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GROW
A rough guide to growing with Jesus

1 BEING SURE



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- What do you think makes someone a Christian?

To build a strong relationship, we need to have confidence about where we stand with the other person. When it comes to God, it's common for Christians to be unsure about our relationship with Him. We question whether it's true that we'll be with Him forever.

- On a scale of 1-10 (where 10 = completely certain), how sure are you that you're right with God and that you'll be with Him forever? On what do you base your confidence?

In **1 John 5:13**, John says:

1 John 5:13 I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.

God wants us to be sure of our relationship with Him. Being clear about this is vital to building trust and friendship with Him.

John 1:12 ... to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God – [13] children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

- What does it mean to receive and believe in Jesus?
- What are the promises in this verse?
- How did you receive Jesus?

CARRY ON OVER THE OTHER SIDE ...

Read through the following passage in its entirety (in the left column); then re-read it one paragraph at a time, answering the questions as you go.

1 John 5:9 We accept human testimony, but God's testimony is greater because it is the testimony of God, which he has given us about his Son.

v 9

- Why is God's testimony greater than man's testimony?
- Do you find it easy to believe God's promises in the Bible?

10 Whoever believes in the Son of God accepts this testimony. Whoever does not believe God has made him out to be a liar, because they have not believed the testimony God has given about his Son.

v 10

- What are our two choices in this verse?
- What is the evidence that we have truly believed according to this verse?

'To believe' here isn't just agreeing with an idea (e.g. 'I trust your driving'); it's placing the weight of our lives on that truth (e.g. letting me drive you around town).

11 And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. **12** Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.

vv 11-12

- Where is eternal life to be found?
- What are the two groups of people in this verse?
- Do you have the Son and how do you know?

If you're unclear about this, consider **John 1:12-13** and **Revelation 3:20**.

13 I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.

v 13

- What are the conditions to this promise?
- Where do you stand in light of this verse?

John doesn't say that we will get eternal life but that we already have it.

- What are the implications of this for you?

14 This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. **15** And if we know that he hears us – whatever we ask – we know that we have what we asked of him.

vv 14-15

- What are the two promises and two conditions in these verses?
- How would you put verses 14-15 in your own words? How do they help us understand what we've considered in the previous verses?

As human beings, our emotions are part of who we are and how God made us. Our feelings are important, but they sometimes have a tendency to drive more of our decision-making, attitude and perspective than we realise.

To grow and strengthen our relationship with God, it's vital for us to live our lives grounded in the truth of His promises; not our feelings. The Christian life is lived by faith – trusting God and His Word.



To be transported by an aeroplane, we must place our faith in the trustworthiness of the aircraft and the pilot who flies it. Our feelings of confidence, or our fear, don't affect the ability of the aeroplane to transport us, though they do affect how much we enjoy the trip.

In the same way, as Christians, trusting God with our lives, it's important for us not to depend disproportionately on our **feelings** or emotions; instead we place our **faith** in the **fact** of God's trustworthiness and the promises of His Word.

- **How does this principle help us with God's promise in John 1:12-13, which we looked at earlier?**

Ultimately, there are three things that give us confidence in our relationship with God:

1. Our trust in the authority of God's Word and the promises He makes to us.
2. The Holy Spirit in our hearts assuring us that we're God's children (**Romans 8:15-17**).

- **Can you relate to this experience of a deep inner knowing that God is your Father?**

3. Over time, we see evidence of change in our lives (**Galatians 5:22-23**).

- **How has your life changed since you chose to follow Jesus?**

CARRY ON OVER THE OTHER SIDE ...

As we spend time with God and get to know Him more, our ability to trust that He loves us and cares about us grows. As our love and trust increase, so we become more and more like Jesus.

- **What else does God promise us in the following verses?**

Romans 8:38 For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, [39] neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Colossians 1:13 For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, [14] in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

1 Peter 1:3 ... In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, [4] and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you,

John 10:28 [*Jesus speaking:* '] I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand. [29] My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. [30] I and the Father are one.'

- **In summary, how are we able to 'know' that we have eternal life?**
- **At the start, we were asked to rate on a scale of 1-10 our confidence that we're right with God. Has this answer changed at all in light of what we've studied?**



2 FORGIVEN & FREE

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- **Close your eyes and imagine you're looking at God. How do you think He feels about you right now?**
- **When you become aware that you've done something wrong, how do you usually deal with it?**

We all make mistakes in our friendships. To keep relationships healthy, we have to face our mistakes and put things right. If we want to enjoy God's friendship all day, every day, it's helpful to know how to sort things out when they go wrong.

1 Peter 3:18 For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive in the Spirit.

- **Did Jesus' death cover sins:**
  - **before the cross?**
  - **from the cross until today?**
  - **from today until He returns again?**

When you receive Jesus into your life, you become a child of God. This is a permanent, secure relationship. God never stops being our Father, but sin can still mess up our daily friendship with Him.

OUR ETERNAL RELATIONSHIP AS GOD'S CHILDREN	OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD
Established once for all	Needs to be maintained
Permanent reality	Moment-by-moment
We can't mess it up	Blocked when we sin

CARRY ON OVER THE OTHER SIDE ...

The effects of sin and guilt are extremely destructive in the Christian life. They undermine our ability to enjoy God's love and to trust Him, and we turn back to our own efforts and resources. Through Jesus, God has provided a way to set us free from both sin and guilt, so we can enjoy His love and forgiveness continually. In the next section we'll look at how to put things right when we mess up.

John 3:19 ... light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. [20] Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed.

- **How is John using the metaphor of light and darkness here?**
- **What does light do?**
- **Why do we hide from the light?**

Read through the following passage, from **1 John 1:5-10**, in its entirety (in the left column); then re-read it one paragraph at a time, answering the questions as you go.

1 John 1:5 This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all.

v 5
- **What does it mean to walk in the darkness?**
- **How does this affect our relationship with God?**

6 If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. [7] But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.

vv 6-7
- **What does it mean to walk in the light?**
- **How is this related to our relationships with one another?**
- **What does God promise?**

8 If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.

v 8
- **How does 'walking in darkness' affect our relationship with ourselves? What are the implications?**

9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. [10] If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us.

vv 9-10
- **What is God's promise here?**
- **What is the condition?**
- **If, as we read in 1 Peter 3:18, Jesus has already forgiven our sins past, present and future, why do we still need to confess them?**
- **What are the implications of rejecting God's verdict on our state as sinners?**

Without sharing with others, ask God now to make you aware of anything wrong between you and Him. Write down the specific things He shows you.

It's helpful to be aware that The Devil tries to make us feel guilty with general accusations (e.g. you're selfish), and we need to reject what he says. However, when the Holy Spirit convicts us of sin, He's always specific (e.g. in this specific situation you had a selfish attitude), so confession needs to be specific. Give Him time to show you everything in your life that's not right with Him.

It's important to agree with God's way of seeing us. Confession means agreeing with what God says:

- *Agreeing with Him when He tells us what we've done wrong*
- *Agreeing with Him that what Jesus did on the Cross was enough to pay for our sin completely*
- *Trusting that God will continue to help us change and become more like Him as we turn away from our sin.*

When you've finished your list, write the words of **1 John 1:9** all over it. Thank God for His forgiveness, and then destroy the list. You may also need to put things right with another person if you realise that you've wronged them. After you've confessed your sins, remember that any guilt you still feel comes from The Devil, so feel free to reject it (**Psalm 32:5**, **Psalm 103:12**).

Confession is about experiencing friendship with God because of the forgiveness that was paid for by Jesus, 2,000 years ago on the Cross. It's already yours! It's not our act of confession that makes us clean, but what Jesus did for us. By confessing our sin as soon as we become aware of it, we can experience God's love and forgiveness continually.

- **How often do you need to confess your sins to God?**
- **How can we be sure we're forgiven?**





3 FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT

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- **What words would you use to describe your experience of the Christian life this week?**

Living the Christian life in our own strength is impossible. Jesus says in **John 15:5**:

John 15:5 … If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.

The only way to live the Christian life is for Jesus to dwell in us, living His life through our life by the Holy Spirit. As we submit ourselves to the Spirit, He *shows us how to live* through the Bible and His prompting, and *gives us power* to obey Him.

Jesus introduces the Holy Spirit in **John 14:16-18**:

John 14:16 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.

From these verses we learn about the Holy Spirit:

1. *The Spirit isn't a force but a personal being*
2. *The original Greek for 'another advocate' literally means 'another advocate of exactly the same kind'*
3. *It's by the Holy Spirit coming and living in us that Jesus is with us.*

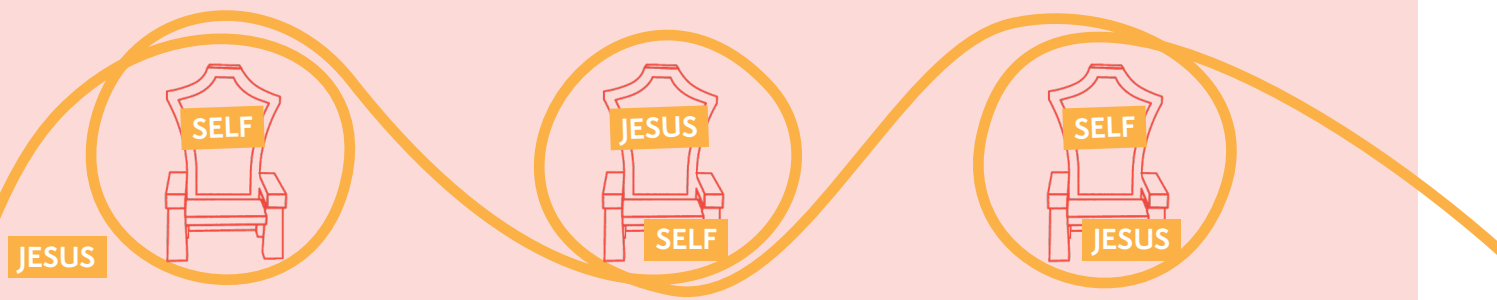
- **What do you understand to be the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives?**

1 Corinthians 2:14 onwards describes three types of people: 1) the person without the Spirit (someone who's not yet a Christian); 2) the spiritual person (a person directed and empowered by the Spirit); and, 3) the worldly, or fleshly, person (a Christian who's not obeying God's Word or depending on His Spirit):

1 Corinthians 2:14, 15; 3:1 The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God ... [15] The person with the Spirit makes judgments about all things, ...

[3:1] Brothers and sisters, I could not address you as people who live by the Spirit but as people who are still worldly – mere infants in Christ.

These people can be represented by the following diagrams:



THE UNBELIEVER (IN JESUS)

THE BELIEVER

THE FRUSTRATED (OR DEFEATED) BELIEVER

The circles represent our lives; the thrones who we're living for. All Christians have the Holy Spirit in their lives, but not all believers are *filled* with the Spirit. The critical question isn't how much *we have of God*; it's how much *God has of us*. When we sin, we take control of our lives and run them to our own ends, in our own power. To be filled with the Spirit is to keep Jesus on the throne of our lives. We do this by surrendering ourselves to Him, obeying Him and trusting Him to empower our obedience.

- **Which circle best describes you?**
- **Which circle would you like to describe you?**

Jesus explains how He lives His life through us in **John 15:4-12** (first read through the following passage in its entirety (in the left column); then re-read it one paragraph at a time, answering the questions as you go):

John 15:4 Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

5 'I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. 6 If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned.

vv 4-6

- What does Jesus mean by 'remain [or abide] in me'?
- What are the implications of remaining, or not remaining, in Him?
- What does it mean to 'bear fruit'?
- What promise does Jesus give?
- What's His warning? What does this mean in light of our assurance of salvation?

7 If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. 8 This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

vv 7-8

- What do we learn about prayer?
- What does it mean for His words to remain in us?
- Why's it good to ask God for things?

9 'As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. 10 If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love. 11 I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. 12 My command is this: love each other as I have loved you.

vv 9-12

- What do we learn about Jesus' love for us?
- How do we remain in His love?
- What's Jesus' command?
- What's the relationship between obedience and love? How's this different from trying to be good?
- Do you find joy in obeying Jesus?
- What do we learn in this passage about living in Jesus' power?

CARRY ON OVER THE OTHER SIDE ...

Jesus lives in us by His Spirit. In **Luke 11:9-13**, Jesus promises the Holy Spirit to all who really want Him:

Luke 11:9 'So I say to you: ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. 10 For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.

11 'Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? 12 Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? 13 If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!'

- What promises does Jesus give in this passage?
- What are the conditions?
- What's He seeking to emphasise by talking about asking, seeking and knocking?

Jesus is keen to emphasise that the Holy Spirit is a good gift!

- Why's this so important?
- How do you feel about being filled with the Spirit?

We know that it's God's will for us to be filled with the Spirit. In **Ephesians 5:18**, we're commanded to be *continually* filled with the Spirit. In **Luke 11:9-13**, we saw that God promises to fill us if we ask Him to.

Consider the following questions:

- Do I want to wholeheartedly give myself to God? Am I willing to turn away from sin?
- Do I really want to be directed and empowered by the Holy Spirit?
- Do I trust God to fill me when I ask Him to, according to His promise in the Bible?

If you can answer 'Yes' to the above, ask God to fill you now and He will. When we've asked God to fill us with the Spirit, our confidence that He's filled us doesn't come from any experiences we may have but from our trust in His promise to fill us when we ask.

We can achieve nothing apart from the Holy Spirit. However, when He fills us, it doesn't mean that we need to do nothing more and become passive. It's as we obey God, trusting in His Spirit, that He empowers our efforts. The Spirit lives *through us*, not *for us*. Being filled with the Spirit isn't a one-off action; it's an ongoing lifestyle of surrendering ourselves to God and trusting Him to empower us as we obey Jesus.

4 WALK THIS WAY



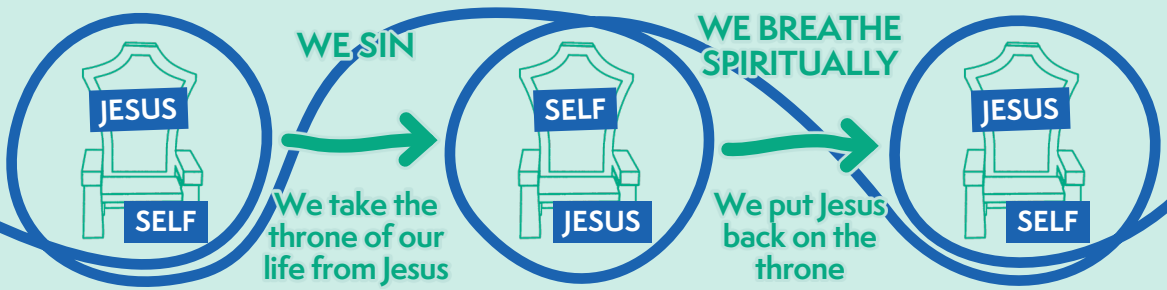
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- **What words would you use to describe your experience of the Christian life this week?**
- **Since the last session, have you asked the Holy Spirit to fill you? How's it going?**

The Spirit-filled life isn't a one-off event; it's a way of life. Jesus wants to live His life through our lives moment-by-moment. **Ephesians 5:18** can be translated literally as '*go on continually being filled with the Spirit*'. To do this, we need to keep Jesus on the throne of our lives by surrendering ourselves to Him, obeying Him and trusting Him to empower our obedience moment-by-moment. A simple analogy with breathing helps us see how we can live in God's power as a way of life:

EXHALE – We breathe out, giving up our sin, dealing with it as soon as we become aware of it.

INHALE – We breathe in the Holy Spirit by surrendering our life to Jesus, trusting the Spirit to fill us with His presence and power. This can be shown as follows:



To be a 'disciple' of Jesus means to follow Him and to learn from Him how to live our everyday life as He would if He were us. It's not easy, because we face opposition – the Bible even pictures the earth as a war zone. We must learn to apply faith to our daily circumstances and relationships.

- **What's been your experience of trying to live the Christian life? What struggles have you faced?**

The Bible describes three main enemies to living the Christian life: our old nature (the 'flesh' – as the Bible calls it – or sinful nature), the world (the culture and people around us) and The Devil.

- **What do we learn about our opponents from the following Bible verses?**

THE FLESH

Romans 7:15 I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. [16] And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. [17] As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. [18] For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out.

THE WORLD

1 John 2:15 Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. [16] For everything in the world – the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life – comes not from the Father but from the world. [17] The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives for ever.

THE DEVIL

John 8:44 ... [*The Devil*] was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

Zechariah 3:1 Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right side to accuse him.

We can overcome our opposition by keeping our friendship with Jesus close. We need to be filled with the Holy Spirit and follow His leading. Being tempted to sin isn't a sin in itself (**Matthew 4:1**, **James 1:13-15**, **1 Corinthians 10:13**). Temptation only becomes sin when we entertain it or act on it. God promises a way out from temptation. Paul describes a life lived in the power of the Holy Spirit in **Galatians 5:16-25**:

Galatians 5:16 So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. [17] For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want. [18] But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

vv 16-18

- **What does it mean to live by the Spirit?**
- **What's the assurance mentioned in verse 16?**
- **Can you relate to the tension that Paul describes in verse 17?**
- **What does it mean to be led by the Spirit?**

When Paul talks about being 'under the law', he means trying to keep God's rules in the Old Testament of the Bible.

- **Why does Paul contrast being led by the Spirit with being under the law?**

19 The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; [20] idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions [21] and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

vv 19-21

- **Why does Paul describe these things as 'acts of the flesh'?**
- **What is the 'kingdom of God'?**
- **What is Paul's warning and what does it mean?**

22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, [23] gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. [24] Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. [25] Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.

vv 22-25

Paul contrasts the 'acts' of the flesh with the 'fruit' of the Spirit.

- **What is the significance of the difference between the 'acts' of the flesh and the 'fruit' of the Spirit? What are the 'acts' plural and 'fruit' singular?**

When Paul says we've 'crucified the flesh', he means we extinguish or subdue those passions and desires.

- **How can we do this?**
- **What does it mean to 'keep in step' with the Spirit?**
- **Does this life look attractive? Why?**

CARRY ON OVER THE OTHER SIDE ...

To live in the power of the Spirit, we need to continually receive His love, wisdom, power, forgiveness and grace. We grow in these things as we spend time with Him, praying, worshipping, and reading and reflecting on the Bible. As we develop our friendship with God, we learn to listen to Him for His leading in our lives and our witnessing about Him to others. The Spirit's transformation of our lives is a process. Because God's not finished with us, we'll continue to make mistakes and sin. As we grow up in our faith, the important issue isn't whether we continue to make mistakes; it's how we respond to them when we make them. We grow to Christian maturity over time by walking moment-by-moment with Jesus and by living in community with others who are also walking with Him.

Christians live by faith. We enjoy God's forgiveness, power, peace and love as we trust His promises. We continue to follow Him when it's hard, because we believe He brings the fullest life possible, and He's taking us somewhere worth going!

- **How would you summarise what we've learned about walking in the Spirit?**



5 THE GREAT COMMISSION

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- When you get to the end of your life, what do you want to see when you look back at how you lived?
- What's most important to God? What are His purposes for the world?

The main purpose of human life is to know and love God: to share in His life, His heart and His purposes. In **John 15:15**, Jesus speaks of the connection between friendship with God and sharing in His purposes:

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

Knowing God can't be separated from being involved with His work: as we share in His heart, we become more deeply concerned with His purposes. As we become more involved with His purposes, we enter more deeply into His heart. We don't share in God's business because He needs our help, as Paul says, in **Acts 17:25**:

Acts 17:25 ... [*God*] is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else.

We share in God's purposes to share in His heart.

The call to be involved in God's purposes in the world is recorded throughout the Bible. One place it's particularly clear is at the very end of Matthew's Gospel (**Matthew 28:16-20**), where Jesus' last words before His ascension, often known as 'the Great Commission', are recorded:

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.

vv 16-17

- Why are people's last words important?

We're told that the disciples worshipped but also that they doubted.

- How's this an encouragement to us?

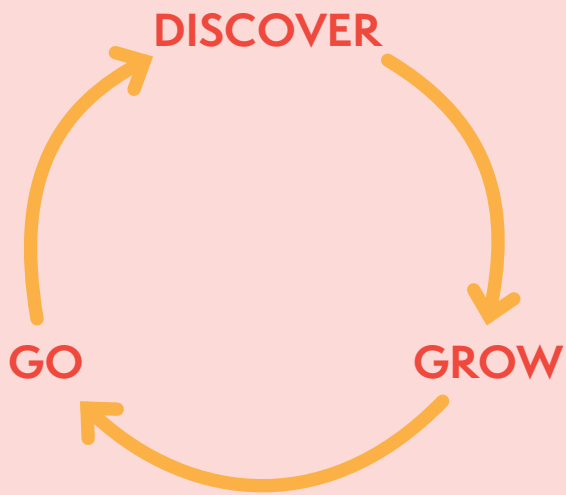
18 Then Jesus came to them and said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. 20 And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.'

vv 18-20

The word 'nation' means 'ethnic group', so not just political states but every tribe.

- What difference does it make to know that Jesus has all authority in heaven and earth?
- What is a disciple?
- What does it mean to 'make disciples'?
- What's the scope of this commission?
- Does this apply to us? Why or why not?
- What's the significance of baptism in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit?
- What's the difference between 'teaching' and 'teaching to obey'?
- What is Jesus' promise?

The plot of the Bible between the creation of the world and the final judgment is that God is rescuing a people to be with Him for ever, and He's restoring them to the purposes for which He created them. In calling us to make disciples from every people group on earth, He's calling us to share in what He's doing in the world.



There are three stages in disciple-making: **DISCOVER** (the initial discovery of who Jesus is and what He can do for us), **GROW** (learning to follow Jesus as a way of life and growing into the people we were always created to be) and **GO** (helping others to also discover Jesus). Disciple-making is integral to being a disciple.

The process of helping people to discover Jesus, helping them grow in their faith and then helping them to go do the same with others is how spiritual movements get started. This is illustrated by the Apostle Paul in **2 Timothy 2:2**:

2 Timothy 2:2 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.

We can see four generations of a growing movement:

PAUL → TIMOTHY → RELIABLE MEN → OTHERS

If we spent a year focusing on helping three people to discover, grow and go, and we equipped them to also do the same with three others, by the following year there'd be four of us multiplying our faith. If we replicated this pattern of discovering, growing and going every year, we'd reach and make disciples of the whole world in 17 years. If the world's population doubles in that time, it'd only take an extra year.

This is how the early church grew so quickly, as we see from the example of the church in Thessalonica:

CARRY ON OVER THE OTHER SIDE ...

1 Thessalonians 1:5 ... You know how we lived among you for your sake. [6] You became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you welcomed the message in the midst of severe suffering with the joy given by the Holy Spirit. [7] And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. [8] The Lord's message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia – your faith in God has become known everywhere. Therefore we do not need to say anything about it, [9] for they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us. They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God[.]

- What did Paul do to pass on his faith?
- Pick out every word in the passage about passing on the Christian life?
- What was the effect?
- Why's modelling and imitation so important in disciple-making?
- How many generations of the movement are recorded in the passage?
- What was so clear to everyone about the Thessalonian disciples?

God is saving a people to be with Him for eternity to share in His heart and His purposes. He's doing this through successive generations of His disciples who are introduced to Him, taught to follow Him moment-by-moment and equipped to pass on what they've received to others. For two millennia, this is how the church has grown to be present all around the world.

Jesus is rescuing people as He empowers the humble obedience of successive generations of His followers. Being a disciple and disciple-making belong together; you can't have one without the other. As Jesus says in **John 15:5, 16**:

John 15:5 ... If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; ...

[16] You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit – fruit that will last ...

- How were you introduced to Jesus, and how've you been helped to follow Him?
- At the moment, who's God placed in your life that you could help to discover Jesus, help to grow in following Him and equip to go multiply with others? How could you get started?
- What do you need to help you get better at disciple-making by discovering, growing and going?



6 NEW IDENTITY

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To be confident in a friendship with someone, you need some idea about who they are, how they see you and how they'll respond to you. When it comes to someone as big and powerful as God, that's even more important.

- **How do you think God feels about you right now? Why do you think that?**
- **Are you defined by what you do, or is what you do defined by who you are? Why?**
- **Where in your life do you see a connection between your beliefs and your behaviour?**

Our practical living must flow out of a right understanding of who we are 'in Jesus'. Becoming a Christian is about much more than just being forgiven. It's about leaving our old lives behind and receiving new lives – becoming new people. Paul talks about our old nature being '*crucified with Christ*' (**Galatians 2:20**). Baptism is a physical symbol of the 'burial' of that old life (**Romans 6:1-4**).

In contrast, Jesus describes becoming a Christian as the start of a new life. That's one reason why He talks about being '*born again*' (**John 1:12-13**; **3:3-7**). God sees us and relates to us as new people. But our new identity also needs to become the basis of how we relate to God, to the world and to ourselves. This is one reason why the transformation of our lives is linked to the '*renewing of our minds*' (**Romans 12:1-2**). As Jesus says, it's as we '*know the truth*' – know in a deep, personal sense – that '*the truth will set us free*' (**John 8:31-32**).

2 Corinthians 5:16 So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. [17] Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: the old has gone, the new is here!

vv 16-17

- In this passage, how does seeing people from a worldly point of view differ from seeing them as Jesus sees them?
- What is the old that's gone and the new that's come?

18 All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: [19] that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. [20] We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: be reconciled to God.

vv 18-20

- What does it mean to be reconciled to God?
- How are we to share in God's purposes in these verses?
- What does it mean to be an ambassador? How can we do this?

21 God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

v 21

- What does it mean for Jesus to become sin for us?
- What does it mean for us to become the righteousness of God in Jesus?
- What are the implications of this?

The diagram at the top of the next page attempts to express how Jesus has taken our sin upon Himself and has, in exchange, given us His righteousness:

THE EXCHANGED LIFE

Jesus makes me acceptable

JESUS

Without sin
Son of God
Pleases God
Spiritually alive
Perfect, free from death
Power to defeat The Devil
The light of the world
Slave to righteousness
Kept the law perfectly

God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. 2 Corinthians 5:21

ME

Sinful nature
Enemy of God
Unable to please God
Spiritually dead
Under God's wrath, death
Powerless to stop sinning
Darkness conceals evil deeds
Slave to sin
Can't keep the law

Jesus takes my sin

On the Cross, Jesus took all our sin, our punishment and God's pain and anger at us on Himself. The pain of the Cross isn't just physical agony; it's also the spiritual agony of the Son being separated from the Father, experiencing spiritual death in our place. In exchange, we've been given Jesus' right standing with God, His eternal inheritance and we've been adopted as sons and daughters of God with free access to the Father.

- **How does God see us?**
- **What are the implications?**

Consider the following verses and discuss the questions:

- **What do these verses tell me about my identity as someone 'in Christ'?**
- **How would my life be different if I really believed these truths?**

Zephaniah 3:17 The LORD your God is with you, the Mighty Warrior who saves. He will take great delight in you; in his love he will no longer rebuke you, but will rejoice over you with singing.'

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

CARRY ON OVER THE OTHER SIDE ...

Romans 6:6 For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin – [7] because anyone who has died has been set free from sin.

Romans 8:16 The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. [17] Now if we are children, then we are heirs – heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

Romans 8:31 ... If God is for us, who can be against us? [32] He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all – how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? [33] Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies.

Titus 3:4 But when the kindness and love of God our Saviour appeared, [5] he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, [6] whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Saviour[.]

- **Which of these promises do I find the easiest to believe? Which is the hardest?**

We haven't earned our new identity; it's a free gift paid for by Jesus. As we learn to trust what God says about us, we begin to see ourselves as God sees us. We're then defined by our destiny, who we're becoming, rather than what's gone on in our past. Our growing security in God's love will transform the way we relate to others.

7 GOD'S FAMILY



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God doesn't want us to live our Christian lives in isolation. As C. S. Lewis put it, 'Several coals blaze brightly together but put one on its own on the hearth and its fire soon goes out.'

When we invited Jesus into our lives, we were born into God's family (**John 1:12**). He's our Father and other believers are our brothers and sisters. His purpose is to build a people who share their lives and His love in such a way that His glory is displayed to the world. This community is at the heart of God's eternal plan. We belong to one another and need each other to grow as disciples of Jesus.

- What's been your experience of church?
- What comes to mind when you think of church?

Jesus spells out the heart of the Christian faith in **Matthew 22:36-40**:

Matthew 22:36 'Teacher, which is the greatest commandment of 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.'

Our relationships with others are to be increasingly shaped by our relationship with God (**1 John 4:7-12**). He longs to use us to help others grow in their faith and to use others to help us. God longs for His family to be close and to care for each other.

Paul talks about our interdependence in **1 Corinthians 12:12-27**:

1 Corinthians 12:12 Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. [13] For we were all baptised by one Spirit so as to form one body – whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free – and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. [14] And so the body is not made up of one part but of many.

vv 12-14

Collectively, we're the 'body of Christ', because His Spirit lives in us and expresses His life through us.

- Do you think the metaphor of a body in describing the Church is a good one? Why or why not?
- What about 'the head'?
- What do we learn about the make up of the body?
- How does this passage answer the idea that 'my faith is a personal thing and I can just worship God on my own'?

15 Now if the foot should say, 'Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,' it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. [16] And if the ear should say, 'Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,' it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. [17] If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be?

vv 15-17

- What do we learn about our relationship to the rest of God's people?
- What specific gifts and abilities can you bring to God's family?
- What, in general terms, can all believers bring to God's family?
- What are the consequences for the body if we fail to play our part?

18 But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. [19] If they were all one part, where would the body be? [20] As it is, there are many parts, but one body.

vv 18-20

- How does the picture of the body help us understand our diversity and our unity?
- What encouragements are there in these verses for us?

21 The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I
don’t need you!’ And the head cannot
say to the feet, ‘I don’t need you!’ 22 On
the contrary, those parts of the body that
seem to be weaker are indispensable,
23 and the parts that we think are less
honourable we treat with special honour.
And the parts that are unpresentable are
treated with special modesty, 24 while
our presentable parts need no special
treatment.

vv 21-24a

- What do we learn about the attitude we need to have towards other Christians?
- How does going to church help us?
- Where do you specifically need help from others?
- How easy do you find respecting and honouring those who are different from you?

24b But God has put the body together,
giving greater honour to the parts that
lacked it, 25 so that there should be no
division in the body, but that its parts
should have equal concern for each
other. 26 If one part suffers, every part
suffers with it; if one part is honoured,
every part rejoices with it.

27 Now you are the body of Christ, and
each one of you is a part of it.

vv 24b-27

- Who’s concerned for and committed to your spiritual life?
- Who are you committed to?

CARRY ON OVER THE OTHER SIDE ...

The book of Acts in the New Testament gives us some wonderful pictures of what life was like in the early church:

Acts 2:42 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. 43 Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. 44 All the believers were together and had everything in common. 45 They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. 46 Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts[.]

- **What excites you about this picture?**
- **Historical details of the church have changed, but what principles behind these specifics challenge you?**

'Fellowship' refers to 'deep sharing in common'.

- **In what practical ways can you devote yourself 'to the fellowship'?**

If you're not already in a church, ask God for wisdom and discernment, and ask other believers you trust to point you in the right direction. But remember, no church is perfect; even the churches described in the Bible had big problems.

The New Testament gives us some things to look out for:

- *The Bible, not just the opinion of the preacher, is the authority for what's taught.*
- *The leaders affirm that Jesus is God in human form (**John 1:1-3, 14**) and members are devoted to Him rather than to church programmes.*
- *People have real, honest friendships and look out for each another.*
- *People are serious about praying, seeking and enjoying God together.*
- *There's a concern to make the good news about Jesus known to others.*
- *The overall environment is one where you can be challenged in your spiritual growth and be given opportunities to serve others.*

God has designed us to share our journey of faith with other believers. If we try to go it on our own, we miss out on a big part of what God's planned for us. We're part of God's family.



8 CONVERSATIONS WITH GOD

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- **Why is communication important in any relationship? What happens if there's none?**
- **What's been your experience of prayer? What answers to prayer have you seen?**

Communication is foundational to any relationship, including our relationship with God. We can each communicate with God through prayer.

Jesus was asked by His disciples for some basic instructions on how to pray. His response, in **Matthew 6:5-13**, wasn't a formula but a guide on how to relate to God and what sort of things to talk to Him about and ask of Him.

Read through the entire story (it continues overleaf), and then re-read it one paragraph at a time, answering the questions as you go.

Matthew 6:5 'And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. 6 But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. 7 And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. 8 Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

vv 5-8

- **What were the hypocrites and pagans doing?**
- **What are the key words from this passage?**

9 ‘This, then, is how you should pray:

‘“Our Father in heaven,
hallowed by your name,
10 your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
11 Give us today our daily bread.
12 And forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.
13 And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from the evil one.

vv 9-13

‘Hallowed’ means holy – meaning not just good or perfect, but entirely set apart from the ordinary.

- **What do we learn from verse 9 about how we’re to relate to God?**
- **What would change in the world and in your life if God had His way all the time?**
- **What things are included in ‘our daily bread’?**
- **Why do we pray this every day?**
- **What would happen if forgiveness slipped out of our prayer life? Why is receiving forgiveness and forgiving others linked?**
- **How should we pray for our own life with God?**

Prayer isn’t just about asking for things. God isn’t only interested in what we do, He’s interested in *us* and in enjoying a relationship with us. Through prayer, we meet with God, worship Him and share our life with Him. This deepening relationship can be illustrated as follows:

KNOWLEDGE
We have some understanding about God through His Word

FELLOWSHIP
We begin to relate to God on the basis of what we’ve come to know

COMMUNION
We share the deep things of our heart with God and He shares with us

UNION
Our thoughts, affections, attitudes and actions are increasingly one with God’s

- **What can you relate to in this diagram?**

The book of Psalms in the Old Testament is a book of prayers and songs of praise. They give us a window through which we can see into the authors' relationship with God. The psalms aren't simply a shopping list of requests for God to do things; they show the authors opening up their hearts to God, often with an honesty that can seem quite shocking.

Psalm 13:1 How long, LORD? Will you forget me for ever? How long will you hide your face from me?
2 How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and day after day have sorrow in my heart? How long will my enemy triumph over me?

3 Look on me and answer, LORD my God. Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep in death, 4 and my enemy will say, 'I have overcome him,' and my foes will rejoice when I fall.

5 But I trust in your unfailing love; my heart rejoices in your salvation. 6 I will sing the LORD's praise, for he has been good to me.

- **What do we learn about prayer from this psalm?**
- **How easy do we find it to share our thoughts and feeling with other people?**
- **How easy do we find it to be this honest with God?**
- **How does honestly sharing our heart with God affect our relationship with Him?**
- **What effect did praying have on the person who wrote this psalm?**
- **How does this psalm reflect the diagram we looked at a moment ago?**

We learn about Jesus' practice of prayer in **Luke 5:16**:

Luke 5:16 But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.

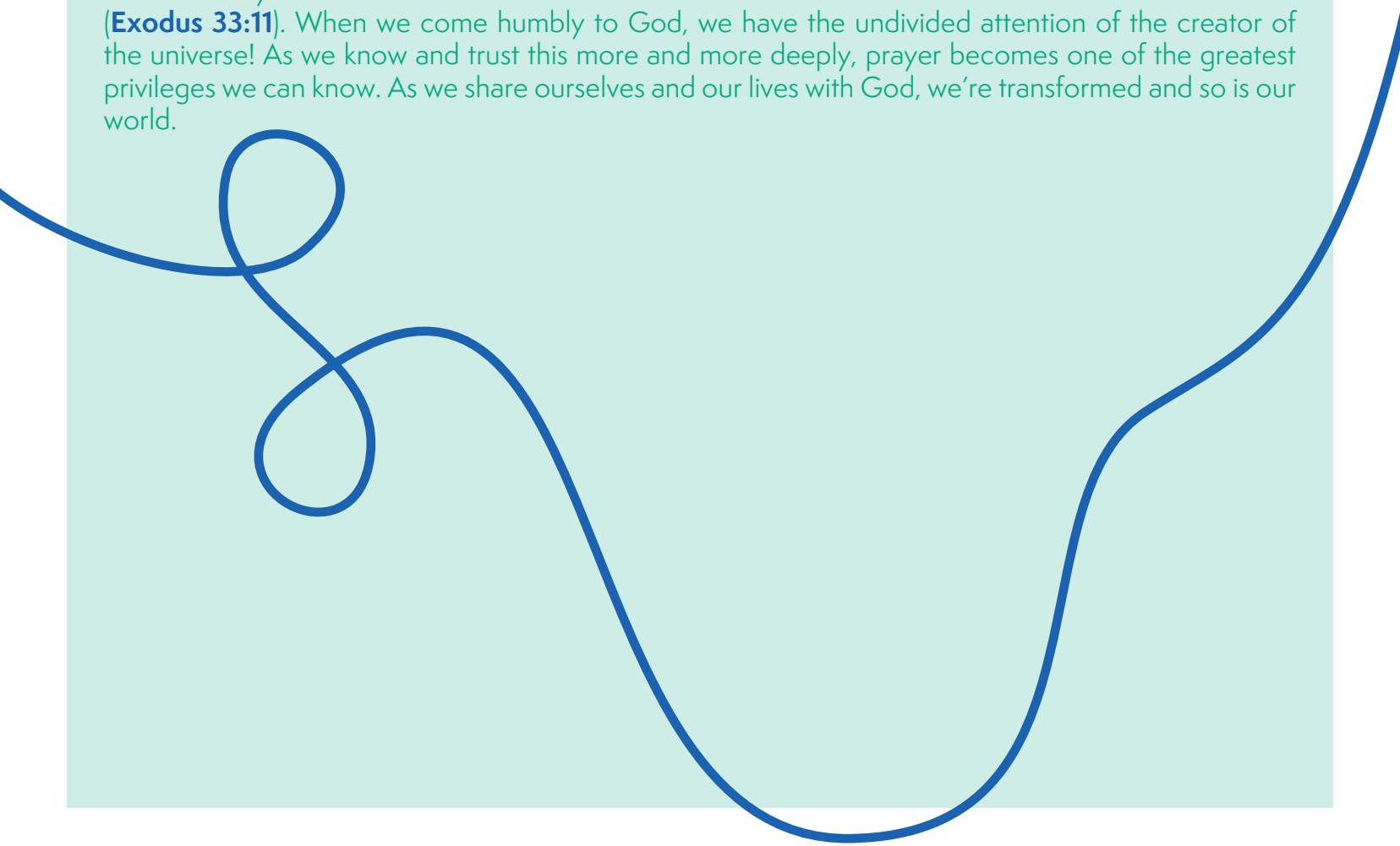
- **What do we learn about Jesus' own practice of prayer?**
- **Why do you think Jesus went to 'lonely' places?**
- **How can we make prayer a part of our everyday life?**
- **When's the best time for you to have one-to-one time with Jesus?**
- **Where's a good place for you to do this?**

CARRY ON OVER THE OTHER SIDE ...

If we ask God to help us as we pray, He'll often drop specific things into our minds which He wants us to pray about. The following are some suggestions of things we could pray about:

- *Putting things right with God that have gone wrong.*
- *Reflecting on God, His character and His attitude towards us.*
- *Thanking God for the things He's done for us.*
- *Asking God for things we need.*
- *Sharing our hopes and fears, joys and sorrows with Him.*
- *Asking Him to help us move on in our relationship with Him and with those around us.*
- *Praying for the Christians and people we know who aren't yet following Jesus who may be struggling.*
- *Praying for people to start following Jesus.*
- *Praying for situations around us and in the world.*
- *Responding to what we're reading in the Bible.*

The Bible says of Moses that he used to talk to God face-to-face as a man talks with his friend (**Exodus 33:11**). When we come humbly to God, we have the undivided attention of the creator of the universe! As we know and trust this more and more deeply, prayer becomes one of the greatest privileges we can know. As we share ourselves and our lives with God, we're transformed and so is our world.



9 LIVING & ACTIVE

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- What's been your experience of reading the Bible?
- What excites you about it? What do you find difficult?

The Bible is absolutely fundamental to Christianity. It's the Creator's book, designed to tell His creatures about Himself and His creation. Without God's Word, the deepest and most important questions about our lives remain unanswered. In **2 Timothy 3:16**, Paul tells us that:

2 Timothy 3:16 All Scripture is God-breathed and useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness[.]

- What does it mean for all scripture to be 'God-breathed'?
- Why's this important?

God has written us this book so we can get to know Him better and begin to live the life He created us for:

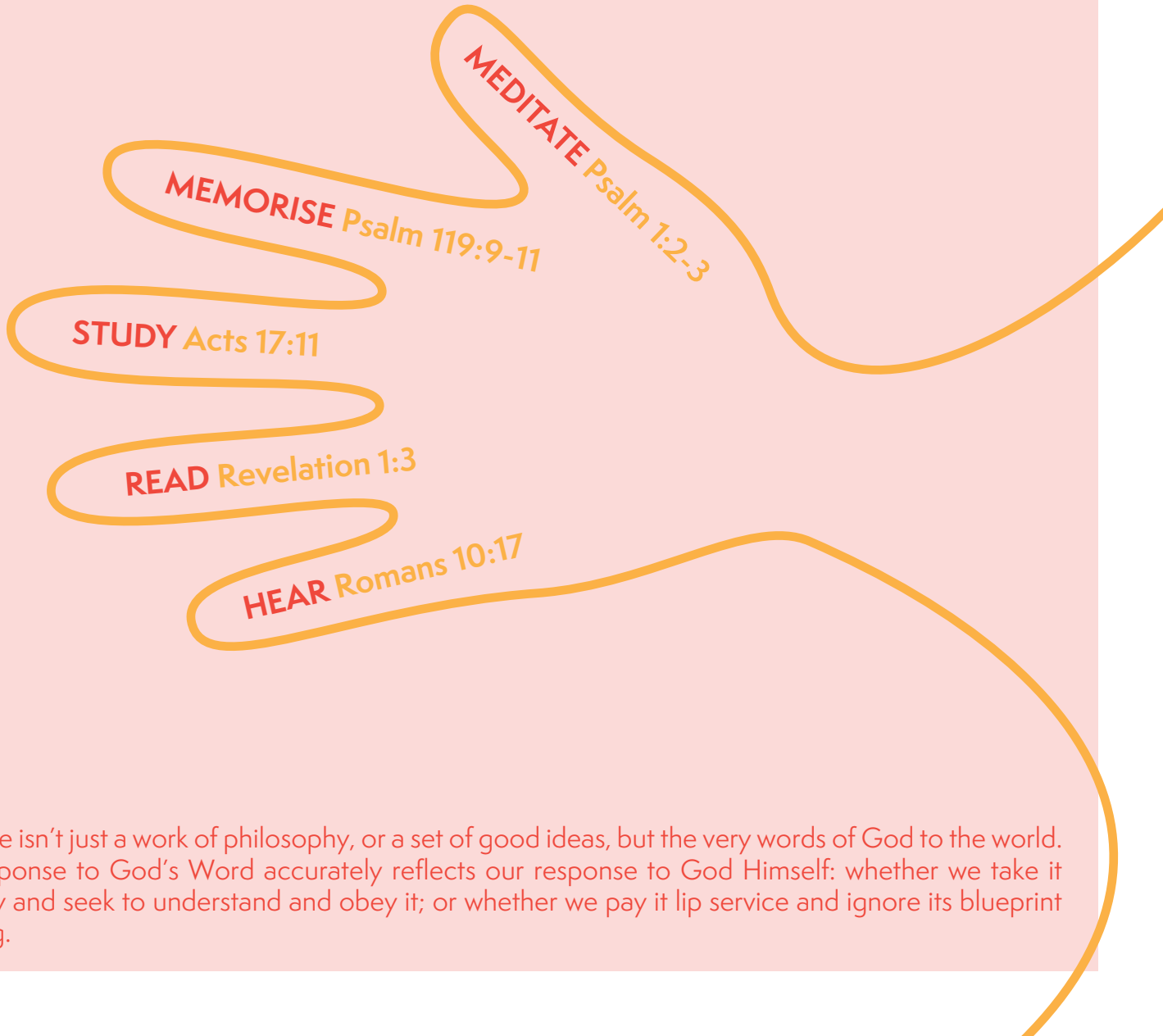
Psalm 19:7 The law of the LORD is perfect, refreshing the soul. The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple. 8 The precepts of the LORD are radiant, giving light to the eyes. 9 The fear of the LORD is pure, enduring for ever. The decrees of the LORD are firm, and all of them are righteous.

10 They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the honeycomb. 11 By them your servant is warned; in keeping them there is great reward.

- What adjectives are used to describe God's words?
- What effect does His Word have on us? (What verbs are used?)
- How does the Word have these effects?
- Have you experienced these things in your life?

CARRY ON OVER THE OTHER SIDE ...

A Christian group called the Navigators use the simple illustration of a hand to help us think through how we can get to grips with God's Word. The aim isn't simply to know what the Bible says but to have it shape our lives, thoughts, feelings, attitudes, relationships and actions. As we hear, read, study, memorise and meditate on the Bible, God works deeply in us and begins to bring our life into line with His.



The Bible isn't just a work of philosophy, or a set of good ideas, but the very words of God to the world. Our response to God's Word accurately reflects our response to God Himself: whether we take it seriously and seek to understand and obey it; or whether we pay it lip service and ignore its blueprint for living.

Matthew 7:21 ‘Not everyone who says to me, “Lord, Lord,” will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. 22 Many will say to me on that day, “Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?” 23 Then I will tell them plainly, “I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!”

vv 21-23

- What might cause us to suspect these people aren’t true followers of Jesus?
- What marks them out as fake followers?
- What’s your reaction to these verses?

24 ‘Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. 25 The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against the house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. 26 But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. 27 The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.’

vv 24-27

- What does building the house represent?
- What do the wise and foolish builders have in common?
- What distinguishes them?
- What are the consequences?
- Where does this challenge you?
- How can we evaluate how effectively we’re putting into practice what God says?

28 When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, 29 because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law.

vv 28-29

- Why does Jesus’ teaching have authority?
- How do you experience this in your life?

CARRY ON OVER THE OTHER SIDE ...

There are four ways for us to really get to grips with the Bible and apply it in our lives. The order may vary, but ultimately we should look to engage with all four:

HEAR/READ	UNDERSTAND	BELIEVE	OBEY
We find out what God says	We figure out what God means and how it makes sense	We're deeply convinced by the truth and goodness of what God says	We work out how to put what God's said into practice and do it

- **In our lives, how can we recognise the difference between understanding, believing and obeying God's Word?**

Until we've obeyed God's Word, we're still foolish builders. As you come to read the Bible, pray that God would help you understand it, believe it and embrace what He says through it. Read a passage and then re-read it slowly, reflecting on the meaning of what you've read. As you read, consider the following questions:

- *Do I clearly understand what this passage is teaching?*
- *How does it relate to me?*
- *Is it a reality in my life?*
- *If not, how can it become so?*

- **Why is the Bible vital for us to grow as disciples of Jesus?**
- **How can we make the Bible a part of our everyday life?**

This is the last session of GROW. The aim of this series has been, not just to provide knowledge, but also to equip us to follow Jesus and live effectively for Him. One of the greatest privileges of our faith is to help others to discover Jesus and help them learn how to follow Him. Is there anyone that you could invite to go through this series with you?

For more ideas and further resources to help you take the next step in your faith, visit: **arc.agape.org.uk**.



Jesus doesn't just offer us hope when we die, He teaches us how to live lives of joy, love and significance in this world. The Christian life is meant to be lived in moment-by-moment friendship with the Living God and to bring a foretaste of heaven to the broken and hurting world around us.

When we're born, we need to grow and learn how to live in the world. In the same way, when we're born again spiritually, we need to learn how our new life works. It's God who causes us to grow, but He does so with our willing involvement. Looking at what the Bible has to say, **GROW** is a nine-session series designed to help you get to grips with how to build a strong and secure friendship with God Himself, and how to make an impact for Him wherever He takes you.

GROW works best in a small group but can also be used one-to-one.

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Session 1: **Being Sure** – Know where you stand with God
Session 2: **Forgiven & Free** – Getting rid of guilt
Session 3: **Filled with the Spirit** – Experiencing God's power
Session 4: **Walk this Way** – Lining our lives up with God
Session 5: **The Great Commission** – Everyone needs to know about this
Session 6: **New Identity** – Seeing yourself God's way
Session 7: **God's Family** – Following Jesus together
Session 8: **Conversations with God** – Making the most of prayer
Session 9: **Living & Active** – The power of the Bible

Also, find other useful resources to help you talk and discover more about faith at: **arc.agape.org.uk**.

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