

GET IN THE GAME!

FIVE WEEKS OF DAILY BIBLE READING NOTES BASED ON THE FIVE CORE VALUES OF LIFE GROUPS AT GATEWAY CHURCH

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WEEK 1: FRIENDSHIP

Day 1: We all need friends

Read Ecclesiastes 4:7-12

Solomon's father (David) understood the value of friends. We see throughout David's life that he invested time and energy into developing friendships (with Jonathan, his mighty men, trusted courtiers). Men like the prophet Nathan who spoke the word of God to David (2 Samuel 7) but also felt able to challenge him when he was wrong (2 Samuel 12)

In the book of Ecclesiastes Solomon writes about all aspects of life and here he considers the value of friendship. He highlights that our true friends will stand with us and support us during the difficult times.

In verse 8 he says "for whom am I toiling" and recognises that our whole existence and purpose is tied together with relationship and community.

He goes on to show that friendship not only provides companionship but also enables us to face the trials of life.

It is important that we develop friendships that are more than casual acquaintances so that we can develop a joyful community with a purpose and effectively support each other through the difficult times.

Consider

- Who are my close friends?
- Who do I turn to when I have problems?
- Who do I allow to be a "Nathan" – speaking uncomfortable truth to me?

Pray

- For courage to trust more and develop deeper relationships
- For those who do not seem to make friends easily
- For more opportunities to meet with people

Day 2: Jesus calls us friends

Read John 15:9-17

These verses are part of the teaching that Jesus gave on the final night before his crucifixion. In chapter 13 we read of the last supper and in Chapter 18 Jesus is arrested.

During this momentous evening, when Jesus must have had a thousand things on his mind he felt it necessary to explain some basic things to his disciples,

- 1) He regarded them (and us) as friends and he was going to lay down his life for them
- 2) They were no longer to be servants (committed to a cause) but friends (committed in relationship)
- 3) The key secret to this friendship was obedience to his instructions which were all centred on sacrificial love for God and each other.

Jesus was signalling a major shift in emphasis – from servant to friend

- Servants serve masters because of reward, loyalty or fear
- Friends serve each other because they love each other, enjoy each others company, and desire the best for each other.

Jesus intends that our relationship with him is a friendship and not a master-servant relationship. God achieved salvation for us through Jesus and welcomes us into his family to enjoy friendship with him.

God is still the same awesome God that he has always been but rather than cowering before him in our fear and sinfulness, 'Fear of the Lord' means we are now free to worship him with passionate grateful hearts and rejoice in the salvation that Jesus has so perfectly completed for us.

- Consider**
- Do I come to God in fear or freedom?
 - Do I know that the blood of Jesus has washed me clean and made me acceptable to God?
 - Do I worship him out of duty or because I cannot stop myself?

- Pray**
- For a deeper intimacy with Jesus
 - For a greater understanding of complete salvation
 - For a freedom to worship Jesus with everything within me

Day 3: Friends relax together

Read John 13:21-30

Today we have read about Jesus and the disciples as they share in one of the most important occasions in the Jewish calendar – the Passover meal.

This meal was a celebration of the salvation that God won for Israel when he brought them out of Egypt, but it was also a prophetic (looking forward) celebration of the salvation that the real “Lamb of God” would one-day win for all men.

We know that this is the last Passover meal that Jesus shared with his disciples, and that he was aware that he was to be crucified the next day.

Jesus probably had many thoughts, feelings and concerns swimming around inside of him, but he wanted to spend this time with his friends.

This passage shows us a great picture of how Jesus was relaxed with his friends – one disciple was “reclining next to him,” he later “leant back against Jesus.”

During this crucial evening when the whole of salvation plan was about to be acted out, Jesus was at ease with his friends, relaxing together, enjoying each others company and sharing a meal together.

We need to be able to relax with our friends, to get away from the turmoil and busyness of our chaotic lives and enjoy the friends that God has blessed us with.

Jesus made time and space for his friends on the greatest night in world history, when he was about to take the major rolewe ought to be able to do the same.

- Consider**
- Have I made my life too busy to be able to enjoy my friends?
 - What distractions do I fill my life with?
 - When did I last spend more than one hour relaxing with friends?

- Pray**
- For opportunities to spend time with friends
 - For courage to stop filling my life with unimportant things
 - For my colleagues/school friends/neighbours

Day 4: Friendship often involves food

Read Matthew 9:9-12

Having meals together is a central part of friendship. Some of my earliest recollections are having school friends round for tea or family get-togethers for meals.

God created us to eat and provided us with a world full of food, he also designed us to be social people and live together in communities - A major part of this is eating together.

Eating is not only a necessity but also a time when we are relaxed and conversation starts to flow more easily – have you noticed how many embarrassing stories are told around the table?This is because food helps us to relax and helps us get away from the pressure of the world/life around us.

I have also noticed how children join in the banter around the table... normally with embarrassing stories! It is important that in this world where the importance of the family is being eroded that we not only teach good family values, but also model good family life to our children.

We have many good friends and these people are also friends to our children. Our children watch us as we relate to our friends and note the importance we give to the relationships we are developing.

God is building his church (a community of believers) and sharing food is a great social opportunity to share our lives, hopes, joys and experiences with each other.

Consider

- When was the last time I shared a meal with friends?
- When did I last invite others to share a meal with me?
- Who can I invite for a meal (even in the school/work canteen)?

Pray

- For opportunities to invite others
- For courage to overcome shyness
- For those around you who do not seem to have many friends

Day 5: We can have friends outside our normal social circle

Read Luke 19:1-10

Zacchaeus was not a good man. Not only did he side with the Romans and collect taxes from his own people, but he also defrauded his own people to make himself wealthy. We might think that Jesus would have a whole list of issues to raise with Zacchaeus, so it is surprising when Jesus simply asks to stay at his house.

Luke does not give us any more detail regarding what they discussed, but Jesus willingness to be a friend to Zacchaeus and be associated with tax collectors seems to have been enough for Zacchaeus to see the error of his ways.

Jesus crossed the boundaries; he got a reputation for being a “guest of sinners”. Jesus wants us to break down the social, economic and class barriers that exist in our world and reach out to everyone regardless of background – everyone needs friends.

Jesus warns us in Matthew 25:31-46 against being selective against any particular elements in society – even if we don’t like them, their behaviour or how they live or look.

- Consider**
- Who would God want me to be a friend to?
 - Is there anyone I know who needs encouraging?
 - How can I cross the boundaries to reach out to other people?

- Pray**
- For opportunities to be a friend to others
 - For those I know who are in need
 - For forgiveness for my prejudices
 - For the Holy Spirits strength to cross boundaries

Day 6: We need to include those who don't fit in

Read Mark 1:40-45

The new testament is full of people from all walks of life who for their own particular reasons do not seem to fit in with every one else.

Some were excluded because of a sickness like leprosy, some felt ashamed to be seen because of their lifestyle and others were just ignored because society felt they had no value. Some, like tax collectors, had jobs working for the Romans (the enemy) and were shunned by society.

We read that whenever Jesus met these people, he always had time for them, he did not consider their circumstances, diseases or backgrounds, but always reached out in compassion to them.

He touched (and healed) the leper, welcomed the tax collectors, cared for the prostitutes, reached out to the Samaritans (other religions), and called the freedom fighter (zealot) to follow him.

He taught that he came to bring good news for the poor, healing for the sick, sight to the blind and freedom for the oppressed. He later sent his disciples out with the same message.

The gospel is good news for everyone, for all ages and for all sections of society. We need to reach out to all people, and not just to those we find it easy to get along with.

- Consider**
- Who can I reach out to?
 - Do I know people who don't fit in easily?
 - How can I share the love of Jesus with them?

- Pray**
- For opportunities to demonstrate the love of Jesus
 - For those I know who struggle to fit in
 - For grace to love the unlovely

Day 7: Fellowship – on an adventure together

Read Philippians 4:1 - 9

In JRR Tolkiens trilogy "Lord of the Rings", the four hobbits and five of their friends form the "fellowship of the ring" with the sole aim of taking the ring to mount doom and destroying it.

Today the word fellowship is often used in relation to Christian groups. This is because we are joined together with a sole purpose – to preach to gospel to all the world and make disciples of all nations.

In our passage from Philippians Paul has some special instructions for two women (Euodia and Syntyche). He pleads with them to "agree with each other" or to get on with each other.

But he then goes on to explain that these two women have "contended at my side in the cause of the gospel."

From Paul's instruction to them we can conclude that these two women had probably continually argued and bickered with each other. But despite this they had both contended at his side for the gospel. They were in fellowship with him, on an adventure to take the gospel to the whole world and they did not allow their differences of opinion to distract them.

This is a wonderful picture of how the church is meant to be. We are not meant to be divided by our disagreements, but rather united to serve Jesus and complete the task that he has commissioned us to do.

Consider

- Who am I contending alongside for the gospel?
- Do I allow petty arguments prevent me encouraging others?
- How can I support and encourage my brothers and sisters?
- Do I regard myself as part of an adventure to take the gospel to all nations?

Pray

- For a wider revelation of the Church's purpose in the world
- For a fresh filling of the Holy Spirit
- For grace to get along with others and focus on the gospel
- For opportunities to support and encourage others

Weekly Summary

What have I learned this week

Consider the topics we have looked at this week and note down the issues that God has challenged you about

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WEEK 2: ONE-ANOTHERING

Day 1: Love one another

Read John 13:31-38

Jesus was about to be delivered to the Romans and his last words were a parting reminder to the disciples "don't forget that whatever happens make sure that you continue to love each other."

Jesus had already taught and modelled how (John 13:1) they should love, and explains that their love for each other would be evidence that they followed him (v35).

Jesus knew their frailties and their tendency to get into heated arguments, so He wanted to impress upon them the importance of loving each other – especially when times got rough.

His instructions are still relevant today. This world is driven by greed, jealousy and anger, but we are called to be different. We are called to stand out as a people who consider others and have compassion for each other.

When we act in love towards each other, then the world notices the difference and that opens up their hearts to the gospel.

We are to be a church that demonstrates the glory of the risen Jesus by behaving the way he instructed us to.

- Consider**
- Who do you have problems with?
 - How have you contributed to any disagreement?
 - How would Jesus want you to behave towards them?

- Pray**
- Be honest with God about your attitudes
 - Remind yourself of Gods love for you and his forgiveness
 - Ask for forgiveness and choose to forgive them
 - Pray for each person you have issues with
 - Make a decision to be reconciled

Day 2: Encourage one another

Read Hebrews 3:12-14

Just before this section of the passage we have been reminded of how Israel had rebelled against God in the wilderness.

They had been distracted from Gods amazing deliverance and the continual abundance of his daily supply for their needs, and had started to grumble, and desire their old ways of life.

In the light of this warning from history, we are challenged to watch our hearts desires and attitudes. It is interesting that this responsibility is not given to each individual but to the group "see to it that none of you."

Unlike the attitude of Cain, we are to be our "brothers keeper," we are to look out for each other, we are to encourage each other to remain faithful to God, stand up against sin and live fruitful lives for Jesus - and we are to do it daily, not just once in a while.

- Consider**
- Who can I encourage today?
 - How do I respond to others asking questions about my walk with Jesus?
 - Who have I encouraged to "watch out" for me?

- Pray**
- Thank God for the friends that you have
 - For opportunities to develop closer friendships
 - For an openness to share your issues with some trusted friends
 - For opportunities to encourage others
 - For your friends that they may be encouraged

Day 3: Serve one another

Read Galatians 5:13-15

This instruction is part of Paul's exhortation to the Galatians to live in the freedom that Jesus has won for them.

But this freedom is not a worldly freedom – to do what I want, say what I want, act as I want. But rather it is a freedom to live our lives free from the constraints of sin, greed and pride – to live our lives the way that God first intended us to live them.

We live in a world driven and motivated by uncontrolled greed, pride and anger – we are set free to be different

Throughout his life Jesus gave us the greatest examples of how to serve:-

- He washed his disciples feet
- He chose Judas knowing that he would betray him
- He made the greatest sacrifice at Calvary

and he calls us to do the same - to demonstrate his love in us by serving each other.

- Consider**
- In what ways could I serve others today?
 - What areas of my life are driven by greed, pride or anger?
 - Who do I know who needs support, encouragement or friendship?

- Pray**
- Ask forgiveness for any sinful motives
 - Invite Jesus to be Lord of those areas
 - For God to continue to change me to be more like Jesus
 - For opportunities to serve others

Day 4: Stir one another up to good works

Read Hebrews 10:22-25

In the earlier part of Hebrews 10 we have been taught how Jesus

- Has made "one sacrifice for sin for all time" (v11) and therefore fulfilled the requirements of the law.
- Through this sacrifice he has "made us holy" (v10) and therefore acceptable to God,
- Which enables us to "have confidence to enter the holy place (v19)

Because of this we are encouraged to

- Draw near to God with a sincere heart (v22)
- Hold unswervingly to the hope we have in Jesus, because God is faithful
- Consider how we can spur one another on towards love and good works

This last statement teaches us that we are to be a people of "love and good works" which is confirmed in Ephesians 2 v 10 "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."

Our "good works" should never be an attempt to win Gods favour or an attempt to impress God – because Jesus has already made us acceptable to God (V10). But our "good works" should be a grateful response to the salvation the Jesus has already won.

The term "consider how" implies that this should not be a passive activity, but that we should be deliberately spending time and energy planning how we can spur each other on to love and good works.

- Consider**
- What is my motivation for good works?
 - How can I encourage my brothers and sisters?
 - How can I serve more?

- Pray**
- Be honest with God about your motivation for good works
 - That God will give you friends that will "spur you on"
 - For opportunities to encourage others

Day 5: Honour one another

Read Romans 12:10

As we read the Bible we can catch some glimpses of how the members of the Trinity interact with each other. The most striking feature of these interactions is the honour they give to each other

- Matthew 3:17 - Father to Jesus – “This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased”

- John 5:19 - Jesus about the Father – “the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing”

- John 15:26 - Jesus about the Holy Spirit – “When the Counselor comes.... He will testify about me.”

In the family of God, which we have been welcomed into, honouring each other is a central feature.

In Philippians 2:3 Paul encourages us to “in humility consider others better than yourselves” – this is not to consider ourselves negatively, but rather to actively honour each other.

Galatians 5:22 speaks of the fruit that the Holy Spirit will grow in our lives (Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Goodness, Faithfulness and Self-Control) and each one of these contribute towards establishing good relationships where we honour each other.

The Holy-Spirit will continue to transform us into the family likeness.

- Consider**
- How do I treat others?
 - Do I seek to put others down or win at their expense?
 - How can I honour others?
 - What attitudes do I need to change?

- Pray**
- Ask the Holy Spirit to continue to grow his fruit in my life
 - For grace to honour those who wound me up
 - For opportunities to demonstrate the fruits of the Spirit

Day 6: Admonish one another

Read Colossians 3:12-17

The word admonish means to warn or reprimand (to tell off) and seems alien to the culture that we live in where no-one seems to be allowed an opinion on other peoples behaviours.

God has joined us into a body of believers and one of our responsibilities is to encourage each other to follow Jesus. But, all of us need someone to challenge us when we seem to stray or get distracted.

Let us not be confused - this instruction does not mean "to be critical of" or "to put people down". Jesus warned us to "take the log out of your own eye before trying to take the speck out of your brothers."

To help us admonish each other correctly Paul lays a simple foundation for us to follow (almost like a recipe)

- v1 - Focus your heart (attitudes/motivation) and mind (thoughts/scheming) on Jesus
- v5-9 - Put to death the behaviours of your sinful nature
- vv12-15 - Clothe yourselves with the nature of God (similar list to the fruits of the Spirit)
- v16 - Be an avid follower of Jesus - Allow the word of Christ to dwell in you richly

Admonishing each other is a very necessary part of discipleship, but we need to ensure that we do it in the correct manner.

- Consider**
- Who could speak words of admonition to me?
 - Has anyone given me the freedom to "speak into" their lives?
 - How can I ensure that I am not just being critical?

- Pray**
- Focus my heart/mind on Jesus
 - Ask Jesus to continue to make me more like him
 - For those I know who are struggling
 - For courage to "speak the truth in love" (Ephesians 4:15)

Day 7: Show hospitality to one another

Read 1 Peter 4:7-11

Eating together in someone's home was a regular occurrence in Bible times and Jesus often used such occasions to encourage, teach and demonstrate his teaching.

A major part of loving each other is to be hospitable, welcoming people into our homes, allowing them to see us as we really are, showing them that they are valued. It is no coincidence that most of our close friends have been to our home and we have been to theirs.

But Jesus instructed us to be careful about our motivation for inviting people – that they shouldn't just be the ones who can return the favour, but should include "the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame" (Luke 14:12).

Hospitality is something that we should all practice, but we need to show it to all and not just to our friends or to those who can repay or are popular.

- Consider**
- How can I show hospitality to others?
 - Do I know people who do not seem to get "included" in things?
 - How can I include them?
 - Has my friendship group expanded recently....how can I make this happen?

- Pray**
- For opportunities to be hospitable...especially to the poor and needy
 - For a wider vision than just my friendship group
 - That God would grow in me a generous and hospitable heart

Weekly Summary

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WEEK 3: OUTREACH

Day 1: Good News

Read Mark 16:14-20

In the days after his resurrection Jesus appeared to the disciples and instructed them to "Go into the world and preach the good news to all creation."

Jesus had completed God's purpose for him on earth and now salvation (which is forgiveness of sins, peace with God, freedom from guilt and fear, and new life in the family of God) was available for all men.

Jesus has given the church the job of carrying this good news story to the world.

The gospel is good news – it is not "come and join our church and sing our flavour of songs," but rather, come and meet Jesus who will set you free to enjoy life in all its fullness.

The gospel is good news - to people being strangled by uncertainty, fear, and depression Jesus brings hope, peace and joy.

The gospel is good news – to people who are mistreated, ignored and abused Jesus brings love, acceptance and freedom.

The gospel is good news – to people who lonely, afraid and despairing Jesus brings friendship, family and purpose.

We have the awesome privilege of sharing this good news with our friends, families, colleagues, school friends and neighbours.

- Consider**
- Who will I meet today that would benefit from meeting Jesus?
 - How can I demonstrate Jesus' life through the way I live?
 - How can I share Jesus as "Good News" and not as a set of rules?

- Pray**
- For the presence of the Holy Spirit to be with you today
 - For opportunities to tell your story
 - For freedom to share the joy of knowing Jesus

Day 2: The Season of Harvest

Read Luke 10:1-5

Jesus often used to speak in farming terms when he taught – he spoke parables about the sower, the seasons, the good crop and the weeds, and the vineyard.

Here he uses the term “harvest” to speak of the people that his disciples were to be taking the message to.

To those in Israel this term would have a prophetic relevance as God had structured their whole civil and religious calendar around farming. In Leviticus 23 we read how God told Moses to establish three feast periods: the Passover, feast of Weeks (also known as harvest or Pentecost) and Tabernacles (or ingathering).

Exodus 23:16 shows us that the feast of Weeks was to celebrate the state of the harvest and the feast of Ingathering was to celebrate the end of the harvest.

All of the three feasts were prophetic celebrations of Gods three stage plan and we are now living in the harvest season, between Pentecost (the start of the harvest) and the trumpet sounding for the feast of Tabernacles.

The sole responsibility of the Church is to focus on the harvest:

- To reach out to a desperate needy world with the “good news” of new life in Jesus
- To introduce them to the only Saviour – Jesus
- To welcome them into Gods family and help them grow to be more like Jesus

And we are to not stop doing it until the moment when the trumpet sounds, the harvest ends and we are taken to be with him.

- Consider**
- Am I focused on the harvest or have I been distracted?
 - Do I see my current situation as a harvest field?
 - How can I encourage others as they share Jesus?

- Pray**
- For courage to talk about Jesus
 - For opportunities to tell people how important Jesus is to me
 - For those around me that they might open their heart to the gospel

Day 3: Everyone is called to the harvest

Read 2 Corinthians 2:12-17

As we saw yesterday the sole purpose of the church is to complete that task that Jesus set us – the harvest – to preach the good news and make disciples of all nations.

In this passage, Paul gives us a wonderful picture of how each one of our lives in itself is a testimony (a fragrance) of Jesus. Have you ever walked past a bakers shop and suddenly found the air filled with the fragrance of freshly cooked bread?

Paul teaches us that we should be the same – wherever we go the fragrance of Jesus goes with us. In John 13 Jesus told his disciples that all men will know we are his disciples by the way we behave.

The way we live our lives is testimony to the Saviour we serve, and through our lives (not just our words) Jesus will spread the fragrance of the knowledge of him.

In the UK our long school summer holidays are a remnant of our farming past, when every man, woman and child were required to bring in the harvest. Every other activity stopped to release workers to gather in the harvest.

I remember times when I was a child having a holiday at a friends farm, and joining in the harvest – there was a job for everyone, even the 4-5 year old children helped gather the loose straw – and then everyone celebrated together with music and food – what a picture of how the church should be!

- Consider**
- Am I leaving the harvesting to the “pastors” and “Evangelists”?
 - How does my life “spread the fragrance” of Jesus?
 - What opportunities do I have to demonstrate Jesus’ love to others?

- Pray**
- For more opportunities to demonstrate the love of Jesus
 - For a greater boldness to speak about Jesus
 - For the fragrance of Jesus to impact your friends

Day 4: We all have a story to tell

Read Acts 1:1-9

Just before Jesus ascended into heaven he told his disciples that they would receive power when the Holy Spirit came on them and that they would be his witnesses throughout the world.

In a court case a witness is only required to tell their story, what they have seen, what they have heard and what they have experienced.

Jesus did not expect his disciples to go to Bible College, get a degree in Theology and understand the exact details of Greek grammar before they were qualified to take his message to the world.

His words are so clear

- 1) Receive the power of the Holy Spirit
- 2) Then tell your story

– and don't stop until you have reached the ends of the earth!

Each one of us has a story to tell, of how Jesus saved us, set us free, is still changing us, and is meeting our needs. This is your story and it is all that Jesus is expecting you to tell.

This can be as simple as honouring God when you are facing tough times.

So when people ask you "how did you cope in a situation" you might answer that "I asked people to pray with me and God gave me peace." This might lead to a conversation about how good God is and how he gives us the church family to support each other.

Many peoples first step towards salvation is a simple conversation like that.

- Consider**
- How can I honour God in my conversations?
 - What is my story (experience) of Jesus?
 - Who can I tell my story today?

- Pray**
- For courage to take opportunities to honour Jesus
 - For my family members who don't know Jesus
 - For a fresh filling of the Holy Spirit

Day 5: We each have an invitation to give

Read 2 Corinthians 5:16-21

Paul explains here that we have been reconciled to God – this means that Jesus has paid the price for our sin, we have been cleansed from all guilt and fear and because of Jesus we can “approach God with freedom and confidence” (Eph 3:12).

Paul then says that God has “given us the ministry of reconciliation” – God has not just saved us, but also desires that we share this good news of reconciliation with those around us.

He goes on to compare us to ambassadors – that we are his representatives – in a way “handling his affairs” on earth. We have experienced the wonder of seeing Jesus transform our lives and set us free to enjoy his abundant life, and he wants us to share that with everyone around us.

In Matthew 22 Jesus tells a parable about a King who wants to give a wedding banquet for his son and sends his servants out to invite people in. Some people are not interested and made excuses, so the King sent his servants out to the streets of the town and then to the country lanes to invite “anyone you can find” (verse 9).

Each of us leads very different lives, have different circles of friends, live in different streets and work in different places. It is as though God has scattered us around the harvest field, and has given each one of us opportunities to “invite” our friends, family, neighbours and colleagues to come..... to be reconciled to God by knowing salvation through Jesus.

Consider

- Do I see myself as Gods ambassador in my school or office?
- What circles of friends do I have?
- Who could I talk to today about Jesus?

Pray

- For my friends who don't know Jesus
- For courage to speak openly about how Jesus has transformed me
- For the Holy Spirit to fill me and give me the words to say

Day 6: Our lives are a witness

Read Matthew 5:13-16

We are not just to speak the good news, but also be a demonstration of the good news. Jesus explained that people observing our lifestyles (our attitudes, decisions and actions) would see the impact of Jesus and glorify God.

Jesus uses two very common everyday pictures to show this, both of which imply that we are meant to be obviously different to the world around us.

Salt - This was used to bring flavour to food; it has a very distinct taste, as everyone who has swallowed sea water knows, but once it loses its salty taste it is useless.

Jesus wants us to be distinctive in this world, to stand out as different, to live by a different set of priorities and be motivated by different values. But he doesn't want us to be separate from the world; we are called to flavour this world, to be evidence of a better way of living – a witness to the transforming power of Jesus

Light – When you turn on a light in a dark room, the darkness disappears. There is something very comforting about light; most children like to have some kind of light left on at night.

Jesus teaches us that we are to be a light to this world, a light that is raised up on a stand that is obvious to all, and providing light to everyone. We are not part of a secret club, the life of Jesus in us is meant to be obvious to all.

Our "good works" (the love we demonstrate, the compassion we show, the help we give, the honesty of our decisions and the generosity of our giving) these are evidence of the life of Jesus in us. He wants these to be so abundantly obvious that our friends will have no choice but to acknowledge to amazing God we serve.

Consider

- How am I being salt and light to my friends?
- Do my attitudes and behaviour glorify Jesus?
- How would Jesus want me to behave differently than I do?

Pray

- For the Holy Spirit to help me make good decisions
- For opportunities to demonstrate the Love of Jesus
- That my friends would see more of Jesus in my life

Day 7: The Holy Spirit and the gospel

Read Acts 1:1-9

To finish this week of studies we return to a passage we looked at earlier.

When Jesus ascended into heaven he gave specific instructions to his disciples:

- Do not leave Jerusalem but wait for the gift (Holy Spirit) my father promised
- You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you
- You will be my witnesses

Jesus was very firm in telling his disciples to stay in Jerusalem and wait for the Holy Spirit. This is because the Holy Spirit is central to the effectiveness of the gospel:

- It is the Holy Spirit that convicts men (John 16:8)
- He brings new birth (John 3:5-8)
- He makes our words effective (1 Thess 1:5)
- He gives us the words to say (Luke 12:11-12)

Without the Holy Spirit the gospel is just another story.

- It was the Holy Spirit that filled the disciples on the day of Pentecost and turned the passionate but bumbling Peter into the effective gospel preacher (Acts 2).
- It was the Holy Spirit that transformed Saul/Paul from the strict Pharisee into the convincing preacher (Acts 9:17-22).
- It was the Holy Spirit that fell on Cornelius's household before Peter had even finished preaching (Acts 10).

We have a great story to tell, but we need to rely on the Holy Spirit for it to be effective.

- Consider**
- How does the fear of other people's opinions impact me?
 - How often do I pray for the Holy Spirit's help?
 - Do I try to share the gospel in my own strength?

- Pray**
- For the Holy Spirit to help me live my life in his strength
 - For the courage to trust him and share the gospel
 - For the Holy Spirit to continue making me more like Jesus

Weekly Summary

What have I learned this week

Consider the topics we have looked at this week and note down the issues that God has challenged you about

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WEEK 4: TEACHING

Day 1: Teaching is a central part of Church life

Read Titus 3:1-16

Paul had left his friend Titus in Crete to complete the work of establishing the church.

In this passage he gives specific instruction on what he should teach to the differing groups in order to establish a godly church.

Three times in this passage he gives his reasons for this teaching

- Verse 5 – so that no-one will malign the word of God
- Verse 8 – so that those who oppose us will have nothing bad to say about us
- Verse 10 – So that in every way they will make the teaching about God our Saviour attractive

Paul's desire was that through effective teaching, lives would be transformed and Jesus would be glorified in an ungodly and arrogant world.

The world around us today is very similar; where people are selfish, arrogant and don't like to be told how to behave.

In verses 11 and 12 Paul explains that God's grace teaches us

- to say "no" to ungodliness and worldly passions"
- to "live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age"

God has set us free to live godly lives and has given us godly teachers and leaders who continue to challenge us to live in the grace of God which will transform our thoughts, attitudes and behaviours to glorify Jesus.

This grace will create in us a spirit that is teachable; a desire to listen to others, hear uncomfortable truths, accept instruction and a willingness to correct our attitudes and behaviours.

- Consider**
- Am I teachable, or do I like to have my own way?
 - Who are my teachers, who do I accept guidance from?
 - What attitudes and behaviours do I need to allow the grace of God to change?

- Pray**
- Ask Jesus to be Lord of my attitudes and behaviours
 - Ask the Holy Spirit to continue to teach me grace
 - For God to help me become more teachable

Day 2: The "Word of the Lord"

Read Acts 6:1-7

In verse 7 we see an interesting phrase – "the word of God spread." It is not a phrase that we would choose to use today – we would probably use "the gospel spread," or the "teaching of Jesus spread."

Throughout the Old Testament the "word of God" or the "word of the Lord" is used to indicate that God himself had brought insight and instruction.

The apostles used this phrase to indicate that this was not just a human effort to publicise Jesus, but actually was God working through them to bring Salvation to the world.

In John 1 we are taught that "in the beginning was the Word," this is Jesus – he is the "Word of God," he came to bring salvation, peace with God and abundant life.

In recent years the term "Word of God" has been used to speak of the Bible or the scriptures, which has led us into misunderstanding the greater depth of its meaning.

The "Word of the Lord" should include the scriptures, as these are God's Word to us and are meant for our instruction and guidance, but we need to reclaim the original meaning of the phrase. The teaching of Jesus is meant to have a living impact on our lives.

Jesus is still the "Word of God" and calls us to join him on a mission to take the knowledge of God and the message of salvation to this world.

As we allow Jesus to work in and through our lives the "Word of the Lord" will spread throughout Poole, the villages of Dorset and the whole of the UK

Consider

- Am I allowing the "Word of God" to change me?
- How is Jesus developing his character in me?
- How can I get involved in his mission to this world?

Pray

- For a greater experience of Jesus working in and through me
- For a deeper understanding of all that Jesus has done for me
- For a passion for the "Word of God" to spread through my world

Day 3: Understanding is not just knowledge

Read Matthew 13:10-17

A few years ago I attended a seminar to help me better understand the Indian culture. We were told that if you ask an Indian "Do you think you can meet a certain deadline?" they will answer "yes," but if you phrase the question "do you feel you can meet the deadline?" they might answer "no."

This is because, generally, Indian culture understands things more with the feelings (the 'heart') than with the mind – this gives us an insight into how Jesus replied to the disciple's question.

His reply quoted Isaiah 6 and included the following phrase,
"Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them."

I find it amusing that people's opinions are often impacted by their heart attitudes,

- a footballer who has dived to get a penalty is seen as "a cheat" or "very clever" depending upon whether he is in your team or not.
- A gadget is either "cool" or "uncool" depending upon trends (other peoples opinion).

God has not made salvation dependant upon intellectual ability; it is not meant to be broken down, analyzed and worked out. He is looking for our hearts response to him; to cry out to him in faith and then walk with him in faith.

As we read the Bible we need to ensure that we are responding to it with our hearts and not only with our minds.

I am not saying that we should avoid studying the Bible, but rather that as we study the Bible we need to allow it to get past our intellect and sink into our hearts so that it can work on the attitudes and desires that drive our behaviours.

Consider

- Do I find myself making excuses for my behaviour?
- Have I allowed God's word access to my attitudes and desires?
- How often do I make time for God's word to soak into me?

Pray

- For God to make my bible readings real to me
- For courage to deal with wrong attitudes and not make excuses
- For the Holy Spirit to fill me with more of the knowledge of God

Day 4: God's word dwelling in us

Read Colossians 3:1-17

Paul writes this letter to the Colossian church to correct some false teaching. In Chapters 1 and 2 he reminds them of the awesome work that Jesus has completed and the freedom that we now have because of Jesus. Then, at the end of Chapter 2, Paul asks a very challenging question "*Since you died with Christ to the basic principles of this world, why, as though you still belonged to it, do you submit to its rules...?*" This question is still relevant to us today; why do we so often allow our lives to be determined by the values, desires and trends of this world?

In our passage today Paul lays out some very simple steps that will enable us to live our lives the way God wants us to (these are the basic steps of discipleship)

- 1) Set your hearts on things above – Focus your desires and ambitions on God
- 2) Set your minds on things above – Focus your thoughts and plans on God
- 3) Put to death/rid yourselves of ungodly habits (Paul supplies a helpful list)
- 4) Clothe yourselves with godly desires and behaviours
- 5) Allow Christ to rule in you

Paul then breaks this last one down into 2 parts

- 1) Let the peace of Christ rule in you – our world is so affected by fear, guilt, greed and anger – but when we allow Jesus to rule in our lives he bring us peace. In our society this week he enables us to peacefully face up to the turmoil of financial issues, relationship breakdown, and fear of the future.
- 2) Let the word of Christ dwell in you – The Bible is not just a book to be read, but contains the words of God that enable us to know salvation and instruct us how to live in the freedom that Jesus has won for us.

We need to allow the words of God to soak into us, to become the foundation of our values and enable us to live our lives the way that God intends.

Consider

- How often do I set aside time to read the Bible?
- Do I expect God to speak through it to me?
- In what ways has the teaching in the Bible changed my attitudes?

Pray

- For the Holy Spirit to open my heart as I read his word
- For Jesus to rule in my heart and mind today
- For courage to make godly decisions today

Day 5: The Bible – full of life!

Read 2 Tim 3:10 – 4:5

Paul is nearing the end of his life and as he is probably writing to Timothy for the last time, he gives him some wonderful fatherly advice.

In verse 14 he encourages Timothy to “continue in what you have learned” or continue to apply what you have learned because the “scriptures (the Bible) are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Jesus.” It is only through the writings in the Bible that we can understand the work that Jesus has done for us and are therefore able to turn to him for salvation.

Paul then goes on to explain that the whole Bible (all scripture) is God breathed; that God inspired men to write every word and passage and it is meant to be used and applied to our lives today.

In verse 16 Paul says that it is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training – this covers all the different types of instruction and shows that it is not meant to just be a book of advice. The Bible is also meant to correct us, rebuke us and discipline (train) us.

Paul then explains that the purpose of all of this instruction is that we would be equipped for every good work. In Eph 2 v 10 Paul writes that, “We are his workmanship created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God has prepared in advance for us to do.”

God has planned good works for each of us to do and he is training us to do these good works by using the scriptures.

We can see that in Chapter 4 Paul instructs Timothy to “Preach the word; be preparedto correct, rebuke and encourage.” The discipline of learning and applying the word that Timothy underwent in Chapter 3 is a preparation to perform the tasks he was called to do in Chapter 4.

Consider

- Am I allowing the Word of God to instruct me?
- What steps am I taking to learn more of Gods word?
- Who am I learning from....who are my teachers?

Pray

- For God to continue to instruct, train and correct me by his word
- For a greater hunger for the word of God
- For God to continue to bless those who teach me

Day 6: Discussing scripture – a daily part of life

Read Deut 6:1-9

When God gave the law to Israel he gave Moses an indication of how important it was to Israel that they not only heard it and obeyed it but that they gave particular attention to teaching it to their children, discussing it with each other, and ensuring that it was remained central to all that they did.

There is an echo of this in the New Testament where we read that after Pentecost the disciples “devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.”

The teachings of God are meant to be a central part of life. We are meant to read and meditate on the scriptures, but we are also called to teach them to our Children, demonstrating to them that we are applying them to our own lives, and encourage them to read and explore the scriptures for themselves.

As we saw yesterday, the Bible gives instruction to help us in every aspect of life. God intends us to become a community of grace, living our lives to glorify him and demonstrating the wonder of his grace through the way we live.

As a father I am responsible for ensuring that my children are fully aware of God, the work of salvation through Jesus, the baptism in the Holy Spirit and the lives of grace that we are called to live.... I am not meant to leave this to the children’s and teens workers at my local church.

Consider

- Do I regularly discuss Christian teaching within my family?
- How can I best demonstrate the life of Jesus to my family?
- What opportunities will I have to talk about Jesus today?

Pray

- For opportunities to discuss Jesus with others
- For my family and the families in Church
- For the kids work at church as we reach out to families around us

Day 7: Teaching and Compassion

Read Mark 6:30-44

In verse 34 Mark makes a strange statement “he had compassion on them...so he began teaching”. We would normally expect someone to have compassion and then care for, feed or maybe pray for, but Mark says that Jesus taught them.

To understand this we need to look at this event in John’s gospel (John 6), where John explains that it is the time of the Jewish Passover. This is one of the three annual times when every man was required to attend the Feast in Jerusalem (Exodus 23:14-17). So the question is “What were 5000 men doing on the far side of Galilee when they should have been in Jerusalem?”

There were many reasons that people were excluded - The law gave many reasons why people should be excluded ...and we can be fairly sure that the Pharisees and Jewish leaders were very strict about enforcing it.

But this year Jesus chose to stay away from Jerusalem and spend this Passover with them. If they couldn’t attend the Passover, then Jesus would bring the Passover to them - Jesus was choosing to include those who were excluded.

Luke records (Luke 9) that Jesus was teaching them about the kingdom of God and healing the sick and then Jesus gave a practical demonstration by hosting the Passover meal (breaking the unleavened bread). The next day Jesus further explained that he is the “bread of life.”

Jesus had seen their need, had compassion for them and responded with the truth that set them free.

So often our response to peoples needs is to attempt to meet their physical or emotional needs, but we should also be seeking to bring them the truth that will set them free; introducing them to the Saviour, who will bring them life, peace, hope and joy.

Consider

- Who do I know that is hurting and how can I bring Jesus to them?
- How can I seek out those who feel excluded and invite them in?
- How can I be the fragrance of Jesus to those around me today?

Pray

- For those I know who are in need
- For opportunities to share Jesus with those who are hurting
- For God to continue to teach me to be compassionate

Weekly Summary

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WEEK 5: BODY LIFE

Day 1: One body in Christ

Read Romans 12:1-8

Paul likens the Church to a body and explains that although we do not all have the same function we are still all important and necessary.

In verse 5 he states that "each member belongs to all the others" and that every characteristic and ability we have is a gift of grace from God. These gifts are meant to be used to serve the rest of the body.

Paul starts this chapter by urging us to "offer our bodies as living sacrifices" to God as a "spiritual act of worship". Our worship is not just singing and praying but using all of our skills, talents, energy, time, money, compassion and intellect on serving each other and so fulfil the greatest command "to love the LORD your God with all your heart, soul, strength and mind, and to love your neighbour as yourself" (Luke 10:27).

Jesus not only taught this but also demonstrated it to us throughout his life. He,

- Included the Children even though he was tired
- Touched the leper and healed him
- Washed his disciples feet whilst they argued about who was the greatest
- The greatest love is to lay down your life for friends (sacrifice yourself)

As Paul says in Philippians 2 "Your attitude should be the same as that of Jesus" and then he lists some of the ways in which Jesus chose to humble himself in order to serve us.

We need to consider the example Jesus set us and commit everything to serving him and each other.

- Consider**
- What have I got that I can serve others with?
 - When did I last "go without" in order to bless someone else?
 - How can I reach out to others today?

- Pray**
- For the Holy Spirit to develop a generous spirit in me
 - For opportunities to serve others
 - For those who serve me and the wider church

Day 2: Joined together in Jesus

Read Ephesians 4:4-16

In verse 16 Paul explains that the body is “held together by every supporting ligament, as each part does its work.” The body of Christ (the church) is dependant upon all of us. If one of is hurt – it affects all of us, if one part is missing then we are not complete.

But this goes further and teaches us that the body needs my input, it is reliant upon my contribution. The Holy Spirit fills each of us and gives us gifts that we are meant to contribute.

Yes, we acknowledge that God does seem to give some people high profile roles (see verse 11), but these are to equip each member of the body to develop in their relationship with Jesus and then to contribute as the Holy Spirit guides them.

We believe that God wants to build us together as a vibrant community of believers where everyone is welcomed, respected and valued, but also where the abundant life of Jesus overflows from every one of us in service to each other.

In verse 15 Paul explains that we are meant to “grow up into Christ.” – that we are continually developing a maturity in our relationship with Jesus so that we will no longer be childish, tossed back and forth, or blown about by misleading teaching or deceitful men.

The Church needs me to mature in Jesus and then support and encourage those around me so that together we demonstrate to this world the magnificence of the grace of God.

Consider

- How do I support and encourage others?
- What gifts has the Holy Spirit given me to bless others with?
- How often do I use these gifts to build up the church?

Pray

- For the Holy Spirit to fill me and help me to encourage others
- For the Holy Spirit to give me courage to use his gifts
- For the leaders of the church

Day 3: Building effective Church

Read Ephesians 4:4-16

As we saw yesterday we are all joined together in Christ and the body is dependant upon the contribution that each person brings.

But this passage also outlines how God is building his church

- 1) Everyone is connected to the head
We each have a personal relationship to Jesus, and therefore we are not reliant upon another man (priest, pastor, teacher, etc.) to speak to God for us.
- 2) Everyone is connected to others
We are not meant to be isolated from other Christians or a local church. The church is the family of God and God wants us to relate to each other and demonstrate to this world the abundant life we have in Jesus.
- 3) Recognition of authority
God has given the church some gifts to lead, guide and bring maturity. The people that have these gifts are not "better" than anyone else, but are godly men who serve the body and bring leadership.
- 4) We are each meant to "grow" in Jesus
Growth normally means change. We are not called to remain babies in Christ but to grow up in him to maturity. Just as parents work to see their children mature into adults, so God wants to see us become mature.
- 5) We are meant to be wary of false teaching (cunning and crafty men who bring weird interpretations)
We are to be wary of any teaching that undermines the completed work of Jesus at Calvary, that tries to re-introduce legalism, or distracts us from the purpose that Jesus gave us – to take the gospel to all the world.

Consider

- Do I spend regular times enjoying God?
- Do I tend to rely on others instead of God?
- How I can play my part in building effective church?

Pray

- For a closer and more passionate walk with God
- For Church to be an effective witness to Jesus
- For our leaders to provide wise and godly leadership

Day 4: We are all ministers

Read 1 Corinthians 12:1-13

In the three main passages that Paul writes about Spiritual Gifts he always uses the analogy of a body. Paul understood that whenever the Holy Spirit gives gifts to people they are for the purpose of building up the church.

Paul explains in verse 7 that "to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given." Every member of the Church is meant to be baptized in the Holy Spirit and have received the gifts God has for them.

Paul continues that these gifts are "for the common good." They are meant to be used to build up the body, to encourage each other to know Jesus more, to strengthen each other and help one another to live our Christian lives more effectively.

This means that if I do not use my gifts, then the body (the church) is missing out on something. Isn't it amazing that God has formed us together as a body where we are each reliant upon each other!

This body is not just made up of different people, but that these people come from all walks of society and countries. The Holy Spirit gives gifts to all regardless of qualifications, career, gender, age or nationality.

Whereas the world is motivated by competitiveness, greed and pride, God is building a church of every type of person, where everyone's contribution is needed.

The Church needs each of us to bring the gift that the Holy Spirit has given us.

- Consider**
- Have I been baptized in the Holy Spirit?
 - What gifts has the Holy Spirit given to me?
 - How can I use the Holy Spirit's gifts more?

- Pray**
- for the Holy Spirit to continue to fill me
 - For courage to break through fear to bring my gift
 - For opportunities to encourage others

Day 5: Let us serve each other with our gifts

Read Romans 12:1-8

It is common in our world today to judge people based on their talent or abilities or looks, but this is not a behaviour that God wants within his church.

Paul challenges us in verse 2 to “not conform to the pattern of this world” and then goes on in verse 3 “Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought.” We are to keep a proper perspective of the gifts that God has given to us and others. While we honour the gifts God gives his church, we are not to give in to the worldly desire to chase personality by exalting men for the gifts that God has given them. This is the beginnings of idolatry.

The gifts come from God and all the glory for them should go to God. Verse 3 then explains that we should “consider ourselves (and others) with sober judgement,” to keep our feet firmly grounded and our eyes continually on Jesus.

Paul again uses the example of the body to explain how we should use our gifts. He emphasises that the body is made up of many parts and they do not all have the same function.

Within the church some gifts seem to have a higher profile than others, and some are unseen by anyone, but they are all necessary and hold the same value to God. I find it amazing that if the smallest or seemingly most insignificant part of my body doesn't work then my whole body is affected - have you ever had toothache or an ingrown toenail. Paul explains that we all belong to each other – we are all necessary to the health of the church.

Finally Paul encourages us that whatever gift God has given us, we should use it to glorify Jesus, serve each other and build the church.

Consider

- What gifts has God given to me?
- How can I use them to encourage others and build the church?
- What is the difference between honouring someone and putting them on a pedestal?

Pray

- For courage to use my gifts more
- For opportunities to serve others
- For God to teach me how to use my gifts in humility

Day 6: The Holy Spirit brings unity

Read Ephesians 4:1-6

In the first three Chapters of Ephesians, Paul has wonderfully explained the master plan of God,

- The pleasure (love) of God to reconcile people to himself
- The purpose of God to redeem us from the curse of death
- The plan of God to bring salvation through Jesus and adopt us into his family

Because of all of this Paul instructs us how we should live together – humility, gentleness, patience and love.

Living our lives this way is not easy because it is not the way that our world works; we like to have our own opinions, some of us like to be controversial and win arguments, others like to get their own way, we are all greedy – just slice up a cake and offer it round....most people will want the biggest slice!

This list of Paul's is very similar to the fruits of the Spirit (Gal 5v22), it is important to understand that the Christian life can only be lived effectively through the power of the Holy Spirit.

But Paul continues in verse 3 that we should "make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit." The fact that he mentioned "every effort" tells us that this will not be easy!

In John 17 Jesus prays for us that we might be "brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them just as you have loved me." Unity within a church has a massive impact on the effectiveness of the gospel we share.

We must continue being filled with the Holy Spirit, and allow him to rule over our natural desires which bring disunity and create divisions.

- Consider**
- Do I enjoy arguments and allow them to cause divisions?
 - What efforts (steps) do I need to take to live more like Jesus?
 - What attitudes do I need to change?

- Pray**
- For the Holy Spirit to fill me again today
 - For God to develop humility, gentleness and patience in me
 - For opportunities to develop unity within church

Day 7: God's gifts bring maturity

Read Ephesians 4:1-11

Yesterday we looked at how the Holy Spirit brings unity, but Paul goes on in this passage to explain how some gifts/people seem to have a greater profile in the church. Before we look at these we need to correct our understanding of how God sees roles within his church.

In Mark 10:43 Jesus said to his disciples, "whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all." Jesus taught that leadership in the church is not the same as leadership in the world; the world seeks after promotion, self-importance and domination but leaders in the church are to be servants to all.

In Ephesians 4 Paul explains the reason that God appoints the various roles: "to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body may be built up...and become mature."

God does not want an immature church, we are meant to become mature. I have two children and my role as a parent is to prepare them to live in this world. This involves teaching, encouraging, caring, loving, disciplining and opening their understanding to the way the world works.

In a similar way, God has given the roles described in Ephesians 4 to the church, to bring us to maturity, to teach us to live vibrant godly lives in this ungodly world, and encourage us to fulfil the calling Jesus gave to the church "to go into all the world" and "make disciples from all nations."

The Holy Spirit gives leaders to the church - not as a status symbol or a badge of honour, but to serve the people of God and bring us to maturity.

Consider

- How often do I pray for my leaders?
- How am I allowing my leaders to bring me to maturity?
- In what ways can I support my leaders?

Pray

- Thank God for our leaders
- For them to closer with God and know the Holy Spirits power
- For opportunities to support them in every way

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