

A photograph of a large tree with its roots exposed in a forest. The roots are thick and spread out across the ground. The background is filled with green foliage and trees. A semi-transparent green banner is overlaid across the middle of the image, containing the text "Discipleship Foundations" in a white, cursive font.

*Discipleship
Foundations*

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HOW TO USE THIS BOOKLET

Our hope and prayer is that as you use this booklet, you grow as a disciple of Jesus. As a church, our mission is:

'to be and make disciples of Jesus, in a loving church, in our local community and beyond.'

As you work through the content, practices and reflections in this booklet we hope that you grow in faith, hope and love. That you will have a deeper understanding of the gospel, and a richer practice of faith and love in your life.

This booklet is designed for a connect group to work through together, but it also has exercises to put into practice on your own, throughout the week.

The booklet is designed around four parts:

HEAD

These sections are about **content**. They are designed to be worked through together as a group. There are some Bible passages scattered throughout and some that you are instructed to read together. These sections are about gaining a deeper understanding and knowledge of faith.

HEART

Head knowledge is vital, but it needs to move beyond the head, and into the heart. These sections are designed with questions to discuss with a group. They are less about understanding, and more about applying what you have learned to your own life. As we open ourselves up with others, take what we have learned (head), and apply it to our lives (heart), we can support and help one another to grow. This section is about getting **personal**.

HANDS... PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE THIS WEEK

Just as it is necessary to move from the head to the heart, our faith also needs to find expression in the practicalities of our lives. It has to move from our heart to

our hands. This section is about the things you can do, the habits you can form, and the ways that you can put what you have learned into **practice**.

These exercises are designed for you to do by yourself (or with a couple of others) in the week ahead. They are trying to help you form habits and practices that you can take responsibility for and make sure that your faith has some concrete actions outside of connect group time. They give you some 'action items'.

Each section has multiple options. You don't have to do them all (in fact, you shouldn't try to do them all). Rather, find one or two that you can grow in and give them a go. The group might find it helpful to discuss what you each are going to try in the coming week... it can also be helpful to begin with some follow up if group members have some stories to share from last time.

RESOURCES TO EXPLORE FURTHER

This section is a menu of things to check out, if you want to explore things further. Hopefully as you work through this booklet you have some 'aha' moments that you haven't thought about before. Sometimes we recognise that there is a particular area we need to spend some more time on, or there is a particular area of curiosity we want to explore further. This section gives you some options if you want to dig a bit deeper. It isn't 'required reading' but rather, 'recommended resources' for if you want to take things further.

Much (most...) of the content in this booklet has come from somewhere else, and this section acts as a kind of bibliography so you can see where and from who we have drawn different ideas from.

On to the first session...

SESSION 1 – WHO IS GOD?

INTRO

Spend some time describing God. What is he like?
What attributes do you most associate with God?

HEAD

When we think about life, we often begin with ourselves as the reference point. We are the centre, and life is about us. The Bible suggests to us something radical:

That God is the centre of all things.

The first question we need to grapple with is: who is God?
And the second is, what is life all about?

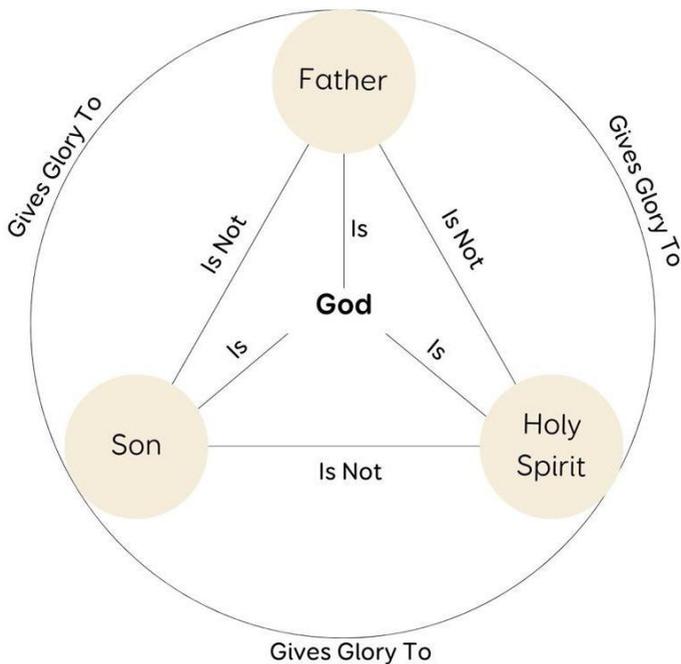
In chapters 14-17 of John's Gospel, Jesus gives us a picture of what is God is like, and it is pretty wild. He describes the one God as being a trinity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Read together John 14:1-24.

It is easy to get tangled up with the ins and outs of this passage, but notice that Jesus talks of an eternal relationship between the Father, the Son (Jesus) and the Holy Spirit. Christians throughout the centuries have understood there to be one God, who is made up of Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The mathematicians in the room may be having a bit of fit at this point ('how can $3 = 1$... how can $1 = 3$!'). But the Trinity (the Christian term for God) isn't a maths problem to be solved. It is more like a relationship to understand.

Theologians have diagrammed it out like this:



You can see the 'family photo' of trinity in Luke 3:21-22:

²¹ *When all the people were being baptised, Jesus was baptised too. And as he was praying, heaven was opened* ²² *and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: 'You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.'*

HEART

Which member of the Trinity – Father, Son or Holy Spirit – do you have the strongest sense of a lived, experienced relationship?

HEAD

There is something profound to realise about God here. John spells it out for us in 1 John 4:8:

^a *Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.*

John isn't saying that God is **loving**... he is saying that God **is love**. Because God is an eternal union of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, God has from all eternity been a glorious, joyful union of love.

Glen Scrivener puts it like this:

The Bible insists that God is 3 persons united in love. Therefore, we've come from love. We are shaped by love. Our lives, our world, our future... it's ruled by love. Could that be true? The Bible says: think back to the beginning... God is three persons united in love. Which means in the beginning there was love. If there was nothing in the beginning, then life would just be absurd. If there was chaos in the beginning, life would just be struggle. If there was power in the beginning, then life would just be slavery. But, in the beginning there was love because God is three persons united in love.

HEART

Does this picture of God change what you think life is all about?

HEAD

We have looked at who God is, but what does this have to do with us? If this is who God is, then what is life all about? Through Jesus, we are brought into the love the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Read together John 17:1-5

Jesus describes eternal life as knowing the one true God. Through knowing God, we share in the eternal life of the trinity. In John 14:15-21 (you can check it out later this week), Jesus talks about the union of the Father, Son and Spirit, but he also includes us! He says that God will live with us, teach us, make his home with us, and even live in us. Through Jesus we are joined into the loving union of the trinity. What a blessing!

HEART

Before today, how would you have described eternal life? Has anything changed in your understanding of eternal life after thinking about the trinity?

An old church catechism answers the question 'what is the goal of life' by saying: 'To glorify God, and to enjoy Him forever'

What do you think? Is there anything you like or dislike about this answer?

HANDS... PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE THIS WEEK

Over this week, read through chapters 14-17 of John's Gospel. Notice the connection and the distinction between the members of the trinity, and our invitation into this relationship

Pray each day this week to the Father, and then to the Son, and then to the Spirit.

Mediate on these songs (you can find them on Spotify or Youtube), and what they say about the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

- *Trinity Song* by Sandra McCracken and All Sons and Daughters
- *This is my Father's World* (with Runkerry Reel) by Keith and Kristyn Getty
- *In Christ Alone* by Keith and Kristyn Getty
- *Holy Spirit, Living Breath of God* by Keith and Kristyn Getty

RESOURCES TO EXPLORE FURTHER

Enjoy God by Tim Chester

None Like Him: 10 Ways God is Different from Us (and Why That's a Good Thing)
by Jen Wilkin

In His Image: 10 Ways God calls us to Reflect His Character by Jen Wilkin

SESSION 2 – THE CHRISTIAN STORY

INTRO

Pick your favourite fictional book or movie.

Tell the group the story in 1-2 minutes (you can't take more than 2 minutes).

HEAD

Today we are going to do an overview of the Christian story. This is a story that is big enough to capture the different parts of our lives, and give us meaning, purpose and direction. Before we jump into the Christian story though, we need to recognise that *all* people have a story by which they live their lives. To put it another way, every worldview, philosophy, religion, ideology or belief system seeks to answer the big questions of life:

- Where did we come from?
- What is wrong with the world/us?
- How can the world/us be fixed?
- What is life all about?
- Where is everything headed?

There are any number of answers that you can give to those questions, but they are fundamental questions that our stories give us answers to.

The gospel story can be told in 5 chapters:

Creation – Fall – Redemption – Resurrection – New Creation

Creation: In the beginning God created all things. He pronounced his creation good because it was beautiful, abundant and ordered. God created humanity in the image of God, with a unique place as stewards of creation. Creation was a place of harmony, where God, humanity, and the wider creation lived in peace.

Fall: Humanity rebelled against God. This brought sin, destruction, and a spiritual death sentence into the world. Sin destroys the relationship with God, humanity, and the wider creation. Every faculty and facet of our lives has been tainted with sin.

Redemption: God desired to redeem and restore his creation. He sent his Son Jesus into the world to become a human being (which is what we celebrate at Christmas). Jesus lived the life we should have lived, and died the death that we

deserved in our place (which is what we celebrate on Good Friday). Through Jesus' death on the cross our sin is paid for, and we are reconciled to God.

Resurrection: Three days after dying on the cross, Jesus was raised back to life by the heavenly Father (which is what we celebrate at Easter) and has ascended back to his Father in heaven. This was a guarantee that Jesus' death redeemed us from sin, and a divine vindication that Jesus is the eternal King of creation. The risen King Jesus is now pouring his life into his followers through the Holy Spirit, and he is redeeming every part of creation.

New Creation: One day in the future Jesus will return and will usher in a new age where there will be no more sin, sorrow, sickness, conflict or death. This will be an eternal restoration of humanity, and of the rest of creation. This will be a return to the peace that God, humanity and creation shared in the beginning.

That is the Christian story in a nutshell. The Bible fleshes this story out in lots of ways, and there is plenty more to be said about each part and the implications it has for our lives. But this story helps to answer the big picture questions we saw in the start and helps to make sense of some of the paradoxes in which we live.

HEART

Does the gospel story explain any of the 'big questions of life' for you, or give any particular hope or comfort?

HEAD

Read through the passages and see how they flesh out the Christian story:

Let's start with **Creation**.

Read Genesis 1:1-2:3.

How is creation described in this passage?
What is God's relationship to his creation?
How is humanity described in this passage?
What is humanity's place in creation?

Whilst this is a beautiful picture, it didn't last long. Let's look at **The Fall**.

Read Genesis 3.

What are the effects of humanity's rebellion and sin:

Between God and humanity?

Between people?

Between humanity and creation?

In how they see themselves?

You can see that as sin entered the world, there is alienation, separation and breakdown. When Paul describes sin, in Romans 3:23 he says that: "The wages of sin is death".

If that was the end of the story, it would be a short and tragic tale. But fortunately, that isn't where the story ends. The verse continues:

²³ For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Through Jesus, we receive **Redemption**. The gospel writers Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John describe the incarnation, life, death and resurrection of Jesus. He died on the cross in the place of sinful humanity to redeem us from the curse of sin, and the punishment we deserved.

Read the summary of what Jesus did for us in Colossians 1:19-23.

What did Jesus' death on the cross achieve? Paul describes what we were, and what we are now through Jesus. Put it in your own words.

When Jesus rose from the dead, and ascended back to God the Father, he gave his Holy Spirit to his followers. The Holy Spirit is the presence and the power of God with his people. Through the Holy Spirit, we share in Jesus' **Resurrection** life, and we are being progressively changed more and more into his likeness. This is part of Jesus restoring all of creation.

Read Colossians 3:1-17.

Being raised with Christ has a real effect in the here and now. Notice that it involves your heart, your mind, your actions and your attitude.

Paul talks about glory that we have 'when Christ, who is your life, appears.' That brings us to **New Creation**, which will happen completely and finally in the future.

Read the description of new creation in Revelation 21:1-8.

HEART

Do you find the Christian story persuasive? Why or why not?

Does the Christian story challenge what you have been living your life for?

Where have you seen Jesus' power most at work in your life?

HANDS... PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE THIS WEEK

Run through the five chapters in your mind each day this week:

Creation – Fall – Redemption – Resurrection – New Creation

Can you put each chapter in one or two sentences?

Pray that God would surprise you with signs of his resurrection power in your life, or in the lives of those around you.

Spend some time in creation. Spend some time praising God for his creativity, beauty and goodness.

Ask someone if you can tell them the Christian story in a few minutes (you can tell them it is for some church homework). Try to tell it as one connected story and then ask if it made sense, and which bit most stood out to them.

Pick one of the following topics (or something else you are wondering about):

Justice

Beauty

Wonder

Love

Identity

The Environment

Hope

Art and Creativity

Human Rights

Think about how each chapter of the story might inform a Christian understanding of that topic.

Find a piece of art (visual, music, poetry, dance, drama... whatever you like) that expresses each section of the story. How does it affect you?

RESOURCES TO EXPLORE FURTHER

God's Big Picture by Vaughn Roberts

Chapters 5-10 of *Stay Salt* by Rebecca Manley Pippert

The Bible Project on Youtube:

“The Story of the Bible: What It's About From Beginning to End”

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7_CGP-12AE0

SESSION 3 – THREE WAYS TO LIVE

INTRO

Are you naturally the kind of person that follows the rules?
Or are you naturally a rebel?

HEAD

When we are living our lives in right relationship with God, we are living as God intended for us to live. But as people who are affected by sin, we are very good at finding ways to ignore and reject God. Jesus told some stories to help us see how to live in right relationship with God, and how not to.

Read Luke 15:11-32.

In this story, the father has two sons. In some ways they are opposite. One is impulsive, the other is dutiful. One rebels against his father and runs away, the other stays at home and works tirelessly. One is the 'black sheep' of the family, the other is a pillar of the community.

But Jesus doesn't tell this story to say: 'be like the older brother, not like the younger brother'. He is actually pointing us to two different ways of being lost.

Look at what the brothers have in common:

- Both sons are loved by their father.
- Both sons insult him and reject him.
- Neither of them wants to be with their father.
- Both of them want the father's stuff, but they don't want to be in relationship with the father.
- Both of them refuse to be in his father's house.
- The fathers comes out to both of them, and seeks to reconcile and restore them to his table.

Look at how the chapter starts in Luke 15:1-2

*Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering round to hear Jesus.
²But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, 'This man welcomes sinners, and eats with them.'*

Whilst it is easy to see that the younger brother is a sinner, Jesus tells this story to confront the religious legalism and moralism of the religious leaders. Notice in the end that the repentant younger brother is reconciled to the father and receives grace... the older brother remains 'lost' on the outside.

HEART

Which of the two brothers in the parable is easiest for you to identify with? Why?

The two brothers each represent a different way of rejecting God. One is rebellious, hedonistic, indulgent and running from God. The other is legalistic, moralistic, slavish and angry. We see the gospel in the middle of the story (verses 17-24). When we come to God in repentance, recognising that we need his grace, we receive welcome, compassion, grace, mercy, restoration and hospitality from God. We aren't welcomed back as slaves, but as children.

In *Gospel in Life*, Keller contrasts a legalistic, moralistic, 'older brother' religion with the gospel of grace.

| Religion | Gospel |
|---|---|
| 'I obey; therefore, I'm accepted' | 'I'm accepted; therefore, I obey' |
| Motivation is based on fear and insecurity | Motivation is based on grateful joy |
| I obey God in order to get things from God | I obey God to get God – to delight in and resemble him |
| When circumstances in my life go wrong, I am angry at God or myself, since I believe anyone who is good deserves a comfortable life. | When circumstances in my life go wrong, I struggle, but I know all my punishment fell on Jesus and that while God may allow this for my training, he will exercise his Fatherly love within my trial. |
| When I am criticized, I am furious or devastated, because it is critical that I think of myself as a 'good person'. Threats to that self-image must be destroyed at all costs | When I am criticized, I struggle, but it is not essential for me to think of myself as a 'good person.' My identity is not built on my record or my performance but on God's love for me in Christ |
| My prayer life consists largely of petition, and it only heats up when I am in a time of need. My main purpose in prayer is the environment | My prayer life consists of generous stretches of praise and adoration. My main purpose is fellowship with God |
| My self-view swings between two poles. If and when I am living up to my standards, | My self view is not based on my moral achievement. In Christ I am |

| | |
|---|---|
| I feel confident, but then I am prone to be proud and unsympathetic to failing people. If and when I am not living up to standards, I feel humble but not confident – I feel like a failure | simultaneously sinful and lost, yet accepted in Christ. I am so bad he had to die for me, and I am so loved that he was glad to die for me. This leads me to deep humility and confidence at the same time |
| My identity and self-worth are based mainly on how hard I work, or how moral I am – and so I must look down on those I perceive as lazy or immoral | My identity and self-worth are centred on the one who died for me. I am saved by sheer grace, so I can't look down on those who believe or practice something different from me. Only by grace I am what I am |

HEART

Look through the chart again and circle anything that you particularly relate to.

HEAD

We see a final trait in the story. The younger brother recognises his need and can joyfully accept grace as a gift. The older brother is furious at the idea of grace... it is an affront to his belief that you must earn favour to be accepted.

Jesus told another story, about how grace affects our practices of faith.

Read Luke 18:9-14.

The word 'justified' means to be right in the eyes of God. The opposite of being justified is being condemned. In Jesus' story the self-righteous religious person, confident of their goodness, and looking down on everyone else is condemned. It is the person who goes to God in repentance who goes home with a right relationship with God.

Keller says that a Christian 'doesn't only repent of their bad things, but also the reason we did our good things.' That is: it isn't just bad behaviour that we repent of, but of self-righteousness as well.

The grace of God always brings us back to Jesus. Whether we are caught in rebellious sin running away from God, or caught in legalistic, self-righteousness, Jesus came to die for us so we can relate to God through his grace.

Has anything in this study changed the way that you see Christianity?

Do you have a sense of being accepted with God? Why or why not?

In the second parable, the Pharisee was quick to look down on other people for their sin. Is there are particular sin or category of sinner that you look down on? Do you need to repent of the way that you have treated/thought of/spoken about someone in particular?

HANDS... PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE THIS WEEK

Put both of the stories that Jesus told in your own words and commit them to memory. Find someone this week and tell them one or both of the stories. Ask them what they think.

Listen to the old hymn: When I Survey the Wondrous Cross on Spotify or Youtube (Chelsea Moon has a nice version). Listen to how the writer describes the effect of the cross on our self-righteousness:

*“When I survey the wondrous cross
On which the prince of glory died
My riches gain, I count but loss
And pour contempt on all my pride”*

“We don’t just repent of our bad things, but the reason we did our good things.” Ask the Holy Spirit to show you this week if there any areas of hidden rebellion, or self-righteousness in your life. Confess these to a trusted Christian brother or sister.

RESOURCES TO EXPLORE FURTHER

The Prodigal God by Timothy Keller

Gospel in Life: Session 2 – Heart by Timothy Keller

Enjoying God; Chapter 13 by Tim Chester

SESSION 4 – WHO ARE WE?

INTRO

If someone asked you what the most significant thing about you is, what would you say?

HEAD

When someone puts their faith in Jesus there are many blessings that are given to us as a gift. Perhaps the most profound and deep change is that we are given a new identity.

A religious tendency is to think like this:

We do religious or moral stuff...
therefore, we are accepted by God...
then he will bless us.

This is a very transactional way of seeing faith. On the other hand, the Christian gospel reverses that 'who' story.

Because of what Jesus has done for us:

God has immensely blessed us (through Jesus)...
therefore, we are accepted by God through grace...
we respond in obedience out of grateful joy.

If you recall in the previous session, the rebellious son goes back home begging to be accepted as a slave... unexpectedly, and completely undeservedly, the father runs out and brings him back with all the rights, privileges and joys of a son. When we put our faith in Jesus, we are given a new identity. The New Testament has many ways to describe our new identity. Today we are going to look at three: **children, servants and ambassadors of God.**

When someone puts their faith in God, they become a **child of God.**

Read John 1:9-13.

This is an astounding claim. It might sound arrogant, except that it only comes to us through faith, and through grace. If we have received Jesus, we are children of God. John reiterates it in his letter 1 John.

Read 1 John 3:1-3.

The idea in the Bible is that we share in the sonship of Jesus. At his baptism, God the Father declared:

'You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.'

Anyone who has put their faith in Jesus can be sure that God looks at them as a beloved son or daughter.

As part of this family, we learn to love like the Father and the Son. Paul writes in Ephesians 5:1-2:

¹ Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children ² and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

Notice the order:

Because of Jesus...

we are accepted as children of God...

and therefore, we live a life of love

HEART

Do you feel accepted by God? Are you confident that he loves you?
Why or why not?

HEAD

The second way our identity changes is we see ourselves as **servants of God**. One of the biggest challenges that the first disciples had was to move from selfishness and ambition to humility and service. Multiple times Jesus had to challenge their view of greatness.

Read Mark 9:33-35.

Read Mark 10:35-45.

The disciples needed to learn that in Jesus' kingdom, greatness isn't a matter of pride, power, or position... but rather of humility and service.

Notice again, the way that our faith in Jesus gives us a new identity:
Jesus gave himself up as a servant for us...
We become servants, following in his way...
He regards our service as greatness.

We serve God, by serving others, in the way of Christ. Paul lays it out for us.

Read Philippians 2:1-11.

HEART

Are there particular ways that you enjoy serving others? Are there particular ways that you are good at serving others?

HEAD

Finally, we become **ambassadors of our King Jesus**. As people who have been reconciled to God, we are given the message of reconciliation to share with the world. Paul explains the simple message of the gospel in Colossians:

Read Colossians 1:21-23.

Now that we have been reconciled to God, we become God's ambassadors, carrying this message to others.

Read 2 Corinthians 5:16-21.

Note again the direction of travel:

We are reconciled to God, through Jesus...

We are now accepted, holy, new creations...

We are now ambassadors, bringing this message of reconciliation to others...

So, who are you? What is the most significant thing about you? Jesus died for you so that you can be a child, a servant, and an ambassador of God.

How confident are you in talking about your faith?

When do you feel closest to God? What do you do to connect with God?

Of these three – child, servant, ambassador – which do you most identify with? Which do you least identify with?

What is the biggest blessing of being a child of God? A servant of God? An ambassador for God?

HANDS... PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE THIS WEEK

Set aside some unstructured time to enjoy being with God. Do something that makes you feel connected with God... enjoy being his child.

Find an opportunity this week to serve someone in a physical way.

Ask God to show you where he is at work in the people around you. Pray for opportunities to talk about your faith in a natural way.

Think about how you would answer the question:

What difference does your faith make?

If someone asked you, what would you say?

RESOURCES TO EXPLORE FURTHER

Faith for Exiles; Practice 1 – by David Kinnaman & Mark Matlock

Stay Salt – Rebecca Manley Pippert

SESSION 5 – HOLINESS

INTRO

How would you define 'holiness'? What images or descriptions come to mind?

HEAD

If you look up the word 'holy' in an English dictionary, you'll find this kind of definition: "*related to a religion or a god; very religious or pure*".

It turns out that holiness is incredibly difficult to define – in fact, holiness doesn't seem to exist by itself at all. This is because all holiness comes from God. God is holy and God is the one who makes things holy. Therefore, we can only understand our holiness if we understand the holiness of God.

The Bible gives us a few glimpses into God's holiness. Break into three groups and spend a few minutes reading through one of these passages each, paying attention to how God's holiness is described:

Exodus 19:16-25.

Isaiah 6:1-5.

Revelation 4:1-11.

HEART

Take turns as a group sharing what you found. How was God's holiness described? Has anything changed in your view of God?

HEAD

Nowhere else in the Bible is God described using three adjectives in a row. Yet in Isaiah and Revelation God is described as 'holy, holy, holy'. The Bible repeats a word like this in the same way that we might say 'good, better, best'... God is absolutely holy. God's holiness is *the* most striking thing about him, and out of God's holiness comes every other attribute – his love, faithfulness, mercy, justice etc. God is who he is because he is completely perfect, utterly pure, and entirely without sin. God is who he is because he is holy.

In the Old Testament, there are places, objects, and clothing that are described as holy. There are whole books of the Bible (like Leviticus) which prescribe laws

and regulations about creating and maintaining holiness. Things can be holy if they are cleansed and purified with the blood of a sacrifice, and if they are set apart for God and his purposes.

But God did something utterly unique, and transformational in the New Testament. God himself came to us in the form of a man – the person of Jesus. Jesus said he came to fulfil the purpose of the Law; he came to deal with our sin, reconcile us to God, and make us holy so we can show God’s character to the world. And Jesus could only do this because he was holy: completely perfect, utterly pure, and entirely without sin.

Through Jesus’ death and resurrection, the penalty for our sin has been paid (Justification), we have been brought from spiritual death to new life (Regeneration), and our hearts have been purified so that God can dwell in us by his Holy Spirit (Sanctification). We receive this as a gift, by putting our faith in Jesus.

God’s purpose is that we would be transformed into the image of Jesus. God wants his *people* to be holy. God’s will for his people has always been that we become holy as he is holy. God wants us to be perfect, pure, and without sin; a people who are set apart by the way we live and who model God’s character to the world.

HEART

Have you considered holiness to be a key purpose for your life?

HEAD

Peter writes this in 1 Peter 1:14-16:

¹⁴ As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. ¹⁵ But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; ¹⁶ for it is written: ‘Be holy, because I am holy.

Later, this is how Peter describes us in 1 Peter 2:9-10:

⁹ But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. ¹⁰ Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

So how do we become holy like God? Firstly, we are made holy by the sacrifice of Jesus.

Read Colossians 1:21-22.

Holiness is something we are given through Jesus' sacrifice for us. We are holy because of what Jesus has done.

Secondly, we grow in holiness by repenting of our old way of life and putting on the new self.

Read Ephesians 4:17-24.

“The Bible presents holiness as both given to us and asked of us. It says, ‘In Christ, you are made holy. Now be holy’” - Jen Wilkin

Thirdly, we grow more in holiness as we worship Jesus.

Read 2 Corinthians 3:17-18.

One of the facts of worship (and why idolatry is so awful) is that we grow more into the image of the thing that we worship.

“God’s will for our lives is that we conform to the image of Christ, whose incarnation shows us humanity perfectly conformed to the image of God” - Jen Wilkin

So, we receive holiness through faith, we grown in holiness through repentance, and we are transformed into the image of Jesus, through worship.

God chose us and set us apart for his purposes. Jesus died for us so that we might be cleansed, purified, and made holy. The Holy Spirit dwells in us so that we can be transformed and made more holy. As we see more and more who God is in worship, we grow to be more like him.

Heart

What is the attribute of God that most stands out to you? What most attracts you to God?

Have you seen yourself grow in holiness? If so, what changed?

Is confession and repentance of sin something you regularly do? When you are made aware of your sin, do you find it easy to repent and accept God's forgiveness, or is this something you struggle with?

"True holiness, we surely ought to remember, does not consist merely of inward sensations and impressions... It is something of 'the image of Christ', which can be seen and observed by others *in our private life and habits and character and doings*". - J.C. Ryle

Are you guilty of striving for a 'spiritual' holiness without changing how you live? Are there any areas of 'practical holiness' in your life that you need to grow in?

HANDS... PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE THIS WEEK

Pick one aspect of God's character:

Loving

Good

Just

Merciful

Gracious

Faithful

Patient

Truthful

Wise

Do a study through the Bible to see this part of His character. The Bible Gateway app/website can help you search in the Bible and find the relevant passages. Does seeing this attribute in God help you desire and grow this for yourself?

Galatians 5:22-23 says:

... *the fruit of the [Holy] Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³gentleness and self-control.*

Which of these fruits can you most see in your life? Which is most lacking? Give thanks to God for the good fruit and ask the Spirit to bear more fruit in your life.

Over the next week spend some time reading through Jesus' Sermon on the Mount and reflect on what this teaches us about living holy lives which reflect God's character to the world (chapters 5-7 of Matthew).

Repentance and confession of sin is a vital part of growing in holiness. Spend some time this week doing one (or more) of the following:

- Read Psalm 32, Psalm 51, or Psalm 130. You might like to spend time meditating on the words or praying through them. You might like to sing

through the Psalms. Bring to God those sins you need to confess, and any areas of your life in which you need to grow in holiness.

- Take some time out to journal and pray through any areas of sin in your life you struggle with. Ask God to forgive you and work in you by the Spirit to help you put this sin to death.
- Meet up with a trusted, believing friend or family member and spend some time confessing your sin to them. Pray together afterwards, asking God to forgive you and work in you by the Spirit to grow you in holiness. You might like to ask this friend to check in on you to see how you are going.

RESOURCES TO EXPLORE FURTHER

Holier Than Thou: How God's Holiness Helps us Trust Him by Jackie Hill Perry

Holiness by J.C. Ryle.

In His Image: 10 Ways God Calls us to Reflect His Character by Jen Wilkin.

The Bible Project's video on holiness:

<https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/holiness/>

SESSION 6 – READING THE BIBLE

INTRO

Have you ever followed a GPS and found that it gave you wrong directions? We know the importance of a reliable guide to navigate by. What do you use to navigate through life? What do you use to navigate faith?

HEAD

The book of Psalms is a collection of songs that ancient Israel used in their worship. The first psalm opens with a vivid description of two ways to live.

Read Psalm 1.

One description of life is temporary, weightless, meaningless and blows away... Chaff that blows away in the wind. The other description of life is solid, grounded, stable and bears good fruit... A tree planted by streams of water.

The psalmist says the difference is because the person is one who ‘delights in the law of the Lord, and who meditates on it day and night.’

Notice that this isn’t cold, hard, duty... the psalmist *delights* in what God says. It isn’t a quick skim read like scanning a social media feed... the psalmist *meditates* on it. And the result of this delight and attention isn’t a cold, hard, legalistic, existence... it results in life, health and fruitfulness.

If our life were a tree, the Bible is like the water that makes it grow and bear fruit. For Christians, the Bible has formed a vital part of daily rhythms of faith and worship. The Bible shows us who God is, and what he is like. It shows us who we are and our need of salvation. It reminds us of all the things that God has done for us, and the promises he has made to us. And it gives us instruction about how to live. Most importantly, it tells us and reminds us of what God did for us through Jesus.

One of the tricky things about reading the Bible is that it is a collection of writings, from a bunch of different authors, written over thousands of years, using a bunch of different genres. The Bible spans different languages, cultures and time periods. Part of the challenge is to understand ‘where in the story’ each part of the Bible comes in.

Despite this, there is a remarkable unity throughout the Bible. Christians believe that although the Bible was written by human authors, God inspired them through the Holy Spirit, and the Bible is his word to us. It is living and active and can still transform lives today. Each part contributes to a *big* story with Jesus at its centre.

At one point in John's gospel, Jesus confronts some Bible experts of his day and says that they have missed the point:

³⁹ *You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me,* ⁴⁰ *yet you refuse to come to me to have life. – John 5:39-40*

Don't be put off if the Bible is an unfamiliar book. The best thing to do is to jump in and read it. The more you read it, the more connections you will make. However, if you haven't read the Bible, we suggest you begin with one of the accounts of Jesus' life (Matthew, Mark, Luke or John at the start of the New Testament), and then circle back to the Old Testament. *God's Big Picture*, listed below, is a great guide to get the big overarching story and figure out where each bit fits in.

HEART

Do you have a favourite verse, passage or story from the Bible? What is it, and why is it meaningful to you?

HEAD

Why do Christians continue to come back to the Bible and make it a part of their faith? One reason is that we believe in the power of what God says.

Read Isaiah 55:8-11.

In Genesis, God creates through the power of his word. And his word continues to have an effect today. As people who have put their trust in God, we are eager to hear what he says. God's word doesn't just stay in our minds. It also has an effect in our lives.

Paul talks about the power and the purpose of God's word, and how we are to use it in our lives.

Read 2 Timothy 3:14-16.

It makes us wise for salvation, it corrects us and trains us in righteousness, and it equips us to do good works. The Bible isn't merely to be read and understood... it is to be obeyed. Each of us will face decisions where the Bible is clear about things that need to change in our life, and we need to decide whether or not to obey. James talks about the kind of reader who reads and understands the Bible but doesn't let it change their lives.

Read James 1:22-25.

HEART

Have there been times where you trusted what the Bible says even though it has been hard? What was the end result?

A final word about reading the Bible: To read with faith is to put ourselves under the authority of what God says. We wrestle with it, ask questions, discover things we hadn't noticed before, find parts that are uncomfortable for us. All of that is natural... but ultimately, to live in faith is to put ourselves under the authority of what the Bible says... not put the Bible under our authority.

The theologian J. I. Packer suggested that there are three sources of authority that we can rely on:

- We can trust in something subjective (our own reason or feelings).
- We can trust in history or tradition (the teachings or practices of an institution or tradition).
- We can trust in the revelation of scripture (what God has revealed about himself, and about us, in his word).

As Christians we do consider our feelings and reason recognising that these are good gifts that God has given us. We do listen to tradition and history recognising that God has given wisdom to people in the past, and sometimes we need the wisdom of previous generations. But our ultimate authority is the revelation that God has given us in the scriptures. Packer writes:

"... the Church must seek, first, to expound Scripture and second, to reform its belief and practice, where these have erred, by the biblical teaching. This is the theological method which Christ commands His Church to follow: to use Scripture as the rule of faith and life."

That isn't always a straightforward exercise, and Christian of good faith can wrestle and come to different conclusions about some matters. But a recognition that the Bible is our authority, and that we come under it, allows for common ground to both wrestle with, and practice our faith together.

In an age of information overload, we are bombarded with thousands of messages every day, all of which influence us. We need to space to hear the Bible, listen to what it says about God and about us, wrestle with it in Christian community, and put it into practice.

Then we can be like a tree by a stream of living water, standing firm in the dry times, and bearing good fruit in season.

HEART

Do you have a daily rhythm of Bible reading? Are there things that you have found helpful you could share with the group?

An old puritan writer, John Bunyan, wrote this:

I have sometimes seen more in a line of the Bible, than I could well tell how to stand under; and yet at another time, the whole Bible hath been to me as dry as a stick; or rather, my heart hath been so dead and dry unto it, that I could not conceive the refreshment, though I have looked it all over.

Can you relate to what Bunyan says? Have you experienced the dryness of scripture? Have you experienced its power or beauty?

Do you feel confident that you understand the big story of the Bible? Could you summarise it briefly?

How do you feel about coming under the authority of the Bible? Are you willing to obey even if it feels hard?

HANDS... PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE THIS WEEK

Sit down with your weekly schedule and put in some time to have a daily time reading the Bible. Think about:

- Are you freshest in the morning or in the evening?
- When can you be still, quiet, and have some uninterrupted time?
- Are there some things that you need to cut out or reduce to make space for the Bible (eg. social media, mobile gaming, podcasts, media consumption)?

Be realistic about what you can do, gracious as you get going, and think about a regular planned time, rather than a perfect time. Try to be consistent for a few weeks and set a good habit.

Commit to a Bible reading plan. Having a plan helps you to read widely (rather than just your favourite bits) and it can be amazing the way that different passages complement each other. There are many plans on the YouVersion Bible App, or Pastor Matt has some good old-fashioned paper plans you could follow. Try not to go from 'zero to hero', but rather set a good, steady habit that you can commit to and engage with deeply.

Try memorising a verse, or a passage. This gives you the blessing of having some of the Bible with you wherever you are, and it helps you to meditate on it deeply.

To memorise a verse:

Read it out aloud 5-10 times.

Cover it and repeat it out aloud 5-10 times until it is in your memory. You might find you need to double check it.

Once you have memorised it, repeat it to yourself a few times during the day.

To memorise a passage:

Follow the above process for the first verse on day 1.

On day 2, memorise verse 2 with the process above, and then repeat verse 1-2 together.

On day 3, memorise verse 3, then repeat verse 1-3 together.

You will be surprised how quickly you can memorise a significant portion of the Bible.

Everything is better with a friend! Invite one or two people to read the Bible with you. Set a time that you can all make, get together, choose a part of the Bible and read it. Heidi has put together a reading guide with some question prompts that you can use to read the Bible with someone else.

RESOURCES TO EXPLORE FURTHER

God's Big Picture: A Bible Overview by Vaughan Roberts

The Field Guide to the Bible: Making Sense of an Ancient Book with Really Tiny Font

The *Bible Project* Channel on Youtube has excellent introduction videos for each book of the Bible.

The *Verses* Channel on Spotify or Youtube has some great songs with Bible verses to help Bible memorisation and meditation on scripture.

<https://www.youtube.com/@Listentoverses/releases>

The *YouVersion Bible App* is a great, easy to use Bible app for apple and android, and features a bunch of Bible reading plans.

'Fundamentalism' and the Word of God by J. I. Packer

Women of the Word by Jen Wilkin

SESSION 7 – PRAYER

INTRO

Have you ever seen a relationship deepen and grow without regular, thoughtful communication? Why/why not?

HEAD

As we read the life of Jesus in the gospels, it's clear that he lived in prayerful dependence upon his Heavenly Father. Jesus prayed in and before significant moments (his baptism, Luke 3:21; appointing his apostles, Luke 6:12-13; the transfiguration, Luke 9:28; the garden of Gethsemane, Mark 14:32-35). He set aside times for prayer. He prayed for people (the little children in Matthew 19:13). He took times to go and be alone to pray (Matthew 14:23, Luke 11:1). It was after one of these times that the disciples asked Jesus to teach them how to pray.

One of the most significant sections of teaching on prayer that Jesus gave is found in the sermon on the mount.

Read Matthew 6:5-15.

Firstly, in verse 5-6 there is a warning about hypocrisy. Prayer isn't a show of piety that we put on for others to see. It is a conversation with God who hears us, and sees what we do in secret, and will reward faithful prayer. This doesn't mean we should never pray with others or pray so others can't hear (otherwise we would never join a prayer meeting or pray in church). But it does mean we should commit to times of personal prayer, and we should guard against putting on a religious show for others, rather than genuinely talking to God.

Secondly, in verse 7-8 there is a warning about 'babbling on'. Prayer isn't about the quantity of words (i.e. whipping ourselves up into a religious frenzy), or even the quality of the words (i.e. using the 'correct' religious language). We come to a Father who knows everything we need and is delighted when we simply bring our requests to him.

Thirdly, in verse 14-15 there is a warning about unforgiveness. It seems that a bitter, unforgiving spirit can poison our prayer life. In the Lord's prayer we ask that 'God would forgive us as we forgive others.' If you want to think about this further, check out 'The Parable of the Unmerciful Servant' in Matthew 18:21-35.

Do you believe that prayer is important? Does your time spent in prayer back up that conviction?

HEAD

Now let's look at the concerns that Jesus teaches his disciples to pray for in verses 9-13:

⁹ *'This, then, is how you should pray:*

*“Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be 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.”*

This prayer is given as a 'model prayer'. It doesn't mean we have to use these exact words as we pray. But it gives us a model for the concerns we can bring to God in prayer.

We are praying for:

- God to be honoured (verse 9)
- God's kingdom to grow (verse 10)
- God's will to be done on earth just like in heaven (verse 10)
- God would give us what we need (verse 11)
- God would forgive us our sin (verse 12)
- God would forgive others their sin (verse 12)
- God would guard us from temptation (verse 13); and
- God would give us spiritual protection from the devil (verse 13).

That isn't just a nice 'shopping list' of prayer points. It shapes how we see God, his kingdom, his world, our need, our sin, and his care for us. We could spend a lot of time thinking about how each point shapes us as disciples, increases our faith, and the depths we can go to as we pray each point. But for now, it is worth

simply reflecting that Jesus wanted his disciples to pray with these concerns in mind.

Nothing is too big or significant for God's power. Nothing is too small or insignificant for God's care. We can bring all things to him in prayer. But these particular concerns are what Jesus taught his disciples as a model for them to pray.

HEART

How broad are your prayers? How kingdom minded?

How do the concerns in the Lord's Prayer compare to the concerns in your regular times of prayer?

HEAD

One final note about the Lord's Prayer. It begins with two profound words:

Our... Father...

This prayer is a communal prayer. It is shaped around the concerns of a group of people who are following Jesus together (*our* Father, *our* daily bread, *our* sins). When we pray (whether in a group, or alone), we are joining with brothers and sisters in the faith all over the world, and we are thinking bigger than just ourselves.

This prayer is also a prayer to a loving, heavenly Father. Prayer isn't a mechanistic ritual that results in divine favour. It isn't a groveling for the deity's attention or scraps. It isn't trying to get the attention of a cold and distant power.

It is a relationship between a loving, gracious heavenly Father, and a beloved, adopted child of God. It involves reverence and intimacy, respect and love. Jesus tells us that God delights to give his children good gifts (Matthew 7:11). While we are encouraged to be persistent in prayer (Luke 18:1-8). But we have a God who loves us, cares about us, knows what we need, and is eager for us to come to him.

When you approach God in prayer, do you have a sense of being a child coming to a good father? Or do you have a different sense as you approach God?

Are there particular people/concerns/situations that you need God to be at work in?

Spend some time sharing your concerns and praying together as a group. See if you can use the concerns of the Lord's prayer as a model for your group as you pray together.

HANDS... PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE THIS WEEK

Memorise and use the Lord's Prayer as a model for prayer. After each line or phrase, spend some time praying for that concern.

Last session we looked at scheduling time set aside for reading the Bible. Include a time of prayer in this schedule. It can be helpful to pray before reading the Bible for God to show you what he wants you to see in his word. It can be helpful to take what you have just read and let it inform/shape/guide your prayers. Some things to consider are:

- When can you be still, quiet, and have some uninterrupted time?
- Are there some things that you need to cut out or reduce to make space for prayer (e.g. social media, mobile gaming, podcasts, media consumption)?

Everything is better with a friend! Invite one or two people to meet regularly to pray with you. Set a time that you can all make, choose somewhere you are comfortable to pray, get together, share what you would like to pray for... and pray. As you share, make sure that you are leaving a good amount of time for prayer, not just talking.

Be alert for opportunities to pray for others. When someone shares a need or concern, ask if they would like you to pray with them. If they are comfortable, say a brief prayer raising that concern to God. If they are not, let them know you care and will commit to pray for it later. For some people, praying for a need can be a first step to meeting Jesus, and shows that faith and life do connect.

Try 'practicing the presence of God'. When you are unoccupied for a moment, turn your attention to God. Take a moment to praise, thank, confess or ask for something. This isn't about neglecting the other responsibilities we have, or giving focus to other things, but about developing the 'spiritual muscle' of being aware of God's presence in our day.

Read some of the prayers that Paul prays, or encourages disciples to pray, in his letters:

- Colossians 1:9-14
- Colossians 4:2-6
- Ephesians 1:15-23
- Ephesians 3:14-21
- 2 Thessalonians 1:3-12
- 2 Thessalonians 1:1-12
- 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13
- Philippians 1:9-11
- Romans 15:14-33

How do Paul's concerns in prayer connect with the concerns in the Lords' Prayer?

RESOURCES TO EXPLORE FURTHER

A Praying Life: Connecting with God in a Distracted World by Paul E. Miller.

Praying Together by Megan Hill.

A Praying Church: Becoming a People of Hope in a Discouraging World by Paul E. Miller.

The Practice of the Presence of God by Brother Laurence.

SESSION 8 – CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

INTRO

In *Gospel in Life* Tim Keller says:

“We will not know God, change deeply, or win the world apart from community.”

Do you agree? Why or why not?

HEAD

Faith and community have always gone hand in hand. From the moment that the Holy Spirit came in power at Pentecost, people have been brought into, and transformed into, a loving, serving community. In Acts chapter 2 the Holy Spirit comes in power and the apostles powerfully preach the gospel to a crowd of people.

Read from the end of Peter’s message in Acts 2:40-47.

What a beautiful community! We can see that the grace of God, and the power of the Holy Spirit transformed their lives and formed a loving, serving, generous community. I bet that all of us would like to be part of a similar community.

We need to recognise that we can’t create this community as a goal in itself. This is something born out faith and the power of the Holy Spirit. A. W. Tozer gives a helpful analogy:

“Has it ever occurred to you that one hundred pianos all tuned to the same fork are automatically tuned to each other? They are of one accord by being tuned, not to each other, but to another standard to which each one must individually bow. So, one hundred worshipers met together, each one looking away to Christ, are in heart nearer to each other than they could possibly be, were they to become ‘unity’ conscious and turn their eyes away from God to strive for closer fellowship.”

The theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer says it even more strongly:

“Those who love their dream of a Christian community more than they love the Christian community itself become destroyers of that Christian community even though their personal intentions may be ever so honest, earnest and sacrificial. God hates this wishful dreaming because it makes the dreamer proud and pretentious. Those who dream of this idealised

community demand that it be fulfilled by God, by others and by themselves. They enter the community of Christians with their demands set up by their own law and judge one another and God accordingly. It is not we who build. Christ builds the church.

HEART

Look again at the community in Acts 2: 40-47. What kind of evidence of God's grace do you see in their lives? How does it compare to the fruit in your own life?

HEAD

Christian community is created, sustained and grown as each individual responds to Jesus, submits to him, and learns to follow him in the way we treat one another. In Philippians 2, Paul talks about the humble descent that Jesus made to the cross, out of obedience to his Heavenly Father:

*⁶ who, being in very nature God,
did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own
advantage;*

*⁷ rather, he made himself nothing
by taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness.*

*⁸ And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself
by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!*

*⁹ Therefore God exalted him to the highest place
and gave him the name that is above every name,*

*¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,*

*¹¹ and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.*

It is startling, though, to read the verses that immediately precede this glorious picture of what Jesus has done for us:

Therefore, if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, ² then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. ³ Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value

others above yourselves, ⁴ not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

⁵ In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus...

HEART

What do you find encouraging about being part of a Christian community? What do you find hard?

HEAD

The New Testament has lots to say about how we live together as followers of Jesus. In fact, it isn't really possible to embody most of the New Testament without being a part of Christian community. The most profound picture of Christian community is found in 1 Corinthians, the picture of the body:

Read 1 Corinthians 12:12-27.

This is part of a wider section that Paul writes about love and spiritual gifts. Notice three things:

Firstly, we can't exclude others who are not like us (see verses 21-22). While we have a natural tendency to exclude people who are not like us, God is the one who makes the body. If someone has put their faith in Jesus, even if they are different, they belong.

Secondly, we can't exclude ourselves if we feel like we are not like others (see verses 15-16). While we have a natural tendency to look for communities of people who are similar to us, we can't 'opt out' of a Christian community because we are different. We naturally want to find a church full of people who are like us, or people we like, but God is the one who makes the body and includes each one by his grace.

Thirdly, we are joined together in our joys and sorrows (verse 26). Being a Christian community means you rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. We are connected and care about others who are going through different things than we are.

All of these elements cut against an individualistic culture where relationships are transactional. A worldly view of community is that 'I will take part as long as I get what I want out of it, and the cost (time, effort, money, discomfort) are not too high'. But a Christian community says 'you have all been joined to Christ and brought into a community through his grace... we now have responsibility to serve and love one another in mutual dependence'.

HEART

What contribution do you think you make to the body of Christ?

Are you ever tempted to exclude others from the body of Christ? Are you ever tempted to exclude yourself?

HEAD

It is easy to see the beauty of a Christian community that is functioning well. You probably have stories of Christian communities that didn't work at all. The gospel always challenges our sin, calls us to repentance, and to change.

In a lot of ways, Christian community acts like a 'greenhouse' which accelerates our growth by exposing the areas of our life where we still need to grow, and hopefully nurturing grace and holiness in us. Whilst community is costly, and difficult, it is one of the ways that we show the costly, difficult love of Christ to each other, and to demonstrate it to the world.

HEART

Do you have any unreconciled relationships with a Christian brother or sister in your community that you need to repair or reconcile (if it is safe or appropriate to do so)?

What practices make a good, strong, healthy Christian community? How can you / your group contribute to making a stronger, healthier community?

Read Colossians 3:12-17 out aloud as an encouragement to persevere in faith and community.

HANDS... PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE THIS WEEK

You can't connect deeply with a community without committing to it. Commit yourself to worship with the church community on Sunday. Commit yourself to gather with a connect group and/or discipleship triplet mid-week. Think about when these groups meet and commit yourself to be there.

Write a list of Christian brothers or sisters that you are closest to. Write them down and incorporate praying for them into your rhythms of prayer.

Think of a Christian brother or sister that you would like to connect with more. Pick up the phone and make a time to catch up. Before you meet, ask God to help you encourage that person, and be open to where the conversation might go.

Think of a couple of people who have encouraged, grown or blessed you in your faith. Find a way to thank them (note, text, call, etc.). Take a moment to thank God for bringing them into your life and ask God to help you be that for someone else.

RESOURCES TO EXPLORE FURTHER

Life Together by Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Need to Know, Chapter 5 by Gary Millar

Gospel in Life; Session 4 by Timothy Keller