



Welcome to the a₂ Bible Study Series

This manual has been prepared to facilitate seven Bible studies in support of a preaching series in Acts Chapter 2 at Ashford Congregational Church, Middlesex, U.K. This manual is for use by both Bible study leaders and participants. It is printed *single-sided* a) to give you plenty of room for notes, and b) so that the suggested answers to the study questions can be hidden just out of sight, but are easily referred to. The manual is intended for use in small groups, but is also suitable for use by individuals.

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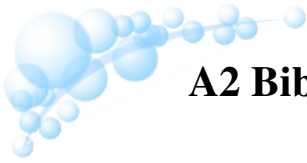
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Ashford Congregational Church (ACC), 19th August, 2006.







Suggestions for background reading and listening

1. Concise Theology, J.I. Packer, IVP, 1993;
2. According to Plan, G. Goldsworthy, IVP, 1991;
3. Prayer and the Knowledge of God, G. Goldsworthy, IVP, 2003;
4. God's Words, J.I. Packer, IVP, 1981;
5. The Message of Acts (Bible Speaks Today Series), J. Stott, IVP, 2005.
6. Sermons of Romans 12:1-8 by John Piper, available here:
<http://www.biblicalpreaching.info/sermons.php>
7. John Piper's sermon series "How to Kill Sin"
<http://www.desiringgod.org/library/sermons/02/>, or download the MP3 audio files from the same web site to listen to them.
8. Operation World, Patrick Johnstone, OM Publishing (updated every few years).
9. Window on the World, Daphne Spraggett and Jill Johnstone, Paternoster Lifestyle, 2001
10. Aren't They Lovely When They're Asleep, Ann Benton, Christian Focus, 2004.
11. Age of Opportunity (A Biblical Guide to Parenting Teens), Paul Tripp, P&R, 1997
12. Come Back, Barbara, C.J. Miller, P&R, 1997.



A2 Bible Study Series - Structure and Content

Each of the seven studies has the same structure, as is shown in the table below. Most of the time should be spent answering the group questions, but leaders should ensure that time is allowed to discuss relevant practical applications and disciplines.

Generic study instructions (45 minutes)	Per-study Instructions		
	Aims of This study	To understand ...	
		To feel motivated to ...	
		To do, or do differently ...	
	Introduction to subject , Theological background		
	 Ice-breaker (intended to take just a minute or two)		
	Per question (x6 or so)	Introduction to the question	
		 The question	
		Explanation of exactly what is being asked	
		 Answers	
 Practical Applications/Disciplines etc.			
 Questions/Ideas/Thoughts for further study or meditation			
 A range of possible answers			



BIBLE STUDY PASSAGES

For each study, there are a small number of passages to study, and then some supplementary passages to make sure that the subject area is covered comprehensively.

1. The Bible (Page 4)

Psalm 1, 19

2. Prayer (Page 11)

Luke 11 and others

3. Meeting Together (Page 19)

Hebrews 10:23-27; Psalm 122 and others, mainly in Acts.

4. Community 'Fit' (Page 26)

1 Corinthians 12:12-27, Romans 12:1-13; Acts 2:44,45;4:32-35; Exodus 35:30-36:7

5. Community Impact (Page 32)

1 Peter 2:4-3:15

6. The Wider World (Page 39)

Genesis 12:1-3; Zechariah 8:20-23; Matthew 28:16-20; Acts 1:4-8

7. Building Tomorrow's Church (Page 45)

Psalm 78:1-8; Deut. 6:5-8; Mark 6:30-44;8:1-10; Titus 1:5-2:10; Acts 20_25-32



THE BIBLE

From the ACC mission statement:

'Jesus Christ transforms lives as people interact with the Word of God. We encourage the diligent study, faithful preaching & teaching and careful application of the Word of God for people of all ages and stages of life.'

Per-study Instructions

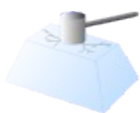
This study looks at both Psalm 1 and Psalm 19. It moves from understanding what the Bible is, through a godly attitude to the Bible, to maximising our benefit from the Bible.

Aims of This Study

- To understand that the Bible is a message from God, and that in it he speaks to us most clearly.
- To learn to love the Bible, and to want to listen to God through the Bible.
- To form regular habits of Bible study both alone and with others.
- To move beyond merely reading the Bible, through study, meditation, and transformation by the Holy Spirit.

Theological Background

The Bible refers to itself in a variety of ways: 'the Scriptures', 'the Word of God' and many more. 2Timothy 3:16 tells us that '*All Scripture is God-breathed ...*' This means much more than simply that some-one wrote down what God said. According to Graham Goldsworthy '*God did not suspend the humanity of the biblical authors ... The Bible bears all the marks of its authors. Their language, thought forms, literary styles and forms, and their culture all shape the actual way the messages were given*'. And yet Jesus tells us: '*... the Scripture cannot be broken*' (John 10:35.) Thus the Bible is the combination of the Holy Spirit revealing truth through humans and God's providence causing them to write it down in their own way, with the results that the Bible is what Goldsworthy calls 'the divine-human' word of God. The fact that the Bible is human should draw us to it as we understand the loving way in which God has accommodated himself to our humanity. The fact that it is divine should cause to treat it with deepest respect.



Ice-breaker

What words or phrases of jargon do Christians use? See how many you can list as a group.

Bear in mind your answers when you come to Question #3 below, which asks about different words used to refer to the Bible. The word 'Word' is one obvious piece of jargon used to refer to the Bible.



Questions for Group Discussion

Introduction to Question #1

Read Psalm 1. Our attitude to the Bible defines whether we are godly or ungodly, as Jesus suggests in Luke 16:31 "*If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets [i.e. the Old Testament], they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.*" Psalm 1 is divided into three parts: Verses 1-3 describe one attitude to the Bible; verses 4-5, another. Verse 6 then summarises the two possible results of our lives.

? Question #1

What two kinds of people are described in Psalm 1?

Explanation of What is Being Asked

There are two types of person who are compared and contrasted throughout the Psalm. Which verses are talking about which type of person?

A Answers

Introduction to Question #2

? Question #2

What are the things that distinguish the righteous man?

Explanation of What is Being Asked

What do verses 1-3 tell us about the righteous man?

What do verses 4 and 5 tell us about the wicked man?

How does verse 6 describe the ultimate destiny of each kind of person?

A Answers

Introduction to Question #3

 Read Psalm 19:1-11

The Bible has many functions, as is suggested by 2 Timothy 3:16 '*All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, ...*' In Psalm 19, the writer makes the same point by using lots of different words to describe the Bible.

 **Question #3**

What different words are used to refer to the Bible in verses 7-11?

Explanation of What is Being Asked

Pick out the nouns in verses 7 - 10, for example 'law' in verse 7.

 **Answers**

Introduction to Question #4

Psalm 19:1-6 describes one sort of revelation from God. The rest of the psalm shows how much better the Bible is, and expresses some right heart-desires.

 **Question #4**

In what ways is the Bible a much better revelation of God than Creation is?

Explanation of What is Being Asked

Look through all the answer to Question 4. For each word, e.g. '*law*' in verse 7, understand how the Bible is so very good.

The word '*law*' is the Hebrew '*torah*'. Originally this meant the Pentateuch, but is used here to mean all of God's revealed will. The word '*statutes*' (NIV) is the Hebrew '*edut*' ('testimony' in AV

and NASB). The idea, according to Kidner's commentary (IVP, 1973) is 'truth attested by God himself', i.e. it is guaranteed to be true. And so on. For each noun referring to God's word there is a different Hebrew word. See Kidner or another commentary on Psalms for further details. Note that the second part of each sentence in verses 7 to 9 gives the clue as to what the noun at the beginning actually means.

It may be useful to look up some of the words in a dictionary.

A Answers

Introduction to Question #5

Having a high opinion of food is all very well, but if we never eat it, we starve. The same is true of the Bible. As with the well-known saying about prayer, seven days without spiritual food makes one weak(week).

? Question #5

In what practical ways can I make sure I benefit from the Bible?

Explanation of What is Being Asked

What easy steps can we take to expose ourselves more to God's Word?

A Answers

Introduction to Question #6

Psalm 1:2 says '... and on his [God's] law he meditates day and night.' Simply reading the Bible is obviously a good thing. But to be like the psalmist, we need to progress deeper into God's Word,

i.e. to learn to meditate on the Bible. See also Psalm 19:14.

 **Question #6**

How can I go beyond just reading the Bible?

Explanation of What is Being Asked

What stages do we need to go through in order to make lasting progress in the Christian life?

 **Answers**



Practical Applications/Disciplines etc.

- Enter Home Group dates in diary now so as not to miss opportunities to study the Bible.
- Read the passages being preached on before Sunday to aid understanding of sermons.
- Commit to reading the Bible every day.
- Commit to teaching the Bible every day to one's children.
- Memorise verses of Scripture from time to time.
- Consider whether Bible-reading notes/plans or the purchase of commentaries would be helpful.


People are encouraged to share what they have done and found helpful.



Questions/Ideas/Thoughts for further study or meditation

 Further passages to study at home or if you run out of questions.

Psalm 119, Acts 2:42, 6:2, II Tim 3:15,16; Luke 24:27,45; Matthew 28:20; 2 Peter 3:16

 To think about: The writer of Psalm 119 loved God's Word so much that he wrote the longest psalm all about it. Do you love the Bible enough to sing about it?

A	<i>The Bible - A Range of Possible Answers</i>
1	Verses 1-3 describe a single type of person, the righteous (godly) man. Verses 4 and 5 describe the unrighteous (wicked) man.
2	<p>The righteous man is variously characterised as one who:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● does not copy wicked people ● does not join sinners in their activities ● does not join in mocking God ● loves God's Word ● spends time meditating on God's Word ● produces fruit from his life ● prospers like a well-watered tree (the implication being that God's Word is like the 'streams of water') <p>The unrighteous man, however, is not even worthy of description. He is temporary, will be judged unfavourably by God, and will not join God's people in Heaven.</p> <p>Verse 6 contrasts both kinds of people by showing God's attitude to them: God's cares for the righteous, but will destroy the wicked.</p>
3	<i>Law, statutes, precepts, commands, fear(?), ordinances, like gold, like honey.</i>
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The 'law' comes from God and is therefore without error, leading to spiritual life. ● God's 'statutes' can be relied upon to give us true wisdom. In the Bible, 'simple' means morally retrograde. I.e. God's Word changes us from morally unwise to (godly) wise. ● etc. ● The '<i>fear of the LORD</i>' is an interesting one! Perhaps it is the holy fear of God that we experience when we realise that God is speaking to us. See Exodus 20:18-20 for an example of this. ¹⁸<i>When the people saw the thunder and lightning and heard the trumpet and saw the mountain in smoke, they trembled with <u>fear</u>. They stayed at a distance ¹⁹and said to Moses, "Speak to us yourself and we will listen. But <u>do not have God speak to us or we will die.</u>" ²⁰Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid. God has come to test you, so that the <u>fear</u> of God will be with you <u>to keep you from sinning.</u>"</i> - i.e. '<i>the fear of the LORD is pure</i>' (Psalm 19:9.) Kidner says that "'<i>fear</i>", or reverence is the human response fostered by his [God's] word". ● Although Creation reveals God's power, genius and beauty, it can never save us.
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Set aside a quiet time and place to read the Bible.

<p>A</p>	<p><i>The Bible - A Range of Possible Answers</i></p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Read the Bible to our children. ● Download sermons from the Internet. ● Go to Christian conferences and other meetings, seminars or courses. ● etc. etc.
<p>6</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● We need to move from merely reading the Bible to understanding what it meant to the original readers when written (this is called exegesis.) ● We need to extract the essential principles from the text so that we understand why God is saying what he is saying (exposition.) ● Don't shy away from texts that seem unattractive or disagreeable; instead realise that God is challenging us through them to see things how he sees them himself. ● We then need to apply what we have learned to ourselves nowadays (application). ● In order for the Holy Spirit to apply a passage to our hearts, we need to meditate on it. Practically, this means memorising key parts of the text and then thinking about them. ● In order to transform our lives into greater Christlikeness, we need to pray as we meditate and humbly ask the Holy Spirit to change us, the way we think, the way we behave etc. (Romans 12:2.)

END OF STUDY ON THE BIBLE



PRAYER

From the ACC mission statement:

'Jesus Christ transforms lives as his people are dependent upon him in prayer. We encourage everyone to seek the Lord's transforming power in their own lives, in the life of the community and in the lives of others.'

Per-study Instructions

This study looks mainly at Jesus' teaching on prayer in Luke chapter 11. It moves from looking at teaching about prayer with respect to God the Father and God the Son to looking a selection of verses that cover the Holy Spirit's role in prayer.

Aims of This Study

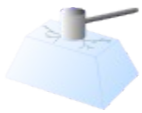
- To understand that prayer can be both taught and learned
- To understand that prayer is talking to a loving father who is eager to listen and answer
- To feel confident in coming to God in prayer through Christ, regardless of what we may otherwise feel like
- To pray with greater faith, expectation and frequency
- To move beyond just saying prayers to interacting with God, truly praying in the Spirit.

Theological Background

The subject of prayer in the Bible is vast and is covered all the way from Genesis 4:26 where 'men began to call on the name of the LORD' to Revelation where John's prayer is simply "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus." Before the New Testament period, prayer was always in the context of sacrifice because it was understood by all who feared God that there was a huge barrier of sin between God and Man.

However, with the coming of Jesus, God is present on Earth with his people. The problem of sin is dealt with through the ultimate sacrifice of Jesus dying for his people. Jesus returns to Heaven and sends the Holy Spirit into his people so that now true trinitarian prayer is possible: Because of Jesus' sacrifice, we are able to come to God; through the Holy Spirit, we are always in God's presence; the Holy Spirit enables us to call God "Father" just as Jesus does; God the Father hears our prayers just as he hears Jesus' prayers, because we are in Christ, in the family.

Thus true prayer is always 'in the Spirit' (Eph. 6:18) and normally addressed to God the Father on the basis of our sonship through Christ.



Ice-breaker

Get a show of hands for who can identify with each of the following statements about prayer (remember to count!)

Count	
	"I sometimes feel my prayers don't go past the ceiling."
	"I can't keep my mind from wandering when I try to pray."
	"Why should God listen to me?"
	"I feel that God will listen to me if can just do prayer right."
	"I feel that I have to pray for at least 15 minutes per day."
	"Does it matter which person of the Trinity I pray to?"
	add others here if you like ...


(some lifted shamelessly from Graeme Goldsworthy's book on Prayer.)

Ask the group why they think the most popular statement is the most popular.



Questions for Group Discussion

Introduction to Question #1

 Read Luke 11:1-14 (don't stop at verse 13)

In verse one we see the example of Jesus praying, so prayer is not just an option, it is a must. The disciples realise that they do not know much about prayer, so they ask Jesus. Jesus does not put them down, he preaches what he has just practised.

 **Question #1**


What can we learn about prayer from just verse 1?

Explanation of What is Being Asked

Several wrong attitudes to prayer are dispelled in this single verse; some good attitudes are exemplified.

A Answers

Introduction to Question #2

 Notice the very first word of the Lord's Prayer, as it is known "Father". Jesus is teaching us to come to God in the same way that children come to their father.

? Question #2


In the Lord's Prayer (starting in verse 2), what kind of earthly fathers is Jesus assuming that we have?

Explanation of What is Being Asked

Jesus is teaching us to come to God as children come to their earthly father. This assumes that we have a fairly positive view of fatherhood from our own childhoods.

A Answers

Introduction to Question #3

 Refer to verses 11 - 13. These summarise the main lesson of the passage, and are based on Jesus telling us to say "Father" when we pray to God.

? Question #3


Before we look at the Lord's Prayer, see if you can spot the main lesson from the passage by comparing verse 2a ("Father") with verses 11 - 13.

Explanation of What is Being Asked

By telling us to call God "Father" in verse 2 and then saying "how much more" in verse 13, Jesus is arguing from the lesser to the greater.

A Answers

Introduction to Question #4

 Refer to verses 2 - 4. When Jesus teaches, he rarely gives us formulas to apply or recipes to cook. Instead he uses examples (parables) to teach us the right attitudes to have. Although it is good and traditional to recite the Lord's Prayer, the main use is for us to learn through it the right attitudes to prayer and approaching God.

? Question #4

What attitudes and priorities is Jesus giving us in the Lord's Prayer?

Explanation of What is Being Asked

Instead of treating the Lord's Prayer as a 'prayer list' or 'shopping list', pick out the essential attitudes and priorities that Jesus is teaching us that we should exhibit when we approach our Father in heaven.

A Answers

Introduction to Question #5

 Refer to verses 5 - 10.

? Question #5


What kinds of thing might stop us from praying? How do verses 5 - 10 help?

Explanation of What is Being Asked

Verses 5 - 10 are saying that it does not matter how we feel, pray anyway because "the door will be opened." We might feel timid, but outrageous boldness is called for by Jesus.

A Answers

Introduction to Question #6

 Read Ephesians 6:18; John 14:15-18; Romans 8:13-16,26,27

So far, we have looked at God the Son and God the Father, but have largely left out God the Holy Spirit. Since prayer is only real prayer when the Holy Spirit is involved, we need to sample some verses that give insight into the Holy Spirit's role.

? Question #6

What can we learn about prayer and God the Holy Spirit from the above collection of verses?

Explanation of What is Being Asked

Pick out the simple, main, teaching about the Holy Spirit. Try not to get bogged down in the harder aspects of some of these verses!

A Answers



Practical Applications/Disciplines etc.

- Read a book about prayer. One suggestion is 'Prayer and the Knowledge of God', G. Goldsworthy, IVP, 2003
- Read a Christian autobiography. The group may like to share some examples where prayer features strongly. John G. Paton - Missionary to the New Hebrides, Banner of Truth reprinted 1994, comes strongly recommended, as do the biographies of George Muller.
- Commit to finding or making a quiet slot each day to pray.
- Teach your children to pray each day. Do it as an example to them. Do it with them.
- Discuss how to pray with brothers and sisters. Find ways of helping each other to pray.
- Keep a prayer diary as *a small group* or individual, especially noting answers to prayer.
- Memorise Bible verses that help or encourage with prayer.
- Seek help and encouragement with prayer by attending prayer meetings. Especially, go to prayer meetings which put first the Kingdom of God.

People are encouraged to share things they have found helpful.



Questions/Ideas/Thoughts for further study or meditation



Further passages to study at home or if you run out of questions.

These verses may shed light on the subject of prayer to God the Son and God the Holy Spirit: II Cor 12:7-9; Rev. 1:4.



Confirm that the Lords Prayer is not merely a formula or recipe by comparing and contrasting the two versions in Matthew and Luke (see Matthew. 6).



To think about: Why does Jesus particularly give the example of asking for Holy Spirit in verse 13? Looking at verse 14 may help.



Q. Why is Matthew 6:6 not teaching us that all prayer should be in secret?

A. Jesus is teaching that we must have the correct attitude to prayer and to God and to other people. Prayer must not be a matter of showing off. We should not be concerned to be seen praying by others so that they will think us spiritual. Instead we should be concerned about what God thinks about us, and that he will hear our prayers.



Other verses to study at home: Matt. 6:5-8; Acts 1:14, 4:24; Gen 18:16-33; Neh. 1; Eph 3:16-21; Acts 4:24ff; Jam 4:1-5.

<p style="text-align: center;">A</p>	<p><i>Prayer - A Range of Possible Answers</i></p>
<p>1</p>	<p>Several <u>wrong</u> attitudes to prayer are dispelled in this single verse:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ prayer must only be in secret; ✗ Jesus didn't need to pray because he was God; ✗ you cannot learn to pray; ✗ still less can some-one teach you to pray. <p><u>Right:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Jesus himself prayed. In this, he is our supreme example. If the perfect man needed to pray, how much more do we? ● It is possible both to learn to pray and to be taught how (hence this Bible study!) ● Both John (the baptist) and Jesus set their disciples good examples. They also both taught how to pray. We too should set each other a good example.
<p>2</p>	<p>Approachable, accepting, forgiving, loving, interested in us, kind, generous, interested in our good etc.</p>
<p>3</p>	<p>If even a bad earthly father gives good things to his children, we can be full of confidence and faith when we come to our heavenly father. The passage is an encouragement to pray willingly, often and with great confidence. Even if we had a lousy earthly father, even he occasionally gave us something good. How much better is our heavenly father.</p>
<p>4</p>	<p>"Hallowed be your name" is about us increasingly revering and loving God. "Your kingdom come" is about people becoming Christians and the transformation of society. "Daily bread" is our natural human needs.</p> <p>Attitudes and Priorities: To prioritise God's kingdom and his glory (v.2). Note how verse 2 comes before verse 3. To trust God to meet our needs (v.3). To approach God humbly, as sinners (v.4). To have godly attitudes to sin (past sin, others' sins and future sins, v.4). Notice that we should not allow consciousness of our own sin keep from prayer and God (v.4).</p>
<p>5</p>	<p>Sometimes we lack the courage to come to God in prayer. Verses 5 - 10 encourage is not to give up so easily but to pray anyway, even if it feels as if we are being 'cheeky' or too bold. Many things might discourage us (but we must pray anyway!):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Awareness of our own sin (see Neh. 1) ● Forgetting that God is our Father (v.2)

<p style="text-align: center;">A</p>	<p><i>Prayer - A Range of Possible Answers</i></p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Lack of confidence in God's power, love, promises etc. (Neh. 1 again.) ● Apparent unheard prayers in the past. (James 4:1-5)
<p>6</p>	<p><u>Ephesians. 6:18</u>: True prayer only happens through the Holy Spirit. Therefore we must depend upon him as we pray.</p> <p><u>John 14</u>: The Holy Spirit is always with us, so we can always pray as sons to our Father.</p> <p><u>Romans 8:13-16</u>: Not only are true Christians sons of God, but the Holy Spirit makes us feel it and enjoy this intimacy with the Father. Prayer is thus very natural for a child of God.</p> <p><u>Romans 8:26,27</u>: Some-times prayer is hard, but even then the Holy Spirit helps us to pray.</p>

END OF STUDY ON PRAYER



MEETING TOGETHER

From the ACC mission statement:

'Jesus Christ transforms lives as his people meet together. We encourage people to meet together at differing times, in differing sized groups and in differing places, to love and serve one another and encourage each other in our walk with Christ'

Per-study Instructions

Beware because this study and the next one, 'Community Fit', potentially overlap a great deal. The idea is to look at the subject of *fellowship*, since meeting together is the main way in which Christians engage in *fellowship* with each other.

Aims of This Study

- To understand that meeting together is the main way that Christians engage in fellowship with each other.
- To want to meet together for God's sake.
- To want to meet together for others' sake.
- To feel the need to meet together
- To prioritise meeting together

Theological Background

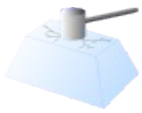
See 'God's Words' (Chapter on Fellowship), by J.I. Packer, IVP, 1981 for useful background reading on the subject of fellowship with both God and other Christians.

The subject of fellowship exists outside the church inasmuch as Non-Christians can have fellowship in clubs, pubs and on the Internet. Christian fellowship, however, moves beyond mere human fellowship because there is always a spiritual dimension and it is always God-centred. The challenge for Christians is for us to make sure that our fellowship never becomes so diluted that it is indistinguishable from that of the world around us. So, the mission statement talks about the need to be God-honouring and authentic.

Biblical fellowship is the expression, or working-out of John 14:20 "*On that day you will realise that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you.*" It has a vertical dimension and a horizontal dimension. The vertical relationship with Christ binds Christians to God; the fact that all true Christians are joined to Jesus binds us all to one another horizontally.

Fellowship can be expressed in many ways, for example: praying for each other, giving money to missionaries, doing something together for God etc. But the main expression of fellowship is

meeting together, in which context we can serve each other and share with each other. Wanting to meet together is an expression of brotherly love, and a very basic sign of authentic Christianity: 1 John 4:21 '*And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother*'.



Ice-breaker

Ask for accounts of when people have turned up to a meeting but nobody else turned up.

How did people feel?

What was the long-term effect of nobody else coming?



Questions for Group Discussion

Introduction to Question #1

 Read Hebrews 10:23 - 27

As part of urging the Hebrew Christians to persevere with the Christian life, the writer commands them to keep meeting together. This is a clear demarcation between those who are persevering and those who have given up.

? Question #1

You invited your neighbour to a 'Carols by Candle-light' service. She said that she considered herself to be a Christian, but politely declined your invitation. She said "You don't have to go to church to be a Christian, you know!" Does the passage help you to understand your neighbour?

Explanation of What is Being Asked

Is meeting together merely an optional extra?

A Answers

Introduction to Question #2

 Read Psalm 122

This psalm is one of the 'Songs of Ascents' that the people sang as they went up to Jerusalem to sacrifice and worship. For us, it very much like going to church.

 **Question #2**


How does your attitude to going to church, home group, a prayer meeting etc. compare with David's in verses 1 - 9 of the psalm?

Explanation of What is Being Asked

Nowadays, 'the house of the LORD' is not a building, it is God's people. The New Testament fulfilment of Jerusalem is also God's people, God living with us and in us by his Holy Spirit. Try to equate David's attitudes on approaching Jerusalem to our attitudes when meeting together.

A Answers


Introduction to Question #3


 Read John 20:19 - 28

The Thomas Factor: For some reason, Thomas wasn't there that first Sunday evening after Jesus' resurrection. He missed out on meeting with the risen Lord. He had to wait until the following Sunday evening to believe and say to Jesus "My Lord and my God."


 **Question #3**

Read the following passages *quickly* and identify, in each case, what the believers would have missed out on had they not been together:

 Luke 24:33-53

 Acts 1:6-11


 Acts 2:1,2


 Acts 2:42,47


 Acts 4:23-31

 Acts 5:1-11

 Acts 6:1-7

 Acts 14:27-15:2

 Acts 15:30-33

 Acts 19:18-20


 Acts 20:7-12

Explanation of What is Being Asked

A lot of key events happened when the believers met together. Spot them.

A Answers

Introduction to Question #4

 Refer to all the passages in Acts from Question #3.

? Question #4

What things might we allow to prevent us from meeting together nowadays?
What might we miss out on or spoil by giving too low a priority to meeting together?

Explanation of What is Being Asked

Many of the good things in Acts would not have happened if the believers had not been meeting together. In other cases, those who were absent may have missed a blessing. Sometimes, God's work would have been harmed by people's absence. Identify up-to-date examples.

A Answers

<hr/> <hr/>



Practical Applications/Disciplines etc.

- Read the chapter on Fellowship in Jim Packer's book "God's Words".
- Re-prioritise meeting together, on Sundays and at other times.
- Commit to involvement in meetings, home groups, other church activities.
- Pray for the success of our various meetings.
- Discuss how to ration television or other, harmful, distractions.
- Join a home group (if not already in one.)
- Memorise Hebrews 10:25.
- Seek to encourage the leaders and organisers of meetings.

People are encouraged to share occasions when they didn't feel like attending a certain meeting, summoned up the energy, went, and received a real blessing (for example).



Questions/Ideas/Thoughts for further study or meditation

● Is it possible to go to too many meetings?

● Think about or discuss this question and answer from a children's catechism:

Do Christians serve God on their own?

No. They worship and witness together as Christ's church. (Acts 2:47) Mt. 16:13-20; 18:15-20; Lk. 24:45-53; Acts 2:41-47; 1 Cor 12:17-20; 14:23-25; 1 Pet 4:7-11.

● (See <http://www.legg.uklinux.net/catechism.html> for more.)

A	<i>Meeting Together - A Range of Possible Answers</i>
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The passage describes meeting together as an integral part of the Christian life. It is not just a bolt-on extra. Verse 25 is a command, not just a suggestion. ● Meeting together is vital for other Christians (and us) to be encouraged. The alternative is discouragement, which leads to powerlessness and failure. ● It is difficult to 'spur one another one to love and good deeds' if we do not meet together. ● The people who were in the habit of not meeting together any more are presumably those who have apostatised and gone back to Judaism. This should worry anyone who is giving up meeting together. ● All in all, it doesn't sound as if your neighbour really knows a great deal about the Christian life. Perhaps she would like to find out more by doing a Christianity Explored course?
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● (v.1) The prospect of meeting with God's people should fill us with joy. Sometimes a challenge? ● (v.2) Actually arriving and being together should be even better. Is there a sense of excitement there in verse 2? ● (v.3) It's going to be a bit of a crush, but we want to be intimately involved in each others' lives, to share, to talk, to help. ● (v.4.) This is not just a football match, God's people are meeting together, to engage in God-centred activity. The significance of what we are doing should motivate us. ● (v.5) We are coming to the King, the one who was promised to sit on David's throne for ever, the Lord Jesus Christ. Should we be a little scared of what he might say to us? ● (vv.6-9) We should meet together with positive attitude of working and praying for peace (co-operation) and spiritual prosperity in God's kingdom, for God's sake, and for us his people's sake.
3	<p>A lot of key events happened when the believers met together. There was lots of blessing and many opportunities. Also, notice how Jesus seemed particularly willing to meet with them on the first day of the week, leading to further growth of the church.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● (14:27-15:2) The opportunity to deal with a particularly nasty heresy. ● (15:30-33) Some useful inter-church fellowship. ● (19:18-20) Making a real impact on the Gentile world. This would have made newspaper headlines! ● (20:7-12) Sunday night: An all-night sermon from the Apostle Paul himself, and the realisation that maybe they should buy some more chairs.

<p>A</p>	<p><i>Meeting Together - A Range of Possible Answers</i></p>
	<p>More detail:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● (Luke 24:33-53, Acts 1:6-11) On Sunday evening, Jesus meets with his people and blesses with his peace and fresh understanding of the Scriptures, the promise of the Holy Spirit and extra power to evangelise. Their mourning was turned into joy, and they witnessed the Ascension. ● (Acts 2:1,2) Pentecost Sunday: The Holy Spirit comes in a new and powerful way to enable the believers to evangelise effectively from now on. ● (2:42,47) The believers experience all the joy and both spiritual and practical benefits of belonging to God's family. Lots of others are added to their number (evangelism.) ● (4:23-31) An amazing prayer meeting with remarkable answers to prayer. ● (5:1-11) A scary appreciation dawns on the believers of just how very holy the Holy Spirit is. A healthy fear of God. ● (6:1-7) Key decision-making events, spiritual delegation, and some prototype deacons, all leading to further growth of the church. ● (14:27-15:2) The opportunity to deal with a particularly nasty heresy. ● (15:30-33) Some useful inter-church fellowship. ● (19:18-20) Making a real impact on the Gentile world. This would have made newspaper headlines! ● (20:7-12) Sunday night: An all-night sermon from the Apostle Paul himself, and the realisation that maybe they should buy some more chairs.
<p>4</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● A low view of meeting together, television, over-work, failure to set aside time for meeting together, quarrels with other Christians etc. etc. ● We can miss special blessings from when God meets with his people if we are not there. ● We miss the ministry of God's Word, and the use of people's other gifts. ● Key decisions stay unmade. Problems are not dealt with. Heresy can grow. ● etc. etc. etc.

END OF STUDY ON MEETING TOGETHER



COMMUNITY 'FIT'

From the ACC mission statement:

'Jesus Christ transforms lives and equips us uniquely to build up his Church. We seek to help all believers to get connected with the church. We will help people to identify the talents and resources that God has given them, and encourage them to steward these gifts and resources for the building up of the church and the wider extension of the Kingdom of God.'

Per-study Instructions

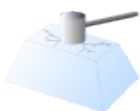
This study looks at 1 Corinthians 12 to understand 'body-ministry', Romans 12 to learn about using our gifts, and some texts from Acts to see how true Christian community means every day fellowship and involvement in each other's lives.

Aims of This Study

- To understand that the church is like a body where every member counts.
- To value other Christians and their gifts.
- To be clear about our own gifts and to deploy them in God's kingdom.
- To break out of a Sunday-only mould and be more involved in each others' lives

Theological Background

The Bible refers to the church as a family, a son, a bride, a temple, a city and many other things, in order to teach us specific doctrine. One of the most important is the idea of the church being a body, the body of the Lord Jesus Christ. Ephesians 1:22 *'And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church,²³ which is his body, the fulness of him who fills everything in every way'*. The idea is that while Jesus is in heaven, we who are on earth carry out his will and become increasingly like him, thereby bringing him glory. It is part of the original Creation mandate for mankind to image God, to show everyone his glory (Eph. 1:11-13). Since we do all this not as a single individual, but as many wildly different people, how we relate to each other as a *community* in order to image God and obey the 'head' (Christ) is of great importance. Hence the title of this study "Community 'Fit'".




Ice-breaker

List all the names of people who do 'jobs' in the church. See how many you can identify. Perhaps write them on a flip-chart. Be prepared to learn a few new things ...



Questions for Group Discussion

Introduction to Question #1

 Read 1 Corinthians 12:12-27.

We may be tempted to think that only ministers, or only the wealthy, or only the very intelligent (insert your own prejudice in here) are essential to church life; all the rest of us are just optional extras ...

? Question #1

Have you ever been tempted to think that your church could manage quite well without you, or without certain other people? What would the Apostle Paul have to say about such thoughts, from the passage?

Explanation of What is Being Asked

Paul argues at length that every member (i.e. Christian) is an essential part of the body. What does this teach us?

A Answers

Introduction to Question #2

 Read Romans 12:1-13.

Romans 12 covers the use of Christians' gifts, the right gifts, in the right way, with the right attitudes. It is essential that our gifts are deployed in God's kingdom, so let's take a fictional friend and bring the problem of the under-use of our gifts to life ...

? Question #2

My friend's church just has a minister, no elders or deacons. The only other person who appears to have a role is the guy who plays the organ. The minister leads services, preaches, leads all other meetings, visits people, arrives early and unlocks, leaves late and locks up, plans everything. He used to be a chef so he even organises the food for special events. My friend just spectates most of


the time; the only things he does as part of church life are singing at services and occasionally praying aloud in the prayer meeting. How should I advise him in the light of Romans 12?

Explanation of What is Being Asked

Clearly in this hypothetical(?) case, my friend's church makes it difficult for him to put into practice much of what Paul describes in Romans 12. What kind of changes should he be praying for? Does he need a new church, or what? Take one paragraph at a time.

A Answers

Introduction to Question #3

 Read Acts 2:44,45, 4:32-35.

The situation in Jerusalem in the early church immediately after Pentecost was temporary, and would soon be disrupted by the persecution associated with martyring of Stephen. Nevertheless, we can learn a lot about healthy Christian fellowship without necessarily setting up a commune.

? Question #3


In what ways did the early Christians take their fellowship beyond simply turning up for Sunday services?

Explanation of What is Being Asked

Pick out from Acts 2 and 4 the ways in which the early believers engaged in really quite intimate fellowship with each other.

A Answers

Introduction to Question #4

 Read Exodus 35:30 - 36:7

God had given Moses instructions about the construction of the Tabernacle and then Moses communicates these to the people.

 **Question #4**

Although we are not building a physical structure, what principles can be drawn from the text about engaging in God's work today?

Explanation of What is Being Asked

Bridge the gap from the physical Old Testament building instructions to spiritual New Testament ideas for nowadays.

 **Answers**

 **Practical Applications/Disciplines etc.**

- Read the chapter in John Stott's commentary on Acts for chapters 4-6, 'The Message of Acts', IVP BST, 2005.
- Listen to a sermon on Romans 12:1-8 by John Piper. Available here: <http://www.biblicalpreaching.info/sermons.php>
- Take every opportunity to discover your gifts.
- If you are a leader, discuss both your and other people's perceptions of where their gifts lie.
- Encourage anyone who seems to be using a gift (feed-back forms, a word in the ear, by just being there, etc.)
- Consider church membership in order to advertise your willingness to deploy your gifts in God's kingdom.
- Consider whether you have been holding back on using your gifts for the building of the

church.

Leaders are encouraged to provide feed-back to anyone to whom they assign a task.



Questions/Ideas/Thoughts for further study or meditation



Further passages to study at home or if you run out of questions.

1 Cor. 12:27-30; Luke 19:11-27; Matt. 25:14-30.



What are the dangers of us thinking we have certain gifts when we do not? How can such problems be avoided?

<p>A</p>	<p><i>Community 'Fit' - A Range of Possible Answers</i></p>
<p>1</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Since the body is a unit (v.12) to remove certain parts would be like the mutilation of Christ's body. ● The Holy Spirit unites all the part of the body, so removing some would clearly be wrong (v.13). ● Every part of the body, that is every Christian, is needed to perform some function. ● The church/body has been designed by God, so even the unlikely-looking members are vital.
<p>2</p>	<p>(vv. 1-2) My friend needs to understand the whole of his life is a sacrifice of worship to God, not just the times when he is at church. His church should be preparing him for family life, work, friendships, trials, marriage, bringing up children etc, so that the whole of his life is a sacrifice of worship to God.</p> <p>(vv. 3-8) Both my friend and his church need to gain an awareness of where his gifts lie, and then encourage him to use them, providing opportunities a) to discover gifting, and b) to deploy gifts for God's glory. This doesn't just mean finding him something to do during a Sunday service. Notice how many of the gifts in verses 6-8 are not necessarily Sunday gifts, e.g. 'showing mercy'.</p> <p>(vv. 9-13) These verses describe many practical difficulties that we need to overcome in deploying our gifts. We need to use our gifts in love (v.9)(not just duty.) We must use them not for evil, but good (v.9). There must be a horizontal 'brotherly' love in how we use gifts - no hyper-spirituality? (v.10) Humility is required (v.10), zeal, etc. etc.</p> <p>Unless his church is moving in this direction, there is a danger that my friend is simply wasting his life, and needs a new church, but notice the verses about humility and love</p>

<p>A</p>	<p><i>Community 'Fit' - A Range of Possible Answers</i></p>
	<p>before recommending anything rash to him!</p>
<p>3</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The believers loved each other more than they did their possessions and homes. ● The believers met together at every opportunity, not just on Sundays. ● They knew what was going on in each other's lives (and so were able to help etc.) ● It wasn't just the leaders who were involved in people's lives (although they organised it 4:35).
<p>4</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● We are chosen by God ● We are resourced personally by His Spirit; ● We have been given gifts, talents to be used for His glory; ● There is a the need to teach others; ● God has given multiple skills for the building of his church; ● It is the Spirit-empowered God-equipped people who will do the work, not some other agency; ● We are given the ability but we must also be willing to actually engage in it; ● Notice how generous the whole community were (they had to be restrained from giving- unheard of!!); ● Where God commands something to be done, he always provides us with the necessary resources.

END OF STUDY ON COMMUNITY 'FIT'



COMMUNITY IMPACT

From the ACC mission statement:

'Jesus Christ transforms lives in order that others might be impacted. We want to be gracious communicators of the gospel and great doers of good in Ashford and beyond by individual, group and corporate expressions of love and generosity. '

Per-study Instructions

This study looks at the relationship between living a godly life and speaking the Gospel to Non-Christians from the middle section of Peter's first letter.

Aims of This Study

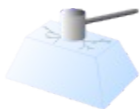
- To be able to explain the Gospel readily
- To understand the importance of a godly life as a platform for the Gospel.
- To have the Gospel as a motivation for Christ-like living.
- To increase the effectiveness of our witness-bearing.
- To live lives that advertise the Gospel.

Theological Background

Successful witness bearing is not about slick presentations of the Gospel or clever arguments (although these may sometimes be useful), it is about being ready at a moment's notice to share what Christ has done for you. The snappy verse 1 Peter 3:15 '*Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have*' presumes

- a) a clear understanding of the Gospel,
- b) that some thought has been given to how best it is explained to another person, and
- c) that a godly life has generated interest from a Non-Christian.

Thus, expecting to be a "good witness" without preparation, without understanding or the reality of a godly life lacks integrity, hence this Bible study ...



Ice-breaker

Share with the group who first explained the Gospel clearly to you. Identify whether it was a family member, a friend, a stranger, a preacher/minister/pastor, etc. See what the most common category of person was. Did you know what kind of life that person was leading? Did it affect how you listened as they explained the Gospel to you. Explore these issues for a few minutes.



Questions for Group Discussion

Introduction to Question #1

 Read 1 Peter 2:4-10

Many portions of Scripture contain summaries of the Gospel. This is one such passage, which leads into Peter's argument about how the Gospel must be presented from the platform of a godly life.

? Question #1

Pick out three or four important elements of the Gospel from the passage.

Explanation of What is Being Asked

If we are to be ready to share the Gospel with people, as per 3:15, we need to have the elements of the Gospel clearly in our heads and hearts, ready.

A Answers

Introduction to Question #2

 Read 1 Peter 2:11

John Piper describes an incident where a man lost a credit card. The ensuing search for the lost plastic meant that he did not watch something lascivious (lustful) on television that night. The following day a great witness-bearing opportunity happened at work, and the man was able to share Christ with a colleague ...

? Question #2

How do we feel if we have just done one of our favourite sins again, and then suddenly, out of the blue, an opportunity arises to tell somebody all about Jesus? Tie this in with verse 11.

Explanation of What is Being Asked

Verse 11 is describing how sin messes up our Christian lives. Peter urges us not to give in to our regular sins because it will affect not only us but also the Non-Christians around us who might

otherwise become Christians. What are the connections between our lives and whether people around us become Christians or not?

A Answers

Introduction to Question #3

 Read 1 Peter 2:12 and 3:15

These two verses, despite being separated by a chapter or so, are both describing how people will become Christians.

? Question #3

Establish the meaning of v.12 and how it is similar to 3:15. How does God work through his people in order to make others into Christians?

Explanation of What is Being Asked

2:12 "*glorify God on the day he visits us*" is generally thought to be describing a day when God the Holy Spirit comes and make lots of people into Christians. This results in them glorifying God. The idea of God visiting us in the Bible usually describes him doing something powerful, sometimes judgement, but in this case blessing.

A Answers

Introduction to Question #4

 Refer to 1 Peter 2:12 to 3:15.

2:12 and 3:15 are a long way apart in Peter's letter. It's time to examine the filling inside the sandwich formed by 2:12 and 3:15.

? Question #4

Pick out a selection of the elements of a godly and gracious, Christ-like, life from 1 Peter 2:13 - 3:14.

Explanation of What is Being Asked

The verses 1 Peter 2:12 and 3:15 both describe how a godly life leads to other people becoming Christians. The verses in between describe what sort of life Peter is writing about, i.e. the sort of life that he calls "*such good lives*" in 2:12 and the sort of life that demonstrates "*the hope you have*" in 3:15.

A Answers

Introduction to Question #5

 Refer to 1 Peter 3:1 and 3:15.

? Question #5

Roger Carswell, an evangelist based in Leeds, says that he hates this quote from Francis of Assisi: "Preach the Gospel always and if necessary use words."

Discuss Roger's view in the light of 1 Peter 3:1 and 3:15

Explanation of What is Being Asked

Is there a conflict between these two verses? How is the apparent conflict correctly resolved?

A Answers



Practical Applications/Disciplines etc.

- Before repeating recurring sins, consider what effect this may have on Non-Christian friends, family, colleagues etc.
- Read John Piper's sermon series "How to Kill Sin"
<http://www.desiringgod.org/library/sermons/02/040702.html>, or download the MP3 audio files from the same web site to listen to them.
- Attend ACC's regular Personal Evangelism courses.
- Prepare a Three-Minute testimony and practise it in front of a mirror, or even a better, get feed-back from a willing Christian, or better still, Non-Christian!
- Memorise 1 Peter 2:11,12; 3:15.
- Join in ACC activities where we attempt to "do good" in the community, sometimes even without a direct evangelistic agenda.
- What needs do you see around you, and what could you do to help meet them?

Leaders are encouraged to share their own testimony or invite others to do so.




Questions/Ideas/Thoughts for further study or meditation



Further passages to study at home or if you run out of questions.

II kings 6:24-7:20; John 13:34,35; Col 4:2-6; II Thess. 2:13-3:1; II Tim 2:10-18; Acts 9:36-39; 6:1-7

 To think about: If Christians try to live really good lives just so that others will become Christians, isn't that rather like the Pharisees in Matthew 23:15 "*Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are*"?

<p>A</p>	<p><i>Community Impact - A Range of Possible Answers</i></p>
<p>1</p>	<p>(vv. 4,5) We can live lives that are acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. (v. 6) If we trust Christ, we will never be put to shame. (vv.7,8) We must believe, i.e. trust in, Christ and obey the Gospel message to be saved. (vv. 9-10) God has chosen a people for himself, showing us mercy, so that we can praise him.</p>
<p>2</p>	<p>Peter tells us to live lives that are different from those of our neighbours (<i>'aliens and strangers in the world'</i>), not living for the sorts of things and pleasures that those around us live for. In particular, he commands us to avoid 'sinful desires'. The NASB calls them 'fleshly lusts', but that does not mean that they are limited to sexual sin. Food sin, comfort sin, etc. are all in scope here.</p> <p>If a Non-Christian sees us living a compromised life that is just like his own he will not be impressed, still less will he be attracted to Christ through us. John Piper: <i>'If some-one has not asked you for the reason for the hope you have, maybe it is that your life is just the same as theirs!'</i></p> <p>Furthermore, even if the Non-Christian does not <i>see</i> us satisfying our 'sinful desires', we will grieve the Holy Spirit, and will also feel guilty, unspiritual and far from God. So whether we are <i>seen</i> or not, our lives have a direct connection to whether those around us are saved or not.</p> <p>God can work in people's lives despite us, of course, but generally he prefers to work through us (see verse 12.)</p>
<p>3</p>	<p>In 2:12, the Christian's distinctive lifestyle leads to some-one else becoming a Christian. In 3:15, some-one notices a Christian's distinctive lifestyle, this provides an opportunity to tell about Christ (filling in some of the detail missing from 2:12.), leading hopefully to the enquirer becoming a Christian.</p> <p>Putting these two verses together gives the following common scenario:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Non-Christian sees Christian leading a godly life. 2. This leads to the Non-Christian hearing the Gospel with an open mind. 3. The Non-Christian is impressed by the both the Gospel and the Christian's life that authenticates the Gospel, and so becomes a Christian. PTL
<p>4</p>	<p>2:13-17 Being law-abiding citizens. 2:18-25 Being good slaves (employees?) even if treated unfairly (like Jesus.)</p>

<p>A</p>	<p><i>Community Impact - A Range of Possible Answers</i></p>
	<p>3:1-6 addresses women married to Non-Christian husbands and describes spiritual beauty (submission, gentleness, purity reverence, etc.) 3:7 stops the husbands sniggering and reminds them not to look down on their wives because they are co-heirs and not inferior! 3:8 Love, co-operation, humility in the church. 3:9-13a No revenge-taking. 3:13b Not being afraid of what Non-Christians fear. ... <u>This is the kind of behaviour that leads eventually to people becoming Christians!</u></p>
<p>5</p>	<p>As usual, in the Bible, the answer is not "one or t'other", but "both, and".</p> <p>Our words and our lives should be consistent with each other: Our lives should exemplify our words, and our words should explain our lives.</p> <p>However, in some circumstances deeds and attitudes are powerful, whereas words might annoy an already bewildered husband (3:1).</p> <p>But when the time is right, we must be ready with the words (3:15) because everyone needs to hear the Gospel explained (Romans 10:14 '<i>... And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard?</i>')</p> <p>But remember the last part of 1 Peter 3:15 '<i>But do this with gentleness and respect, ...</i>'</p>

END OF STUDY ON COMMUNITY IMPACT



THE WIDER WORLD

From the ACC mission statement:

'Jesus Christ transforms lives throughout the world and we want to be a part of it. We seek to partner with believers locally, nationally and internationally who are also committed to life transformation by Jesus Christ. Through prayer, financial support and missions, we will have a greater awareness of the Great Commission being fulfilled.'

Per-study Instructions

This study looks at the progress of worldwide evangelism from Genesis to Acts, challenging us to both understand and feel the force of the Great Commission.

Aims of This Study

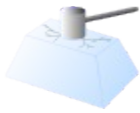
- To understand that worldwide evangelism is what God was planning all along.
- To be grateful to God that the Gospel reached us here.
- To feel confidence in Jesus' authority, power and continued presence.
- To understand that evangelism (like charity) starts at home, but does not end at home.
- To open our minds to being involved in God's work outside ACC.

Theological Background

When God selected Abraham, he was not only intending to bless Abraham's descendants, the Jews. His intention was to bless and restore the whole world. With the coming of the Holy Spirit in a new and powerful way, evangelism of the world has been going on for 2,000 years. We are the direct beneficiaries of it.

Now it is our turn to act in the power of the same Holy Spirit, so that we too follow the biblical pattern of evangelism found in Acts 1:8 "*You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.*" Notice the progression '*Jerusalem ... Samaria ... the ends of the earth*'. Like charity, evangelism begins at home, but it certainly does not end there. Evangelism starts at home (*Jerusalem=Ashford?*), works outwards to nearby areas (*Samaria=England?*), and gradually embraces the whole world (*the ends of the earth=everywhere*).

The apostles who received the Great Commission were martyred long ago. The baton has been handed to us, hence this Bible study ...




Ice-breaker

Ask the group to think if they know any Jewish Christians, or at least Christians who have some Jewish blood. Bear in mind how many or few were identified for when we come to question #2.



Questions for Group Discussion

Introduction to Question #1

 Read Genesis 12:1-3

These verses are the origin of the church, and reveal God's plan very early in both the Bible and world history.

 **Question #1**

Who exactly is God promising to 'bless' in this inaugural covenant promise made by the LORD to Abram?

Explanation of What is Being Asked

God does not promise only to bless Abram, nor even just the Jews. The full scope becomes clear in verse 3.

 **Answers**

Introduction to Question #2

 Read Zechariah 8:20-23

Although God's kingdom was at one of its most inglorious low-points when Zechariah was prophesying (see figure below), the prophetic message was looking ahead to much better times, times after the messiah had come ...

 **Question #2**

Who is the prophet Zechariah describing?

Explanation of What is Being Asked

Who are the 'many peoples and powerful nations' in verse 22 and the 'ten men from all languages and nations'?

Answers

The Progress of the Kingdom



Figure for Question #2 - Notice points 16 to 20 on the graph, and the dotted line above.

Introduction to Question #3

Read Matthew 28:16-20

It is possible to read the Great Commission (verses 18-20) as a stark command that just gets us into a lot of trouble, weighs us down with an impossible burden, and offers no real help.

However, a closer inspection of what the Lord says in these verses reveals some powerful antidotes to cynical Britishness.

? Question #3

If we try to evangelise, aren't we just control freaks, busybodies and troublemakers? How is it that we can legitimately interfere with other people's lives, even far from home?

Explanation of What is Being Asked

The Anglo-Saxon temperament (apologies to others!) resists interfering in other people's lives and dislikes imposing the claims of Christ on them. How can we be sure that evangelism is the right thing to do?

A Answers

Introduction to Question #4

 Read Acts 1:4-8

Luke's version of the Great Commission, as recorded in Acts, has a different focus from that of Matthew.

? Question #4

The disciples' question to Jesus in verse 6 reveals a significant misunderstanding about the size and shape of the Kingdom of God. How does Jesus go about straightening them out?

Explanation of What is Being Asked

The disciples clearly think that God's kingdom is a) only Jewish and b) concentrated in and limited to Israel. How does Jesus take their limited view of his kingdom and expand it?

A Answers



Practical Applications/Disciplines etc.

- Think about what is the equivalent to Jerusalem, Samaria and the ends of the earth for you.
- Consider how you can be involved in mission at home, nearby, and across the world.
- Actively take on supporting a missionary or other ministry further afield.
- Go to prayer meetings for worldwide evangelism.
- Pray for the persecuted church.
- Thank God for inspiring Christians to bring the Gospel to this country.
- Pray that God would once again have mercy on Britain as he is showing in many other parts of the world.
- Read Operation World by Patrick Johnstone. Prayer fuel.
- Read Window on the World by Spraggett and Johnstone to your children.
- Adopt a missionary/cause/ministry in your home group.

Leaders are encouraged to share what they themselves do to support missionaries etc.



Questions/Ideas/Thoughts for further study or meditation



Further passages to study at home or if you run out of questions.

II Kings 7:9; Zech. 8:20-22; Joel 2:28-32; Acts 2; I Pet 3:15; Acts 13:1-5; 13:46-48.

🌐 To think about: How would you advise a British young person who is all fired up to evangelise a hitherto unevangelised tribe in the "two-thirds world"? What questions might you ask about how well his personal evangelism is going at home/school/work/college/neighbours etc?

<p style="text-align: center;">A</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>The Wider World - A Range of Possible Answers</i></p>
<p>1</p>	<p>Initially God separates off Abraham and his family from all the other nations in verse 1. However, his promise to bless Abram grows in scope as each verse comes and goes. Eventually, in verse 3, it becomes apparent that God intends to bless all the nations of the world through Abraham. This has been partially achieved by Jesus dying for both Jews and Gentiles, but the final fulfilment has yet to be realised.</p> <p>So, it looks as if God was planning worldwide evangelisation all along. Check out Galatians 3:8 <i>'The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: "All nations will be blessed through you." 'So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.'</i></p>
<p>2</p>	<p>Us (especially the Gentiles among us. Bear in mind the ice-breaker.)</p>
<p>3</p>	<p>In the Great Commission, in verse 19, Jesus does not just say <i>"Go and make disciples"</i>, he also gives us two great encouragements:</p> <p>a) Jesus says that <i>'all authority'</i> has been given to him, so when he sends us out, we have the authority to do seemingly outrageous things like taking the Gospel out into the community, or evangelising in a Muslim country. We have God's full authority to interfere in people's lives!</p> <p>b) Jesus says that he will always be with us in verse 20. He is our Immanuel (God with Us). He achieves this by his Holy Spirit. So, when you take the Gospel to the world, expect people to become Christians, because the Holy Spirit's power has been promised by Jesus.</p>
<p>4</p>	<p>Jesus confirms that the start of the restoration of the kingdom was indeed going to start soon, at Pentecost in fact (although he does not reveal the exact date to them; he just tells them to wait.) However, the scope is very soon going to be enlarged out of all proportion because a) the gentiles are going to be included, and b) the kingdom will eventually cover the whole earth as Habakkuk prophesied: Hab. 2:14 <i>'For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.'</i></p> <p>The other surprise that Jesus gave them was that they (the disciples) were doing to do the job (v.8)! Jesus would provide the power; they would be the witnesses-bearers.</p>

END OF STUDY ON THE WIDER WORLD



BUILDING TOMORROW'S CHURCH

From the ACC mission statement:

'Jesus Christ transforms lives and will continue to build his church. [We will] seek to identify, help equip and launch those who will be leaders in tomorrow's church.'

Per-study Instructions

This study looks at the need to train our children, how we must not stop discipling people just after they have been converted, how we need to train future leaders and teachers, how we must equip everyone to cope with the dangers of the future. A variety of passages is sampled to cover this wide and varied ground.

Aims of This Study

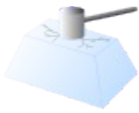
- To understand the importance of preparing for the future in our church and family life today.
- To feel that Christ's church is precious and must be given our best attention now.
- To follow the instructions in the Bible for building tomorrow's church today.

Theological Background

The selection of study passages, coming from both the Old and New testaments, shows that God has been concerned that his people should provide for the future by building tomorrow's church through all of time.

The theme of bringing up children for God has been important ever since the creation of marriage: Malachi refers right back to Genesis chapter 2 when he says in Malachi 2:15 '*Has not the LORD made them one? In flesh and spirit they are his. And why one? Because he was seeking godly offspring.*'

However there is another dimension to building tomorrow's church which does not focus on children. This is the training, equipping and discipleship dimension. We see it in how Jesus trained his disciples, and later in how the Apostle Paul made sure that all the churches he had planted had overseers and elders to equip and "disciple" the new Christians. Paul makes sure that his churches are well defended against future dangers.




Ice-breaker

Ask the group if they recall any churches that went out of business. Do they have views about why any of these churches failed?



Questions for Group Discussion

Introduction to Question #1

 Read Psalm 78:1-8, then refer to Deut. 6:5-8.

These verses impress on the current generation of parents their responsibilities towards not just the rising generation, but even the one after (v.6).

 **Question #1**


In what practical ways can we be obedient from this psalm, taking heed of its warnings and promises? Deuteronomy 6:1-7 may give some additional ideas.

Explanation of What is Being Asked

List concrete, practical, ways of training and instructing our children in the things of God, noting the warning in verse 8 and the promise in verse 7.

 **Answers**

Introduction to Question #2

 Read Mark 6:30-44, 8:1-10

These verses contain more than one lesson, and the sign-miracle seems to have more than one message in it, but one lesson in particular is relevant to our subject of "Building Tomorrow's Church".

 **Question #2**

Study these two miracles in Mark, taking careful note of who said what, and who exactly did what, then answer this question: Who fed the 5,000 and 4,000? And so how do we apply this to

ourselves?

Explanation of What is Being Asked

Notice who Jesus asked to do the feeding, and then who actually did it.

Answers

Introduction to Question #3

 Read Titus 1:5-2:10

Throughout the Old and New Testaments God provides both leaders and teachers for his people. Since we are still in the New Testament era, what should we be doing nowadays?

? Question #3

Your brother is member of a church that traditionally had just one pastor and few other officers. At the time when the last pastor left, there was just one infirm deacon and no elders or overseers. How has your brother's church ignored Scripture, and what are the likely effects on his local church?

Explanation of What is Being Asked

Over the past 500 years or so, the subject of church officers has been quite controversial. Hopefully we can largely avoid the controversy during this study and deal simply with what Paul says to Titus in his letter.

Paul appears to identify two church offices in Titus, '*elder*' and '*overseer*'. Most agree that from the way these are spoken of in 1:5,6 and 1:7, they are essentially the same single office, the words simply emphasising different aspects of the role. Let's call them *overseers* for convenience. Furthermore, because instructions for how to appoint *pastors* and *teachers* are not given elsewhere in the New Testament, it is largely agreed that the terms *pastor* and *teacher* are two aspects of the *overseer* office. *Deacons* do not feature explicitly in Titus.

So, the question is asking about the effect of a church suddenly having no *overseers* to lead, teach, pastor and oversee it.

A Answers

Introduction to Question #4

 Read Acts 20:25-32

Paul calls in at Miletus from where he says goodbye to the elders of the church(es) in nearby Ephesus. He is concerned to discharge his responsibilities to them, and the main thing he wants to do is to warn them about the dangers that their church(es) will face.

? Question #4

What are the main dangers that Paul is warning the Ephesian elders and overseers about?
Are they still dangers 2,000 years later?

Explanation of What is Being Asked

Look at each verse and pick out implied or explicit dangers, thinking whether they are relevant to us today.

A Answers



Practical Applications/Disciplines etc.

- Read a parenting book. See the short list below.
- Attend, pray for, encourage leaders of the ACC parenting course.
- Pray for Christian parents and the rising generation.
- Take opportunities to receive training in leading, preaching, teaching, parenting, personal

evangelism etc.

- Be willing to try and fail and try again.
- Follow, encourage and pray for leaders in the church.
- Regard the 'flock of God' as exceedingly precious.
- Guard against the dilution of the Gospel/Scripture

Leaders are encouraged to consider how the training of people in home group roles is going. Do people need advice, encouragement, feed-back?



Questions/Ideas/Thoughts for further study or meditation



Further passages to study at home or if you run out of questions.

Eph. 6:1-4; Gen. 17:7; Isaiah 49:22-26; Mark 3:13-18



Sometimes a parenting book is a good idea. Consider these examples for reading yourself or giving away:


- If your children are young: Aren't They Lovely When They're Asleep, Ann Benton, Christian Focus, 2004, or Shepherding the Heart of a Child, Ted Tripp.
- If you have teenagers: Age of Opportunity (A Biblical Guide to Parenting Teens), Paul Tripp, P&R, 1997
- If you have wayward, grown-up, children: Come Back, Barbara, C.J. Miller, P&R, 1997.



How can those who are not themselves parents help or support those who are? Praying for parents is one obvious idea. Does Titus 2:4 shed any light?



To think about: To what extent can parents delegate the teaching of their children to Sunday School, schools, Young People's Meetings? This is not a straightforward question! Check your answer against Deut. 6:5-8.

A	<i>Building Tomorrow's Church - A Range of Possible Answers</i>
1	<p>(vv.1,4) Children must be taught God's word. This means Bible stories, memory verses, quizzes and fun things. Catechisms make efficient use of time, see http://www.legg.uklinux.net/123.html for small children, and http://www.legg.uklinux.net/catechism.html for older children. Children need to be taught how to read the Bible for themselves, to pray and to listen to preaching.</p> <p>(v.2.) is actually fulfilled in Jesus' teaching (Matt. 13:35) showing that we must teach Jesus' parables to our children, as well as "Bible stories".</p> <p>(v.3) The historical books of the Bible make great stories for teaching children.</p> <p>(v.4.) We must tell our children how God has dealt with us, answers to prayer, great providences, disciplines, warnings etc.</p> <p>(v.5) We must teach children God's commands.</p> <p>(v.6.) We should remember that when we are bringing up our children, we are at one and the same time teaching them by example how to bring up their children, our grandchildren! Do grandparents have a role here too?</p> <p>(v.7) The whole aim of bringing up children is verse 7. This must always be our prayer, our goal.</p> <p>(v.8) We must impress the warnings of Scripture on our children, e.g. the sad history of Israel and Judah, The Fall, Cain, The Flood, Babel, Judges, Ananias and Sapphira, Judas Iscariot, etc.</p> <p>Deuteronomy 6 shows us further how to turn everyday events into spiritual lessons.</p> <p> Those who are not parents may like to look at the further study and meditation section for how they can support those who are parents.</p>
2	<p>One of the major themes in Mark's Gospel is the training of the disciples. It features in at least Chapters 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 13 and 14. See http://www.legg.uklinux.net/what_is_mark_about.html for more details. Indeed Jesus chooses the Twelve disciples for that very purpose in Mark 4:13-19: So that they can learn from his teaching and example, but also so that they could get some hands-on training.</p> <p>When the disciples simply wanted to get some rest, Jesus starts a fresh chapter of hands-on training: Mark 6:37 ... "You give them something to eat." And that is exactly what happens, Jesus does the actual miracle, but the disciples learn to serve using the resources they have been providentially given, with power supplied by Jesus. Because the disciples were a bit slow to learn, Jesus trains them a second time with 4,000 people - same dialogue, very similar lesson: Practical, hands-on training for the disciples.</p>

<p>A</p>	<p><i>Building Tomorrow's Church - A Range of Possible Answers</i></p>
	<p>Jesus, was training the next generation of church leaders. He taught them, he exemplified daily what he taught, and then he gave them practical experience and feed-back (Mark 8:17-21.) Jesus forgave them when they blew it, gave them another practice, and eventually sent them off to do it for real (John 21:17 in Peter's case.)</p>
<p>3</p>	<p>(1:5) Clearly, Crete Congregational Church is incomplete without some church officers. This was sufficiently important or worrying for Paul to leave Titus in Crete to appoint some.</p> <p>(1:7) An overseer is needed to take charge of God's work in a place, so your brother's church must now be severely handicapped. The future of the church must be in doubt if it cannot be relied upon to do God's work!</p> <p>(1:9) clearly tells us that overseers are responsible for encouraging sound doctrine and for refuting error. This ought to be very worrying for the members of your brother's church.</p> <p>It becomes clear from 1:10 to 2:10 that, since there are no overseers in the church in Crete, Titus is having to do their job for them. A church, such as your brother's, would have nobody to:</p> <p>(1:10) silence the many trouble-makers, and protect households that are in danger. (2:1) teach sound doctrine, (2:2) teach the older men, (2:3) teach the older women to teach the younger, (2:6-10) take charge of the young men and slaves (employees nowadays, perhaps?) All in all, the remaining inform deacon is really going to have his work cut out ...</p> <p>It goes without saying then, that our overseers/elders/pastors/teachers need be followed and encouraged (Heb. 13:17) so that they do not suddenly leave. They, with the help of the rest of the church, need to make sure that new officers are trained, recognised and appointed so that the future of the church is catered for biblically. Every church needs recognised leaders and teachers.</p>
<p>4</p>	<p>(vv.25-27) Paul was never going to see them again, so it was important that learned to stand on their own two feet from now on. He was no longer going to be around to sort their problems out. He had told them everything they needed to know, but they had to be careful not to allow the Gospel to get diluted just because Paul wasn't around any more to correct them. This is perhaps even more of a problem 2,000 years later. Thankfully, we have Paul's letters.</p> <p>(v.28) By calling the church a 'flock', Paul is showing how vulnerable new Christians are.</p>

A	<i>Building Tomorrow's Church - A Range of Possible Answers</i>
	<p>They are like sheep who need constant shepherding until they reach maturity and become shepherds themselves.</p> <p>(v.29) Paul says that the church was bought with God's own blood (presumably meaning God the Son's own blood.) This makes us unspeakably precious. We are inclined to underestimate the danger of the savage wolves who come amongst us. Remembering how precious the church is will help to correct any careless attitudes we may have to truth and the Bible and the Gospel.</p> <p>(v.30) The real surprise here is that the savage wolves may well originate from inside the church to 'distort the truth' and 'draw away disciples'.</p> <p>So the dangers that still seem to be dangers today include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The dilution of the Gospel ● The vulnerability of Christians (especially new ones) ● Our tendency not to regard each other as precious in God's sight ● Being off-guard (or too nice?) when savage wolves originate from within the church ● The distortion of the truth (rather than obvious outright denial?) ● The splitting churches by 'drawing away disciples'

END OF STUDY ON BUILDING TOMORROW'S CHURCH

END OF BIBLE STUDY NOTES