruit – his presence, life & strength working through us that produces fruit. God trims the non-productive parts away.

5. What is our responsibility in the fruit-producing process?

To remain in Christ

6. What does it mean for us personally to *remain* or *abide* in Christ? (See John 14:15 & 21; Galatians 5:16,17,22-25; John 7:37,38)

Jesus has our best interests in mind / we show our trust by thanking him for difficulties he allows to come into our lives / trust him to equip us to do what he asks us to do

7. Jesus said in verse 4, "Remain in me, and I will remain in you". To whom does the 'I' in that statement refer? (see John 14:17-19)
Holy Spirit. When Jesus says "I will come to you" he is referring to his Spirit, the one who would be sent to be with you forever. The Holy Spirit is the sap of the vine.

Acts 4:5-13, 24-31

1. How were the disciples transformed in their witness for Christ, by the coming of the Holy Spirit?
Changed from fearful to bold. [What is 'to be filled with the Spirit'? - see Ephesians 5:18,19 - person drunk with wine is influenced by wine; a person filled with the Spirit is controlled by the Spirit.]
2. Think about the story of the scared sky-diver. How does this illustration relate to us as we look for opportunities to share our faith?
Being scared is normal. Instead of trusting our fears, we need to act in obedience and trust that Jesus will do as he promised. Our 'parachute' is the Holy Spirit.

Ask - In what do we put our faith?

Depend on Jesus - the trustworthiness of his promises, not our feelings

3. When will we experience the Holy Spirit's help in our witness?
If Jesus is at the centre of our life we will follow his leadership and, at the appropriate moment speak up for him, trusting that his Spirit will work in us and alongside us and in the other person. We won't experience this until we speak. God wants us to walk by faith not by sight.
4. Can you remember a situation where you sensed the Holy Spirit helping you to speak up about Jesus to someone?

Encourage group to share, then invite them to read through the next section quietly.

Apply - personally

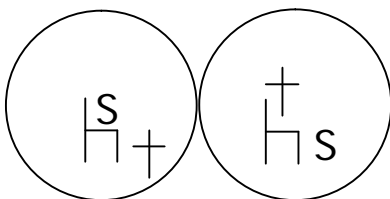
For Jesus to be at the centre of our life, self must get out of the driving seat. Otherwise, our Christian life will be stuck on the level of human self-effort.

- Is there any un-confessed, self-centred attitude or action in my life that is short-circuiting my relationship with God my Father?

If so, confess it now and know the reality of God's forgiveness.

- Am I ready to let Jesus take central place?

Consider the following two diagrams:



If you are a Christian, the spirit of Jesus Christ has taken up residence in your life. But he may not have his rightful place. Self (represented by S) may be running the show. (see left hand diagram). Perhaps you have handed over the driving seat to Jesus in the past but have taken the controls again. Maybe you want to ask Jesus back into the driving seat.

As a way of expressing your trust in Christ, you could say this:

Lord Jesus, thank you for forgiving my self-centredness. I want to allow you to take your rightful place at the centre of my life. Thank you for being willing to live in me. Help me to trust you for the courage and power to reach out to lost people by speaking up for you. Amen.

Pray

That God will help us walk in the power of the Holy Spirit this week, moment by moment.

Pray for one of the names on Five in Focus.

Before next time...

Continue praying for your Five in focus

Be ready to share your answers to 'Anything to Declare?' next time if you haven't already

Pray for an opportunity to use your answers to 'Anything to declare' in a conversation with someone.

How do we get the confidence to speak up?

Aim of study: to show that boldness to share our faith only comes through the Holy Spirit and we need to yield our lives to his leadership. Fear hinders us from speaking up for God.

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- How will the Holy Spirit help others?

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5. What is our responsibility in the fruit-producing process?
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(See John 14:15 & 21; Galatians 5:16,17,22-25; John 7:37,38)
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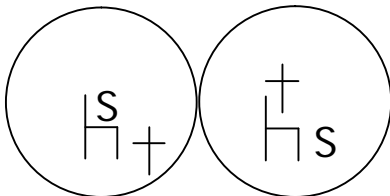
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Pray

That we would walk in the power of the Holy Spirit this week, moment by moment.
Each pray for one of the names on your Five in Focus

Before next time...

Continue praying for your Five in focus

Be ready to share your answers to 'Anything to Declare?' next time if you haven't already

Pray for an opportunity to use your answers to 'anything to declare' in a conversation with someone.

Are we seeing the world through God's eyes?

Aim of study: to see every person as having an eternal destiny and that we each have a special mission field, right where we are, for building bridges with those outside God's family

Review: Ask - was anyone able to use their *anything to declare* answers this week?

Get the rest of the group to share their answers to Anything to Declare, followed by critique: was it clear? Was there jargon? Did it make you want to find out more?

Launching question: When we meet someone for the first time, what are some ways we tend to put them in boxes?
Distribute notes & ask someone to read the first section.

We often put people in boxes:

- the mechanic who repairs my car
- the milkman who supplies our milk
- my children's teachers
- the noisy teenagers who hang out on the corner
- the shopkeepers who gladly take my money
- the self-occupied neighbours

We relate to them according to their 'box'. In our study we want to review how God sees people, and consider how his view of people might influence our lives and actions.

Assign each passage to a group member to read and answer.

1. In what basic categories does God view men and women? See Ephesians 2:13; Romans 5:19; Luke 15:6,9,24 and Romans 5:1,9

Assign each passage to a group member to read and answer.

2. What is the ultimate destiny of men and women? What is that destiny based upon? (see John 3:16-18, 36; Ephesians 2:12; John 10:27,28)
Eternal life with God or life apart from God, based on their response to Jesus.
3. Think of a friend or neighbour (maybe someone on your Five in Focus), someone who doesn't have any particular need for religion. What do these passages say about a possible third category - a sort of celestial waiting room for nice people who are basically good but want nothing to do with Jesus?

If the question of what happens to the heathen who haven't heard about Jesus comes up, refer to Stepping Stones, an Agapé publication for a helpful concise answer.

- How does the message of these passages affect your relationship to that person?

2 Corinthians 5:11-21

1. How does Paul describe his role in life?

Ambassador / minister of reconciliation / persuader of men

2. What are the things that motivate him in this role?

Fear (a healthy awe) of God / the love of Christ: not his love for Christ, but the effect of Jesus' unconditional love for him

3. According to this passage, how did Paul view people?

No longer in worldly categories, although he once did, but as people who were without Christ or people who were a new creation in Christ

MAKING HIM KNOWN STUDY 9: ARE WE SEEING THE WORLD THROUGH GOD'S EYES? LEADER'S NOTES

4. Paul uses the term 'ambassador'. What is the responsibility of an ambassador?

Represents the views and messages of the head of his country to the country in which he is stationed. A messenger, a go-between, an official representative. (an active ambassador doesn't live in his own country)

5. To what extent are all Christians (as well as professionals like Paul) to be ambassadors for Christ?

If all our neighbours and friends face eternity without God, we all have a responsibility to be ambassadors to those in our circle of influence.

6. What are some of the reasons that we avoid relating to others as ambassadors of Christ?

Not truly seeing others from God's perspective / lack of training and confidence to know what to say / a fear of being rejected, put down or ridiculed by those we speak to / not wanting to be like the caricature - a negative Christian witness

7. What are some ideas to help us cope with the possibility of being rejected?

Jesus was rejected / timing & sensitivity to the person is important / let their response motivate us to pray regularly for God to soften their heart / be sure that we are guided by God's love in our words and actions, not out of compulsive duty to perform in order to please God

Read out the following:

"But how shall they ask him to save them unless they believe in him? And how can they believe in him if they have never heard about him? And how can they hear about him unless someone tells them? How beautiful are the feet of those who bring the Gospel of peace with God."

Romans 10:14,15 Living Bible

Review - Read this section to the group and give time for practical application.

Think back over your study notes for all nine sessions. Choose the TWO sessions that influenced your thinking or touched your heart the most.

Make a note of the reason you chose those two. What was it about that study that influenced you?

Now consider two practical steps you could take in the next few weeks. Be prepared to share these with the group.

Study title Reason

Practical Step

Study title Reason

Practical Step

Pray

Pray for your Five in Focus, that God would bring opportunities for you to be his ambassador in their lives.

Pray for an opportunity to share your answers to 'Anything to Declare' in a helpful way for someone.

What next?

Consider working through 'Mind the Gap – *working together to shape an evangelism plan*' from Agapé or The Good Book Company.

More information: www.agape.org.uk/mindthegap
www.thegoodbook.co.uk/Mind-the-Gap-Full-Pack-mtgp_1036/



Are we seeing the world through God's eyes?

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We often put people in boxes:

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 - How does the message of these passages affect your relationship to that person?

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2. What are the things that motivate him in this role?

3. According to this passage, how did Paul view people?

4. Paul uses the term 'ambassador'. What is the responsibility of an ambassador?

5. To what extent are all Christians (as well as professionals like Paul) to be ambassadors for Christ?

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