

COMMUNITY GROUP STUDIES

YOU CAN THRIVE



YOU CAN THRIVE

GROWING UP IN CHRIST

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



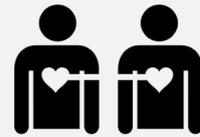
Dependence
and Devotion



Humility



Sincerity and
Integrity



Costly Love



Generosity



Sharing the
Gospel

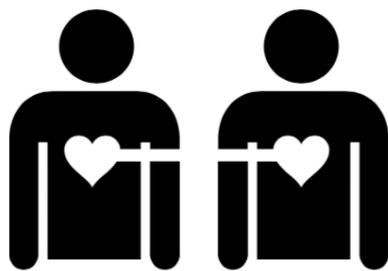


Suffering for
the Gospel



Building Up
the Body

WEEK 6
COSTLY LOVE



STUDY QUESTIONS

'Becoming more and more like Jesus himself' is what it means to grow and thrive as a Christian. That doesn't mean wearing the same clothes and sandals as Jesus, speaking Aramaic, travelling around Israel and then literally getting nailed up on a cross. It does mean taking on more and more of Jesus' character: his humility, his integrity... and as we see this week, his love. And when we see the way Jesus loves us, it might change our whole definition of what 'love' really is...

For most of your friends and family, what does it mean to 'love' someone?

HOW JESUS LIVED IT

We see the way Jesus himself loved people in one of the most famous parts of the Bible. These are Jesus' words in John 3:15-16: *"The Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him. For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."*

Paul says something very similar in Romans 5:6-8: *"You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."*

What's the main way God showed his love for the world? How was that 'loving' toward us?

What did it cost God, the Father and the Son, to love us like this?

Jesus has loved us with much more than a strong feeling. Jesus has loved us with his whole life: giving his life, dying in our place, taking the punishment we deserve, for our sins against God himself! Jesus' love is costly love.

STUDY QUESTIONS

When you don't feel God's love, how could you feel it again?

HOW WE CAN GROW IN IT

After loving people with his whole life, Jesus made his own costly love the model for us to follow. In fact, just before he left his first followers to go to the cross for them, Jesus said these words:

"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." John 13:34-35

"My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends." John 15:12-13

Loving each other with the costly love of Jesus is a really big deal in the whole New Testament. Here are just some of the passages that talk about what it should like in practice:

Romans 12:9-16

Ephesians 4:1-3

1 Peter 3:8-9

1 Corinthians 13:4-7

Ephesians 4:15-16

1 Peter 4:8-11

Philippians 2:1-8

Ephesians 4:31-5:2

1 John 3:11-18

Divide them up among your group, maybe each person or pair taking a column of three. As you read them, start to fill out below. It's a list of practical ways to love others which you might get from the passages you read. Once everyone's read their passages and taken some notes below, work through the list together discussing how each way of loving: would benefit another person, could cost you personally, and so be like Jesus' love for you.

Way of loving	Passages	Benefit to another	Cost to you	How like Jesus
Speaking truth				
Honouring above yourself				
Serving				
Praying for				
Sharing to meet needs				
Hosting in your home				
Repaying evil with good				
Rejoicing with				
Mourning with				
Associating with				
Uniting with				
Being patient				
Being gentle, not angry				
Forgiving sin				

Does concern about the potential cost ever limit how much you love others in these ways? Can you share an example?

In his death for us, Jesus redefined love. More than a strong feeling, the love of Jesus is costly sacrifice. We might hesitate to follow his example. But learning to love like Jesus is in fact the greatest blessing. Loving like Jesus is costly, by definition. It's also how we really thrive. How is God leading you to love others in a deeper, more costly way, like Jesus has loved you?

WEEK 7
GENEROSITY



STUDY QUESTIONS

Money plays a huge role in our lives when you think about it. We spend our days working for it, thinking about it, wishing we had more of it, spending it on things we need, and spending even more of it on things we want. But the gospel completely reorients the way we think about money. Since we've received everything we need in Jesus we can turn around and be generous toward others with whatever resources we have.

What are the top three luxury items you spend your money on?

Can you picture someone right now who's particularly generous? Who are they?

How important do you think generosity is in the life of a Christian?

HOW JESUS LIVED IT

Read 2 Corinthians 8:1–9.

In what ways was Jesus rich (give some examples)?

In what ways did Jesus become poor (give some examples)?

STUDY QUESTIONS

What does it mean to be rich in Christ?

HOW WE CAN GROW IN IT

The church in Corinth has come up with a great plan to help struggling Christians around the world: they're going to raise some funds and give them to the apostles to distribute. The only problem is that they haven't yet done what they said they would do (can anyone relate...?!). So in his letter to them, Paul encourages the Corinthians to finish what they've started.

What does Paul want the Corinthians to do?

Why doesn't Paul want to force the Corinthians to give away their money (v.8)?

What motives does Paul give the Corinthians for being generous?

In what ways is our expenditure of money an indicator of what is in our heart?

How should the grace we've been shown by God affect how generous we are with our money? What does it mean if we aren't generous?

In his book *Generous Justice*, Tim Keller writes: "A lack of generosity refuses to acknowledge that your assets are not really yours, but God's." Discuss this statement. Do you agree with it? How does it make you feel?

Read Matthew 6:2–4.

Jesus says that our giving must be done in private. Why does Jesus say this? What dangers or traps can we fall into when giving – and how can we avoid them?

How can we spend our money in such a way that it communicates the grace of God to others?

What are some ways in which you can practice generosity regularly?

What's one thing you want God to change in your heart when it comes to giving generously? What is one small step you can take toward that this week? Pray for these things together.

WEEK 8

EQUIPPED AND
SHARING THE
GOSPEL



STUDY QUESTIONS

Break up into groups of two. Share with one another how you came to know Christ (2 minutes each).

What role did other people have in you coming to know Christ?

People can have many problems that keep them from sharing their faith. Read the four below. Do any of them resonate with you?

Do you have a theological problem?

You may misunderstand the wonderful reality of God's sovereignty to the extent that we think that there is no human role at all either to set forth or respond to the gospel. God will do what he wants anyway so why bother.

Do you have an experiential problem?

Have you become so disillusioned by seemingly fruitless attempts to share the gospel that you have concluded that your efforts don't achieve anything? Or you may feel so personally inept that it seems not worth trying?

Do you have a spiritual problem?

You have no regard for the glory of God nor the command of Jesus to go make disciples of all nations. You are not open to the Spirit's prompting to witness. You are rarely moved by the plight of the lost, at home and abroad.

Do you have a relational problem?

Our love for Christ has grown cold or lukewarm. We care too much for other peoples' affirmation and acceptance at the cost of Christ's.

STUDY QUESTIONS

HOW JESUS LIVED IT

Read John 4:1-42.

Some people say that all you have to do is share the Gospel with someone. How does Jesus' interaction with the Samaritan woman show the inadequacy of that statement?

Read Matthew 3:16-17, Isaiah 42:1 and John 17:24.

Read these words from Tim Chester:

“God didn’t create the world to meet some need that he had. God wasn’t up in heaven on his own feeling lonely. He doesn’t need the world. It doesn’t add anything to him. God wasn’t a frustrated Ruler looking for something to create. He wasn’t even a frustrated Lover looking for something to love. He was a Father with a Son living in perfect love through the Spirit. 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.”

How does this “delight” and the “overflow of his love and joy” better equip us to share the gospel?

HOW WE CAN GROW IN IT

There are 5 threshold that sceptics often have to face as they make their way to faith in Jesus:

Threshold #1 From distrust to trust

Threshold # 2 From indifference to curiosity

Threshold #3 From being closed to change to becoming open to change

Threshold #4 From meandering to seeking

Threshold #5 From lost to saved



Can you identify with any of these thresholds? What made the difference to you on your journey to faith?

What might be some ways we can best help our friends cross each threshold?

What might be some specific prayers we can pray for our friends?

How can we as a community become more fruitfully, joyfully and regularly involved in helping people come to Jesus?

If the gospel really is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes (Romans 1:16), then we must be ready to share the gospel clearly when we have the chance.

If someone asked you "what is the Gospel?" how would you explain it to them? Do you use a tool like "2 Ways to Live" or "Bridge to Life"? What might be some of the Christianese jargon that you might need to steer away from?

Look back at the first question. Who might you need to begin to share the gospel with, as it was shared with you? At Kids' church? Youth group? At work? On the street?

WEEK 9

SUFFERING FOR THE GOSPEL



STUDY QUESTIONS

The author Nik Ripkin was interviewing a pastor in Russia who had been through much suffering for the sake of the gospel. He had heard story after story of unspeakable suffering but also stories of God's power at work. He was surprised that the pastor had never published these stories. The pastor seemed confused and took Nik aside and pointed out the window and said,

"How many times have you awakened your children before dawn and taken them to the east facing part of your home? How many times have you said to them, "Boys, get ready! Look out this window because the sun is about to come up in the east!"

Nik replied, "I have never done that. In fact my children would think I'm crazy if I did that."

The pastor nodded and said, "You would never do that with your children because the sun coming up in the east is normal and ordinary. It is an everyday event. Well, that the way persecution is for us. That's the way God's activity is for us. We don't write much about these things-we don't even talk about these things-because these things are as normal as the sun coming up the east."

Is this a perspective you share with the pastor and his family? Is suffering for the gospel exceptional? Unusual? Out of the ordinary? Is it a problem? An inconvenience? Something to be avoided? What is often our attitude toward suffering for the sake of Christ and the gospel?

STUDY QUESTIONS

HOW JESUS LIVED IT

What does Jesus have to say about suffering for the Gospel?
In Matthew 10, Jesus speaks to his disciples of what they are expected to face when they choose to follow Him. Spend some time going through each section, drawing out any principles and commands Jesus might be giving to his followers.

v.16-20

v.21-25

v.26-31

v.32-39

v.40-42

Now collate these instructions under this heading:
"Guiding principles for anyone who wants to follow Jesus"

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HOW WE CAN GROW IN IT

Read Acts 4:1-35.

How did the disciples apply these instructions in Acts 4:1-35?

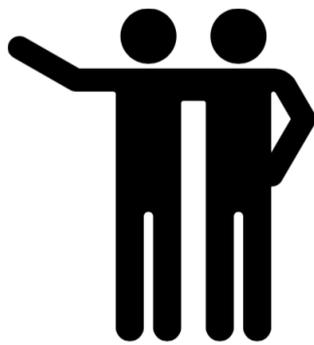
How have you seen these instructions played out throughout church history and in your own experience?

How might we apply these instructions today in Brisbane? What "Guiding Principles" do you need to remind yourself of this week?

Perhaps this is a brand new thought, but is it possible that suffering for the gospel is simply the normal way of living for those who choose to follow Christ? And then, is it possible that God can bring about some greater purpose out of suffering?

Maybe the question we should be asking ourselves is not, How can I avoid suffering for the Gospel? but, why am I not experiencing suffering for the Gospel?

WEEK 10
BUILDING UP
THE BODY



STUDY QUESTIONS

HOW JESUS LIVED IT

I wonder: If you think about Jesus' ministry, do you think he spent the most time performing miracles, preaching, or in conversations?

In just one example, if your group has a quick breeze through Mark chapters 7-11, there are 26 scene changes. It's almost written like a DVD menu, with short, sharp chapters. If you quickly tallied what each of these scenes involved:

In these 26 scenes:

4 out of the 26 scenes are about actions and miracles (not primarily word ministry).

4 out of the 26 are public ministry, preaching to crowds.

18 out of 26 involve Jesus in conversation with people, speaking the truth in love.

Does that surprise you?

Jesus spent the bulk of his ministry talking personally with people, speaking the truth in love, into their lives and specific situations.

So it shouldn't be a surprise to us that when we come to Ephesians 4, one of the richest pictures of how the body of Christ is to live, a large part of the picture involves people speaking the truth in love to one another, to grow up in Christ.

HOW WE CAN GROW IN IT

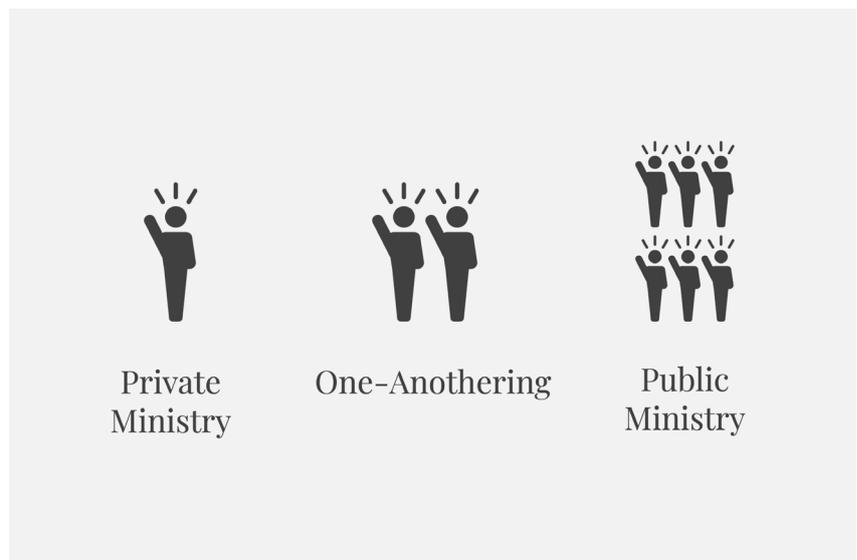
If you were forced to answer this question: "What's the single, most important thing that people need to do to grow in Christ?" What would you say?

STUDY QUESTIONS

When's the last time that you felt a deep conviction of sin, and it brought change to your life?

We will all have different experiences with those two questions. *But my guess is that for many of us, our answer to the first question will be either an example from private ministry (daily Bible reading, constant leaning on God in prayer), or public ministry (listening to good preaching, praising God together). Yet, for the second question (I don't know if it was the case for you), I suspect that your answer involved neither of these. But instead, it was a moment was when a wise Christian friend personally spoke truthful words to us, out of love.*

Which is a category that tends to be neglected in our thinking: the interpersonal, side-by-side, one-anothering of speaking Christ to one another aspect of the Christian life. And while Ephesians 4 wouldn't necessarily say that this is the most important thing that we need to be doing to grow up in Christ... Ephesians 4 would still consider it an essential part of the picture.



Read Ephesians 4:11-16.

What's the goal of church, from this passage?

Do you lean more toward speaking the truth without love, or love without truth?

Here are some things in our Aussie culture that can make this picture in Ephesians 4 hard. Do you relate to any of them?

Individualism: "I want to solve my problems myself. I don't want to rely on other people."

Superficiality: "I don't want people to really know me, I just want to have a laugh, or talk about something easy to talk about."

Apathy: "I just couldn't care less about other people. They're probably fine, they don't need me to speak into their life."

As God's church, we need to be pushing back on all these temptations, so that we can be on the front-foot in speaking the truth in love to others, and from them to us. Because, **as we've seen in Ephesians 4, the body of Christ (the church) is healthy and growing when its members are speaking the truth in love into one another's lives.**

Here are some ways that you can be taking steps forward with this. Which one are you going to try and put into practice this week?

Start talking more deeply and vulnerably with others at church. Share spiritual weaknesses and failings to allow others to encourage me.

Find space to spiritually speak into one another during our Sunday gathering after church (stick around after the service, and have self-awareness when your conversations avoid spiritual matters)?

Pray for God to give you a soft heart whenever you hear the Word of God (private reading, public teaching). Be thinking: How should this change my life? And try to speak with someone about your thoughts.

What's one thing you want God to change in your heart when it comes to speaking the truth in love? What is one small step you can take toward it this week? Pray for these things together.



VILLAGE CHURCH
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