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# Discipleship Essentials

DEVOTIONAL STUDIES  
TOOLS WE NEED FOR GROWTH



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## INTRODUCTION to the series...

### The Essentials

This series explores some of the essentials for Christian Discipleship and growth. There are more of course and we will look at these over time. For now, we will explore some basic essentials including joining a church and being part of community, emphasising the lifeblood of faith which is prayer, and the importance of the Bible - all of which have come under fire in recent years. I have included some extras for further thought and prayer.

Some of these themes may seem really obvious to you - and I hope that will give a good starting point for discussion, prayer and provide you with some tools for helping other people in their walk of discipleship with Jesus. Our ability to speak confidently about our faith, love and hope in Jesus affects the quality of our discipleship and the effectiveness of our witness.

Expressing some of our own concerns within the safety of a trusted small group can help us to iron out some of the wrinkles in our understanding and to give voice to some of the harder to speak about areas of our personal walk of discipleship. Please talk to a Church Leader about joining a small group/house group if you are interested.

We are equipping ourselves and each other with the depth of understanding and confidence in God that we need in order to be proclaimers of the Good News of Jesus and witnesses to his love and Salvation in your community.

I hope you will enjoy this series and pray that we will be effective disciples, faithfully sharing the love of Jesus and the Gospel of Salvation for all people.

Always with love,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Catherine', followed by a long horizontal flourish.

# Why do we need the Bible?

## Beginnings

Draw a picture or choose an emoji from your phone to convey your current mood or feelings...

## Pause to Pray & Worship God

Please read Psalm 119:9-16 from your own Bible

## Deep in Thought

Psalm 119 is the longest chapter in the Bible, and is thoroughly in praise of the Word of God. It constantly refers to God and of a deep, personal relationship with God. It is certainly worth a deep and prayerful reading as we discover a psalmist, thoroughly human and wrestling with the issues of life that affect us all. Christopher Wright in his commentary has identified verses 9-16 as being a section concerned with *“Personal sin and the Word of Grace”* xvi

The verses divide into balanced halves. Mark them up on your Bible.

As we consider ‘why we need the Bible’ as disciples of Jesus Christ, Psalm 119 is a useful anchor point. It is saturated with understanding about the value of scripture and its challenge to a desire to evade God in our choices.

‘Sin’ has become a word that is often avoided in our culture, personal and often our prayer lives. Yet it is a stumbling block to Godly living.

Look at verses 9 & 10.

The Word of God reminds us that there is Godly expectation of us as disciples. This should not lead to academic discussions along the lines of “is this wrong or is this okay?” Rather, knowledge of God through his Word will allow the Spirit of God to speak conviction into our hearts. The Word of God rooted within us stops us from rationalising God into the shape of the culture of the present age.

Christopher Wright says that; *“Shame is the first response to sin. In the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve tried to cover themselves and to hide from God. Shame is the urgent desire to be covered, to hide away from the gaze of others.”* p56



Wright goes on to write that; *“It is when people can sin without shame that they are in a serious spiritual state of hardness.”* p56

**Ponder over the reasons why shame is so powerful.**

**How does the Bible help us to understand the purpose of shame with regard to sin?**

**Note down several Bible passages can help us to work out the way to be released from sin?**

The psalmist speaks of both prevention and cure. We know that God is Good. The Bible also shows us the effect of sin on a person and on society. In verse 9, we are counselled to live close to the Word.

**What does living close to the Word mean for you? What does it look like?**

**How will it affect your worship and your service?**

The question “what does the Bible say?” has not always been used well. There has been a tendency to give ‘proof texts’ and to offer quotes out of context in support of personal and political agendas.

There is a whole wealth of life-giving salvation hope in the Bible. The more thoroughly we know it, the better our understanding and appreciation of God becomes. The Bible shows us who God is. It is his Living Word.

It is most effective where we apply it to the thoughts and decision-processes of our own hearts. In this way, we are better able to resist and avoid sin and so lead Godly, God-honouring lives.

**Talk about how the Bible has sent you back to God for recovery and repentance...**

**Or how you remembered the word of God and so avoided a choice that would have led you into godless places in activity and spirit.**

**Look up and talk about what you learn from:**

**Numbers 32:1-24**

**Galatians 6:1-8**

We each have a choice to make. To choose God’s way or to not. The Bible is full of accounts of each and we can learn from them. When we take the Word of God deep into our being, we are better able to be disciples and

to follow Jesus. The Word of God is powerful to transform our attitudes and activities.

**Look again at verses 15 & 16.**

**What passages of scripture are your landmark texts?**

**Note them down and ponder on how they help you.**

*13 With my own mouth, I tell others the laws that you have spoken.*

*14 Obeying your instructions brings as much happiness as being rich.*

The words above are testimony to the Psalmist's experience of God's Word. Here, we see commitment in speaking about the Character, Nature and Promise of God through scriptures (13).

**How can you begin to make God's Word part of your everyday conversations? Share your ideas with other people.**

Happiness is a much sought-after state of being.

**How does verse 14 challenge the culture in which we are living?**

**How can we, as disciples, show the truth of this statement to a society largely pre-occupied with being rich?**

## **Reflections with a Cup of Tea**

*I was challenged a number of years ago by a trusted elder in the church when I arrived at a prayer meeting without my Bible.*

*"You don't show up for battle without your sword."*

*Her words have stuck with me ever since and I always make sure that as far and as often as possible, I have continuous access to the Word of God.*

As influencers of friends, family and colleagues with regard to the Love of God in Jesus and as disciples ourselves, we must show a respect and desire to live close to the Bible.

**Consider and pray about taking seriously the need to travel with your Bible, and what that might mean.**

**Ask yourselves the question; "Do you bring your Bible to church?" What are your reasons? Talk about why your own copy of the Bible has value for your own discipleship development.**

**How do your visible values shape the values and understandings of following generations?**



# **Why We Need The Bible**

## **2 Timothy 3: 12-17**

As Paul encourages Timothy, he is reminding him of the value of Scripture and of the Witnesses of Jesus whom he has known. Our personal teaching of the Scriptures and sharing a love of them across the generations is important.

I remember my Grandad sharing scripture with his best ‘preaching voice’ across his small living room after the Saturday Football Results had been announced. He was a man from whom faith shone and I loved and respected him enormously.

In moments of doubt or discouragement (seasons, aeons...), I remembered his faith and commitment. This kept me wandering in the right direction.

As we read through Paul’s letter to Timothy, we know that Paul is praying for him. We know that Paul is encouraging Timothy to take the Word of God seriously and to trust it.

As disciples, we can offer that same encouragement to the younger generations.

# **Why We Need to Follow Jesus**

## **A Mini Study**

### **Read Ephesians 4:17-5:20**

In this mini-study, we immerse ourselves in Paul’s encouragement to the believers to stop following the ways of the world and to live the new life to which they have committed themselves.

It is never easy to be the person who is different. We see this as conformity through school uniform, and in a received way of thinking which is promoted through the national media. ‘Toleration’ has become a word that is used to bulldoze through difference to pretend it is not there and to

create an illusion of 'this place is an happy homogenous blend'. This leaves the people who are different from the masses disenfranchised, as they are expected to blend in and not to present a problem for the majority.

Paul is challenging the Christian to actively be different. To live the different life ,which separates them from those who are living for pleasures, greed and indulgence.

Paul is confronting the Christians to live the new life that they have received from Christ as the gift that it is and to be godly. It is impossible to mix the light into the dark. Followers of Christ must be distinct.

- **How does this passage from Ephesians challenge your life?**
- **What are the reasons Paul gives for living differently?**
- **What does following Jesus mean that you still need to let go of?**
- **How would you encourage a new disciple to follow Jesus in the whole of their lives?**
- **What problems can only following Jesus in some areas lead to in your heart and your being?**
- **Pray for your local church leaders and preachers. That their lives and actions may be unified through Christ.**
- **How can a focus on Jesus help to re-orientate a disciple who has been trying to keep a foot in the old life?**



# Why do we Need to Join a Church?

## Beginnings

Jot down all the words you associate with “church”.  
(Family, worship, dull, lovely, irrelevant etc)

## Pause to Pray & Worship God

Please read Hebrews 10:19-25 & 1 Peter 2:9-10 from your own Bible

## Deep in Thought

The approach to God, ‘drawing near’ Hebrews 10:22, had only been possible for the High Priest in the holy of holies. Jesus’ death and resurrection has opened the way into God’s presence for all believers. This is a huge privilege for all who believe.

**Mark the words & phrases that describe the difference between the old way and the new way.**

**Consider the nature of the relationship which a believer can expect to have with God.**

The call from Peter and the author of the Letter to the Hebrews speaks to the believers as a body. Throughout the New Testament, the Church is described as a body, a collection of living stones, a people.

**Think about the importance of being together as outlined in the two passages of scripture.**

‘Church’ can be a controversial and political topic of conversation.

Churches sometimes argue over style and content, method, routine and ritual.

People might attend church because of their family connections to the ground on which it has been built.

Sometimes, people build ‘empires’ within the church which are less about belonging to God and more about a personal quest for power and ownership.

**Look at the passages above and pause awhile. Why should we choose to belong to something that is broken, fallen and imperfect?**

**Consider the challenges that this presents to you.**

**How might your group or local church support you?**

**Why did you join a church? Record some of the reasons you have.**

Raymond Brown in his commentary on Hebrews writes;

*Since in the teaching of this letter Christians are brothers [and sisters] in the same family, partners in the same enterprise and members of the same household, they have a responsibility not only to ‘hold fast’ themselves, but also to encourage their fellow believers to do the same. John Wesley often reminded the early Methodist people of the words of a friend: ‘The Bible knows nothing of a solitary religion.’ P186-7*

**It is the encouragement and fellowship in faith that is emphasised here.**

**Look at Brown’s assertions regarding the personal need to ‘hold fast’ and the responsibility to encourage fellow believers. How does this ‘feel’ in your own culture?(eg: among your social or work circle)**

**Maybe you could think about whether belonging to a digital faith community is sufficient of itself or if it is another ‘part’ of a believer’s responsibility.**

**Ponder on the caution against ‘solitary religion’ with regard to the outworking of our faith and discipleship. How may we help each other to value being part of a church?**

**List several things that you love about your church?**

**How does your local church help you to live your life with God at the centre?**



Ideally, what could the church you belong to look like? Try to think about the way it behaves and what it does rather than its physicality.

What does your local church believe, hope, do?

How does 'your church' show love?

What is your own role within it?

## **Reflections with a Cup of Tea**

Church is the place of encouragement for your faith.  
Share stories with a friend of how you have been encouraged over the years.

Church is also the place where mission is developed and missionaries sent out from the body of believers.  
**Think about how your church is a missionary community & the adjustments that could be made that it might be more missional.**

There are many different types of churches around the area.  
**How would you advise someone who is looking for a church?**  
**What priorities do you set?**

**Ponder on the value of different church families and how they can bless a community such as ours.**

*Pray together and continue to pray for and look for opportunities to encourage those whom you know to come to church, especially those whom you know to have faith.*

# Why do we Need to Pray?

## A Mini Study

### James 5:13-20

Whatever life is doing, James writes to the people, your focus should be on God and on the prayers and praise which that focus elicits. However, when it is sickness, Chester (p82) draws our attention to the elders being called in for prayer and anointing. The life of the disciple is grounded in the community of the church. This passage turns prayer from being the introspective meanderings of the individual into the noisy, corporate activity of the church.

In this passage of scripture, James looks to prayer as being a whole-life activity during good times, suffering and sickness. In confession and in helping one another to stay faithful to God on our walk of discipleship, prayer is a key ingredient for life.

I interviewed Cheryl-Anne who runs a Catholic Community House about prayer. She describes her experience like this;

*“One night, when I was 18, I had an experience of God. He just poured himself into every crack and crevice of my being with love and it was profoundly personal and so I knew, that night, that there is a God who loves me, who calls me and wants my love and that the rest of my life will be spent in him. It was an amazing experience and from that point on - I didn’t know anything about formal, private prayer just what you do in church - but I found myself talking to God all the time and hearing from him and just thought this happens to everyone. When you come to know God it’s a love-relationship and you think about him all the time.”*

There is no separation at all between who she is and who she is when she is at prayer. By praying, we approach God in order that we may be with him and through this intimacy, have our world-view and self-view transformed as we are changed to be more like him.

God teaches us to pray by his presence dwelling within us. We become ever less self-conscious and ever more Christ-conscious. When we pray, we discover that God is at work inside us and in the world we inhabit. He creates us ever more in his image as we surrender into his

jurisdiction our time, our intellect, our career, relationships and all the important bits that make us who we are.

Prayer makes it easier for us to be ourselves, as the subtle layers of sin and other junk are washed away. To really pray, we need to rid ourselves of the notion that prayer is a formula, and let it pervade the entirety of our life, stopping to lose ourselves in the wonder of his love whenever we find the least excuse to go there.

**Think about and note down the pattern of your praying.**

**What do you need some help with? Who might be the 'elders' or key people to help you here?**

**Have you had an adventure through surrendering your entire situation to God? What can you remember from that time which would help you or help other people to understand prayer better?**

**What difference do you notice in yourself as you pray?**

**How would you talk about the importance of prayer to a new disciple?**



# **Why do we Need to Speak About Faith?**

## **Beginnings**

Talk about your holidays this year. Whether you can recommend the place and accommodation to a friend and why... How about recommending a local cafe or coffee shop if you've remained local...

## **Pause to Pray & Worship God**

Please read 1 Peter 3:8-18 from your own Bible

## **Deep in Thought**

Peter thoroughly understands the importance of being able to speak about his faith in The Risen Jesus. He has, etched on his memory, the time that he refused to acknowledge his friendship with Jesus in the courtyard during the trial at the High Priest's house. Now, he has the power of the Risen Jesus alive in him and he is offering instruction along the lines of "Godly living and clean conscience with ever gracious words" to the disciples.

Have there been times when you have felt as though you were 'under attack' by someone who questioned you about faith?

Mull over (be gentle with yourself) how it felt and what advice you would give yourself now...

Peter speaks in very positive terms about the conduct that disciple should exhibit in their relationships with each other.

**Take a close look at verse 8.** All these characteristics are found in Jesus and also in his direct teaching of the apostles. The beatitudes in Matthew 5 and Luke 6 as well as being picked up by Paul in his letter to the Romans 12:17-20 where he quotes from Proverbs 25:21-22.

The gospel which Peter is preaching is centred on the self-giving love of Jesus which blessed and forgave Jesus' own enemies and those who were in rebellion against God in order that they might be drawn towards God.

**Reflect on how our behaviour as Christians matters as much as our sharing the words of the gospel:**

a) In our dealings with other Christians

**b) In our relationships with those who don't yet know Jesus**

**c) In our responses to those who actively oppose the Christian faith.**

Clowney, in his commentary, reminds us that;

*“Stephen prayed for those who stoned him, ‘Lord do not hold this sin against them’. A young Pharisee named Saul was one of those for whom Stephen prayed. The Lord who stood at the right hand of God received Stephen and answered his prayer.” P141*

This passage is very much a word to those who, like Peter have struggled to keep their focus on Jesus in times of interrogation. He has discovered the secret to overcoming fear and keeping his conscience clear.

Clowney goes on to say that; *“Peter shows us that our hope provides both the courage for our witness and the content of our witness. We sanctify the Lord Christ in our hearts; there is the end of fear. We sanctify Christ in our words, there is the start of witness.” P148*

We have a faith that is worth speaking about. It is life-saving and life-giving. It follows the mandate that Jesus gave to his early disciples to “Go and make disciples of all nations” at the close of Matthew’s gospel.

**How easy do you find it to speak of your faith in Jesus?**

**Contemplate a significant moment in your faith with the group.**

**How would you start talking about Jesus with someone who doesn't know him?**

**How might you begin your ‘defence’ or ‘argument’ for faith in Jesus with someone who is actively against Christianity?**

**What personal hope do you draw from Peter’s words?**

**How can you use them to strengthen your position as a witness of Jesus?**

The quality of our witness is in keeping close to the cross of Jesus in which we find our hope and salvation. The closer we remain to Jesus, the more we follow in his likeness and demonstrate his characteristics in our living. The missional purpose of Jesus was to preach the good news of God's saving love to the world who did not know him.

As co-heirs with Christ, we share in his mission to share and show the love of God the Father with the world.

We have a drive from within us to share our faith ... but we often lack in confidence and example.

## **Reflections with a Cup of Tea**

*I had taken a group of young missionaries to Uganda to work with the local church in their schools' outreach programme and to share in ladies' ministry with the local church leadership. It was a wonderful time of faith being put into action as we found ourselves out of our areas of experience and trusting both in the grace of God and of our hosts for the strength we needed. My team of travellers all grew in confidence as they 'had a go for God'. Tears were shed. Lives were changed, and we were doing really well until Pastor Brian announced; "Today, we are doing street evangelism!"*

*Almost as soon as he finished his statement, my team were behind me, tense and nervous for what this might mean ...*

*As it happened it meant that the church were providing leaders to accompany us in three groups to visit the businesses near to the church and to offer translation into the local language. We were briefed on what we should say. We went. We shared the good news of Jesus' love and prayed with some, were sent away by others but in all things we remained courteous and confident that God would be with us.*

Over refreshments, organise to prayer walk the streets on which each member of your group lives. If you are at home doing this, pray 'with purpose' for the homes nearby yours.

Arrange to meet in twos or threes in a coffee shop. Invite some other friends that don't come to worship and treat them.

Offer to pray for them or invite them to church as part of the conversation.

# **Why do we Need to Worship with Others?**

## **A Mini Study**

**Psalm 116 & 2 Chronicles 5:11-14**

The Bible shows us that people have worshipped the Living God throughout all memory.

Cain and Abel bring offerings to God in Genesis 5. Noah builds an altar to God in Genesis 8. There are many 100s of years between this act of worship and that of the offering to God of the gifts by Cain and Abel, yet it is described in an offhand way, as though this were something that was often done.

This is all part of acknowledging where our provision comes from and offering our response to God in Worship. Worship is offered on behalf of the people. Noah offers on behalf of his family, and in the passage from 2 Chronicles, we see the priests and singers worshipping God together.

Worship takes all our focus and places us firmly in the presence of God. Being among other people who are of like mind and attitude help us to focus.

**Bring to mind some of the more obscure places you have found yourself worshipping God. What makes it worship?**

**Consider the reasons you have for worshipping God. What are your expectations?**

**What level of importance does worship hold for you?**

**Is worshipping God your own, or a leader's responsibility?**

One of the greatest sources of emotional pain in our society is loneliness. We are a culture which has many isolated people within it. Many of our joys and pains have become internalised as we have made isolation a normal thing in our society.

**When do you value having other people around you in worship?  
Why is this?**

Worship is our response to God for all that he does to give us life and salvation.

Pray the psalm above for the community, bringing local needs, people and situations to him.

Worship God for all that he has done, and prayerfully worship God for all that he will do, within the spirit of the psalm.

Make a commitment of worship on behalf of those for whom you pray.

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