

COMMUNITY GROUP STUDIES

YOU CAN THRIVE



GROWING UP IN CHRIST



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Imagine that you have two plants. One of the plants you water, prune, fertilise, and place in the sunlight. Day by day, as you watch this plant, what do you imagine is going to happen? It's going to thrive.

Now imagine you have another plant. This plant you're going to neglect. You're not going to water it. You're going to keep it out of sunlight and let weeds grow around it. What do you think is going to happen? It will begin to slowly wither and die. One plant growing and bearing fruit because of the attention you give it. The other one shrivelling up and dying because it's neglected.

This illustration comes straight from the Word of God. In Psalm 1 the Blessed person is the one who feeds on God's word and is therefore "like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers." That's the picture. And Jesus uses the same picture in John 15. He says to his followers: "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit." But then he also says: "If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers."

// God has designed us for growth, and through his Holy Spirit he is growing us to be more and more like his Son Jesus everyday.

Followers of Jesus are either growing in Jesus, becoming more or more like him, or we're withering. We neglect our growth at our peril. But God wants us to grow and produce fruit. He wants us to thrive as his people. And the good news is, in Jesus he has given us all the resources we need to do exactly that. God has designed us for growth, and through his Holy Spirit he is growing us to be more and more like his Son Jesus everyday.

That's what this 10 week series is all about. How we can grow up in Christ through the Holy Spirit. We'll consider together the means God gives us to grow us. We'll uncover some of the fruit of Christian maturity and how we can be pursuing it in our own lives and as a community.

No matter who you are we invite you to thrive in Christ.



Repentance



Leaning on
God's word



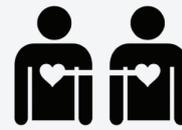
Dependence
and Devotion



Humility



Sincerity and
Integrity



Costly Love



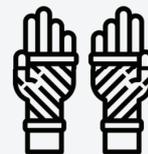
Generosity



Building Up
the Body



Sharing the
Gospel



Suffering for
the Gospel

WEEK 1
REPENTANCE



STUDY QUESTIONS

What is sin? How would you describe "sin"?

Look at the following passages. How does the Bible describe sin and its consequences?

Genesis 3:1-19

Mark 7:20-23

Romans 6:23

Read Psalm 51.

What are some of the words King David uses to describe his sin?

What are some of the words which describe David's response to his sin and what he wants to see happen to it?

On a scale from 1-5 how serious do you consider sin to be in your life?

HOW JESUS LIVED IT

How do we see how serious God takes sin in the death of Jesus on the cross? Have a look at the following passages:

Isaiah 53

John 1:29

2 Corinthians 5:21

1 Peter 2:24

If sin is that serious, has serious consequences in our lives and God takes it that seriously, then it will require a serious response from us.

A LIFESTYLE OF REPENTANCE

Describe repentance in your own words:

STUDY QUESTIONS

How do these authors describe repentance?

"Regret is not a proactive feeling. It is situated in disappointment, sorrow, even remorse. It merely wishes things were different without an act to cause a difference. However, repentance is different. Repentance is an admission of, hatred of, and turning away from sin before God." Monica Johnson

"The mystery of the Christian life is that Christ expects us to flee sin and the devil, but does not expect us to rid ourselves of either on this side of glory. Repentance is a way of life, and so is the pursuit of godliness." Kevin de Young

Jesus commanded his followers to "Repent and believe in the gospel" (Mark 1:14). How do repentance AND faith go hand in hand? Why do you think this is important? Can you think of any examples of this?

HOW WE CAN GROW IN IT

THOMAS WATSON AND THE SIX MARKS OF REPENTANCE

1. Sight of Sin

Do you see sin in your own life? How might you learn to see sin more clearly?

2. Sorrow over Sin

Are you experiencing sorrow over sin? Do you experience "holy agony" (as Watson puts it)? Does your heart bleed, not just for the sin you commit (and feel the consequences of), but also for the sin you harbour in your heart?

3. Confession of Sin (putting sin to death)

Do you voluntarily confess your sin to God? Do you feel the weight of sin in your life and yearn to be free from it? Do you confess with the resolution not to do it again? How ruthless are you with your sin? How quick are you in dealing with it?

4. Shame of Sin

Are you genuinely ashamed before God for your sin?

5. Hatred of Sin

What is your attitude toward sin? Do you loathe sin? Do you make excuses for it? "Christ is never loved till sin be loathed. Sound repentance begins in the love of God and ends in the hatred of sin." Watson

6. Turning from Sin

Are you actively turning from sin? Are you entering into the life that Christ has prepared for you, in turning from sin to life in His name?

"When we repent of our sin, when we die to our sin, we are also saying yes to God's ways for our lives. We are unleashing His resurrection power in our lives, bringing us new life (Romans 6:1-14). We cannot be committed to a life of sin AND a life of righteousness. Each will consume the other."
Thomas Watson.

What area of repentance do you find easiest? Which area do you find the hardest?

How have you experienced the power of repentance in your own life?

What would it look like for you to try out repentance this week? Set a challenge for everyone in your group to give it a go for a week, and report back next week about what changed for you.

If there was one thing you wanted God to change in your heart when it comes to repentance, what would it be? Pray together for these things.

WEEK 2

LEANING ON GOD'S WORD



II TIMOTHY
is committed to thy trust, avoid-
ing profane and vain babblings,
and oppositions of science falsely
so called.

21 Which some professing have

THE SECOND EPISTLE OF PAUL THE APOSTLE
TO

TIMOTHY

CHAPTER 1

PAUL, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, according to the promise of life which is in Christ Jesus,

2 To Timothy, my dearly beloved son: Grace, mercy, and peace, from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.

3 I thank God, whom I serve from my forefathers with pure conscience, that without ceasing I have remembrance of thee in my prayers night and day.

4 Greatly desiring to see thee, being mindful of thy tears, that I may be filled with joy.

5 When I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that in thee also.

6 Wherefore I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the gift of God, which is in thee by the putting on of my hands.

7 For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.

8 Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner: but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God;

9 Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began.

10 But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel:

11 Whereunto I am appointed a preacher, and an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles.

12 For the which cause I also suffer these things; nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.

13 Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus.

14 That good thing which was committed unto thee keep by the Holy Ghost which dwelleth in us.

15 This thou knowest, that all they which are in Asia be turned away from me; of whom are Phylageus and Hieronymus.

16 The Lord give mercy unto the house of Onesiphorus; for he oft refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chain:

17 As he sought me out very diligently, and found me.

18 The Lord grant unto him that he may find mercy of the Lord in that day: and in how me at Ephesus, thou knowest very well.

CHAPTER 2

THOU therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

2 And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.

3 Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.

4 No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier.

5 And if a man also strive for masteries, yet is he not crowned, except he strive lawfully.

6 The husbandman that laboureth must be first partaker of the fruits.

7 Consider what I say; and the Lord give thee understanding in all things.

8 Remember that Jesus Christ of the seed of David was raised from the dead according to my gospel:

9 Wherein I suffer trouble, as an evildoer, even unto bonds; but for the elect's sakes, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.

11 *It is a faithful saying:* For if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him:

12 *If we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us;*

13 *If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself.*

14 Of these things put them in remembrance, charging them before the Lord that they strive not about words to no profit, but to the subverting of the hearers.

15 Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

16 But shun profane and vain babblings: for they will increase unto more ungodliness.

17 And their word will eat as doth a canker of whom is Hymanus; and Philetus;

18 Who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already; and overthrow the faith of some.

19 Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity.

20 But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some to honour, and some to dishonour.

21 If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work.

22 Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart.

23 But foolish and unlearned questions avoid, knowing that they do gender strifes.

24 And the servant of the Lord
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STUDY QUESTIONS

Sometimes God can feel so distant. Like he's not interested in you. Like you don't know what he wants you to do. Like maybe he's not even really there.

Do you ever feel like that? Can you share your experience?

Do you ever wish God would actually just talk to you? How would that help?

HOW JESUS LIVED IT

God knows he's distant from us. We're distant because all humanity rejected God from the beginning. But the Bible is the story of God breaking down that distance and restoring relationship...

Read John 1:1-4 and 1:14-18. What's the problem mentioned at the start of v18?

How does Jesus, the "Word", solve that problem?

Jewish people thought they knew God through the law of Moses (Genesis to Deuteronomy) and the rest of the Old Testament which flows from that. Since Christians are meant to be growing more like Jesus Christ, let's see how Jesus himself used the Old Testament.

Read John 5:37-47. Jesus claims the whole Old Testament was always leading up to and pointing somewhere. To what or whom does it all point?

While the Old Testament was written before Jesus, the New Testament was written after, by his first followers and their co-workers. Read John 16:6-15 where Jesus is telling them he's about to leave them, headed for the cross, resurrection and ascension to

STUDY QUESTIONS

heaven.

Is it really better for us that Jesus returned to his Father instead of staying with his followers? What do you think?

HOW WE CAN GROW IN IT

Jesus is the “Word”, God’s self-communication to humanity. Jesus himself said that the Bible, both Old and New Testament, is God’s word about Jesus. So reading the Bible is where we see and hear God in Jesus. It’s how we meet with God himself.

Does that make you want to read the Bible more?

How do you think it would help your relationship with God if each day you heard him speak to you about Jesus from the Bible?

To most of us, the Bible can seem big, complex, old and foreign. It can be daunting. **If know-how is a barrier, the little 3-step guide could be a good place to start.** You don’t need to have all the answers before you can encounter God in Jesus as you read the Bible.

Read Relate Respond

For each Bible passage, whether it’s telling a story or making an argument, all you need to do is read, relate and respond. A handful of questions at each step can help you do that...

Read

1. What words and ideas are repeated or emphasised in this passage?
2. If it’s a story, what are the characters’ motivations, actions and consequences?
3. If it’s an argument, what are the logical steps to the

conclusion?

4. How is this passage relevant within the book it's a part of?
5. What main point is this story or argument trying to make?

Relate

1. If it's a story, where does it fit in the Bible's storyline from creation to new creation?
2. If it's an argument, which stage of the Bible's storyline does it aim at directly?
3. What kind of problems does this passage point to in people and the world?
4. What does this reveal to you about God in Jesus?

Respond

1. What practical difference would this passage have made for the original audience?
2. What sins should you confess to God?
3. What should you praise God for?
4. What should you specifically do differently and ask God to help you change?

For the next 3 weeks, commit to at least 5 minutes a day—maybe when you first wake up, maybe on the way to work--to read, relate and respond to one small section of John at a time (since we've just read a bit of John together already). Why not try it and see what happens?

If time and energy are short, literally just 5 minutes a day can make a powerful difference in your relationship with God. If motivation is lacking, hopefully this study has helped! It can also help to just get started. Not every daily reading will be an experience of seeing and hearing God in Jesus. But some will be. And once you've experienced that yourself, you'll want more. So why not try this over the next 3 weeks?

If there was one thing you wanted God to change in your heart when it comes to God's Word, what would it be? Pray together for these things.

WEEK 3
THANKFUL
DEPENDENCE AND
DEVOTION



STUDY QUESTIONS

How would you describe prayer?

How would you describe your prayer life?

HOW JESUS LIVED IT

“Jesus died and rose from the dead in victory over sin, so that all who trust in Him—no matter who you are, no matter what you’ve done—can be reconciled with God and experience deep relationship with God. You can walk with God. You can experience deep relationship, closeness and intimacy with God. He has designed you for closeness with Himself. You were made to walk with God. And Jesus came to make that possible for you so don’t settle for anything less in your life than intimacy, closeness and walking with God. You were made for this. This is the key to thriving in this world. It makes sense—you walk with God, the One Who created you, loves you and designed you for life.”

David Platt

Is this how you would describe your relationship with God? Why or why not?

Why do we find prayer so hard?

What prayer is NOT. **Read Matthew 6:5-8** to see an example.

STUDY QUESTIONS

What prayer is...

Prayer is asking God to come through on what He has promised

For examples: Genesis 4:26, Genesis 50:24, Exodus 2:23.

Can you think of some of God's other promises?

Pray flows out of the overflow of the Father's delight in the Son

(Matthew 3:17)

"The reason why God created the world and is now redeeming the world is to share his delight in his Son. God created us to be his children, and he recreates us as his children out of the overflow of his love and joy." Tim Chester

How does this truth change the way we look at prayer?

God our Father loves to hear and answer our prayers (Luke 11:2; 5-13)

Prayer is the act of a child asking his or her father for help (Luke 10:21)

Prayer is an awareness of our need and a confidence in our heavenly Father's kindness and love

Prayer is not about getting something but knowing someone.

Loving and enjoying someone. The heart of prayer is what happens when you're in the room alone—just you and God the Father in heaven.

HOW WE CAN GROW IN IT

How does Jesus encourage us to pray? **Read Luke 11:1-4.**

P: Praise

R: Repent

A: Ask

Y: Yield

P.R.A.Y Spend some time doing that right now (you might even like to write down your prayers under the headings above). Decide on how long you are going to pray for. Then dedicate how long you are going to pray for in each section. Now pray.

Identify one step forward that you can take in your life regarding prayer this month, starting today. We're all at different points in our relationship with God, but we can all take one step forward, one step deeper.

WEEK 4

HUMILITY



STUDY QUESTIONS

Can you picture someone right now who's particularly humble? Who are they and can you describe them to the group?

From a historical perspective, humility as a virtue is relatively unique to our time and culture. Why do you think we as a society view humility as such an ethically beautiful way to live?

Humility is the act of choosing, in love, to lower yourself for the sake of others. It is to use your power to empower others, in other words, to "exercise power in service of others."

What do you think of this definition of humility?

HOW JESUS LIVED IT

Read Philippians 2:1-11.

Historians will say that Philippians 2 is the first real account of humility (as we know it today) being promoted as a virtue to be pursued. It is a uniquely Christian concept.

What does that tell us about the uniqueness of God? What kind of God is he?

Why is there such an emphasis on the Philippians' mind (v. 2-5)?

Read vv. 3-4 again. What would our community look like if we could perfectly live out these words – use your imagination!

Trace the arc of humility & exaltation in vv. 4-10. What stands out to you?

STUDY QUESTIONS

Read Luke 4:1-13.

There's a lot going on in this scene, but the main point is that Satan tempts Jesus to use his power for his own benefit. Jesus could gain the world without going to the cross and suffering on behalf of humanity.

If Jesus had taken Satan up on his offer, how would that have affected human history?

In what ways are you tempted to grasp at things in life instead of humbly relying on your heavenly Father to give to you?

Jesus' death on a cross was proof that greatness can express itself in humility. It is the ultimate expression of lowering yourself for the sake of others. When you're tempted to grab for power instead of humility, how does the death and resurrection of Jesus help you see things more clearly?

HOW WE CAN GROW IN IT

It can be so easy to tell God how we would do things if we were him. In the past, what's helped you keep a humble attitude toward God when you didn't understand what he was up to?

Our own lack of humility toward others is often exposed when we're faced with loving or relating to someone different to us. Who are the people in your life right now who you think aren't worth your time or energy or emotions?

What's one step you can take right now to use your resources (emotional, physical, financial etc) to better love and serve those people you've identified?

Another area that can flag our own lack of humility is when our

insecurities are exposed by people who are more gifted or talented in particular areas we long to excel at. Can you identify who those people are in your life? What's one way you will personally honour them this week?

False humility is just pride packaged differently. It's often expressed in the way we tear others down while keeping a Christian veneer. For example, it's like saying, "I would never share the gospel like that" while failing to share the gospel yourself. Or it's like saying, "Our church is more Bible-centred than that church over there" while failing to love as our Bible commands.

In what area of life are you most tempted to judge others or tear them down (e.g. parenting, evangelism, leadership, morality etc)? What can you start doing right now to either help build those people up or positively contribute to building that area up in your own life?

Another great diagnostic for humility is how you respond to correction, rebuke, or criticism. Are you more prone to a spirit of chronic self-defence or a spirit of teachability? What steps can you take this week to start developing a more teachable spirit (for e.g. start by inviting criticism/critique from close loved ones and just listen)?

"As you lay yourself down for the sake of others, you'll find that God is really keen to pick you back up." Have you ever experienced this in your own life?

What would it look like for you to try out humility this week? Set a challenge for everyone in your group to give it a go for a week, whatever that looks like, and report back next week about what changed for you.

If there was one thing you wanted God to change in your heart when it comes to humility, what would it be? Pray together for these things.

WEEK 5

SINCERITY AND
INTEGRITY



STUDY QUESTIONS

Are you who you others think you are? It's a complex question. No doubt, many of you will answer: "Well, yeah, I guess, but..." None of us shows every part of our heart and mind, and we can't be expected to. But regardless, it's a vital question when it comes to our faith, because the Bible speaks a lot about this kind of idea.

"Now the goal of our instruction is love that comes from a pure heart, a good conscience, and a sincere faith."

1 Timothy 1:5.

Think through those three: pure heart, good conscience and sincere faith. Do you think you can have just two out of those three? Pick just one of the three, and think about what someone's life might be like if only one of those three things went wrong (impure heart, guilty conscience, insincere faith). How do you think it would effect the other two?

HOW JESUS LIVED IT

Jesus is the perfect image of this. He lived his whole life connected to the Father in trust and prayer. And in every relationship, he connected whole-heartedly with the people before him. There was no disconnect between his heart and his life. Just look at these stories he told:

Read Luke 6:43-49.

From these parables, what's the connection between our heart and our life?

STUDY QUESTIONS

“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which appear beautiful on the outside, but inside are full of the bones of the dead and every kind of impurity. In the same way, on the outside you seem righteous to people, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.”
Matthew 23:27-28.

How are the scribes and the Pharisees a negative example of this?

HOW WE CAN GROW IN IT

Read through this passage from 1 Peter 1:

“Therefore, with your minds ready for action, be sober-minded and set your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ...Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God. Since you have purified yourselves by your obedience to the truth, so that you show sincere brotherly love for each other, from a pure heart love one another constantly, because you have been born again—not of perishable seed but of imperishable—through the living and enduring word of God.”
1 Peter 1:13, 21-23.

How are our minds called to connect with what God has done in Christ?

How are our relationships called to connect with what God has done in Christ?

Sincere love comes from a place of purity in your life with God. In other words, integrity leads to sincerity.

This process takes time. But we grow in Christ by connecting all of our life with God. We grow as the blind spots disappear—all those moments where we live as if God isn't there, he doesn't care, he doesn't speak into that habit, or that situation, or that relationship. Growth in this means saying "yes" to God, moment-by-moment. It means a completeness to our life in Christ, with no compartmentalisation.



Think of a moment from your week from each of these categories, where it's easy to disconnect from God. What would it look like to actively seek to connect that moment with God?

At work: <hr/>	
Off-time: <hr/>	
A difficult relationship: <hr/>	
Talking with friends: <hr/>	

In which category can you be tempted to live with the biggest disconnect between your heart and your life?

What would it look like for you to try out sincerity and integrity this week? Set a challenge for everyone in your group to give it a go for a week, and report back next week about what changed for you.

If there was one thing you wanted God to change in your heart when it comes to sincerity and integrity, what would it be? Pray for these things.



VILLAGE CHURCH
2021