

agapé uk[†]

Getting Started

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Getting Started

What is *Getting Started*?

Hello! Welcome to *Getting Started*. We're so glad you're here! The university years are a unique time in our lives, full of new opportunities and challenges.

The Bible tells us that these years are no accident; God has placed each of us at the universities we're in:

Acts 17:26 From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands.

- NIVUK

The Bible goes on to tell us why God has made this deliberate decision for us:

Acts 17:27 God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us.

- NIVUK

What a gift it is to know that you've been placed in your university by God who loves you, wants you to know Him more and is not far from any of the students around you. So, what do we do with such amazing news? This is where we want to help you get started!

Our hope is that the *Getting Started* series will help us all to get to know Agapé Students, connect with others and grow ourselves. It's a guide to planning fun and interactive gatherings for groups of students who are interested in Jesus and want to find out what it means to:

- **Discover** more about Jesus;
- **Grow** in their relationship with Jesus; and
- Live out the words of Jesus when He said, 'Go!'

In this five-session series, we'll introduce some basic principles we've discovered to help start and support a thriving group of students, seeking to discover faith, to grow in loving and following Jesus and to go to invite others to discover more about Jesus.

How to run *Getting Started*

Getting Started is ideally run right after Freshers', but it can also be used all year round. The aim of the sessions is to create a safe place for people to get to know each other and start journeying with others in Agapé Students. If we follow these four steps, we can set ourselves up for success this term:

- 1. Pick a day, time and location that works best for the size of the group expected.** We recommend a group size of no more than 10; more than that and it would no longer be a 'small group'! If you find there are more students than this wanting to be involved, you could divide the group and have multiple groups running at the same time. You could meet for drinks in an open café setting; have dinner in a cosy, homely environment; or organise an event in a generous-sized common room. Just make sure it's easy to get to, especially for any new Freshers attending. Each session has been designed to run for about 90 minutes. It might help to communicate this to your group beforehand to help them to plan *Getting Started* into their schedule.
- 2. Invite other students who might be interested to follow Jesus and make disciples** (a 'disciple' is simply someone who's committed to following a teacher; Christians are disciples of Jesus). Think about how to spread the word about *Getting Started*, and make sure people know how to sign up. Think about using social media, Freshers' Week, WhatsApp groups, etc.
- 3. Prepare well!** As Taylor Swift reminds us, 'If you fail to plan, you plan to fail!' If you need or would like to, arrive early to organise the space or to prepare any food and drink. Take time to look over each session in advance. If there are other leaders joining you in facilitating the groups then help make sure they're also prepared. There are different practical elements in each session and some require accompanying resources so you'll need to find out before the group meets what you need to bring with you. (Take a look at the session overview below!) And crucially, pray!
- 4. Have fun,** make new friends and get excited about what God wants to do in this new term! Remember that you're not alone, God is with you, loves to empower you with His Spirit and wants to show up in your life and the lives of those around you.

Getting Started session overview

- Each session (except session 1) starts with a '**Look back**' section allowing everyone to share what progress they've made on the previous sessions theme. (Approx 15 mins)
- The session then moves on to the '**Look up**' section. This consists of a short Bible passage to highlight some key principles of Agapé Students. This section also has a practical action part. (Approx 45 mins)
- The session finishes with the '**Look forward**' section which helps participants to think about how to implement what they've learnt and discussed. This section is designed to allow every individual to put what they're learning into practice by picking their own action step. If needed, lead the group in a minute or so of quiet reflection before sharing together. (Approx 15 mins)
- **Resources you'll need:** a Bible, *Unfilter'd* (1. Welcome), *Discover Jesus: The Quiz* (2. Discover).

1. Welcome

Welcome to *Getting Started*! Thanks so much for joining us!

We're Agapé Students – a movement of students who are discovering Jesus together. We'd love for every student in the UK to have the opportunity to discover who Jesus is so that they can follow Him and discover the relationship with Him that they were made for. And, of course, invite others to do the same.

Our vision is to help create safe spaces together where we can explore questions about life and faith, share our own questions and experiences, and be challenged to grow in skills and character to help others discover Jesus.

Look up

So, where do we begin? In this five-session series, we'll introduce some basic principles we've discovered along the way to help start and support a thriving group of students seeking to discover faith, grow in loving and following Jesus and go to others wherever they may be on their faith journey.

It's a big vision set by an even bigger God! Thankfully, because we're part of something much bigger than ourselves, we're able to learn from those who've gone before us. Let's take a quick look at the example of Paul – a famous 'apostle' (a specially chosen teacher) – and his team, found in 1 Thessalonians. (*If you're interested to learn more about how the movement started in Thessalonica, take a look at Acts 17:1-9.*)

Read 1 Thessalonians 1:2-10

Clearly and crucially, God was at work to transform lives in Thessalonica. What do you notice about the impact of the good news about Jesus and how it characterised this new community of believers?

It's been said that, 'The gospel comes to us as it's on its way to someone else.' In other words, lives aren't transformed in isolation. In this short passage alone, we see four generations of believers. Can you identify each group?

What happened in the lives of real people in Thessalonica couldn't be contained; the news about Jesus 'rang out' from them. Jesus is still at work today and the good news is continuing to change lives. We want to join Jesus where He's at work so that the message can ring out from us, too, and be heard amongst students everywhere.

But firstly, we'd love to simply start where we are, get to know each other better and learn what our own journeys have been like so far. We'll play the game *Unfilter'd* to find out what's brought us all here.

Play the game with a maximum of 5 people. Divide up into smaller groups if necessary.

Unfilter'd photos

Answer the following questions:

1. Pick a photo that describes your life right now.
2. Pick a photo that describes how you'd like your life to look.
3. Pick a photo that describes God.
4. Pick a photo that describes your faith journey so far.
5. Pick a photo that describes what you wish God would do at our university.

Look forward

This was the first session. We hope it's been fun and we've all learnt something new about ourselves and each other. Next week, we'll take a look at what it means to discover Jesus together. **Is there anyone you know who'd enjoy being a be part of this as well?** Why not invite them, too? We look forwards to gathering together again then!

Finish in prayer and remind the group of the date and time of the next session.

Tip: Share ways to stay connected, eg joining a WhatsApp group, announcing upcoming socials or events.

2. Discover

Look back

Last week we got to know each other a bit better and talked about our faith journey. How was this for you? We also talked about inviting people who might enjoy being part of this *Getting Started* group. Has there been anyone you've thought about or spoken to?

Look up

Whatever our worldview is, it seems that searching for answers to the question 'Why?' is a common part of the human experience. However, our journey to discovering meaning and purpose is very personal; no two journeys are the same.

We believe it's important for everyone to go through their journey at their own pace and in their own way. We also believe we all benefit from learning and discovering life and faith questions together, whether we feel like we've just started exploring, or whether we've been following a clear path for a long time. And remember, as we journey together, no question is wrong or strange; every question can bring a new and unique perspective to learn from.

In Agapé Students, we like to start with the Bible as we pursue answers to life's big questions. In this session, and for the rest of *Getting Started*, we'll be looking at the person of Jesus, and discussing together His teachings and life, as we each work out our next step in our journeys.

We'll start by having a look at the book of John, which is an account of Jesus' life, written by one of Jesus' closest friends. John's perspective is a helpful starting point, because he was an eyewitness to the life of Jesus. He saw Him, travelled with Him and learnt from Him, and then wrote the following words about Jesus...

Read: John 1:1-18

(Useful to know: In the original Greek the term used for 'Word' is 'Logos'. In Greek philosophy the Logos was known as the guiding principle behind the universe – essentially, the 'Why?' behind all things.)

- In this passage, John is quick to expose the reality of who God is and the world He's created. How does John describe the 'Word' and how does he describe the 'world'?
- What does John say the 'Word' has come to do?
- What's your reaction to John's description of Jesus? Does this description match your own thoughts and experiences?

Last week we used *Unfilter'd* to discuss our faith journeys together. This week we're going to take a look at *Discover Jesus: The Quiz* together. *The Quiz* is a different game that helps us to work out which category of questions about faith we're most interested in and to think about our next step in our journeys.

Play Discover Jesus: The Quiz in groups of a maximum of 5 people and share your personal next steps.

This is the end of the second session. Thank you for being part of *Getting Started*, and we hope everyone's enjoyed today. If you want to dig a bit deeper and explore more questions, make sure to check out *Discover Jesus: The Podcast* or *The Exploration* YouVersion reading plans. You can find them all at: www.agape.org.uk/discover-jesus.

Look forward

What next step could you take to discover more about Jesus? Consider whether *The Podcast* or *The Exploration* YouVersion plans could be helpful for you in this.

Finish in prayer, and remind the group about next week's meeting.

3. Grow

Look back

Last time, in the Discover session, we thought together about how we can discover more about Jesus. What have you learnt about Jesus over the last week? Please share with the group.

Look up

In our experience, spiritual journeys are never static. We’re always learning, growing and changing through the different ups and downs we experience throughout our lives. Sharing our journey with others is important to help inspire each other and learn together as we discover what it means to love and follow Jesus. Your journey can inspire others! It can help them to take new steps on their own journey.

As we journey together in Agapé Students, it’s our hope that we all continue to grow in our own way. As we meet together for these sessions, we’d love to commit to challenging each other and to inviting each other to try new things that help us to grow. And as we do this, we’ll share and celebrate our successes together as well as encourage each other in the areas where we’re continuing to grow.

Next, we’re going to take a look at a letter written by the Apostle Paul, who shared the teachings of Jesus with people around Europe in the first century. At the time Paul was writing the letter we’re going to be looking at together, he was in prison in Rome, knowing he’d be executed very soon. He’s writing his final letter to Timothy, a church leader whom he’d known from when he was a boy. You could say these were his last words with his final instructions:

2 Timothy 2:1 You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. 2 And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others.

- NIVUK

Having been trained as a Jewish religious teacher, Paul knew that you learn best in the company of others. He particularly knew that growing in faith meant not only growing your knowledge but growing in implementing what you’ve learnt, as well.

Fuelled by the ‘grace that is in Christ Jesus’, real growth is able to produce real change. But Paul’s instruction also takes it one step further. He reminds Timothy that he shouldn’t just think about his own spiritual growth but also share what he’s learnt with others who are reliable and will be proactive in teaching others too – just as Paul showed him.

- What does Paul instruct Timothy to do in these verses?
- What do you think about this part of Paul’s last instructions?
- How much of it applies to us today?

Taking Paul’s example, in Agapé Students we think that there are two key elements to growth:

- 1. Grace.** It’s always worth saying that, in the Christian life, growth is not about self-development but rather trusting and surrendering to God who grows and transforms us. Like Paul, we want to emphasise ‘the grace that is in Christ Jesus’.

In what ways have you experienced God’s grace shaping and transforming you or those around you?
- 2. Community.** Paul talks to Timothy as his ‘Son’ and reminds him of the ‘many witnesses’ and ‘reliable people’ around him. We are created for relationship and in community we realise that helping others grow is a crucial part of growing ourselves.

So, let’s take some time to think about the people God has placed in our lives: Who are we growing alongside? Who is helping us to grow? And, who are we helping to grow?

Take a look at the GROW map below. Which names could you add to your map?

GROW map

Who is helping you to grow?
(friend, mentor, someone in this group, someone else)

Who are you growing alongside at uni?
(friend, housemate, someone else)

Who are you growing alongside at home?
(friend, family, someone else)

Who are you helping to grow?
(friend, housemate, someone else)

Look forward

So how do we GROW? Our relationship with God and our relationships with others are vital. This is why Agapé Students is very passionate about having faith conversations. We want to be comfortable talking about the questions of life and faith which impact us and our friends. We also want to be open to learn from our friends’ points of view, too.

A great way to start is by spending time with God and others, and learning to ask good questions. What question about life or faith could you ask your friends to help you get to know them better? Which friends could you ask your question to this week?

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4. Go

Look back

Last session we finished by talking about getting to know our friends better by asking genuine questions about their experience of life and faith. What question did you ask? What did you learn from your friends' responses?

Look up

We hope that everyone who's connected with Agapé Students already experiences how helpful and encouraging it is to share our faith journeys with each other.

However, there are still so many students in the UK, and beyond, who aren't getting to have this experience yet. We're determined to see this change! Our dream is to have Agapé Students communities providing a safe space to discover Jesus together – like we've been experiencing over the last few meetings – everywhere.

But before we think too much about what this could look like in practice, we want to take time to look at why we go. We're going to look at the book of Matthew in the Bible to see what Jesus said about going, following both 'The Great Commission' and 'The Great Commandment'.

The event that Matthew describes in the passage takes place at a time after Jesus had died, come back to life again and had been teaching about God's Kingdom for forty days. We're going to join Him just as He's called together His disciples (the original 'disciples' were His core group of committed followers) one last time to give them His final instructions:

Matthew 28:16 *Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. ¹⁷ When they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted. ¹⁸ Then Jesus came to them and said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.'*

- NIVUK

Jesus' words in this passage are called 'The Great Commission'. Have you ever heard these words before? What is your reaction to them?

Matthew, interestingly, talks about the faith, and also the doubts, of Jesus' disciples as they worshipped Him. Nevertheless, to all of them Jesus gave this one assignment: go and make disciples. How could He give such a crucial role to His partly doubting friends? It's because the assignment is also wrapped in these truths:

1. 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me'; and
2. 'surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.'

Success doesn't depend on us; Jesus has all the authority and will be with us always. With the help we get from the Holy Spirit, we have the love and strength to go and make disciples.

Next, let's take a look at 'The Great Commandment', found slightly earlier in Matthew's account of Jesus' life:

Matthew 22:36 *'Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?'*

³⁷ *Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind."*

³⁸ *This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹ And the second is like it: "Love your neighbour as yourself."*

⁴⁰ *All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.'*

- NIVUK

Jesus teaches that these two things are inseparable: loving God and loving people. We're reminded that the orientation of our hearts will affect our motivations and our actions. Sharing our faith is always primarily about loving people, not about merely communicating information. By focussing on both The Great Commission and The Great Commandment, we're reminded that we can't really love people well without sharing our faith and we can't share our faith well if we're not really loving people.

Now, how does this all fit together for us? 'Love your neighbour as yourself' are some of the most well-known words of Jesus, but what could a community of students taking Jesus' instructions seriously – to go make disciples on campus and loving those around us – actually look like?

Agapé Students exists to help students grow communities just like this: where students can feel loved and cared for, and where they're given the invitation to discover Jesus alongside others, no matter where they're at on their own faith journey. And this is where you come in! You have the opportunity to play a vital role in making these communities come to life.

Below are three building blocks which help build communities where we can discover Jesus together:

- **Third spaces** – In the UK, we live with the reality that many of our friends deselect themselves from coming to church and Christian events. However, people are still interested in genuinely sharing life, asking questions in a safe environment and experiencing depth in community. So, what might it look like for us, as Agapé Students, to create a 'third space' between our everyday lives and church where our friends feel like they can belong, even if they don't believe? Whether it's in a pub, halls of residence, student housing or a venue in or near campus, it's a space where we can invite our friends, build relationships and talk together about the things that really matter.
- **Training in faith conversations** – Ever wondered how to start and actually have a spiritual conversation? It might not be as scary or complicated as we sometimes think! This is an organised time to go and have faith conversations with students in order to learn how to share our faith in the context of everyday relationships. This time is made up of some short training, having faith conversations (using a resource) and praying together.
- **Discipleship small groups** – We've said it before, and we'll say it again: growth happens in community! These small groups are spaces to connect, pray, study, learn and plan so we can grow and learn how to be and make disciples alongside others.

Is there anything from these three building blocks which catches your eye or you would like to hear more about?

Dreaming about what these things could look like on your campus is exciting, and you might have questions about how this could happen. Why not take some time to ask the Agapé Students coaches you know to share more about them and help you think through how this could look on your campus?

Look forward

Take time this week to pray and ask God how He can use you this year in making disciples, and how you can be involved in building the Agapé Students community.

Next week is our last session together. There'll be an opportunity for each of us to share the things which have excited us, and what we've heard from God about being and making disciples.

5. What's Next

This is the last session in the *Getting Started* series. We hope it's been fun getting to know everyone a bit better, and we hope that we've all grown in our faith and excitement in following Jesus.

Look back

Last time we talked about what a community on our campus could look like. Now that we've had some time to think it over, what are your current thoughts and feelings about these things?

Look up

God loves it when we get involved in His plans! When we read about Jesus' time with His disciples, as He was training them for the work ahead, He always let them in on His plans as much as He could. When Jesus returned to God the Father, and the disciples were left in charge of continuing Jesus' work, He didn't just leave them to do everything on their own; He gave them the best helper possible, the Holy Spirit.

These are Jesus' words about the Holy Spirit as He describes Him to His friends. At this point Jesus knows full well that he won't be with the disciples much longer, so these words are meant to instruct and encourage His friends as they continue Jesus' work after He has left.

***John 14:12** 'Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. ¹³ And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. ¹⁴ You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.*

¹⁵ 'If you love me, keep my commands. ¹⁶ And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you for ever – ¹⁷ the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. ¹⁸ I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. ¹⁹ Before long, the world will not see me any more, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. ²⁰ On that day you will realise that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you. ²¹ Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me. The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love them and show myself to them.'

- NIVUK

1. What description does Jesus give of the Holy Spirit?
2. Is there anything which is new, exciting, confusing or encouraging for you from Jesus' description of the Holy Spirit?
3. How do you feel about being invited to join in with Jesus' plans, and His words in verse 12?

If we're honest, it's not always easy to surrender to the Holy Spirit! But it's always ultimately what's best for us and others. As Jesus promises us, the Holy Spirit will, 'help you and be with you for ever.' What a privilege to know God is with us, empowering us and revealing Himself to us!

So, knowing that God wants to empower us with His Spirit, what next steps can we take? We've looked already, in our session together last week, at God's call on us to love Him, others and go to make disciples. This week, we'll go slightly deeper as we consider, what's God's plan for our uni, and how does He want us each to be involved?

Here are two challenges for us to consider:

- 1. Learn what it means to love and follow Jesus (be His disciple) and invite others to discover Him, too (make other disciples)**

As we looked at last week, the orientation of our hearts is what's most important. What we choose to do, and the motives we have for doing them, ultimately flow from our hearts and our desires. Why not take a moment now, individually, or as a group, to prayerfully consider these questions:

- What's your personal response to the idea of being and making disciples?
- Do you want to surrender to the Holy Spirit, and allow Him to fill you, as you follow Him and invite others to do the same at your university? If not, what's holding you back?

- 2. Be part of and contribute to a local Agapé Students community (help grow a community and organise activities)**

In Agapé Students, we want to discover, grow and go *together*. Following Paul's example in 2 Timothy – which we looked at in session 3 – we believe that community is essential for our own growth as well as for others'. We believe, sharing our faith together, and creating spaces for others to discover Jesus, is an essential part of our faith journeys.

Take a look at the following question together, and, if you feel able, why not share your thoughts with the group:

- What's your response to not only being involved but also helping to form a community like this on your campus?

Last week, we looked at some community building blocks to try on campus (ie a third space, training in faith conversations, discipleship small groups). Is there anything from those things which you would like to help run? Is there anyone else, either in this group or others you may know, who you could invite to join you?

Look forward

We've now come to the end of *Getting Started*, but the journey might only just be beginning!

Agapé Students exists to help you as you look to discover Jesus, grow in your faith and go to invite others to do the same. If you want to continue this journey, agree a time to meet again this week, and begin to plan and pray for the things God has in store.

Close in prayer to thank God for the Holy Spirit and for each other.