

LEADER'S GUIDE

INTRODUCTION

- As the introduction in the booklet suggests, there has been some deliberate shaping of this series. Discipleship will naturally encompass all of life, and there could be all kinds of logic behind different ways to order the studies. Really, the order is a little bit arbitrary, except for the beginning and the end. This series begins with God's grace, the centrality of Christ and the foundation of Scripture to help ensure we are all on the same page with God's initiative, his call and his revelation, before we consider how we respond further. Yet it should be noted that each of the studies in this series must continue to emphasise these foundational realities. So whether doing a study on giving or prayer or anything else, it is vital that the themes of God's grace in Christ as revealed in the Word run through the way you engage with the studies. This protects us from turning discipleship into legalism and our response to God's grace into the cause of our confidence before him. Indeed, if we keep the beginning in mind throughout, then the end goal of our praise of God for his glory should also run throughout the series as well, as we seek to live lives responding to his grace, for his glory, in the daily practicalities that we explore together.
- These studies are intended to be accessible to new Christians as we seek to consolidate a shared understanding of the shape of Christian discipleship. This does not mean they will be too simplistic for mature Christians, but it may mean that individuals or groups with members who have been trusting Jesus for many years may find it particularly helpful to explore some of the 'Further reading' passages to stretch the more mature disciples amongst us. It should also be noted that while some of the studies engage fairly basic matters, it should be acknowledged with humility that God's Word remains living and active, sharper than a double-edged sword, penetrating deeply as it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. As such, even familiar passages and concepts can be approached with expectant humility!
- The studies follow a consistent and fairly simple shape as we seek to equip one another with a pattern of Bible study that we can continue to use in our own reading of the Word in an ongoing way. It will be familiar to many, but may benefit from some general explanation:

Reflect

These reflection questions aim to open discussion without necessarily drawing conclusions. It is helpful to encourage interaction between the group members rather than seeking to resolve the question. It may be helpful to leave uncertainty hanging and suggest to the group that you will turn together to the Word to seek to clarify the matter.

Investigate

These investigation questions are all about reading the text carefully. Our Bible study should be exactly that—study of the Bible, which requires us to pay close attention to what has been written rather than jumping to our own conclusions. Our tendency is to presume we know what has been said and gloss over important details, especially with passages or topics we think we know well. Some of these questions are deliberately brief—they may be simple comprehension questions or closed questions requiring little more than a short answer. This is okay as it still helps people engage with the text, without having to have already developed a complex idea. However, it remains important that any answers are drawn from the text. A helpful follow up question may be to ask 'Can you help us see where that comes from in the passage?'



Apply

It is probably the application section that requires the most careful consideration for who is in the group, as it may be that you choose to add further application that more specifically addresses the life circumstances of those meeting together. We have sought to incorporate prayer into each study in a more specific sense than simply 'Close in prayer'. The intent is to have our time in the Word shape our prayers, and our prayers to provide opportunity to respond in relation to God on the basis of what he has been teaching us.



Further reading

These further reading suggestions are simply some additional opportunities to read from the Bible and helpful Christian authors. They are not intended to be exhaustive, and you may think of other areas in Scripture that you would like to explore together.

STUDY 1: SAVED BY GRACE



Investigate

- These questions seek to particularly draw out the perspective God has on life and death—not only our physical life and death, but our spiritual life and death!
- Paul describes us as ‘dead’ in our transgressions, and dead people are incapable of rescuing themselves.
- The emphasis in this passage is on God’s initiative and action in salvation. This is his work, of which we are undeserving, which is summed up as ‘grace’. Grace as a gift is helpful to explore—a gift is something freely given, at someone else’s expense, for the benefit of the person who receives it.
- It may be helpful to bear in mind that this passage highlights the difference between sin (‘your transgressions and sins’) and the temptation which underlies it (‘the cravings of our flesh’ and ‘its desires and thoughts’). Some people will feel unnecessarily guilty for temptation, while others will feel inappropriately relaxed about sin. This passage helps us differentiate between the two and take both seriously.
- Note that this brief passage includes mention of both the present and future implications of being saved by grace.
- Try and keep each of these questions grounded in the text—it will feel easy for the group to try and answer them from wider knowledge or assumptions. For mature and new Christians alike it is helpful to consider this passage carefully and with humility.



Apply

- It can be helpful to have thought through a simple and memorable way of describing grace in your preparation. If you don’t know one already, consider the phrase ‘**God’s Riches At Christ’s Expense**’. Of course, this needs to be unpacked without using jargon, but it provides a helpful framework and can be expanded on from this passage.

STUDY 2: DEVOTED TO JESUS



Reflect

- These questions are meant to get people to reflect on ‘the cost of discipleship’, i.e. what Jesus asks of us when we become his follower. It would be good to avoid people feeling either proud or pitiful, but simply to be open and honest. In discussing these questions it is likely that those who can recognise the cost of discipleship will also be able to share most clearly of the joy of discipleship—this can be really helpful for the group to reflect on together.

Investigate

- Sometimes it can be difficult to engage with narrative passages beyond the very obvious comprehension. That is why there are some ‘why’ questions which ask people to try and explore the way the story has been told and the aspects that are highlighted. As you work through these questions, keep getting people to draw from the passage rather than their own assumptions about what is going on.

Apply

- These questions are meant to help people consider what it means for each one of us to follow Jesus. In a sense, there is less focus on the actual behaviour and more on the underlying motives behind our conduct.

STUDY 3: GROUNDED IN SCRIPTURE



This study begins with the assumption that when Paul writes to Timothy and refers to ‘all scripture’ his primary referent is the Old Testament Scriptures, however, what he says of them is true of all Scripture which we have now received. This is not introduced initially so we can get into the text and what it is saying about Scripture generally, before then considering the question of what the scope of ‘Scripture’ is. It will be helpful to avoid getting bogged down in apologetic questions regarding the Canon of Scripture in this study, though if you anticipate that some in your group may have questions in this regard it would be worth doing some pre-reading from the books suggested in ‘Further reading’. Both are easy to read and very accessible.



Investigate

- Question 3 may seem very simplistic, but you could spend quite a bit of time considering each element:
 - ‘All’ emphasises that we don’t get to pick which bits we want to listen to.
 - ‘Scripture’ emphasises that it is the written word that we’re dealing with, and the word as accepted by the church as Scripture.
 - ‘is’ helps us see that this is a present reality—it’s not that it was God-breathed and has somehow been relegated irrelevant (Hebrews 4:12 is a good verse to look at here).
 - ‘God-breathed’ is a very loaded term that sums up the principle that Scripture is the word of God, not merely the word of humans about God. It informs us that Scripture is his inspired word without specifying the mechanism of inspiration. 2 Peter 1:16-21 is helpful in this regard too.
- The uses of Scripture in verse 16 can be understood fairly simply from the English words used. There’s nothing terribly tricky about them, but it is helpful for us to see how Paul is encouraging Timothy in the comprehensive usefulness of Scripture.
 - teaching: setting forth correct understanding of God and the gospel—the repetition of this idea in Titus is helpful to see.
 - rebuking: convicting people of their error—you may like to look at how it is portrayed in Titus 1:9 & 1:13, and also later in 2 Timothy 4:2.
 - correcting: redirecting away from falsehood towards truth.
 - training in righteousness: a very practical idea that prevents us from thinking it is all about thinking!
- In looking at a few passages dealing with Jesus’ view of Scripture, the intent is to see how he affirms and values it—down to fine detail. The John 10 passage may feel quite obscure, and it is part of a very detailed debate between Jesus and his Jewish opponents, but it is an example of Jesus’ attention to detail in the written word as well as an explicit affirmation that ‘Scripture cannot be set aside’.



Apply

- These questions seek to get us thinking and talking about our own attitude to the Bible and therefore what we should expect from those who teach it. This has implications for the priority we give it in our own lives as well as the emphasis we should expect it to be given in our church communities.



STUDY 4: BELONGING TO CHURCH



Reflect

- Encourage your group members to talk about the various attributes that *other* people might look for in a church, without feeling like they are saying that this is what *they* would be concerned about in themselves—this is likely to get people sharing more freely.



Investigate

- It is important to recognise that our unity is not based on worldly categories or preferences that might normally cause us to associate with other people—we are unified in Christ.
- The key point to draw out regarding the gifts is that they all relate to the proclamation and teaching of the Word of God—this is what enables maturity in Christ.
- Regarding the importance of belonging to the body of Christ, recognise both the need to be equipped, sustained and encouraged, but also to do the same for others. You might like to get people thinking about how ‘making every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace’ contributes to our maturity as well. This certainly challenges our consumer mindset that thinks first about what is good for ourselves. This goes to the heart of what God is doing—not saving us to live in isolation but to serve together.
- Regarding the table for 1 Corinthians 12:15-27, you might like to highlight the phrases ‘But in fact God’ and ‘But God’ in verses 18 and 24, which helps us to see the solution to the issue comes from God and his wisdom and kindness.



Apply

- Encourage responses to questions 8 to 10 to be really practical things that people can and will actually do, e.g. ‘make it a priority to be there’, ‘pray that God would have me sit next to someone I can encourage’, ‘arrive early’, ‘look out for the lonely or the new’, ‘volunteer to help’, etc.

STUDY 5: GENEROUS IN GIVING



The big goal of the study is *not* to improve the income of the church or parachurch organisations. The idea is to help people understand what drives us to be generous in giving. It is very easy to slip into legalism that reduces generosity to rules and percentages. However, the logic of the New Testament is centred on the generosity of God, especially in the cross of Christ, which results in transformed hearts and behaviours. The passage highlighted for study is quite long, but it does outline the key gospel-centred motivation which results in generosity.



Reflect

- In twenty-first century Australia, money is a sensitive and private issue for most people. As such, use the reflection questions to acknowledge this.



Investigate

- A potential trap—understanding 2 Corinthians 9:6-11. Verses such as 2 Corinthians 9:6, ‘Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously’, and 2 Corinthians 9:11, ‘You will be enriched in every way ...’, are often quoted by those who hold to what is known as the ‘prosperity gospel’. This is a theological approach that affirms that God’s intention for Christians is that they should be wealthy in material terms.

There are a lot of reasons why this is a faulty theological approach. Even instinctively it is hard to see how a Christian could be motivated by self-gain to give. This runs counter to the example of the cross of Christ, which is foundational in the passage. However, a closer examination of the text also helps see that this conclusion is not correct.

The idea that Paul outlines is a sowing/reaping concept. As a generalisation, a farmer will have an increased crop if more seed is sown and a smaller crop if less is sown. It’s the same with giving for the work of the gospel. The overflow is described as ‘thanks to God’ (verse 12), an enlarged ‘harvest of your righteousness’ (verse 10), and so ‘you will abound in every good work’ (verse 8). In verse 9 there is a quote from Psalm 112 which is a description of the godly person who scatters gifts to the poor. That is, the focus is on praise to God and growth in godliness—not a promise of increased wealth.

Some people argue, however, that the ‘enriched in every way’ (verse 11) also includes material prosperity. Two thoughts on this: Firstly, it is problematic to take general wisdom principles and turn them into cast iron rules or promises. Just as sowing more seed does not automatically mean a greater harvest (elements of nature such as heat, rain, frost, etc. all play their part), so this verse is not meant to be read as a rule. Secondly, it is clear that the Macedonian churches gave out of their poverty, not wealth (2 Corinthians 8:2). The example of Jesus becoming poor is a clear corrective, and the focus is on God providing so that we can continue to be generous. It is fairly clear that an approach based on self-focused gain is a misreading of the text. If you want to read more on this, the book by Brian Rosner mentioned at the end of the study is helpful.



Apply

- For some people the practice of sitting down and doing some self evaluation and sums will be quite new. Others may find it quite challenging and hesitate to do it. Remember, this is not meant to provoke guilt but to help members of Bible study groups think about how well they have understood grace. If you are doing this in a group context you will need to use your discretion as to whether any of the results are discussed in the group, and in what manner. It would certainly be better to get everyone to do the exercise privately before the study itself. The questions that follow the table may be used individually or in group discussion.

STUDY 6: DEPENDENT IN PRAYER



One of the key marks of the disciple is their ongoing dependence on God, expressed in prayer. This is not so much a skill as a relationship, however it is so radical and unique it needs to be taught. Jesus' teaching on prayer contained several key differences to Jewish prayer and pagan prayer. Central to these differences were the assurance of approaching the Sovereign God as Father. This was only made possible by Jesus' death on the cross, so we who were God's enemies can approach God as Father, because through the Son, we too, can become God's children.



Investigate

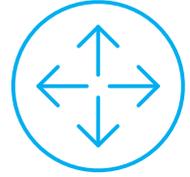
- Putting the prayer into our own words in the table forces us to think deeply about what Jesus taught, whether they are words that will be very familiar to some, or perhaps quite startling for newer Christians. Whatever the case, don't skip this step—this is the main content of Jesus' teaching on prayer! The result of thinking about each line of the prayer should be that our own priorities then get reordered in line with God's priorities.
- Note that the differences between the records of the Lord's Prayer need not cause any concern about the reliability of the New Testament. It is entirely reasonable to think that Jesus taught his disciples about prayer on many occasions. Matthew and Luke's accounts differ in the context, the explanations given, and even the mention that he is teaching his disciples *collectively* in Matthew 6 and *one in particular* in Luke 11. This variation ends up showing the consistent pattern that Jesus used to teach his disciples. However, we should not conclude from this that this is the only way to pray—the context in Matthew 6, in particular, emphasises that personal devotion to God is to be heartfelt and not mechanical or for show. So the Lord's Prayer is a wonderful lesson in prayer, but not the only way to pray.
- Regarding the emphasis of Luke 11:5-13, it is helpful to see that in both cases Jesus is working with a 'how much more' principle. In verses 5-8 he is not teaching us about God's character—that he is somehow reluctant to answer our request—but rather, that if you can be bold in asking a reluctant neighbour, then how much more can you be bold in asking your loving Heavenly Father? And in verses 9-13, if earthly fathers with all their failings can give good gifts to their children, then how much more will your loving Heavenly Father? At this stage in the Bible, before the Spirit has been poured out on all who believe, such richness of blessing would have been staggering beyond belief.



Apply

- The tips for a regular prayer life are some practical suggestions to talk through about how to cultivate a life that's dependent upon God in prayer. Feel free to add your own ideas, or to ask for other ideas which people have found helpful.

STUDY 7: BOLD IN MISSION



Investigate

- If you'd like to get your group to work harder at unpacking the content of the gospel as Paul presents it in Colossians, you could get them to refer back to Colossians 1:13-23 rather than just verses 21-23. This shows a symmetric structure of recounting our rescue and forgiveness (verses 13-14), Jesus reigning over all things (verses 15-20), and returning to our rescue and forgiveness (verses 21-23). This helps us see that the gospel is the announcement that Jesus is Saviour and Lord.



Apply

- Some people may feel threatened by the call to speak about Christ. This is central to being a Christian, however it doesn't mean that the only way we make him known is by giving public speeches or having theological debates. When working through question 5, encourage the group to share even simple ways they've spoken about Jesus as well as those times they have been able to articulate the gospel more fully.
- In working through the table in question 8, encourage people to think of simple, practical, loving ways they can engage with people around them that create small opportunities to talk about Jesus, as well as bigger opportunities to explain the gospel. This isn't about filling the whole table, it is about growing in our gospel concern for the people in our lives.
- Depending on your group, it may be helpful to take them through a 'mission minded' approach in considering how they might help someone take the next step towards Jesus—from making initial contact, to pre-evangelistic opportunities, to engaging this person with Christian friends or the church community, to initial gospel conversations, to reading the Bible and clearly understanding the gospel.

STUDY 8: LOVING IN SERVICE



Investigate

- Given the significance of the context of ‘the end of all things’ in 1 Peter, it would be fruitful preparation to read the letter in full to see how this context shapes the perspective and concerns of the letter. Helpful questions to ask ourselves are ‘how are we living as if these are the last days?’ and ‘does our lifestyle suggest that we expect things to go on indefinitely?’ What difference does this context make in this letter? How does it sustain us with the long period of time between Jesus’ first and second coming, while also instilling in us a sense of urgency?
- There is a wonderful interplay between our dependency on God and our personal activity in this passage. We depend on God in prayer, reliant on his grace, serving in his strength, for his glory. Yet we are active in this, seeking to be faithful in our response to all he has done for us.
- The table is based on the observation that ‘love each other deeply’ acts as a heading over the instructions that follow—it is the primary instruction ‘above all’ that the rest of the paragraph unpacks.

STUDY 9: OVERFLOWING WITH PRAISE



Reflect

- These questions might raise all kinds of different perspectives on praise that reflect different church backgrounds. On the other hand they may be quite difficult for some newer Christians to answer if they feel that praising God is some kind of special Christian activity. If this is the case it may be helpful to talk about how we think about praising other people, and then relate the concept to praise of God.



Investigate

- The passage from 1 Peter 2 is rich with allusions to the Old Testament understanding of being the people of God. Peter is taking words and images of how Israel is described and applying them to Christians. Exodus 19:5-6, Deuteronomy 7:6 and Isaiah 43:20-21 are key passages to read in their original context to understand some of these ideas.
- The content of Christian praise could include many things that Israel praised God for—whether it is his power in creation and kindness in provision, or his work in saving and sustaining his people. Yet the special content of the Christian's praise is that all the blessings of this short passage are found in Christ! This is particularly evident from the verses that come immediately before it, but all the more so in Peter's own words of praise as he begins the letter in 1 Peter 1:3-4.
- Psalm 3 may feel like a surprising passage to turn to in a study on praise, but it is our hope and confidence that it will be fruitful as we see praise even in the context of hard times. We also see that the praise offered to God serves to strengthen the psalmist and those who would read his words throughout the ages that follow.
- Note that when we ask God to act based on his particular qualities, we are affirming those qualities and inherently praising him for them. As such, we see the blurry line between praise and petition.

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Please contact us if you notice errors so that we can make improvements in future editions.

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