

DISCIPLESHIP 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." 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 discipleship booklet is all about: How we can grow up in Christ through his Holy Spirit. We hope that it helps you can consider the means God gives us to grow us, and find some of the fruit of Christian maturity.

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



Watch a short intro video about our You Can Thrive series here.



Repentance



Leaning on
God's word



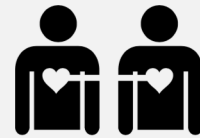
Dependence
and Devotion



Humility



Sincerity and
Integrity



Costly Love



Generosity



Sharing the
Gospel



Suffering for
the Gospel



Building Up
the Body

UNIT 1
REPENTANCE



STUDY QUESTIONS

The first area that God gives us to help us thrive in our Christian lives is repentance. Repentance can often be a neglected, or misunderstood idea. But it's vital if we're going to grow in Christ.

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

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

Genesis 3:1-19

Mark 7:20-23

Romans 6:23

Psalms 51.

In Psalm 51, what are some of the words that 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?

There are three ways that we can sin. Try to think of an example of each:

Internally, we sin against ourselves, we let ourselves down...



Horizontally, we sin against other people...



Vertically, we sin against God...



STUDY QUESTIONS

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:

Martin Luther opened the Reformation by nailing "The Ninety-Five Articles" to the door of Wittenberg Cathedral. The very first article was: "Our Lord and Master Jesus Christ willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance."

What do you think he means by that?

Look at how 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

Thomas Watson is one of the English Puritan pastors of the 17th century, and he wrote a helpful book called *The Doctrine of Repentance*. And I think he has some helpful things to say to us. He defines repentance in this way:

"Repentance is a grace of God's Spirit whereby a sinner is inwardly humbled and visibly reformed."

Simply put, repentance can be defined as turning from sin.

In his book, Watson describes the six marks of true repentance. According to him, if any mark is left out, we dilute its power in our lives. Here are his six marks of repentance. Spend some time going through each and thinking of how they speak to your life:

1. Sight of Sin

Do you see find it easy to 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 live all of this out this week? Set a challenge to give it a go for a week, and report back next week about what changed for you.

Repentance is a key part of the Christian life. It never feels good — and if it does, you're probably missing the point — but it is necessary. It's an opportunity to receive and experience God's deep love, forgiveness and grace. God wills for you to thrive

Spend some time praying for the ways that God has spoken to you about repentance in your life:



UNIT 2

LEARNING ON GOD'S WORD



II TIMOTHY is committed to thy trust, avoiding 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 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.

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 Phylis and Hirtagogus.

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

17 I 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 many things he ministered unto 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 the word of God is not bound.

10 Therefore I endure all things 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 Hymenaeus 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

STUDY QUESTIONS



How have you gone at living out what we looked at last week? Have you noticed any changes since then?

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.

Have you ever felt like that?

Christians often talk about having a "personal relationship" with God. But for many of us, we can feel that our relationship with God should be closer than it is. And when people feel this, they can seek to draw nearer to him in different ways:

Seeking a more immersive experience in church.

Seeking a more traditional style of church experience.

Seeking God in nature.

Have you ever tried any of these ways to draw closer to God?

I want to put to you that there's a much more powerful way to grow in your relationship with God. Now, after looking at those other things, beautiful and impressive, I am bit embarrassed that what I'm commending looks mundane by comparison.

STUDY QUESTIONS

Because it's simply this: Reading the Bible. Because, to put it simply:

- 1) Jesus himself is by far the best way to know God.
- 2) Reading the Bible is by far the best way to know Jesus.
- 3) Meeting Jesus in the Bible over and over as part of your daily life is the most powerful way to grow in your relationship with God.

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 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...

Pick a Bible passage and try to READ-RELATE-RESPOND to it together:

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?

There are a lot of different things that different people can find helpful to lean on God's Word. And there's no one-size-fits-all.

So all I'll say now is: Keep trying different things until you've found a way to make reading the Bible a part of your daily relationship with God. When you drop the habit (and you will sometimes) don't feel guilty. Be grateful for grace and just pick it back up again.

Because we really meet God in Jesus.

We really meet Jesus in the Bible.

And reading the Bible, and reading it again, is really the key to growing in your life and relationship with God.

Pray for God to help you lean on him by consistently hearing his true and living Word:



UNIT 3
THANKFUL
DEPENDENCE AND
DEVOTION



STUDY QUESTIONS



How have you gone at living out what we looked at last week? Have you noticed any changes since then?

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?

STUDY QUESTIONS

Why do we find prayer so hard?

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

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?

When we pray, asking God to come through on His promises, then we are praying on solid ground.

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)

That is the delight that we get caught up in with when we pray. We sinful human beings, through the redeeming work of the Lord Jesus Christ, in His name, have a seat at God's table. Whether we are praying when we driving the car, or going for a walk, or on our knees in the bedroom, positionally we sitting at God's table, we are that close.

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

"So many books and talks on prayer make prayer a discipline that we need to work on, so we become good pray-ers. Prayer then becomes something we achieve. But it's not. Prayer is a child asking her father for help-nothing more, nothing less."

Tim Chester.

When Jesus talks to his Father do you expect his Father to answer? We do, don't we? We imagine His Father is delighting in His son, keen and ready to answer. Yet we struggle to think that God would feel the same about us. Yet, because of what Jesus has done for us, God our Father is as ready to hear our prayers as he is to hear the prayers of Jesus.

How would believing this change your prayer life?

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

God our father loves to listen to us. Just like a parent loves to hear their children speak for the first time, whether it's a goo goo or a gaa gaa so our Father loves to hear us speak to Him, he delights in our faltering and feeble prayers. He just loves it when we turn to Him and want to spend time with Him.

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: Start by fixing your eyes, heart, and affection on God.

R: Repent: Confess your sins to God. Acknowledge your need for Jesus.

A: Ask: Ask for your own needs, the needs of those around you, the needs of the nations.

Y: Yield: Surrender your life to following Jesus wherever and however He leads you.

P.R.A.Y Spend some time doing that right now. 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.

Read Luke 11:5-13.

How do these verses encourage you in your prayers?

“Imagine a father playing a practical joke on his child, laughing cruelly as the egg on his son’s plate unfolds into a scorpion, or the fish turns out to be a snake. God isn’t like this. He is not a practical joker, messing with our heads while he laughs at us from heaven. His purposes are always good. He doesn’t always give us what we want, but he always gives us what is good.”

Tim Chester

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.

Try that out over the next week (or until you meet again for unit 3). Try to find time every day to pray intentionally, using the P.R.A.Y. format.

Finally, spend some time praying for one another, wherever you need God's help at the moment:



UNIT 4
HUMILITY



STUDY QUESTIONS



How have you gone at living out what we looked at last week? Have you noticed any changes since then?

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

Looking across history, humility hasn't always been seen as a virtue. Why do you think our culture sees humility as good thing?

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.

Why do you think there's such an emphasis on the Philippians' minds in this passage (v. 2-5)?

STUDY QUESTIONS

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?

Historians 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?

Jesus' death on a cross was proof that greatness can express itself in humility. It's 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?

Now that we've thought about humility in our culture, and Jesus' ultimate example of it, we'll spend a bit of time thinking about how we can be practicing humility in our day-to-day lives:

HOW WE CAN GROW IN IT

1. Love Across Difference

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 struggle to think (even if only in your



own heart) are worth your time or energy or emotions?

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?

2. Move Closer in Love

Given that you've put your finger on those individuals, and that struggle of yours in humility, what's one step you can take right now to use your resources (emotional, physical, financial etc) to better love and serve those people, as Jesus gave himself for us?

3. Put to Death False Humility

We can struggle with humility in different ways. One of the ways that Aussies tend to struggle is in the area of false humility. If you're struggling to think of what that is, here's a quote that sum up false humility pretty well:

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.

It could be the examples listed in the quote, or it could be criticising church music, or Bible teaching, or the church community, whilst not trying to step in to become a part of the solution.

Can you see any of these tendencies in yourself?

4. Invite Criticism

A great way to diagnose false humility is when someone critiques us: What position do you take? Do you rush to self-defence? Or do you use it as an opportunity to grow? A great way you can grow in humility is to open up your life to critique. Invite trusted loved ones to speak into your life. Ask them to point out blindspots in your character. Get someone to provide feedback on an area of life you want to improve in. Invite criticism, and practice receiving that criticism with humility.

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)?

What's one way from this unit that you want to practice humility this week? Chat about it, each try 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.



UNIT 5
SINCERITY AND
INTEGRITY





How have you gone at living out what we looked at last week? Have you noticed any changes since then?

Are you who you other people think you are? It's a hard 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 someone who lived a life of sincere love and a pure heart: 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?

*"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:

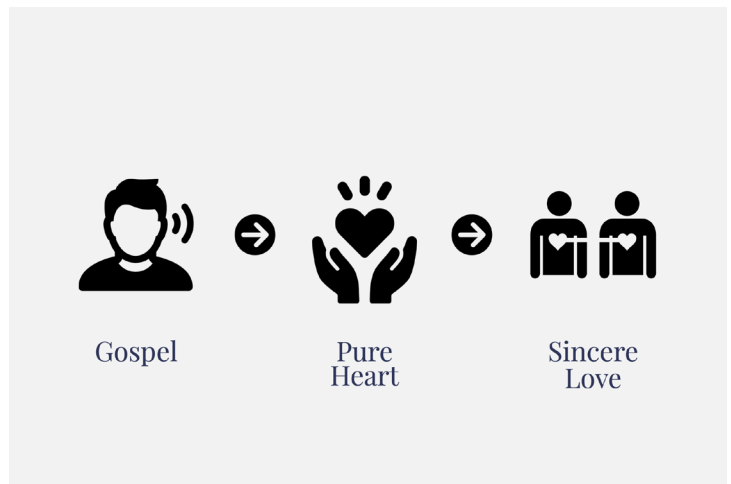
*"Therefore, with your minds ready for action, be sober-minded and set your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ...Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God. Since you have purified 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: _____	
Off-time: _____	
A difficult relationship: _____	
Talking with friends: _____	

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

As we've been doing a bit in these studies, I want you to imagine your life as a garden.

There are always going to be some lovely patches, where there's growth and beauty. There are always going to be some weeds and thorns, of stubborn sins that keep appearing in our lives. But because the sunshine of God's goodness is shining on them, they can't take over our lives.

But if you walk down the footpath, through the rusty gate, there's another garden growing under some thick trees, behind some thorny bushes. This is the dark and secret garden that your brothers and sisters in Christ have never seen... And in your own mind at least, God's light can never get in. And in this garden, the thorns and weeds are taking over, because they thrive in darkness. There're sins that you're nursing along in this garden. Angers and jealousies and lusts and bitterness... And the issue isn't mainly that there are weeds, that there are sins—because we all have sins in our life. The issue is that they are hidden sins—sins not acknowledged, hidden from others, and not repented of to God. And they're growing because they're in the darkness. Because they're hidden.



Often, this can be the biggest roadblock to our thriving in Christ.

So think of where those areas are for you, and take the bold step of bringing those dark gardens to the light:

God knows all of us: our public faces, and our dark spaces. But if that discourages us, we need to remember that that isn't the end of the story...

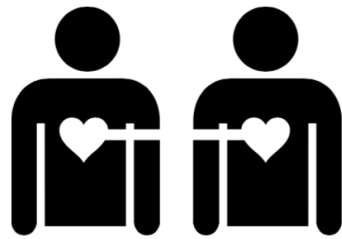
In the Gospel, God is a Father who has forgiven us. Because Christ lived his entire life for us, completely connected to his Heavenly Father, in all of his weakness and temptation, and all of his pain. And through his death and resurrection, he's opened up a way for us to live with God, in Christ. Because we're alive in Christ, there's always mercy for our sins... And because of Christ, there's always hope in the face of our struggles...

That's how we can live all of our life openly before God... that's how we can live without secret gardens that we're hiding from the light of God... with sincere faith, with sincere love, and how we can stand upright with integrity. By standing in the light of the Gospel, by basking in the glory of Christ, and drinking in the warmth of God's goodness.

Pray this for one another, remembering Christ's mercy and grace for you:



UNIT 6
COSTLY LOVE



STUDY QUESTIONS



How have you gone at living out what we looked at last week?
Have you noticed any changes since then?

'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 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: *"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."*

STUDY QUESTIONS

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.

When you've struggled to feel God's love in the past, what's helped you to 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. Give them a read and jot down a few thoughts on what costly love means in these passages:

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

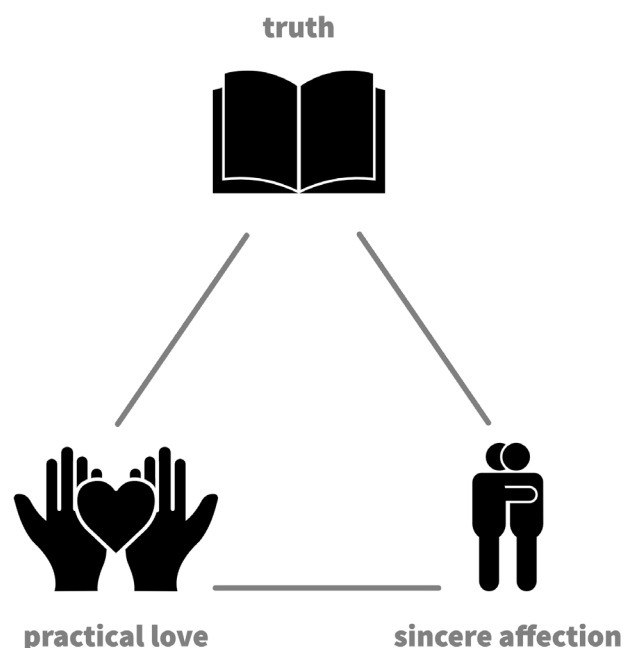
Ephesians 4:31-5:2

1 John 3:11-18

In the Bible, real love always has three essential parts: truth, practical love, and sincere affection. Try to imagine love with only two of the three. What might that look like?:

Without truth: _____

Without practical love: _____



Without sincere affection: _____

Have a look through the list below. Each of you choose three of the ways of loving that you find particularly difficult. Write down a few ways that they cost you personally, and a few ways that they would benefit others:

	Cost to You	Benefit to Others
Speaking Truth		
Serving		
Telling someone I'm Christian		
Praying for		
Hosting at your home		
Rejoicing with		
Mourning with		
Being patient		
Being gentle, not angry		
Forgiving sin		
Sharing your faith		

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

How do the gospel, Jesus and the gift of the Spirit help us in this?

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?

Spend some time praying over the things you've spoken about, and ask God for his help in helping you to understand the depths of Christ's love for you: *"I pray that you, being rooted and firmly established in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the length and width, height and depth of God's love, and to know Christ's love that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God"*
(Ephesians 3:17-19)



UNIT 7
GENEROSITY



STUDY QUESTIONS



How have you gone at living out what we looked at last week? Have you noticed any changes since then?

Money plays a huge role in our lives. 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, and what makes them so generous?

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

STUDY QUESTIONS

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)?

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 spending of money an indicator of what's happening in our hearts?

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 6:1–4.

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?

Read Luke 21:1-4.

How was the woman being more generous than anyone else?

What should it suggest to us, that Jesus noticed and praised this woman's actions?



No matter how much money we have, it's important to think about how we can be generous to others with our money.

But the reality is, money isn't the only resource that we have that God calls us to be generous with. Here are three more. Have a chat about what you have to give in each of these, and what it might look like for you to take a step forward in being generous with them:

	Resources to give	One step forward
Time		
Emotional energy		
Possessions		

Read these two passages:

Keep your life free from the love of money. Be satisfied with what you have, for he himself has said, I will never leave you or abandon you. Therefore, we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?

Hebrews 13:5-6

Godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out. If we have food and clothing, we will be content with these. But those who want to be rich fall into temptation, a trap, and many foolish and harmful desires, which plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and by craving it, some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs. But you, man of God, flee from these things, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, and gentleness.

1 Timothy 6:6-11

How do these passages speak to your heart now?

How can you be praying for God to work in your hearts now, to give you the kind of hearts that these passages are speaking of?



UNIT 8
SHARING
THE GOSPEL



STUDY QUESTIONS



How have you gone at living out what we looked at last week? Have you noticed any changes since then?

Spend some time sharing with one another how you came to know Christ.

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

Have you ever tried to share your faith with someone? What was that experience like?

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

Is it theological?

"Why share the gospel if God will do whatever he wants anyway?"

Is it experiential?

"I just feel so awkward and not equipped to share my faith with anyone."

STUDY QUESTIONS

Is it spiritual?

"I know I should care more, but I just can't bring myself to face how enormous it is to consider how many lost people there are out there."

Is it relational?

"I'm worried they might not like me talking about my faith, and I'm afraid of losing our friendship."

Spend a few minutes chatting about which of these you think most holds you back from speaking about your faith.

HOW JESUS LIVED IT

Read John 4:1-42.

On the other hand, some Christians can swing the other way, and say that your only responsibility with other people is to share the Gospel with someone. How does Jesus' interaction with the Samaritan woman show what's lacking in that statement?

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

What do these three passages have in common?

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 live 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? Did any of them make a difference to you on your journey to faith?



What might be some ways we can best help our friends cross each threshold? Have a think through each. What are some things you can brainstorm together that might help people cross each threshold?

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

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.

This week, spend some time trying to write out your testimonies of how you came to faith, and why you trust in the gospel. Read them out to each other next time you meet. You never know how this might help you to be ready to share about God's work in your life!

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?

If you're not quite sure how to answer the question above, maybe it would be worth doing our course *The Story*, which is a five-week introduction to the Christian faith. You can register at vc.org.au/story/

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?

What might be some specific prayers we can pray for our friends? Who are two or three people you want to commit to praying for, that they would come to know Christ?



UNIT 9
SUFFERING FOR
THE GOSPEL



STUDY QUESTIONS



How have you gone at living out what we looked at last week? Have you noticed any changes since then?

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?

STUDY QUESTIONS

Try and each think of a time when following Jesus has cost you something (comfort, relationships, career advancement, emotional toll).

How did that experience shape your faith (positively or negatively)?

HOW JESUS LIVED IT

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 of the sections below, drawing out any principles and commands Jesus might be giving to his followers.

v. 5-8

v. 9-15

v.16-20

v.21-25



v.26-31

v.32-39

v.40-42

Now try and bring together these instructions under this heading:

“Guiding principles for anyone who wants to follow Jesus”

-
-
-

HOW WE CAN GROW IN IT

Read Acts 4:1-35.

What does this passage have to say about suffering for the Gospel?

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

What are a few ways that you've seen these instructions play out in church history, and in your own experience?

How might we apply the “Guiding Principles” today in Brisbane?
What “Guiding Principles” do you need to remind yourself of this week?

Read Romans 8:12-39.

Look through each section, and list the kind of suffering it addresses, and the hope that it gives us in the face of it:

	Kind of suffering	Hope
Verses 12-17		
Verses 18-22		
Verses 23-25		
Verses 26-30		
Verses 31-36		
Verses 37-39		

God never calls us to go out and look for suffering, to try and look more faithful and sacrificial. But he does tell us that: "All who want to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (2 Timothy 3:12). So whatever that cost is for you, and wherever the Gospel calls you to endure suffering to remain faithful to Christ, remember God's promises of hope.

Finally, here is a passage from 2 Timothy 2:3-13:

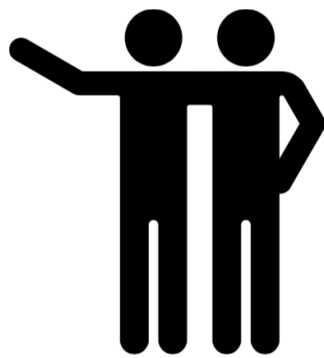
Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No one serving as a soldier gets entangled in the concerns of civilian life; he seeks to please the commanding officer. Also, if anyone competes as an athlete, he is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules. The hardworking farmer ought to be the first to get a share of the crops. Consider what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything.

Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead and descended from David, according to my gospel, for which I suffer to the point of being bound like a criminal. But the word of God is not bound.

Spend some time praying for one another: for faith, for endurance, for hope in the face of suffering:



UNIT 10
BUILDING UP
THE BODY





How have you gone at living out what we looked at last week?
Have you noticed any changes since then?

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?

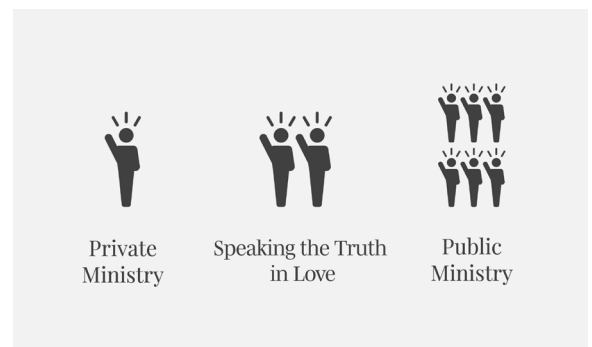
For just one example, if you have a quick breeze through Mark chapters 7-11, there are 26 scene changes. It's almost written like a DVD menu, with short, sharp chapters. If you quickly tallied what each of these scenes involved:

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

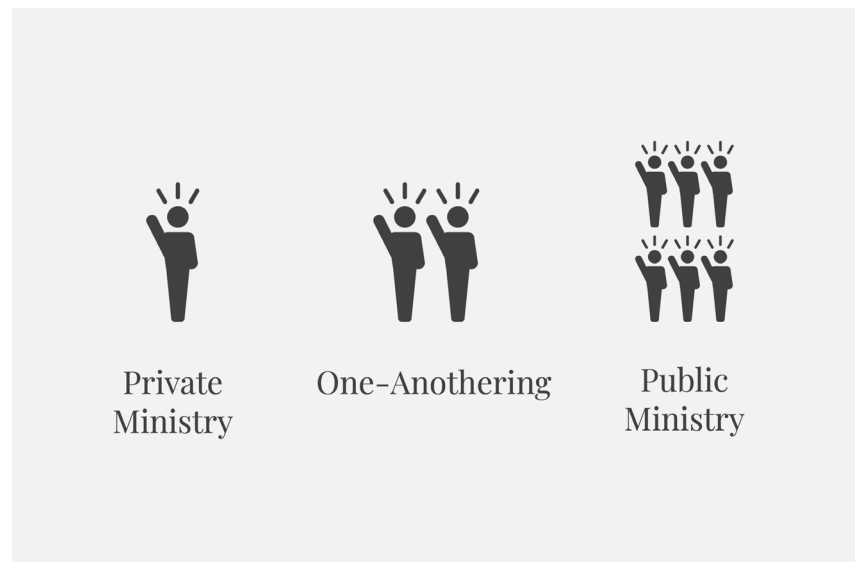
How would you answer these two questions:

What's the single, most important thing that people need to do to grow in Christ?

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 still tells us that it's 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?

TRUTH  LOVE

Here are some attitudes 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."

Only relying on experts: "If I don't understand something in the Bible, I want to chat to a pastor about it, not just another church member."

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.***

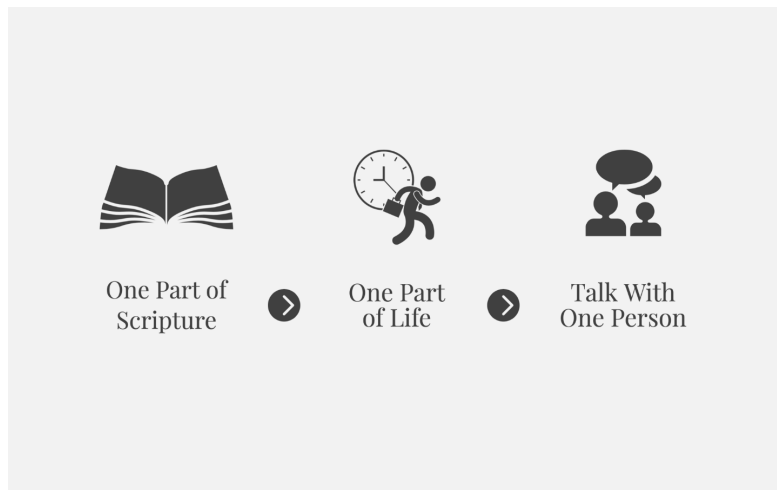
Here are three ways that you can be taking steps forward with this. How can you be trying to put one into practice this week?

1) Stick around after church: When the person up the front finishes, when the final song's sung, when the MC wraps things up... if it feels like the lights come on at the end of a movie, the reality around you suddenly changes, you're suddenly flung from being passive to active. At that moment, you might be tempted to duck off, before you have to talk to anyone. But if you believe what Ephesians 4 says, you're leaving before a lot of the key work of the Spirit even starts!

2) Open your heart to others: When we talk to others, our small talk can so easily become: I'm talking to you because I have to, and I'm not going to open up my life or heart to you. I'm not going to seek to really know you. I'm just doing what I have to do until I can leave in a somewhat socially-acceptable way. And if that's you... What would it look like to be generous with your time and energy and questions when you're talking to someone? How do you actually change that, to talk openly, and spiritually?

3) Try to always connect God's Word with your life, and one another: Whenever you're receiving the Word of God, whether from one person teaching, or from your own Bible reading, try your best to think: What's one part of God's Word here that I can connect with one part of my life? It sounds too simple. But there's a lot in it, and it takes a lot of practice to do this naturally.

So often we can just go into passive-mode when we're listening to Bible teaching, or even when we're reading our Bibles. It can just be another thing we have to do. But trying to always connect one part of Scripture with one part of your life, and speak about it to one person is a good habit to get into, because God's Word is always living and active. And our lives are always changing; we're always changing.



So every time you encounter the Word of God, try and think: What's one part of God's Word here that I can connect with one part of my life? What's one thing that I've heard that reminds me of something I need to repent of? Or one thing that I should have done but didn't? Or one area where, actually, I think, by God's grace, I've actually seen progress in this? And who could I be speaking to about this?

Spend some time praying for God to give you opportunities to start talking more deeply and vulnerably with others, and to grow in the habit of connecting God's Word with your life, and with others.





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