

HOME GROUP BIBLE STUDIES:

INTRODUCTION

Why do we come together for home group?

To study God's word, and also to have fellowship with God and each other.

Bible Reading: 1 John 1:1-10

What have we been created for and saved for? (vv.1-3)

We have been created and saved to have eternal life, which is fellowship with God and His people.

How do we come into eternal fellowship with God and His people?

God's Son, Jesus Christ, the Word of Life, has brought about us having fellowship with God and each other, if we would believe in Him and receive Him (cf. John 1:12-13).

Besides fellowship with God, what will responding to Jesus result in? (vv.4-7)

It will bring about joy, living our lives in God's light, and having our sins forgiven.

What hinders this fellowship and how can it be maintained? (vv. 8-10)

Sin hinders and damages our fellowship with God and each other. But if we would confess our sins to God, and seek forgiveness through Christ, then we are forgiven, and our fellowship with God and each other is maintained.

Bible Reading: Acts 2:42-47

What were the four essentials that the New Testament church were devoted to? (Acts 2:42)

They were devoted to the apostles' teaching (Bible), fellowship, breaking of bread (communion) & prayer.

How devoted are we to these four things? (Discuss)

Do you read the Bible daily and pray often (Psa 1:2; Dan 6:10)? Do you long for and have weekly fellowship (Heb 10:24-25)? Do you love to break bread and remember Jesus each week? (Act 20:7).

What was the outcome of this "devoted" life? (vv. 43-47)

God's people had a sense of awe, they cared for each other, they had one mind and glad hearts as they praised God and broke bread together, they had favour with the people, and God used their vibrant fellowship to bring others into His family. Fellowship with God and each other is what it's all about.

The Bible study course we are about to embark on will enrich our fellowship with God and each other. We were made for this and saved for this.

Fellowship is what results when we are a faithful follower of Jesus.

There are four things that mark a faithful follower of Jesus, and that brings about true fellowship.

1. They walk with God

Read: Gen 5:21-22 (Enoch); Acts 4:13 (Peter & John)

2. They live out the Word

Read: Col 3:16-17; Jam 1:21-25

3. They serve believers

Read: Acts 4:32-35

4. They impact the world

Read: Acts 2:37-41

May this Bible study series cause these four marks of a true follower of Jesus be formed in us, for the glory of God, for the growth of His eternal kingdom, and for the enriching of our fellowship.

FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

1.1 The Greatest Friendship

Aim: To help us value our relationship with God through Christ and enabled by the Spirit.

Discuss: *What are some necessary ingredients for building a relationship with another person?*

Meeting the person, spending time communicating, and having shared experiences.

It's the same in building our relationship with God (meeting, communicating, sharing).

Why We Can Have a Personal Relationship with God

A. God has made us special.

Why can we have a relationship with God according to Gen 1:26-27?

God has made us different to all other creatures – He has made us special. He has made us in His image. Because of this fundamental reality, we can know God and relate to Him. We see this truth unfold in the Bible – we see God walking and talking with people, and people communicating with God.

B. God has sought us out.

Adam & Eve enjoyed full fellowship with God. But what happened? (Gen 3:1-7)

Adam and Eve sinned against God, and this had huge consequences in regard to their (and our) relationship with God. We have been made to be in relationship with God, but sin damages that.

What was God's response when Adam and Eve sinned against Him? (Gen 3:8-13)

God didn't come, in His justice, to destroy Adam and Eve because of their sin. Instead, in His mercy and grace, He came down and called out to them; He sought them out. This response characterizes God's heart to us fallen sinners – God seeks after us so that we might be in relationship with Him. Jesus affirmed this in the stories of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son in Luke 15.

C. God has drawn us.

Not only has God made us for relationship with Him, and sought after us when we sinned, but what amazing thing has God done to restore our relationship with Him? (Eph 2:1-5; 12-19)

God, in His amazing grace and mercy, has brought us back into relationship with Himself through His Son – through Jesus' shed blood at the cross. All people groups can know God and be drawn into relationship with Him through Jesus. In Christ, we can be redeemed and reconciled.

What God Has Given Us to Establish This Relationship

A. He gave us His Son.

God gave His eternal Son. He sent Him from heaven to earth. Why was He given? How was He given? (John 3:16; Rom 5:6-8; 2 Cor 9:15)

God gave (sent) Jesus in order to save us from the consequences of our sins (eternal separation from God) and in order to bring us back into an everlasting relationship with Him (Col 1:19-20). God gave Jesus out of His great love for us. The gift of the Son is extraordinary – indescribable and truly amazing.

B. He gave us His book.

Why is the Bible so important for our relationship with God? (2 Tim 3:14-17)

The Bible is God's revelation to us. It contains 66 books filled with truth about God, us, and life. God used more than forty authors, writing over 1,500 years, in three languages, on three continents. The Bible was written, copied, and protected from those who sought to destroy it. God preserved it to make sure we'd have solid truth in regard to who He is and how we can come back into relationship with Him.

C. He gave us His Spirit.

What does the Holy Spirit do for us? (John 14:16-17, 23; John 16:13-14; Rom 8:14-17)

It would be enough if God just associated with us; a privilege in and of itself. Yet He doesn't stop at merely getting near us. He comes to dwell in us at the point of our conversion. Ever since we became believers, God's Spirit has lived in us. He actively works in and through us, producing Christ-like character, a desire for holiness, and a hunger to be in relationship with God and to know Him.

What is your response to the truths we have considered in this study?

May we highly value our relationship with God and do everything we can to enrich it. May our relationship with God be one of devotion (I want to), rather than one of duty (I have to).

Summary: **God wants a relationship with you and has gone to great lengths to establish it. God is the very best Friend. Knowing Him through Jesus is what life is about.**

1.2A How to Be Sure You're a Christian

Aim: To help us be assured of our salvation and that heaven is our eternal destiny.

Discuss: No couple can build a lasting marriage if one partner is unsure of the love of the other. If a spouse isn't sure if the other person accepts them completely, or doubts the other's commitment for life, then the marriage will become unstable and unhealthy. The same is true in our relationship with God. If we aren't sure of our salvation, then we can never fully experience the blessings of our union with Christ.

This study will challenge us to see if we have a false assurance of salvation. We will examine some of the most common misconceptions about being a Christian. In our study the following week we will consider how to have genuine assurance of salvation.

People fall into three categories:

- Those who live with false confidence that they have salvation
- Those who are saved, but at times doubt their salvation
- Those who are saved and enjoy their salvation

Which category best describes you?

Consider also these two important questions:

If you were to die tonight, how certain are you that you would go to heaven?

If you were to die tonight, why should God let you into heaven?

False Assurances of Salvation

Explore each of the following assumptions people rely on to gain entrance into heaven.

A. "I believe there is a God."

How can a person believe in God and yet not have salvation?

Look up James 2:19. Demons believe in God, but they are not saved. That's because belief in the existence of God cannot wash away our guilt before Him. Also, in Mark 1:23-24, we see demons who knew who Jesus was. But again, their knowledge of Christ is not enough to save them.

B. "I'm basically a good person."

How could a fair God exclude a person with no major blemishes and with many acts of charity?

Look up Psalm 14:2-3; Isaiah 64:6; Romans 3:23. The person who relies on their goodness overlooks their sin, overestimates their righteousness, underestimates God's holiness, and misunderstands that entrance into heaven by good works requires a 100% perfect life. One sin is enough to "sink" us, just as one hole is enough to sink a boat.

C. "I attend church and pray often."

Why doesn't being religious give assurance of salvation?

Look up Luke 18:9-14. The religious person assumes that participation in spiritual activities means he's included in God's kingdom. But if salvation is something you earn, you never know how much is enough.

D. "I was baptised, christened, or confirmed."

Why could a person who has been baptised not have assurance of salvation?

Look up Acts 16:31; Ephesians 2:8-9. Many have been baptised, not knowing what they were doing, or just pleasing others, or wrongly believing that they will be saved by it. But baptism cannot save us. We can only be saved by God's grace through personal faith in Christ. Like how a wedding band symbolises marriage, and yet does not make one married, so baptism symbolizes salvation, but cannot save.

E. "I once prayed a prayer and asked Jesus into my heart."

How could a person invite Jesus into their heart and still not have a relationship with Him?

Look up Matthew 7:21-27. We can pray the "sinner's prayer", we can call Jesus "Lord", we can even do amazing things in His name, but unless we know Jesus personally, and seek to follow Him (ie, unless we have repented and chosen to give our life to Jesus) then we will not be saved.

Look up Mark 4:1-20. Only those who receive Christ and His Word, persevere and persist, resist the world and its ways, and show the fruit of knowing Jesus and living for Him, will be saved.

Summary: God wants you to be secure and sure about your relationship with Him. 1 John 5:13

Isn't it good that God doesn't want us to be "up in the air" about our salvation.

1.2B How to Be Sure You're a Christian (continued)

Aim: To help us be assured of our salvation and that heaven is our eternal destiny.

Discuss: *Can a person really be sure that they are going to make it to heaven?
Why do many say "no", and even look down upon those who are certain?
Some can be certain, but they actually shouldn't be. Why is this?*

Last week we looked at false assurances of salvation. This week we shall consider how we can be sure.

But firstly, what does the Bible say we must do if we wish to be saved? (cf. John 3:3-5, 16-18)

We must be born again (v.3), and we must believe in Jesus (v.16).

But even if we have followed what the Bible says, how can we be sure we are saved? [discuss]

Genuine Assurances of Salvation

A. Read John 1:10-12

According to these verses what must we do to be saved?

In verse 12, "believing in Jesus" is synonymous with "receiving Him". In other words, believing in Jesus is more than mental assent. It requires action; it's where we embrace Jesus as God and Saviour and King.

According to John 1:12-13 how do we know we have received Jesus? (ie, what does God do?)

He makes us His child, He causes us to be born of God (born again), and He adopts us into His family. This is something we are to experience to affirm that we have truly been saved.

B. Read John 5:24

According to this verse, what must we do to be saved?

We must hear Jesus' word (the Gospel) and believe it. This also implies doing His Word (cf. John 3:36).

According to John 5:24, what does God do when we hear and do Jesus' Word?

He grants us eternal life, frees us from judgment, and transfers us from spiritual death to spiritual life; and it's something we are to experience. We ought to know the joy of being freed from sin and judgment.

Three Other Tests for Those Who Want to Be Sure

The Bible gives us ways to examine our lives for evidence that God has saved us. These tests are not "things we do"; they are things God has done in us to assure us that we are saved.

A. The repentance test

What does it mean to repent? (Acts 17:30-31, 19:18-19)

Repentance is a change of mind and heart before God in regard to sin; it means "to do an about face."

Why is repentance a sign that we are truly saved? (John 16:8-11; 2 Cor 7:9-10)

Genuine repentance is brought about by the Holy Spirit convicting us of sin so that we have godly sorrow and repentance (2 Cor 7:10). A saved person continues to be convicted about sin; an unbeliever isn't. A saved person wants to repent of sin; not justify it. A saved person wants cleansing and forgiveness; not to just forget it! Conviction of sin and godly repentance is a sure sign we are saved.

B. The presence test

When a person truly is saved through faith in Christ what happens? (John 14:23; 2 Cor 13:5)

God comes to dwell in us by His Spirit. We are born again. God becomes present in us.

How can we tell that God's Spirit is dwelling in us? (Romans 8:15-16)

The Holy Spirit tells us that we are His children. We sense His presence and have a quiet confidence that we are His (not to be confused with the presumption of some who haven't been born again). We know we are the Lord's, even if we know we sometimes (or often) disappoint Him.

C. The evidence test

What will be true of someone who is saved? (2 Cor 5:17; John 15:5-8; Gal 5:22-23)

That person's life will be different. They will bear spiritual fruit through the Spirit of Christ, proving that they are saved. This does not mean that true Christians never sin (cf. 1 John 1:8). But it is true that a genuine believer will live differently and have a verifiable behavioural change in their life – they will, more and more, be like Jesus (Rom 8:29). But this change takes place over time. But to experience no change is a warning sign that something is wrong spiritually.

If you were arrested for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?

Summary: God wants you to be secure in your relationship with Him. 1 John 5:11-13

1.3 God's Word to You

Aim: To help us appreciate and be motivated in taking in God's Word daily.

Discuss: If you received a very important letter/email from a close friend, what would you do? Why then, do Christians often neglect to open and read the "letter" (Bible) God has written for us? It is His primary means of speaking to us. Consider: When it comes to taking in God's Word, the key is not to fill our mind with information, but knowing God and experiencing transformation."

Five Ways We Grasp God's Word

What are the five ways, seen in the Bible, for taking in God's Word? (cf. Rom 10:17; Rev 1:3; Acts 17:11; Psa 119:11-16; Psa 1:1-3) How many of these five ways do you put into practice? Hear; Read; Study; Memorise (Not Forget); and Meditate.

What Will God's Word Do As We Take It In?

1. Save our soul (2 Tim 3:14-15; James 1:21)

We are saved by grace through faith in Jesus (Eph 2:8-9). But how do we come to this place? It's through accepting and receiving God's Word (2 Tim 3:14-15; James 1:21). The Word is essential.

2. Grow our faith (Rom 10:17)

In Rom 10:17 what does the Word of Christ (or the Word of God) do? How does it do this? It grows our faith in God and His Son. This is because the Bible reveals the true God and His salvation.

3. Grow us in our Salvation (1 Peter 2:1-2)

In 1 Pet 2:1-2, what is God's Word likened to? What will it do? God's Word is likened to milk. Just as mother's milk helps a baby grow, God's Word is our spiritual milk that will nourish our soul and enable us to grow in respect to our salvation.

4. Equip us for righteousness, good works and holiness (2 Timothy 3:16-17; John 17:15-17)

What important roles does the Word of God accomplish for us according to 2 Tim 3:16-17? It teaches, reproves, corrects and trains us so that we live a righteous life, and it equips us for good works. In His prayer to the Father, what did Jesus say the Word of God does (John 17:15-17)? It sanctifies us; that is, it enables us not to be polluted by the world, but rather, to live a holy life.

5. Renew our mind (Romans 12:1-2)

In Rom 12:1-2 what important role does God's Word do, as we live in this fallen world? God's Word renews our mind. As we live in this fallen world, we have a tendency to be conformed to it. We pick up on the world's ways and the world's philosophies. But as we read God's Word, our mind is renewed and refreshed with God's will and way. We are enabled to see life through God's eyes.

6. Reveal our true state (Hebrews 4:12)

In Heb 4:12, how is God's Word described? What is it able to do? God's Word is living and active, and like a deep-cutting sword, it convicts us and exposes our sin and what we are really like in the light of God's glory. Without this, we might fool ourselves into thinking we are okay. No other book does this (it is like a mirror where we see ourselves correctly; Jam 1:23-25).

7. Bring great blessing (Psalm 19:7-11)

In Psalm 19:7-11 what blessings come as we take in God's Word? How should we view it? We are restored, made wise, filled with joy, enlightened. We are also warned, and in following it we are truly blessed. Therefore, we should love and delight in God's Word, and see it as priceless and precious.

8. Protect us when attacked (Ephesians 6:17)

We live in a world where we undergo spiritual attacks. What does God's Word do? (Eph 6:17) God's Word is like a sword in a soldier's hand. By it, we strike down lies and deceptions that come against us, to try and weaken and defeat us. It is by God's truth that we are set free (John 8:31-32) and are victorious (Rev 12:11). Consider how Jesus used God's Word to overcome Satan (Matt 4:1-10).

Summary: God's Word is priceless and precious. We cannot live without it. Let us give God every opportunity to speak to us personally each day through taking in His Word.

How are you going to ensure this? Cf. Hearing; Reading; Studying; Memorising; Meditating

1.4 God's Word in You

Aim: To help us learn how to read the Bible effectively.

Discuss: *Many Christians do not read the Bible daily. Why is that?*

(too busy, not disciplined, not appreciative of the importance of God's Word, etc)

Even when we do read the Bible regularly, we often don't read it well. Why is that?

(distracted with other things, can't understand what we are reading, overwhelmed by the Bible's size, etc)

If we were to read the Bible daily, and read it well, what would that do? (cf. Psa 1:1-6; Eph 4:14)

We would become fruitful and strong, like a tree near water, rather than chaff; and not be tossed about.

Four Approaches to Personal Bible Reading

Despite good intentions, many Christians develop unhelpful ways in reading the Bible, which hinder their growth. Let's consider four common ways of reading the Bible (the first three are not too helpful).

A. The Sitters: They just "sit at the feet" of one who will explain the Bible to them (eg, a priest/pastor)

What are the "sitters" missing out on by not reading the Bible for themselves?

Although there is great value in learning from good Bible teachers, this can never replace the absolutely important need for us to hear from God directly, through His Spirit, as we read His Word.

B. The Skimmers: They read a small portion of God's Word each time, with each reading disconnected from what they read previously (devotionals tend to be like this).

What do the "skimmers" miss out on?

It's better for us to read God's word by reading through a whole letter/book, passage by passage, for then we will be reading verses in context, and getting an idea of what the main points of a book/letter are.

C. The Scholars: They read the Bible, with reliance on commentaries, Bible dictionaries, and other tools.

Why might "scholars" find themselves being barren spiritually through how they read the Bible?

They often displace the authority of God's Word with what theologians and scholars say, and view the Bible from an intellectual perspective. Head knowledge will not produce spiritual growth.

D. The Students: They are like the righteous person in Psalm 1, or the workman in 2 Tim 2:15.

What qualities does the "meditator" (Psa 1:2) and the "workman" (2 Tim 2:14-15) possess?

They daily read and study God's Word, seeking to understand it and apply it correctly, with the help of God's Spirit. With such diligence, they allow God to speak to them, change them, and make them fruitful.

How to Be a Good Student of the Word

What are some of the key ways that we can read the Bible well?

- **Pray before** you read – ask God to help you be humble, teachable, and to understand what you read.
- **Read well** the Bible; not like a butterfly flitting about. Choose to read through a book/letter of the Bible.
- **Apply wisdom** - if you find it hard to read, read out loud; don't lay in bed, if it makes you nod off.
- **Seek out** a good place each day where you are free from distractions; your special place with the Lord.
- **Focus on** God's character, God's salvation in Christ, God's will for you, and God's plan for you.
- **Pray after** you read, and speak to God about what you have read and learnt.

When reading a Bible passage, consider these 5 steps:[see Handout on back of page for example]

1. Background: Who wrote it, to whom was it written, what is the setting or circumstances, how does it fit in to the whole letter/book/Bible?

2. Read: Read through the passage carefully; do your best to be prayerful, to concentrate, to take it in.

3. Observe: What is the passage about? How does it fit in to the whole counsel of God?

4. Apply: How should you apply this passage? Is there a salvation truth to be cherished (Col 1:19-20)? A promise to claim (Heb 13:5)? A command to obey (Eph 5:21)? A sin to confess (1 John 1:8-10)? An example to follow (1 Thess 2:5)? A change to be made (Col 3:12-17)? Some encouragement (Phil 4:13)? An insight to gain (Romans 8:28-29)? An issue to pray about (1 Tim 2:1-4)?

Note: Though it is important to have specific applications, allow for times when truths deeply impress and encourage your spirit. This is the most helpful application. After all, responding with worship for God after reading His Word is the most important application of all (Rom 11:33-36).

5. Meditate/Memorise: Continue to reflect on what you read. Memorising a key verse is also helpful.

Summary: **God's Word is indispensable in knowing God and walking with Him and in His ways.**

It will take time and effort to read the Bible well each day: Are you committed/disciplined to do this?

HANDOUT

Example of Applying the Five-Step Bible Reading Method from Study 1.4

Particular passage to read and study: James 1:1-4

1. Background:

Written by the apostle James to persecuted Jewish Christians (James 1:1), to help encourage them while they experienced hardships and persecutions.

Key truths include persevering, being "doers" of the Word, having faith with works, being holy and not becoming polluted by this world.

The letter of James is in the latter part of our New Testament. It's not so concerned about how to be saved, but how the saved should live in this fallen world that is hostile and toxic to our faith.

Note: The background to a letter/book can often be found in study Bibles or commentaries.

2. Read:

Read James 1:1-4.

Read it again if you didn't quite understand it, or if it didn't make sense.

James 1:1-14 (NIV 1984)

- 1 James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes scattered among the nations: Greetings.
- 2 Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds,
- 3 because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance.
- 4 Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

3. Observation: "What does it say?"

Be joyful when trials come. Note: It's not that we should rejoice over the trial, but we should rejoice because of what the trial can produce in us.

Under God's hand, trials test our faith and grow us. It leads to us becoming mature spiritually.

Growing spiritually is more important than being comfortable.

4. Application: "What should I do?"

Praise God that He is sovereign and He will allow trials, and use trials, for our good and growth.

Have I viewed my trials wrongly in the past? Have I blamed God? Then I will need to confess my sin to God, and change my attitude toward the way I view trials in the future.

Think of a trial you are presently going through. Consider how you might view it positively (with joy), and how this trial has the potential to make you grow and mature.

Think of someone you know who is going through a trial. Pray for them that they may not get discouraged, but see the trial from God's perspective, and have joy. Pray for yourself as well, and that you may have joy.

5. Meditate/Memorise:

Memorise James 1:2 and try and meditate upon the words of this verse during the day.

"Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds"

1.5 Prayer - God Hears and Answers Prayer

Aim: To help us be encouraged in prayer, and to pray more regularly.

Discuss: Prayer is talking with God. Nothing should be easier or more natural. It's like breathing. *Yet, why do many believers find it difficult? And why do we find public prayer difficult?*

We will explore seven key truths on prayer, and also the three kinds of answers God gives.

Seven Key Truths on Prayer

1. Prayer - God sees and rewards us when we pray

What did Jesus teach us about prayer in Matt 6:5-6?

When we pray sincerely, even away from the eyes of the world, God sees, rewards, and blesses us.

2. Prayer - God already knows what we need

What did Jesus teach us about prayer in Matt 6:7-8?

God already knows what we need, but he welcomes us to come and to share our requests with Him. We don't even need to go on and on about our needs, but be brief and to the point, for He knows everything.

3. Prayer is to God our Father

Read Jesus' prayer in Matt 6:9-13. What can we call God? Why?

We can and are to call God our Father. Through faith in Jesus, God has become our loving and caring Father, who loves to hear and bless His children.

4. Prayer - God hears and answers

What did Jesus teach us about prayer in Matt 7:7-11 and John 15:7-8?

If we would ask God for things in prayer, He promises to give us what we ask; if we have asked for good things, and if we have asked while abiding in Christ and His Word.

What do we learn about prayer in 1 John 5:14-15?

God hears and answers us if we would pray according to His will. Indeed, this gives us great confidence in approaching God in prayer (cf. Heb 10:19-22).

5. Praying in the name of Jesus

What did Jesus teach us about prayer in John 16:23-27?

We are privileged to ask the Father directly for things, as long as we come in the name of Jesus. The Father Himself loves us and delights in us coming to His throne and praying to Him.

6. Prayer and the Holy Spirit

When we pray, who helps us (Rom 8:26-27)? In what way does He help us?

The Holy Spirit helps us to know what and how to pray. He also intercedes on our behalf, requesting the Father on our behalf, with expressions that our words cannot convey.

7. Prayer and faith

When we pray, what do we need to have hand in hand with our prayer? (Mark 11:22-24)

We need to pray in faith. We need to believe that God hears and is able to grant our request (cf. Heb 11:6).

Three Ways God Answers Prayer

1a. No – *Why may God not choose to answer our prayers? (cf. 1 John 5:14; Matt 26:36-39)*

God will not answer our prayers in the affirmative if it not according to His will; even Jesus knew this.

1b. No – *What's another reason why God may say "no" to our requests? (Psa 66:18; Jam 4:2-3)*

God will not hear and answer us if we have unconfessed sin before Him, and He will not grant our request if we have asked with sinful motives or if we have asked with a wrong attitude (cf. 1 Pet 3:7).

2. Wait – *God may choose to delay answering our prayers. Why? In such a case, what should we do?*

God may choose to not answer our prayers immediately because the timing is not right according to His will (cf. John 11:1-6), or because other things are happening beyond our knowledge (cf. Dan 10:12-14).

When God doesn't answer us immediately, we must be patient and wait on the Lord (Psalm 27:14).

3. Yes – *God may choose to answer our prayers. When can we be sure He will? (1 John 5:14)*

We can be sure that God will answer "yes", when we are without sin, when our request is with right motives, the timing is right, and it is according to His will. Another way to put it is this: when we are abiding in Jesus, and His Word (John 15:7). Consider: Joshua 10:12-14; 1 Kings 18:36-39; Jam 5:16-18.

What are some of your prayers that God has answered with a "yes"?

Summary: Pray, because God is our Father, and He hears and answers prayer.

What will it take for us to become a people of prayer?

1.6 Biblical Praying

Aim: To help you be more balanced and biblical in your prayers.

Discuss: What would your reaction be to a friend whose only conversation with you is to ask you for things? True friendship involves supporting, affirming, sharing, admitting wrongs, and expressing thanks. Similarly, our prayers need to be balanced. Prayer is much more than just asking God for things.

This study will show you a method for having a more balanced prayer life. This will allow you to overcome the all too common tendency to pray only about the things you want ("shopping list" praying).

LORD'S PRAYER (Matt 6:9-13)

One of the best ways to learn about prayer is through our Lord Jesus. He prayed Himself, and He taught us to pray. Read Matt 6:9-13. What do we learn from His model prayer that He gave to help us?

- We are to address God as Father, for this reflects our new relationship with God through Christ.
- We are to adore God in prayer – to "hallow" His name.
- We are to express to God our heart for His kingdom and His will being established.
- We are to pray for our daily needs; even our most menial needs we are to bring before our God.
- We are to seek forgiveness for our sins, knowing that God won't forgive us if we don't forgive others.
- We are to ask God to help us live a righteous life, by giving us victory over temptation and evil.

BALANCED PRAYER (A. C. T. S.)

Adoration (1 Chron 29:10-13; Dan 2:19-23; Psa 145:1-9)

What is adoration?

Adoration is where we focus on the glorious characteristics of our God. We adore and worship Him for who He is. It's different from thanksgiving in that we focus on *who* God is; not what He has *done* for us.

Typically adoration of God in our prayers does not come easily to most of us. Why? [discuss]

How can we better adore God in prayer?

It is good to be still and meditate on God (Psa 46:10), as well as to meditate on a Bible passage of praise.

Confession (Psa 51:1-4; 1 John 1:8-10)

Why is it important to confess our sins to God? What if we don't confess our sins?

Confession of sins enables us to be forgiven, and for us to maintain our fellowship with God. If we don't confess our sins, then we won't be in fellowship with God, and our prayers will not be heard (Psa 66:18).

Why can it be difficult to confess our sin to God?

The hardest part about confession is the humility and honesty it requires (Psa 51:17). Of course, we don't inform God of anything during confession; He knows everything already. In confession we tell God that we agree with Him about the sin He sees in our heart. Our natural tendency is to hide it, or play it down.

What if we feel we have nothing to confess to God?

We should ask God to forgive us for sins we are not aware of, as we sin even when we don't realise it. Also, it's good to ask God to reveal any word, thought or deed that isn't holy, so that we might confess it.

Thanksgiving (Psa 103:1-5; Eph 1:3-7; 1 Thess 5:18)

To thank God in prayer is quite easy for us to do. Why? What things can you thank God for?

God is such a good and gracious God, who constantly blesses us with so much. May we thank Him always.

Supplication (Eph 1:15-21; Eph 3:14-19; Phil 4:6-7)

Asking God for things in prayer comes so easily to us. What are some important things to ask for?

The salvation of non-Christian friends; growing in holiness and fruitfulness in Christ's kingdom; asking the Lord to help us with our various concerns and needs, etc. We are to pray for ourselves and others.

If God knows all of our needs, why should we pray?

We should pray because God desires our friendship, and He wants us to grow in faith and dependence.

EFFECTIVE PRAYER

What do we learn from Jam 1:5-8 in relation to asking God for things in prayer?

We must ask, believing that God hears us and is able to give us what we ask, if it's His will. Cf. Heb 11:6.

What do we learn from Jam 5:16-18 and John 15:7-8 about prayer?

Our prayers will be effective and accomplish much, if we would walk with Christ in righteousness.

God answers prayer if it's His will (1 John 5:14-15). How can we know His will (Rom 12:1-2)?

We know His will by giving ourselves to Him as a living sacrifice and by being transformed by His Word.

Summary: Prayer is more than just asking God. It's also adoring, confessing, and thanking Him.

1.7 Getting Together With God (Quiet Time)

Aim: To help establish the discipline of daily devotions with God; also known as a "quiet time".

Discuss: After driving through congested traffic, a busy executive arrives home and puts aside all his homely duties to spend some quality time with his wife. A frazzled mother puts her tired children to bed and plops down on the couch in the stillness of the evening to talk at last with her husband.

In these scenarios what are the people doing, despite their busy and hectic life?

They are choosing to seek some time with their spouse in order to enjoy and nurture their relationship.

When it comes to the Lord, what should we be prioritizing in our life? Why?

We should be choosing to spend some quality time with God each day, enjoying His company and building our relationship with Him through reflecting on His Word and prayer. This is the quiet time.

What Is a Quiet Time?

How would you describe a quiet time?

It's a special daily time with God during which we spend an uninterrupted and unhurried time with Him alone in prayer and reading the Bible. As we do that, God ministers to us and we communicate with Him.

What do you do during your times alone with God? (Have group share what they do)

There is no one correct way. We should pick a method that works best for us and is appropriate for us.

What do we learn from Psa 1:1-2 and Matt 6:5-6 about spending time with God?

We should take time to delight in and meditate on God's Word, and we should pray to God in a place where we are free from disruptions and distractions (we need to find our "inner room").

Making the Time

Why do we often not have a quiet time, or not have a quality quiet time with God? (Luke 10:38-42)

Don't make time for it; too busy with other things (even good things); too distracted; too tired; feel that we don't get anything out of it and so we don't make it a priority.

What plans do you need to make in order to have a time with God? (cf. Mark 1:35)

Like Jesus, we need to desire to meet with our Father in heaven. We need to set right priorities (which can include getting up earlier), and to be in a right state (alert) and to be in a right place free from distractions.

Reading the Bible

What hinders you from getting more out of personal Bible reading? [discuss]

Time constraints, tiredness, distractions, etc. Other things may be that you are using a translation you can't understand, or you may be reading the Bible without any plan or systematic method.

Discuss the following helpful ways to get more out of our daily Bible reading:

- Pray before you read - look to the Holy Spirit to be your teacher (John 16:13; 1 John 2:27).
- Read the passage - think through what you have read and learnt (Psa 1:2)
- Observe helpful notes - such as helps in the margin or foot of your Bible, or through cross references.
- Mark a key verse or two - doing this will reinforce what you have learnt (you could even memorise it)
- Pray and meditate afterward - pray to God about what you have read, and meditate upon the passage.

Read Matt 13:14-15. What warning is given here? How can we avoid such a state?

We can become "dull" to God's Word, so that we actually don't respond to His truth; eg, we become complacent. To avoid this, we need to repent of any wrong attitude, and to ask God to help us.

Praying

What prevents you from praying regularly and meaningfully? [discuss]

Allowing our busy life to prevent us making right priorities for prayer; not having a quiet place ("inner room") to meet God in prayer; lack of faith in the value of prayer; not appreciating the work of the enemy of our soul who will do all he can to stop us praying (he knows the reality of James 5:16b).

Discuss the following points to keep your prayer life fresh:

Practise A.C.T.S. (Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, Supplication); ask the Lord to teach you to pray (Luke 11:1); study some of the great prayers in the Bible (e.g., Eph 1:18-21; Eph 3:14-19; Col 1:9-14).

Summary: Getting together with God on a daily basis is essential for developing and growing our relationship with Him, and helping us in our spiritual growth.

What actions do you need to take in order to have a daily quiet time? It is very important.

1.8 The Role of the Holy Spirit

Aim: To help us understand the person and role of the Holy Spirit.

Discuss: "The Christian life is not difficult - it's impossible." Discuss!

The only one who could live the Christian life is Christ Himself. So, if we're to live the kind of life He did, we'll need Him living His life through us (cf. John 15:5)! Without the Spirit of Christ, the Christian will be very frustrated in his attempts at growth and service; understanding and appropriating the Spirit's work is what brings great fruitfulness. With this in mind we will do a four-week study on the Holy Spirit.

The Person of the Holy Spirit

Read John 14:16-18. Who is the Holy Spirit like?

He is just like Jesus. In v.16 Jesus tells us that the Father would send another (in the Greek, it specifically reads as "someone who is the same as"). That's why at the end of v.18, Jesus says "I will come to you".

Who is the Holy Spirit, according to how Jesus describes Him in John 14:16?

He is the Counselor. In the Greek, the word is *paracletos* - this rich picture word means "one called (*klytos*) alongside (*para*) to help". That's why this word is translated either by the English words Counselor, Helper comforter, or advocate (Note: Jesus is described by this same word in 1 John 2:1).

Read Matt 10:19-20 and Rom 8:9. Who is the Holy Spirit? How does this tie into John 14:23?

He is the Spirit of the Father and the Spirit of Jesus. As a result, when He comes to live in us through faith in Jesus, we have the Father and the Son living in us, just as Jesus said in John 14:23.

Is the Holy Spirit divine? Is He God too?

He sure is! He is completely connected and one with God the Father and God the Son, and works equally with them; eg, He helped create the world (Gen 1:1-2), and helped raise Christ from the dead (Rom 8:11). The Holy Spirit is so one with the Father and the Son, that this is reflected in Jesus' command when we baptise; we are to baptise new believers in the name of the Father, the Son, and Holy Spirit (Matt 28:19). In a nutshell - He is God; the third person of the Trinity; everything God is, He is.

The Role of the Holy Spirit

In John 14:16-18 we have already seen some of the key roles of the Holy Spirit. What are they?

He helps us by comforting us and giving us counsel. He is the Spirit of truth, teaching us God's truth; especially concerning God's revelation to us. He also is with us so that we are never alone.

In John 14:26, 16:13-14 & 1 John 2:27 what else do we learn about the Spirit's role as Teacher?

He will teach us all things (ie, in regard to God), He will remind us of Jesus' teaching, and will guide us into all truth (biblical truth). Without the Spirit we will never understand God's truth (cf. 1 Cor 2:12-16). Let us remember, God's Spirit brought about the Bible in the first place (2 Peter 1:20-21; 2 Tim 3:16).

What do we learn about the Spirit's role in John 16:7-11?

He convicts us of our sin, our lack of righteousness and Christ's perfect righteousness, and the judgment we will face if we don't trust in Jesus. This role is paramount in bringing us to Christ. But even after we become a Christian, He continues to convict us when we sin so that we might confess our sins, and be forgiven through Christ's blood, and remain in fellowship with God (1 John 1:8-10).

In regard to salvation, the Holy Spirit is instrumental. Consider John 3:3-5; Tit 3:4-5; Rom 8:11

It is the Holy Spirit who causes us to be born again, to be regenerated and renewed, and to be filled with spiritual and abundant life. Before the Spirit comes into us, we are spiritually dead (Eph 2:1).

According to Eph 1:13-14 and Rom 8:15-16, what else does the Spirit do for us?

His presence in our life affirms that we now belong to God (ie, He is God's seal of ownership), and He also testifies with our spirit that we are a true child of God. Indeed, if we don't have the Spirit, then we don't belong to God or Christ (Rom 8:9).

What great work is the Holy Spirit doing in us? (2 Thess 2:13; Rom 8:29; Gal 5:22-23)

He is sanctifying us (making us holy), by conforming us to the image of Jesus (Rom 8:29), and bearing His fruit in us. Holiness is the Spirit's great attribute and work - that's why He is called the "Holy" Spirit.

What else does the Holy Spirit do? (Acts 1:8; 1 Cor 12:4-7; Rom 8:26-27; Gal 5:16-17)

He helps us to witness for Jesus; He equips us with spiritual gifts to bless fellow believers; He helps us to pray; He helps us in our walk with God to overcome our sin nature (cf. Rom 8:13). He does so much!

Summary: The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of the Father and the Son. He is Divine. He is also actively at work in every believer, doing a huge array of work to help us and grow us.

1.9 The Baptism and Filling of the Holy Spirit

Aim: To help us know the importance of the baptism of the Spirit and being filled with the Spirit.

Discuss: Besides being saved, being made right with God, and having the gift of eternal life, what great gift should we know and delight in (John 14:16-18; John 16:7-15; Acts 1:6-8)? [*the Holy Spirit*]

Baptism of the Holy Spirit

Before Jesus began His ministry, what did John the Baptist proclaim? (Matt 3:11-12)

He proclaimed Christ's supremacy, as well as His special ministry in baptising us in the Holy Spirit.

Before His ascension, what did Jesus affirm to His disciples (Acts 1:4-5)? When did this happen?

He affirmed that He would baptise His disciples (and us) with the Holy Spirit. This first happened on the Day of Pentecost, as recorded in Acts 2:1-4.

Why is the giving of the Spirit described as being "baptised in the Spirit"?

When we are given the Holy Spirit, He is "poured out upon us" (Titus 3:5-6); ie, the language used suggests that we are immersed and flooded with the Spirit – just like when we are baptised in water, we are immersed in the water. However, let us remember that it's not an outside experience; it's inside.

When does Jesus give us (baptise us) in the Holy Spirit? (Acts 2:38)

It occurs the moment we repent of our sins, which includes believing in Jesus as our Lord and Saviour.

Baptism is mentioned in Acts 2:38. What baptism is this?

Water baptism is mentioned in Acts 2:38 – a baptism that is in obedience to Christ, that symbolises our identification with the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, (cf. Matt 28:19), and that is a picture of our salvation in Christ (Rom 6:3-4); dying to sin and living a new life in Christ.

In Acts 2:38, it appears that we must be baptised in water to be forgiven of our sins (to be saved) and to receive the Holy Spirit. Is this the case? (cf. Acts 16:30-31; Eph 2:8-9)

It's actually not the case. In Acts 16:30-31, salvation is clearly by faith in Christ; not through baptism (cf. also Eph 2:8-9). What we need to understand in Acts 2 is that the people believed in Jesus (they were convicted and convinced that Jesus is the Lord Christ – see Acts 2:36-37), and that Peter's first part of his answer to their question results in salvation and the receiving of the Holy Spirit – ie, repenting and believing. But baptism is included, because it's something we should do after being saved, even though it does not bring about our salvation or the receiving of the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Also, what does Rom 8:9 affirm about being a Christian and having the Holy Spirit?

We cannot be a Christian without having the Holy Spirit. So, since faith alone in Christ saves us and makes us a Christian, the Holy Spirit must come into us the moment we have faith in Christ.

Some teach that we don't receive the Holy Spirit at conversion. It is received by having someone lay hands on us and pray over us, or by having a special spiritual experience. Is this true?

No! We receive the Holy Spirit when we put our faith in Christ. Note: There are special circumstances in the book of Acts where the Holy Spirit was given by the apostles praying and laying their hands on believers (cf. Acts 8:14-17). This was when the first Gentiles were being saved - it was done this unique ("one-off") way to help the Jewish Christians realise that God was pleased to save Gentiles also.

Being Filled with the Holy Spirit

Once we are saved and have the Holy Spirit, what are we urged to do in Eph 5:18? Why?

We are urged to be filled with the Spirit. There are many things to pursue as a Christian, but to be filled with the Spirit is the most important, as it results in a life of great fruitfulness and where God is glorified.

What does it mean for a Christian to be "filled" with the Holy Spirit?

It is best understood by how Paul illustrates it. He uses the example of a drunk person. A drunk person is "controlled by," "under the influence of," "captivated by," or "dominated by" alcohol. In a similar way, a person filled with the Holy Spirit is controlled and under the influence of the Holy Spirit.

According to Eph 5:15-21, what does it look like when we are "filled" with the Holy Spirit?

We live our life wisely and purposefully for God's glory, we seek to do God's will (rather than our own), we are filled with songs of worship to God, are filled with thankfulness toward Him, and we serve each other out of reverence for Christ; in other words, we are Christ-centred, and other people centred.

How does being filled with the Spirit influence our character? (Galatians 5:22-23)

As the Holy Spirit is allowed to control our lives, we will change so that His qualities will become ours.

Summary: **The great gift of the Holy Spirit is given at conversion. We may have the Holy Spirit, but does the Holy Spirit have us? Is He "full" in us? Is He really controlling all our life?**

1.10 How to be Filled with the Holy Spirit

Aim: To help us understand how we can be filled with the Holy Spirit.

Discuss: A young businessman had a new promising job under a seasoned and successful director. But, instead of trusting in the director's wisdom, he decided to do things his way. He ignored directives about financial planning. He made ill-advised decisions without consulting his director. He even kept him out of important meetings. Predictably, he failed at his job within a short time.

Do you see a parallel with many who live the Christian life like that (perhaps you are one of them)? We know about having a daily quiet time and the need to have the Spirit direct our lives. But we insist on "going it alone"; doing things our way. It should come as no surprise when we stumble and fall. But such stumblings are entirely preventable if we would allow the Spirit to control us.

How Can I Be Filled with the Holy Spirit?

In last week's lesson we considered the command in Eph 5:18 to be "filled" with the Holy Spirit. Recapping last week's lesson, what does it mean for a Christian to be "filled" with the Holy Spirit?

It is best understood by how Paul illustrates it. He uses the example of a drunk person. A drunk person is "controlled by," "under the influence of," "captivated by," or "dominated by" alcohol. In a similar way, a person filled with the Holy Spirit is controlled and under the influence of the Holy Spirit.

In order to be under the control and influence of the Holy Spirit, what must we do? [discuss]
We must yield to Christ, obey Christ and abide in Christ. The rest of our study will consider this.

1. Yield to Christ

What does Jesus teach us to do in Matt 16:24-25? What does this mean practically?

We are to yield (surrender) to Jesus; this happens when we deny ourselves, die to self ("take up our cross") and follow Jesus. To follow Jesus is to give up our life to Him in order to find true life in Him.

Yielding to Christ is essential for salvation. But why is it also important once we are a Christian?
Yielding to Christ results in us experiencing fullness of life in Christ – this is the same as being filled with the Spirit. We are to continue to yield to Jesus if we wish to be blessed and to be filled with the Spirit.

Stephen is an example of one who yielded to Jesus. What was the result? (cf. Acts 6:5-15)

He was a man full of the Spirit, full of faith, as well as grace and power. He performed great wonders, he had amazing wisdom, and he was courageous before a hostile Jewish Council with a face shining like an angel. Though he was martyred, his life was a powerful testimony for Jesus, and God was glorified.

In Rom 12:1-2 what do we learn there about yielding? Why should we yield?

To yield means to be a living and holy sacrifice to God; we give our bodies, our everything, to worship and serve God. This is to be our reasonable service in the light of God's amazing grace and mercy to us.

2. Obey Christ

Yielding to Christ specifically includes obedience. What does obedience result in? (1 Pet 1:13-16)

Obedience results in a holy life; and a holy life is one and the same as being filled with the Spirit – for the Spirit's desire is for us to be holy and to obey Jesus (cf. 1 Peter 1:2).

If we don't obey Jesus, what does that do to the Spirit? (Eph 4:30-32) What does obeying do?

It grieves the Spirit when we are disobedient, for his desire is to help us to obey Jesus. When we obey Jesus, not only do we make the Spirit happy, but we please Jesus and show love to Him (cf. John 14:15).

3. Abide in Christ

Read John 15:1-11. What are we urged to do? What does it result in?

We are urged to abide in (remain in) Christ. This results in us bearing much fruit for God's glory, and being filled with joy, and having our prayers answered. To abide in Jesus is to truly live the Christian life.

In the illustration of the vine and the branches, Jesus is the vine and we are the branches. What do you think the Holy Spirit is represented by? What is He doing?

He is like the sap – the sap flows from the vine into the branches and makes it alive and fruitful. So is the Holy Spirit – He flows from God into our lives to give us life and fruitfulness (cf. John 7:37-39).

An Important Note: There is no such thing as being filled with the Holy Spirit once and for all. In Eph 5:18, the Greek tense used is called the "present imperative"; that is, we are to "go on being filled" with the Spirit. Thus, it's something we need to maintain every day through yielding, obeying and abiding.

Summary: **Keep on being filled with the Spirit (Eph 5:18) - yield, obey and abide in Christ daily.**

How can you make this a reality each day? What could you pray each morning?

1.11 Grieving, Quenching and Provoking the Holy Spirit

Aim: To help us understand what it means to grieve, quench and provoke the Holy Spirit and to help us know how to be restored back into fellowship with Him.

Discuss: Imagine sitting around a campfire on a cool evening. The warmth of the flames makes you feel comfortable and content. Then, without warning, a sudden downpour occurs. The leaping flames turn into flickers, and then into smouldering ashes. Now you are wet and miserable.

In much the same way, we can quench the fire of the Holy Spirit with careless actions and sinful attitudes. Not only do we cause God anguish, but we become miserable ourselves.

Grieving the Holy Spirit

What can we do to the Holy Spirit (Eph 4:30?) What does this mean?

We can grieve the Holy Spirit. This means to cause Him pain or to make Him sad (cf. God in Gen 6:5-6).

According to the context, how do we grieve the Holy Spirit? (Eph 4:25-31)

We grieve the Holy Spirit through sin – through lying, by not dealing rightly with our anger, through stealing, through unwholesome talk, by being bitter and slanderous, and by not forgiving others.

Read Gal 5:16-21. What battle is occurring in us? How does this impact the Holy Spirit?

The sinful nature within us is at war with God's Spirit. It does not want to submit to the Spirit of Christ; but is in open rebellion to Him. When we yield to our sinful nature, and carry out its desires, we commit sin and disgrace Christ's name. This causes the Holy Spirit to be deeply grieved.

Quenching the Holy Spirit

What else can we do to the Holy Spirit, according to 1 Thess 5:19? What does this mean?

We can quench the Holy Spirit. This means to stifle, suppress or restrain the Spirit's influence in our life. It doesn't mean that He is extinguished completely or removed from our life. Praise God for that!

How do we quench the Holy Spirit according to the context of 1 Thess 5:19-21?

We quench the Holy Spirit by despising the Spirit's exhortations and instructions; ie, when God speaks to us through His Word or through a minister of His Word, and we do not pay attention to it.

Quenching the Spirit is connected to passive disobedience. What does Jam 4:17 tell us?

If we don't do what is right, after hearing and knowing God's Word, this is sin, and it quenches the Spirit.

What are some examples of knowing the right thing to do but not doing it? (consider 2 Tim 1:6; Jam 2:15-16; 1 Tim 5:8; Mark 10:42-45; Heb 10:24-25; Mal 3:8-10)

Not using our spiritual gifts (2 Tim 1:6), not being compassionate towards the needy (Jam 2:15-16), not providing for one's family (1 Tim 5:8), not seeking ways to be a servant to others (Mark 10:42-45), not having fellowship by attending church (Heb 10:24-25), not tithing and giving our offerings (Mal 3:8-10).

Provoking the Holy Spirit to Jealousy

There is another impact we can have on the Holy Spirit. What does Jam 4:4-5 say?

We can provoke the Spirit to jealousy by being a friend of the world. We do this by either living for the things of this world rather than seeking to do God's will, or by seeking to please people who live for this world by doing what they do, rather than pleasing God.

Consider 1 John 2:15-17. What do we learn here about the world and God?

This fallen world is about the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life. If we follow this way (ie, love the world), then we cannot love God. Those who do God's will love God.

Being Restored back into Fellowship with the Spirit

We often grieve/quench/provoke God's Spirit. How do we know that we have? (cf. Psa 32:3-5)

When we adversely affect the Spirit in our life we can tell. We are no longer in fellowship with God, and we no longer enjoy the blessings of walking in the Spirit (such as peace and joy and contentment).

What should we do when we grieve/quench/provoke the Holy Spirit? (1 John 1:9)

We need to turn back to God in repentance, and humbly confess our sins (1 John 1:9). Whether it's active disobedience (breaking God's laws), or passive disobedience (not doing the right thing according to God's Word), or loving the things of this world, we urgently need to put things right with God. Only then can we be in fellowship with God and enjoy His presence and the filling of the Holy Spirit (Eph 5:18).

Summary: Sinful behaviour, inactivity and loving this fallen world grieve and quench and provoke the Holy Spirit. Are we conscious of this? In response, are we repenting and confessing?

1.12 Having a Heart to Worship God

Aim: To encourage us to worship God, and to see that worship is our highest calling.

Discuss: *What is one of the great ministries that the Holy Spirit produces in us? (Phil 3:3)*

He helps us and enables us to worship God – indeed, only worship through the Spirit is true worship.

What did Jesus teach us when He spoke to the woman at the well in John 4:19-24?

The Father seeks worshippers, but only those who worship in spirit and truth.

What does it mean to worship in "spirit" and to worship in "truth"?

To worship in "spirit", is to worship God with our spirit that has been made alive by the Holy Spirit. To worship in "truth" is to worship God according to His revelation to us (in the Bible).

The Preeminence of Worship:

According to Psalm 95:6, 96:1-9, and Rev 15:2-4, what is God's main purpose for people?

Our main purpose is to worship Him. It is God's will for all to worship Him. From worship flows everything else – including evangelism and serving God in His church, etc.

Consider God's creation. How have we been made? What's the link to worship? (Gen 1:26-27)

We have been made in God's image– different to all other creatures. Thus, we are able to know God, appreciate God and communicate with God. We have been made different to worship God.

Consider the saving work of God in Christ. What have we been saved for? (1 Peter 2:9-10)

We have been saved to "declare His praises"; in other words, we have been saved to worship God. We have not just been saved so that we may have our sins forgiven and go to heaven.

Consider our eternal destiny. What will be doing in glory? (Rev 7:9-17)

God's eternal plan is that we may serve Him and worship Him forever and ever.

The Westminster Shorter Catechism (a series of questions and answers written in 1647), has as its first question: "What is the chief end [purpose] of man?" What answer is given, and what does this mean? The answer given is: "Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever". This document rightly declares that our chief purpose is to worship God – the work of Creation and of Christ are to this end.

What is worship?

What comes to mind when you think of worship? What is worship? [discuss]

We often think of worship as what we do at a Sunday morning worship service. We think of worship as singing songs to God. However, worship is much more than that - as we shall see.

One way to help us understand what worship is, is to consider the two main Greek words used in the New Testament for "worship". The most common Greek word used for worship is "proskuneo". What action is connected with this word? What does this imply? (Matt 2:11, 4:9; 1 Cor 14:24-25; Rev 4:9-11)

Worship is falling down/bowing down before God. Indeed, proskuneo literally means "bow down to kiss". In other words, worship is about humbling ourselves before God, revering and fearing Him, and honouring and adoring Him. It's about a right heart attitude to the great God of heaven and earth.

Another Greek word for worship is "latreuo". It means to "serve", and is often translated as "worship" or "service". What do you learn from its use in the following verses? (Acts 24:11-14 – v.11 uses the word proskuneo, and v.14 uses the word latreuo; also consider Rom 9:3-4 and Rom 12:1)

Worship is directly connected to service for God, and it indeed is called worship in and of itself.

Is all "service" worship? How should we distinguish "normal service" from "worship service"?

Not all service is worship – most isn't. That's because we do things without any reference to God. Service that is worship is when we do or act because of who God is, and according to His will and for His glory.

From the two main Greek words used for worship in the New Testament, what is true worship?

True worship of God is when we have a humble and reverent heart toward God, and seek to serve Him according to His will and for His glory.

Besides singing songs of praise to God, what else can we call worship?

Praying – especially adoring God in prayer (Matt 6:9-10); cleaning the church when we do it for His glory; sharing the Gospel of grace with others; using our spiritual gifts in Christ's church, etc.

What do we learn from 1 Cor 10:31 in regard to worship?

Everything we do ought to be done as worship, even doing such common things as eating and drinking. The key is to be conscious of God and His glory when we do things – even the mundane things of life.

Summary: We were made for worship; saved for worship. Our chief purpose is to glorify God. Do you?

1.13 Having a Heart to Seek God

Aim: To encourage us to seek God and desire fellowship with Him.

Discuss: We can know all about the things that we ought to do to maintain our fellowship with God, such as reading and studying the Bible, praying, being filled with the Holy Spirit, and worshipping God. But there is something else we need; we need a heart for God. [Discuss]

Unless we have a heart for God, we will find ourselves being poor readers of His Word, poor prayers, poor worshippers, and we will not experience deep fellowship with God.

As our last study in this mini-series on "Fellowship with God", let us look at the heart we should have for God, and then let us examine where we are at.

A Heart for God

What did David's heart long for? Read Psalm 27:1-8

David desired to dwell in the Lord's house in order to worship the Lord. He sought the Lord's face. He desired to think upon and meditate upon the **beauty** of the Lord. This desire consumed him.

What was Mary commended for? Read Luke 10:38-42 and John 12:1-7

She was commended for being at the feet of Jesus listening to Him, and being at the feet of Jesus anointing Him with perfume in an act of worship. She did not allow daily chores to distract her from her devotion to Jesus, nor did she allow pride to stop her anointing Jesus. She chose what was best.

What did the Apostle Paul desire more than anything else in life? Read Phil 3:7-14.

Paul's great desire was to know (intimately know) Christ Jesus. He was not just satisfied in being a Christian. He wanted to know the Lord more and more.

What was Paul's great boast at the end of his life? Read 2 Tim 1:12

He intimately knew the Lord in whom he had believed in. It's one thing to believe in Jesus; it's another thing to grow so that we get to know Him well. Paul knew Him well. That's what he was saying.

Examples to Follow

Read Gen 18:16-19 and James 2:23. What do we learn about Abraham's relationship with God?

The Lord shared freely with Abraham. He was the friend of God.

Read Exodus 33:8-11. What do we learn of Moses' relationship with the Lord?

Moses was so close to the Lord, that God would speak to him face to face, as a man speaks to his friend.

Jesus has the very best relationship with God. Not only has Jesus opened the way for us to know God, but what did He do for us? (Cf. Mark 1:35; Luke 4:16-20; John 12:27-28)

Jesus modeled to us what it looks like to know God and walk with Him. He prayed, He knew the Bible and He worshipped God. May we fix our eyes on Jesus and follow His example (cf. Heb 12:1-3).

Read Isaiah 64:7 and James 4:7-10. What do we learn from these verses?

God challenges us to "lay hold of Him". Do we want a relationship like Abraham and Moses, and even more so, the relationship that Jesus had with His Father? Then we must seek God with all our heart. We need to have a passion for God Himself. As we seek and draw near to God, He **will** draw near to us.

What great promise did God give Israel in Jer 29:10-13? Does it apply to us?

God promised to rescue His people from exile, and that they would find Him if they sought Him. For us, God doesn't promise deliverance from Babylon, but the promise still applies, that if we seek God with all our heart (and through Jesus) we will find Him. How many of us avail ourselves of this glorious promise?

Questions to Ponder on

We have looked at seeking after God. Let us conclude this mini-series by asking ourselves some searching questions about how we are going in our walk with God.

(Discuss these questions in your group, but especially consider them with the Lord on your own)

To what extent is my Bible reading adequate for helping me walk close with God?

To what extent is my prayer time adequate for helping me walk close with God?

Am I disciplined in having a daily quiet time with the Lord; reading His Word and praying to Him?

What effort am I putting into repentance and obedience in order to be filled with the Spirit?

Do I comprehend the supremacy of worship and am I growing in my worship of God?

To what extent do I seek God and pursue Him?

Summary: God has given everything, even His life, to walk with you. Will you walk with Him?

DISCOVERING THE CHURCH

2.1 The Church – God's New People

Aim: To help us appreciate the Lord's church and its establishment.

Discuss: People have such contrasting views on church. The word *church* can bring up painful thoughts. For others, *church* is merely a building associated with certain practices or programs. For others, it is connected with a qualified/official leader (ie, priest). *What's your thoughts on church?*

In the New Testament, the Greek word for church is ekklesia. The original meaning is "called out ones". Its common meaning is "assembling together (of believers)". According to this, what is church? Church is not a building, or certain programs and practices. It's the assembling together of people who have been called out of this world to be God's people through faith in Jesus Christ (cf. 1 Peter 2:9-10).

In our next series of studies in "Walking with God", we will be considering *church* and what *church* is meant to be about, according to God and His Word. *What do you think church should be about?*

The Establishment of the First Church: (Acts 2:1-4; 32-40)

When and how was the first church established? (Acts 2:1-4)

After Christ's atoning death and His resurrection from the dead, the Lord Jesus sent the Holy Spirit into the lives of His followers on the Day of Pentecost – on that day the church was born.

Before His ascension, in Acts 1:4-8, Jesus spoke of the Holy Spirit. What do we learn?

The Spirit was promised by God the Father (Ezek 36:27), and even Jesus affirmed this promise during His earthly ministry (John 14:16-18). He would come and give power to Christ's followers to proclaim Christ's name to the world. He also would come and give spiritual life (cf. John 7:37-39; Rom 8:11).

When the Spirit first came, how did it happen and what did He do? (Acts 2:1-4; 11)

He came powerfully and supernaturally for all to see and observe. The disciples of Jesus spoke in unlearned languages, and in those new languages others heard them speak of the mighty deeds of God.

What was this a picture and a foretaste of?

It was a picture and a foretaste of how the Gospel (what God has done for us in Christ) would be declared in all the languages of the world to all the people groups of the world so that others might be saved.

With courage and clarity, the apostle Peter preached the first sermon after the church was established. What was the heart of His message? (Acts 2:22-24, 33-36)

Jesus Christ died according to the will of God (v.23), was raised from the dead by God (v.24), and has been declared by God to be Lord and Christ (our Saviour King).

In order for others to be part of Christ's church (and to be saved from their sins), what did Peter command the crowd to do in Acts 2:37-40? Why?

He commanded them to repent of their sins and be baptised. Through repentance and faith in Christ we are forgiven of our sins and receive the Holy Spirit, and we also are urged to get baptised, not for salvation, but in order to obey Christ (Matt 28:19-20) and to declare our allegiance to Him.

Life in the First Church: (Acts 2:41-47)

One the first day of the church, 3000 people became Christians (Acts 2:41). They became a changed people. What characterised their new life in Christ because of the Holy Spirit? (Acts 2:42)

They became devoted to the apostles' teaching, to fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer.

Today what does it practically look like to live out Acts 2:42? What do we normally call this?

It means coming together under the teaching of God's Word (and especially the New Testament), and having fellowship in Jesus' name, having communion (breaking bread), and praying. This is church!

According to Acts 2:43-47, what did the first church look like as they lived out Acts 2:42?

There was a sense of awe toward God as He did miracles through His apostles. Also, being filled with the Spirit, the people were selfless, loving and caring for each other so that no one was in need. They also were one people, gladly meeting together, and worshipping God together. Outsiders were impressed!

In Acts 2:47 what was God doing daily? What enabled God's work to be done more easily?

God was growing the church; it's His sovereign work (John 6:44). But let us affirm that through His people, God used their new and transformed lives to proclaim to others the reality of Christ. Do we?

Summary: God established His church through Christ's work and the empowering of His Spirit. Church should look like Acts 2:42-47 (even without apostles). How do we compare?

2.2 The Church: The Body and Bride of Christ

Aim: To help us learn how God intends for us to function as members in His church.

Discuss: At the base of the human brain is a small organ called the pituitary gland. By appearances it wouldn't seem to be an important organ. But this tiny gland is a vital regulator, secreting hormones that are critical to the functioning of other organs. With the nervous system it co-ordinates and integrates those mechanisms that help us adapt to changes in our environment. It can also "tell" other glands to produce greater quantities of hormones. It is very small, but the body could not function properly without it.

Discuss this statement: "Every Christian is like a pituitary gland". In what way?

We are part of the body of Christ, and like a pituitary gland in the human body, our service in Christ's body is really important. By attending and encouraging fellow believers, using our spiritual gifts and serving each other in various ways, we bless and help other believers to grow and function well.

The Body of Christ

In 1 Cor 12:12-14, and also v.27, what is the church?

The church is the body of Christ, and each Christian is a member (body part) of Christ's church. The church is not a building, or institution – it is Christ's body that He has given birth to through His Spirit.

Like how each body part has a different function and the whole body relies on individual body parts functioning, what has God done in the body of Christ? (1 Cor 12:4-11)

God has given to each Christian different spiritual gifts/ministries/roles to serve the rest of Christ's body. The rest of the body of Christ relies on us functioning well to maintain health and life in the body of Christ.

Has every genuine Christian (born again) been given a gift(s) from the Spirit? (1 Cor 12:7, 11)

Yes! Every Christian has been given one or more spiritual gifts to use in Christ's body.

What should we keep in mind when we talk about our spiritual gifts? (1 Cor 12:4-6, 11)

Spiritual gifts are a gift from God. We didn't produce them in ourselves. So don't boast, but be thankful.

Why does God give spiritual gifts to Christians in His church? (1 Cor 12:7; Eph 4:11-13)

Gifts have been given for the good of the church, and to help equip us and grow us to maturity in Christ.

Can we demand God to give us the gifts we want? (1 Cor 12:11; 14:1)

We can desire spiritual gifts and ask God for certain ones, but what He gives us is according to His will.

Read 1 Cor 12:14-21. What attitude toward ourselves and others are we to guard against?

In regard to ourselves we are not to think that our gift(s) is unimportant. Every gift has been given by God for a noble purpose. Also, toward others, we are not to despise or covet the gifts that others have.

What reassurance do we have when we don't feel very important in the church? (1 Cor 12:22-25)

God has given the seemingly insignificant gifts/roles in Christ's church greater honour.

According to 1 Cor 12:25-26, why has God done things the way He has?

He has done things in such a way so that there may be unity, care, and equal concern for each other.

Based on 1 Cor 12, what conclusion should we draw to?

We all have gifts/ministries/roles that God wants us to use/do for His service and to benefit each other.

The Bride of Christ

Besides the church being the "body of Christ", how else is the church described in Rev 19:7-9?

The church is the bride of Christ, and one day in glory there will be the marriage of the Lamb to His bride.

In Eph 5:22-33 what illustration does Paul use when writing about Christian marriage? Why?

The illustration of Christ and the church is used for marriage, because the relationship between Christ and His church is like a marriage; indeed, it is a marriage – the greatest of all.

How does Christ relate to His bride, the church? (Eph 5:23, 25-32)

He is the head of the church, and as the head, He loves us and gave Himself for us (at the cross), in order to cleanse us from sin, and to make us right and glorious. We are also His body, and are one with Him now.

How are we, the bride of Christ and the body of Christ, to relate to Christ? (Eph 5:22-24)

We are to submit ourselves to our Lord Jesus, honouring and respecting Him as our Head.

In submitting to Christ, out of reverence for Him, how are we to relate to each other? (Eph 5:21)

We are to submit to one another (to the members of His body). This means serving one another above ourselves, and using our gifts and abilities to bless and help one another. Do we live this out?

Summary: The church is not an organisation but a living entity; we are the body of Christ and the bride of Christ. It breathes with God's Spirit, grows by God's design, and functions through the gifts God has given to it. Christ wants all the members of His body to be active in serving one another.

2.3 The Church: The House of God

Aim: To help us understand how the church is a spiritual building held together in and by Christ.

Discuss: A single brick, by itself, is pretty useless. It's even a nuisance; if left on a path it may get damaged, and may even do damage to a bike or trip up a person. But a brick properly positioned with other bricks, according to a master design, can result in a useful and impressive structure. Consider also: a useful and impressive structure would not look right if that one single brick was missing.

How does this analogy relate to Christ's Church? (Read 1 Peter 2:5) The church is a spiritual building where every Christian is a brick in that building. Like how every brick in a physical building has a place and a part to play in the overall structure, every Christian has a place, and a part to play in the Lord's church. When we go it alone, we are ineffective, and cause the church to be lacking. When we connect and work with other believers, we help each other fulfil God's purpose and build His church.

Living Stones (1 Peter 2:4-10)

Once we were dead stones, and we were not part of God's spiritual house (not part of His church). How do we become "living stones" in God's house? (1 Pet 2:4-5)

We must come to Jesus, the Living Stone who gives spiritual life to us "dead stones". By coming to Jesus, and through His Spirit, we are made into "living stones" and become part of God's spiritual house.

What is significant about the church being called a "spiritual house" in 1 Pet 2:5?

We are now God's temple (spiritual house) here on earth; no longer is it a grand physical building like in the Old Testament. As God dwelt in the temple of old, now He dwells in His people (His spiritual house). Also, in this house we find shelter and security and are spiritually nurtured. This is the church.

Consider the service in the temple in the Old Testament period. What is the service that is to be done in the new spiritual house (temple) that God has established in Christ (ie, the church)? (1 Pet 2:5)

In the Old Testament, the temple was the place where priests ministered to God and the people, and offered up physical sacrifices to atone for sin and to thank God. Now, as God's new spiritual house (temple) we are all to serve as priests, ministering to God and to each other. Together we offer up spiritual sacrifices, not physical sacrifices, which include the worship of God and service to Him and His people.

What's the connection between Jesus and this new building God has established? (1 Pet 2:4,6)

God has made His Son the "choice stone" and "cornerstone" of His house; the church. These terms are used for the first stone laid in a building. It's the most perfect, true and strong stone, and from it a building is built. What a picture of Christ! Jesus is the perfect Son of God, who is true and strong, and through His death and resurrection, God has made Him the cornerstone of His house. As we come to Him and line up our life with Him (making Jesus our Lord and Saviour), we become part of God's building.

How does God view this "cornerstone"? How should we? (2:4,6)

God views Jesus as precious and choice. Though many reject Christ, we are to view Him as God does. He is precious, and we are to come to Him and believe in Him. All who do will never be disappointed. As living stones, made new in Christ, we are built into a spiritual house where God dwells.

What does it say in 1 Peter 2:7-8 about those who have not come to Jesus and believed in Him?

They are not part of God's house. By rejecting Jesus, one day they will stumble and fall into eternal ruin.

What purpose does God have for His church? (1 Peter 2:9-10)

As God's chosen and special people, we are to proclaim the glory and greatness of our God to others. We ought to do this all the more because of what God has done for us and what He has made us into.

The Mortar (Ephesians 4:1-16)

We are living stones in God's house, but what's the "mortar" that holds us together? (Eph 4:4-6)

We are one – one body through one Spirit in us. We have one Lord, one faith, one hope, one Father.

As living stones, how can we practically contribute to having "mortar" to hold us? (Eph 4:1-3)

We are to be Christ-like toward each other; humble, gentle, patient, and bearing with one another in love.

What else contributes to our unity, and creates the "mortar" amongst us? (Eph 4:7-16)

Christ has given us, by His Spirit, spiritual gifts and various ministries. It's what we supply to each other through our gifts and service under His Lordship that helps hold us together (v.16).

When we all contribute and have spiritual gifts functioning, what blessings occur? (Eph 4:13-16)

We have unity, maturity, security and love. We won't collapse or crumble; even from attack or opposition.

Summary: We are living stones that are to work together so that God can build His church.

2.4 The Church: Contributing or Consuming?

Aim: To examine three attitudes amongst Christians that contribute to the church's shortcomings: Self-sufficiency, consumerism, and "minister does all".

Discuss: You have had enough paying for expensive tools every time you want to do a job around your house. So you come up with a plan. You call your neighbours together and suggest that they start a tool-lending service. They enthusiastically agree. On the first weekend, your neighbours take your tools for things they need to do. As a result, you wait until next weekend to do your jobs. But by next weekend no one returns your tools. Worse still, they tell you that you can't use their tools because they are using them. This occurs week after week, with excuse after excuse. There is no giving, but only "taking".

Consider when the "taking" attitude is dominant in a church, rather than "giving". What does it look like? What results? This study will examine some of the church's shortcomings.

Qualities of the New Testament Church

Read Acts 2:44-47 and Acts 4:32-37. What things characterised the New Testament church?

They shared what they had with other believers, they cared for those in need, they loved to be together, they had one heart and mind, and they loved praising God, enjoying gladness, sincerity and God's grace.

How does the modern-day church compare with the New Testament church?

The church, in general, does not have the same enthusiasm and dedication for fellowship, sharing with others, caring for the poor and helpless, and being one (or working at being one) with other believers.

Why does the church today fall short of the standard set by the New Testament church?

One reason is that we have allowed the world to influence us, rather than Christ. The world encourages the promotion of self-sufficiency, self-reliance, and a "take all" attitude. Christ doesn't (Mark 10:42-45).

Enemies of the Modern Church:

1. The Self-Sufficiency Attitude

In what way has self-sufficiency in our culture affected the way we regard our possessions?

Self-sufficiency encourages us to believe that depending on others is a sign of weakness, that we should own our own things rather than borrow, that success is the absence of need and the protection against any economic/personal crisis. Many of us have achieved self-sufficiency, but the accompanying attitudes have led to us being tight-fisted, viewing our possessions as being our own, and using them only for ourselves.

Read Acts 4:32-37 again. How did the first Christians regard their possessions?

They shared their possessions so that no one was in need. The needy were esteemed; not demeaned.

What are some important changes we need to make to stop the "self-sufficiency" epidemic?

We need to realise that our possessions are the Lord's, and that we are to be good tenants of what He has given us (1 Cor 4:7; Luke 16:10-13). We are to share our possessions with others; especially the needy.

2. The Consumerism Attitude

Many Christians attend church with a wrong attitude. What attitude is this?

They go for the purpose of what they can get out of it; stimulation, entertainment, a "pick me-up", etc.

Why is the consumerism attitude prevalent among so many Christians?

We have allowed our fallen nature to influence our thinking so that we view church in regard to how it will satisfy our desires/wants. Also, the influence of the world will drive us to this attitude.

What happens if we have a consumerism attitude and don't get what we want?

We often go elsewhere. We have no desire to stay and help a church, through service and contribution.

When we are dominated by consumerism, what important Christian attitudes are missing?

We are not "other" focussed, giving and serving others, as we have been taught (John 13:12-17; Phil 2:1-8).

What change can we make so that we become a serving, giving and contributing Christian?

We need to fix our eyes on Jesus and follow His example – He gave Himself and served us (Mark 10:45).

3. The "Minister does all" Attitude

Another damaging attitude in church is the "minister does all" one. Where does it come from?

It comes from wrong thinking: "the minister is paid to do the work". It comes from wrong priorities: "I'm too busy to serve, so the paid minister will do it". It comes from bad ministers: "I'm the only one able".

Read Ephesians 4:11-13. What's the role of church leaders (ministers)?

They are to use their God-given gifts to equip God's people for ministry. They are not called to do it all.

Is God using me and my gifts to benefit the local church? Am I involved in the Lord's work?

Summary: Your church will be a better place if you contribute to it rather than take from it.

2.5 The Church- in Need of Encouragers

Aim: To help us encourage one another and build up the body of Christ.

Discuss: We know times in our lives when another person's words have helped encourage us to go on, or helped us through a trying situation, or bolstered our self-worth. Can you give any examples?

The New Testament has many examples of believers caring for and encouraging one another in the faith. We all need to develop caring hearts and people-oriented outlooks that will enable us to encourage one another and build up the body of Christ. We've all heard that a chain is as strong as its weakest link. When we don't encourage, we become a weak link and cause the chain to break.

Examples of Encouragement

Read Acts 4:36-37. What was Joseph renamed and why?

He was named Barnabas, which means "son of encouragement" for he was a great encourager. In these verses we see him selling land so that the apostles might use the money to help encourage the poor.

In Acts 9:26-27 what do we find Barnabas doing?

He helped the Jerusalem church receive Paul as a true brother in Christ. Initially, they weren't willing to receive Paul, because he had been a persecutor. But Barnabas made it happen through encouragement.

What was the problem in Acts 15:36-40, and what did Barnabas do to rectify it?

There was a disagreement between Paul and Barnabas over Mark. Barnabas chose to encourage Mark by taking him under his wing. Mark could so easily have become disheartened, but he ended up going on with the Lord, and even becoming a great help to Paul (2 Tim 4:11).

Read Acts 18:24-28. How was Apollos assisted by the Christians in Ephesus?

Priscilla and Aquila didn't oppose Apollos because of how his teaching was lacking to some degree, but they encouraged him in "the way of God more accurately". Also, when Apollos wanted to go to Achaia, the Ephesian church encouraged him to go, and they encouraged the church in Achaia to receive him.

What resulted from Apollos' visit to Achaia?

He was a great help, encouraging the believers in the Lord, and standing up to the Jews who were opposing them and blaspheming the name of Christ.

What principles about encouragement can we deduce from the readings in the book of Acts?

Encouragement causes those in need to be helped, it brings about unity, it prevents us from giving up, it helps us be fruitful for the kingdom, and it inspires others to be encouragers as well.

Teaching on Encouragement

Read Phil 2:1-4. What encouragement do we receive by being united to Christ? (v. 1)

We receive the comfort of His love, the fellowship of the Spirit, and His tenderness and compassion.

Christ encourages us, but how are we to be an encouragement to one another? (v. 2)

We are to be an encouragement to one another by being united in mind, spirit and purpose, and by maintaining Christ's love toward each other. Through love and unity, we are enabled to have a real sense of belonging and worth before God and each other – what a source of great encouragement.

What does it practically mean to live out Phil 2:2?

It means not letting things get between us, and getting alongside each other to help one another.

Why did Paul caution us not to do things out of "selfish ambition or vain conceit"? (v. 3)

Such actions of self-centredness cause others to be humiliated, put down, neglected, and to eventually be discouraged. It certainly does nothing to build up and maintain the unity of the body of Christ.

Instead, what is every Christian called to do? (vv. 3-4)

We are to clothe ourselves with humility, which practically means considering every other believer more important than ourselves, and not looking only to our own interests, but the interests of others.

Read 1 Thess 5:11-14. What practical things do we learn about encouragement in this passage?

We are urged to build one another up, to encourage the leaders, to be at peace with each other, to encourage the feeble, to help the weak, and to be patient to all. Imagine if we all lived this out?

Tests in Encouragement

Consider your conversations. Do you talk more about yourself, or listen and take an interest in others?

Consider your attitudes. Do you criticise fellow believers, or do you express your appreciation of them?

Consider your prayers. Do you pray positively for fellow believers, thanking God for them?

Summary: Encourage and build up the body of Christ, by being other-centred and humble.

2.6 The Church – A People Who Meet Together

Aim: To help encourage us to meet together regularly and to be a blessing to each other.

Discuss: A pastor visited a man in his congregation. He attended church rarely, always finding excuses for his non-attendance. Entering the man's home, the pastor walked over to the fireplace, picked up the tongs, removed a coal from the fire, and placed it by itself on the hearth. The man thought his actions strange, but as they talked, the pastor's actions hit home. If we choose not to have fellowship, we will become like that removed coal – cold and useless! Also, by not having fellowship, we reduce the warmth and heat of the remaining coals in the fire. We are "living coals," designed by God to burn brightly when brought together in close association. Subsequently, the man agreed to attend church.

This study will look at Heb 10:23-25, from which we will gain helpful insight into fellowship.

Let us hold unwaveringly to the hope we profess . . .

What are we, as Christians, to do as we live in this fallen world?

We are to hold unwaveringly (or to hold fast) to our hope in Christ; our salvation in Christ.

How should this be reflected in our meetings when we come together for fellowship?

We should sing and pray and talk about our sure and certain hope in Christ.

... for he who promised is faithful.

How can we be sure that our hope is certain?

God is faithful! All His promises in Christ are yes and amen! (2 Cor 1:20; Heb 6:13-20)

And let us consider how we may spur one another on . . .

There are many things we may consider doing in life. What does God want us to consider doing?

He wants us to consider how we can spur (stimulate, incite) fellow believers in their faith.

... toward love and good deeds.

What area of our faith do we need to specifically spur one another on?

We are to spur one another on to be lovers of God and each other, and to show that love in practical ways (1 John 3:17-18). We are also to encourage each other to be engaged in good works for God's glory (Matt 5:16), fulfilling God's purpose for us, as highlighted in Eph 2:10.

What must we be doing if we are going to spur one another on to love and good deeds?

We must be catching up with each other and having fellowship. It can't happen otherwise!

Let us not give up meeting together . . .

There is no way around this verse! What is every Christian to do?

We are to regularly meet together for fellowship with fellow believers; i.e., church, home group, etc.

We are specifically commanded to "not give up" meeting together. What can make us "give up"?

Tiredness, lack of commitment, wrong priorities, personal conflicts with others, don't get anything out of it.

... as some are in the habit of doing . . .

What happens to people who start missing church without any good reason?

It becomes a habit, and finally they don't come anymore. It's the devil's plan to stop us having fellowship.

What can happen to a person who no longer has fellowship with other Christians?

They can lose their fire for the Lord (like a coal removed from a fire), and they can even fall away from the Lord. Our fellowship with God's people is a true reflection of our love for God (1 John 4:20-21).

... but let us encourage one another . . .

In what way are we to encourage each other? (there are possibly two things to consider here)

We are to encourage each other to meet regularly, and to encourage each other in our Christian walk.

How can we encourage someone who doesn't regard fellowship to be very important?

We can share the blessings we experience in meeting with God's people, and highlight Heb 10:23-25.

... and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

What is meant by "the Day"?

It is the glorious return of Christ when we will be taken up to be with Him forever (1 Thess 4:16-18).

What effect should Christ's coming have on us?

It should spur us on to be an active participant in church, busily encouraging one another to love and good deeds, so that at His coming, we may all be found mature and complete in Him, doing God's will.

Summary: Never forsake fellowship; always encourage and spur one another on in the Lord.

2.7 The Church – Accountability in Action

Aim: To help us understand that we are accountable to God and to others in Christ's church.

Discuss: Who are you accountable to? If you are a student, you are accountable to a teacher to do your work. If you are a taxpayer, you are accountable to the government to pay your taxes. If you are a car driver, you are accountable to the police to obey traffic laws. Whether we like it or not, everyone is accountable to others. This includes being a Christian in Christ's church. *Who are you accountable to?* [You are accountable to God, to spiritual leaders in the church, and to fellow believers]

Accountability in the church can be a touchy subject. Some are reluctant to allow themselves to be held accountable to other believers. Some even avoid church in order to escape from any accountability. Yet such accountability is necessary. *Why?* [It enables the church to function well, and for each individual Christian to remain true to Christ's ways and to be productive and fruitful in their service to God]

Accountability before God

As Christians we have been set free through Christ (Gal 5:1)? Does our freedom negate accountability? How are we to understand our freedom in Christ? (Gal 5:13-14)

In Christ we are set free from the curse of the law (Gal 3:13), and from condemnation in regard to our sin (Rom 8:1). However, this freedom does not negate our accountability to God.

What do we learn from Heb 4:13 and 2 Cor 5:10? How do these verses make you feel?

One day we will have to give an account of ourselves before God. Even though we will be spared from being judged for our sins, we will appear before the judgment seat of Christ, and our deeds will be examined, and we will receive reward according to how we have lived our lives.

Read Matt 25:14-30. What is Jesus teaching us in this parable?

We will have to give an account of our life before the Lord. To those who have been blessed with much, more shall be required. God is looking for faithfulness in regard to what He has entrusted to us.

Read 1 Cor 3:10-15. What do these verses reveal about our accountability to God?

All of us have been engaged in work, since we came to know Christ. One day, God will examine our work, and reward us accordingly. If we have not served the Lord well, then we will be saved ("as through fire"), but receive no reward. This isn't good; especially after all that Christ has done for us.

What do the different materials represent in v. 12?

The costly materials represent work we have done for God's glory with the Spirit; eg, serving the Lord in His church, helping fellow believers, telling others of Jesus. The poorer materials represent fleshly works; ie, pursuing personal interests, or even doing Christian ministry in our own strength and for our own glory.

Read 1 Cor 4:1-5. What do we learn in this passage?

What other people think of us, or what we think of ourselves, is not the main matter. It's what God thinks of us. He will examine us. Therefore, let us live in the light of our accountability to Him.

Accountability before Church Leaders

What responsibility do our church leaders have for us? (Heb 13:17; 1 Pet 5:1-4)

They watch over us and shepherd us. They themselves are accountable to God for the flock.

How should we respond to Church leaders? (Heb 13:17; 1 Cor 16:15-16)

We are to obey leaders and submit to their authority. In this sense, we are accountable to them.

When we submit to Church leaders, what does it result in? Why? (Heb 13:17)

It results in Christian leaders experiencing joy (cf. also 3 John 4), and where we all benefit. Besides not having to experience discipline, we are also spurred on to more fruitful ministry for the Lord.

What are we to do if a Church leader is not behaving as they ought (ie, according to the Bible)?

We're not to reject them! We are to confront them and call them to repentance (cf. 1 Tim 5:19-20).

Accountability before Each Other

We are also to be accountable to each other. What does this look like practically? (Jam 5:19-20)

When we see a fellow believer sin, then we are to point out their sin and encourage them to repent.

How is accountability to each other best done?

It's best done through one-on-one mentoring/discipleship. Besides reading God's Word and praying together, we can openly share our lives and hold each other accountable; eg, in overcoming a besetting sin, or being more disciplined in our devotions to the Lord. Are you accountable to anyone?

Summary: We are not free to do whatever we please - we are accountable to God and each other.

2.8 The Church - Being My Brother's Keeper

Aim: To help us appreciate our responsibility for fellow brothers and sisters in Christ.

Discuss: When Cain said to the Lord, "Am I my brother's keeper?" his sarcasm and lack of concern for his brother were clearly evident. *For us today, are we to be our brother's keeper?* [Yes! Absolutely!]

It is true that the Lord is our keeper (Psa 121), but as we shall see from this study, every Christian is called to be their brother's keeper. We are responsible for one another.

Being responsible for one another is not easy in our culture. *Why?* [Fear and vulnerability can keep us at arm's length from each other, as well as the promotion of self-reliance and independence]

Our Responsibility For Each Other

Read 1 John 3:16-17. What responsibility do we have toward fellow believers?

We are to lay down our life for each other; practically, that means helping each other, even if it costs us. This was the practice of the church in Acts (cf. Acts 4:34-35).

Read Rom 15:1-3. Who are the "strong" and what onus does the Lord place on them?

The "strong" are those who are strong in the Lord and enjoying His blessings. Such believers are not to please themselves and turn a blind eye to those in need. Instead, the Lord gives them the responsibility to help those who are weak and struggling; both spiritually and physically. We are to be like the Lord.

When a fellow believer sins, what is our responsibility? (Matt 18:15-17)

We are to point out a fellow believer's fault in private, and to follow the rest of the procedure if he doesn't listen (this applies to sins that can't be overlooked; there are others that can be - Pro 19:11). We are not permitted to do nothing; we have a responsibility, whether we like it or not.

Paul also taught about dealing with a fellow believer caught in sin. What are we to do and how are we to go about it? (Gal 6:1-2)

We are to help restore a fellow believer caught in sin; ie, encouraging them to turn away from their sin and to seek forgiveness. But we are to do it with gentleness and compassion; not by being rough and judgmental. We need to remember that we all have the potential to fall ourselves.

According to Gal 6:2 we are to bear one another's burdens. What does that look like practically?

When a fellow believer is burdened with trials, or caught in sin, we are to help bear their "load"; ie, we are not to push them down, but lift them up (cf. Psa 37:23-24). We are to encourage them and pray for them, and even help them practically if they have needs (i.e., provide finances, meals, home help, etc).

What responsibility do we have toward each other according to Rom 15:14? What does this mean?

We are to admonish each other; that is, we are to correct each other when we stray or are not living as we ought. This is to be done with a heart full of goodness and godly wisdom (knowledge). Admonishing a fellow believer does not mean "telling them off", or belittling them, or being judgmental of them.

When someone has something against us, what is our responsibility? (Matt 5:23-24)

Even though we may not be in the wrong, God holds us responsible to go to our brother to make peace.

We will not be able to care for and be responsible for each other with a right attitude if we do not have a right heart toward each other. What characteristics do we need to develop? (Col 3:12-14)

Compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forbearance, forgiveness and love.

Read Col 3:15-16. What else is essential so that we can truly care for and help each other?

We need Christ's peace to rule our hearts (our emotions) and we need Christ's word to give us wisdom and knowledge. Without these, we will not know how to help each other, or have the right heart to do it.

What's the purpose of being our "brother's keeper" with a right heart toward each other?

The Lord wants love and unity in our fellowship so that we can grow and be nurtured in the faith, and where God is glorified, and where lost souls see the reality of Christ through us.

Our Response To Others

We are responsible for other believers when they sin, but what about when we fall? What attitude do we need to have when a fellow believer lovingly challenges us? (Pro 13:18, 15:31-33; 1 Pet 5:5)

We need to listen to reproof! We need to be humble and teachable; not proud and defensive.

Consider David when he sinned. What would have happened if David didn't listen to Nathan, or if Nathan hadn't obeyed God and challenged David? (2 Sam 12:1-7, 13)

David would have continued to be out of fellowship with God. We all need to listen, take heed and repent.

Summary: We are to be our brother's keeper; for the good of each other and for God's glory.

2.9 The Church - Being Truthful and Loving

Aim: To help us build good relationships by sharing truthfully and loving each other.

Discuss: In modern society there is a lack of closeness when it comes to relationships. We even find this in families; between husbands & wives, parents & children. Busy work schedules, outside activities, and keeping up with everyday tasks seems to encourage our relationships to be superficial and non-committal. Even the fear of vulnerability through openness keeps us distant from each other.

Consider: We are becoming a society of people all alone from each other. [discuss]

God never intended His church to be like how our society is becoming; cold and superficial. We are to share with each other and love each other. The church can't be the church without this.

Being Together

We see how church ought to be, and how we are to relate to each other, in the early chapters of the book of Acts. What did the first church devote themselves to? (Acts 2:42)

They were continually devoted to the apostles' teaching (which is now our New Testaments), to fellowship, to the breaking of bread (remembering Jesus' death through communion), and to prayer.

The early church devoted themselves to fellowship. What did that look like? (Acts 2:42-46)

They spent time with each other daily, caring for each other, worshipping God together, and sharing in the reality of Christ's presence and power amongst them. They also shared meals together. Thus, they did not isolate themselves, or just share superficially. They related strongly to each other.

Why should church fellowship be strong? (Eph 2:19-22; 1 Pet 2:9-10)

We are God's people, through our faith in Christ. We are part of God's family; His household. As a result of what we have become, and how we have the Holy Spirit dwelling in each believer, we ought to know and experience strong fellowship with each other – we're not just any club!

Speaking Together

When we do have strong fellowship with each other, we can then share our lives with each other through communication. How are we to speak to each other? (Eph 4:15)

We are to speak truthfully and we are to speak lovingly to each other.

What does it mean to speak truthfully? (Eph 4:25; Jam 5:12; Gal 6:1)

We are never to lie, distort, or deceive each other. Our "yes" is "yes", and our "no" is "no" (Jam 5:12). Being truthful also includes sharing the truth with each other in regard to correcting one other (Gal 6:1).

We are also to speak lovingly to each other. What does that look like? (Eph 4:29-32)

We are to speak wholesome words to each other that stem from a desire to build up or help one another. We are not to tear down each other, or slander and maliciously align each other.

In Eph 4:29, what does it mean that we are to "give grace" when we speak?

When we speak, we are to be gracious and show favour to each other. The one hearing us should feel loved and honoured; not belittled. We are never to judge and condemn each other (Matt 7:1-5).

Loving Each Other

Besides being loving in our speech, we are to be loving to each other in our conduct. What did Jesus teach us in regard to this in John 13:34-35?

We are to love each other as He loved us; ie, we are to love each other sacrificially and unconditionally. This is only possible as we allow God's Spirit to fill us and rule us and produce His love in us (Gal 5:22).

Paul taught the Corinthians how they are to love each other. How important is love? (1 Cor 13:1-3)

Love is more important than all the other blessings we receive through Christ. Love is the key!

What is love? How does Paul describe the love we are to have toward each other in 1 Cor 13:4-8?

We are to be patient, kind, happy for each other, humble, thoughtful, selfless and forgiving. Love embraces righteousness and truth, and it is enduring and hopeful. Love is supreme (1 Cor 13:13).

Read 1 Pet 1:22-23. How are we to love each other? Why can we love like this?

We are to love each other from the heart; ie, deeply. We can do this, only because of how we have been born again. God has and is changing us by His Spirit, so that we might love each other as He loves us.

Read together 1 John 3:16-17 and 1 John 4:7-11. What do we learn about love in these passages?

We are to love each other by laying down our life for each other; ie, it should cost us (3:16). We are to love practically, doing what we can to help each other (3:17). We are to love because we are loved of God.

Summary: Church is where we are to be together, share together in truth, and love each other.

2.10 The Church - the Importance of Unity

Aim: To help us value the importance of unity in the church and the need to maintain it.

Discuss: In 1858, Abraham Lincoln gave a speech entitled "A house divided against itself cannot stand" to his republican colleagues in regard to the abolition of slavery. He knew that if his colleagues did not become united in their debate on slavery, then they would fall and be no more.

The Lord Jesus Himself was the one who first came up with the phrase "A house divided against itself cannot stand" (Luke 11:17). *Discuss this statement in relation to us, His church?*

Our Priority for Unity

What emphasis do we find in Jesus' prayer to His Father in John 17:20-23?

Jesus prayed that we may be one; one with God and each other; and that we might be perfected in unity.

What is so important about our unity according to Jesus in John 17?

Our unity is a vital sign to the world of how Jesus was sent by the Father and that He is God's Son and our Saviour. Our unity is vital in authenticating to the world the reality of Jesus and His Gospel.

Read John 10:14-16. What was Jesus' mission? What did He stress in v.16?

Jesus' mission was to lay down His life for His followers, as well as to bring others (non-Christians) into His kingdom (fold). His mission was to establish **one** fold with **one** shepherd; He emphasised unity.

What do we see emphasised by the apostle Paul in Eph 4:1-3?

Paul emphasised the same thing that our Lord Jesus did; that we, as God's people, are to be one. We are to preserve and maintain our unity. It is something we should be diligent about; ie, put much effort into.

In Eph 4:4-6 what do we learn is the basis of our unity?

There is one body (ie, the church is the one body of Christ), one Holy Spirit dwelling in each believer, we have received the same calling to be God's saved people, we have one Lord Jesus, one common faith, we have been baptized with the same baptism, and we all have one God and Father. What a basis for unity!

Consider the great divides back in the New Testament period; Jews/Gentiles, slaves/freed men, male/female, etc. What has Christ done for His people? (Gal 3:26-28; Eph 2:12-18)

He has broken down all divides to create one people. Do we appreciate the unity God has established?

Our Reality of Disunity

How would you evaluate our unity as Christians today? [Discuss] Why is this?

We are not very united; besides denominational divides, we often have divisions within a local church. We are often separated from each other by allowing petty doctrinal differences, or cultural differences, or leadership differences, or even different music preferences, to keep us divided.

What do we need to be aware of in regard to our battle to maintain unity? (Eph 6:10-13)

It is all part of spiritual warfare. The devil wants to divide us so that Christ's church might fall, and that we might lose all credibility before the world in regard to our witness of Christ's reality.

In the light of Christ's teaching on unity, and our present-day disunity, what should we be doing?

We should be acknowledging our disobedience to Christ, and be doing everything we can to foster unity.

Our Responsibility to Create Unity

In our own local church what can we do to foster unity? (Col 3:12-14; Phil 2:1-4)

We need to be compassionate and humble, forbearing and forgiving each other. We need to be selfless and be considering others more important than ourselves. This is what Jesus modelled to us.

When we are not right with another believer, what are we to do? (Matt 5:23-24)

We are to seek reconciliation and be right with each other (even before Christian service).

What member of our body must we control if we want to maintain unity? (Jam 3:5b-6)

We must control our tongue. We are not to speak against each other (Jam 4:11-12).

What can we learn from the Corinthian church in 1 Cor 1:10-13?

We are not to be divided by following different human leaders; instead, we are all to follow Christ.

What do we need to be aware of according to Acts 20:29-31?

We need to be aware of false teachers; their agenda is not just to lead us astray, but to break our unity.

What do we learn from Rom 16:17?

There can be divisive people in a church; we are not to associate with such people for unity is important.

Read together Psalm 133 and consider God's delight in unity and the joy we should have in unity.

Summary: The unity of the fellowship is to be diligently preserved; it pleases God and blesses us.

2.11 Lessons from Seven Churches (Part 1)

Aim: To recognize that Jesus knows every church, and He calls us to repentance and perseverance.

Discuss: In high level sporting teams there are coaches and specialists that continually evaluate a team's performance. *Why?* [to help the team improve; to identify weaknesses that need to be rectified]

The Lord Jesus is the captain coach of the church; and of every local church. He knows how each church is going; our strengths and weaknesses, our passions and apathies. As our captain, He desires for us to grow and improve. Nowhere is this truth seen more clearly than in Rev 2 & 3, where Christ instructs seven churches. The encouragement and warning that Christ gives these churches is timeless, and all believers should heed these words and apply them to themselves and to their church. [discuss]

Ephesus (Rev 2:1-7): Ephesus was the capital of Asia Minor, one of the three most important cities in the eastern part of the Roman Empire. The temple of Artemis was there, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. Paul spent three years at Ephesus, and during this time the Gospel caused many to turn from Artemis to Christ, and so the trade in the production of images for Artemis dropped off, leading to a riot (Acts 19). The church in Ephesus sought to live a holy life. This wasn't easy in a city noted for idolatry.

What commendable characteristics did the church of Ephesus have? (Rev 2:2-3, 6)

It worked hard in doing good deeds, not tolerating wicked men, discerning and rejecting the message of false apostles, and persevering and enduring hardships for Christ. It also hated the deeds of the Nicolaitans; an heretical sect that sought to incorporate heathen practices into local churches.

Although the church in Ephesus had some commendable characteristics, the Lord Jesus, who sees and knows all things, knew that they had a serious problem. What was it? What is this? (Rev 2:4-5)

It had forsaken its first love for the Lord; ie, the special love we have for the Lord Jesus when we first come to believe in Him and embrace Him, and experience His amazing kindness, goodness and grace.

Where did they go wrong?

They loved their status of doing what is right, more than they loved the Lord; ie, they were more caught up with deeds, than devotion to Christ (cf. Jesus' words to the Pharisees and Scribes in Matt 15:7-9).

What did Jesus call the Ephesians to do?

He called them to repent and to do what they first did; ie, serve Him out of a heart of love and thankfulness.

If they didn't repent what would happen?

Even though Jesus is gracious, if they didn't repent, there would be serious consequences. He would remove the lampstand; ie, He would not be present with them, and therefore, His blessings would cease.

What promise did Jesus offer to those who repented and overcame? (Rev 2:7)

He promised them that they would gain the right to eat from the tree of life and enjoy God's Paradise.

What can we learn for ourselves from Jesus' words to the church at Ephesus?

We are to love the Lord more than all other things, including living rightly and being engaged in church duties. We are to serve the Lord out of devotion, and not just duty. This is so important, as a failure to live like this will result in the Lord withdrawing from His people.

Smyrna (Rev 2:8-11): The city of Smyrna was about 80 km north of Ephesus. It was nicknamed the "Port of Asia" because it had an excellent harbour on the Aegean Sea. The church in this city struggled against two hostile forces: a Jewish population strongly opposed to Christianity, and a non-Jewish population that was loyal to Rome and supported emperor worship.

Why were the believers in Smyrna "rich"? (Rev 2:9)

Despite their afflictions and poverty, they were spiritually rich through their faith in Christ (2 Cor 8:9).

How did the Lord Jesus view the Jews who were opposing them? (Rev 2:9)

He called them a "synagogue of Satan". They were not of God; they were doing Satan's dirty work.

What were these believers about to suffer? Why did they not have to fear? (Rev 2:10)

They would be imprisoned and persecuted. However, they did not have to fear, for the Lord Jesus controlled their lives and their situation. Satan does not have a free hand to do what he wants.

What reward was promised to those who withstood these trials? (Rev 2:10-11)

They would receive the crown of life, and be spared the second death (eternal death in hell – Rev 20:14).

What can we learn for ourselves from Jesus' words to the church at Smyrna?

We may suffer persecution, but we are not to fear. There is great reward if we endure (Matt 5:11-12).

Summary: As Christ's church, we are called to love and faithfully serve our Lord in all situations.

2.12 Lessons from Seven Churches (Part 2)

Aim: To recognize that Jesus knows every church, and He calls us to repentance and perseverance.

Pergamum (Rev 2:12-17): Pergamum was a prosperous and pagan city, the centre of emperor worship, and the first city to build a temple to the Roman emperor. It was also the first place where Christians were executed; which set a precedence for the Empire. Christians felt pressure to leave the faith or compromise.

Why did Jesus refer to Himself as the "One who has the sharp two-edged sword"? (Rev 2:12)

Though Rome's sword was powerful in execution, it could only kill the body. The sword to fear the most is God's (Matt 10:28), and it is the Lord Jesus who wields that sword (Rev 19:15-16).

Why were the believers in Pergamum praised by Jesus for their faith? (Rev 2:13)

They lived in a city "where Satan's throne is"; ie, Satan himself was behind all the idols and the idolatry of the city. Yet, in the midst of all the idolatry, the believers had remained faithful to Christ, holding fast to His name, and they had not denied the faith; even after the death of a faithful witness named Antipas.

What did Christ hold against the church of Pergamum? (Rev 2:14-15)

Some believers were following the teaching of "Balaam"; ie, just as Balaam led Israel into idol worship and sexual immorality, so false teachers at Pergamum were leading some Christians to do the same.

Others were following the Nicolaitans, who used their so-called "spiritual liberty" to be free of morality.

What were Jesus' strong words to those who were immoral or caught up in idolatry? (Rev 2:16-17)

Repent! Otherwise He would come quickly and bring judgment (He does bear a sword to do this).

What can we learn for ourselves from Jesus' words to the church at Pergamum?

We live in a pagan society and can easily compromise our moral standards and worship the idols of our society to be accepted by others. Unless we repent of these things, we will be chastened by Christ Himself, but if we do repent, and endure for His name's sake, we are promised great blessing (v. 17).

Thyatira (Rev 2:18-29): Thyatira was a working man's town, with many trade guilds in cloth making, dyeing, and pottery. These trade guilds honoured patron deities. Christians who refused to do this were isolated socially and economically. This was hard in a city whose citizens valued their trades.

What do we find Jesus doing again before He challenged the church of Thyatira? (Rev 2:19)

He encouraged them in their deeds, love, faith, service and perseverance.

But besides their good points, what sin was the church of Thyatira guilty of? (Rev 2:20)

They tolerated Jezebel, a woman who esteemed herself as a prophetess. Yet she led God's people astray, by encouraging them in immorality and idolatry in order to conform them to be citizens of Thyatira.

What was God's response to her wickedness? (Rev 2:21-23)

In His grace, He gave her time to repent, but she refused. As a result, she would now face judgement.

What can we learn for ourselves from Jesus' words to the church at Thyatira?

We can also tolerate false teaching, especially if it's from someone who esteems themselves. We also need to be careful of those who convince us to embrace worldly behaviour and to live compromised lives.

What instructions did Jesus give to those who did not follow Jezebel's teaching? (Rev 2:24-29)

He urged them to hold fast to Him and His ways, and to persevere to the end. Those who did would be blessed, not only with salvation, but they would be given authority over the nations with Christ.

Sardis (Rev 3:1-6): The wealthy city of Sardis was a pagan city, worshipping many deities, but where there was religious tolerance. Christians could live here without the fear of persecution.

What reputation did the church of Sardis have? (Rev 3:1)

It was supposedly an "alive" church; one that did great things for God.

But what was the real state of the church according to Jesus, and not man? (Rev 3:1-2, 4)

They were spiritually dead; their deeds were lacking; they were compromised with sin (garments soiled).

What did Christ urge the church of Sardis to do? (Rev 3:2-3)

He urged them to wake up; ie, to remember and do what they had received, and to repent of their sins.

Like Sardis, we presently don't experience much persecution. What do we need to be aware of?

When free of persecution, we can be spiritually dead, lacking in good deeds, and be compromised with worldliness. We must remain alert, knowing God's will found in His word, and repenting of any sins.

What blessing comes to those who are awake, who persevere, and resist compromise? (Rev 3:4-6)

They will walk with Jesus in white clothes, and their position in glory will be secure (ie, their names in the Book of Life will remain). They will be considered worthy of entering glory and enjoying eternal life.

Summary: Christ calls us to be spiritually alive, to hold fast to Him, and to not be compromised.

2.13 Lessons from Seven Churches (Part 3)

Aim: To recognize that Jesus knows every church, and He calls us to repentance and perseverance.

Philadelphia (Rev 3:7-13): Philadelphia was a frontier city, built as a gateway to the central plateau of Asia Minor. Its residents kept barbarians out and brought in Greek culture. It was an idolatrous city, housing the temples of five major Greek gods. A strong Jewish community was present. They persecuted the church, mainly made up of Jewish Christians, excluding them from worshipping in their synagogue.

How does Jesus present Himself to the Philadelphian church? Why does He do this? (Rev 3:7)

Jesus reminds His people that He holds the "key of David"; ie, He now rules on David's throne. As a result, every Jew who persecutes His people is also in rebellion to Him, the King of the Jews.

The church was severely persecuted by the Jews. How did Jesus view the Jews? (Rev 3:9)

He called them a "synagogue of Satan" (cf. also Rev 2:9); ie, they didn't know or worship the true God. Instead, they followed Satan, who also hates and opposes Jesus and His followers (cf. John 8:42-44).

What does the Lord commend this church for? (Rev 3:8, 10)

He commended them for their deeds, and the way they were faithful in keeping His word and not denying His name, despite the persecution they faced and the little power that they had against their enemies.

What promises did Jesus give the church for their faithfulness and perseverance? (Rev 3:8-10)

Jesus would put before them "an open door"; ie, they would not be closed, or shut down, by their enemies. Also, their enemies would humbly acknowledge His love for His church, and His people would also be kept from the hour of trial that was coming upon the then known world.

Why does God permit trials according to what it says at the end of Rev 3:10?

He uses trials to test us; to sort out the true believers (sheep) from the false believers (goats).

Read Rev 3:11-13. What can we learn from the final words of Jesus to the Philadelphian church?

- 1) We are to live in anticipation of Christ's coming; this will help us to endure to the end (cf. Matt 24:13).
- 2) For those who endure, God will more than make up for our suffering. Though we are dishonoured here, God will honour us with a crown; though banned to enter synagogues, etc, we will dwell in God's temple.
- 3) During this testing time, we must listen to God's Spirit (and what the Spirit says through God's Word).

Laodicea (Rev 3:14-22): Laodicea was the wealthiest of the seven cities, known for its banking, wool industry, and eye salve for healing. But the city had a problem with its water supply. At one time an aqueduct was built to bring water from hot springs. But by the time the water reached the city, it was neither hot nor refreshingly cool - only lukewarm. The church had become as bland as that tepid water.

How does Jesus introduce Himself to the Laodicean church? Why? (Rev 3:14)

Jesus is the source of God's creation. He's also the source of spiritual life. Without Him we cannot do anything (John 15:5). However, the Laodicean church was self-sufficient and independent of Jesus.

What does it mean that the deeds of the Laodiceans were neither cold nor hot? (Rev 3:15)

Being in an affluent society, the church had become worldly - preoccupied with materialism and proud of their self-sufficiency. Spiritually, they had become lukewarm. Just as hot and cold water both have useful purposes, but lukewarm water rarely benefits anyone, so the church had become like lukewarm water.

According to Rev 3:16, how did Jesus feel about this church being lukewarm? Why?

Jesus was "disgusted" with them. The reason Jesus had such a reaction to them is because it is so hurtful to Him for us to be so apathetic and carefree after all that He has done for us in His great passion.

How did the Laodicean church view themselves? (Rev 3:17)

They thought that they were spiritually well, and blessed of God; especially because they were wealthy.

How did the Lord view this church? (Rev 3:17) Why was this (cf. Rev 3:20)

They were wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked spiritually; they were the opposite to what they thought of themselves. By trusting in themselves/ riches, they had pushed the Lord outside of His church.

How did Jesus respond to this wayward church, and what did He call them to do? (Rev 3:18-19)

We see Christ loving this wayward church, and in His love, He reproved them and called them to repent, so that they may no longer be wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked, but spiritually hot and well.

If we are lukewarm, how can we be made spiritually hot again? (Rev 3:19-20)

We must repent of our self-sufficiency and respond to His knock and call to have Him rule in our life.

What blessings come to those who repent and respond to Jesus rightly? (Rev 3:20-21)

He comes in to us, to commune with us, and one day we will enjoy eternal communion before His throne.

Summary: Christ loves His church. He calls us to listen to Him, and to repent of sin & lukewarmness.

MINISTRY IN THE CHURCH

3.1 Ministry: Your Ministry Is Everything

Aim: To help us understand that ministry in church is an essential part of our Christian walk.

Discuss: *What do you feel at the thought of being "used"? [discuss]*

Some Christians have a negative view of being "used" in regard to church. Why is that?

For some, the term "used" is synonymous with "abused." To be used means having someone else's agenda forced on you, or to be doing something you don't want to do, or to be "giving" to the point of exhaustion. No wonder some can't get very excited about being "used" in God's church.

Some Christians have a positive view of being "used" in regard to church. Why is that?

They understand that they have a loving heavenly Father who has hand-crafted them with special talents and abilities, and who longs for them to engage their talents and abilities in His kingdom for His glory and for their joy. They see themselves also as givers and receivers; that they serve for mutual benefit.

Introduction

This next series of studies on *Ministry in the Church* is designed to help us see how God made us and gifted us, not so He could merely "employ" us, but so that we would experience the joy of being a co-builder in His eternal kingdom. It's not enough to merely be an attender of a local church. God wants us to be involved. Through ministry, God fills us with a sense of accomplishment. When we contribute, we find fulfilment. In this first study we shall look at God's call for all of us to be ministering to each other.

God's Call to Ministry

How did members of the early church minister to each other? (Acts 2:43-45; 4:32-35)

They shared everything in common, the rich sold their possessions and goods and gave to those with needs, and they met regularly to praise God together and to encourage one another. Ministry was the key.

Read Heb 6:9-13. What is evident in genuine believers?

They work for and love the Lord, and that includes ministering to and helping fellow believers.

What's the main difference between the sheep and the goats? (Matt 25:31-46)

The difference is what they did and didn't do. The sheep served those in need; the goats didn't.

What should our attitude be in serving? (Col 3:23-24)

As we serve one another, we should serve as best we can, knowing that ultimately we serve the Lord.

How does Jesus challenge our customary ideas of service? (Matt 20:25-28)

Serving others is not a lowly thing, but a thing of greatness in God's eyes. The greatest in the kingdom is the one who serves the most. Jesus is the supreme example of this; He gave Himself for us (Matt 20:28).

How do people in the church today serve each other? How do you serve?

They share their material blessings with others or for the work of the church. They contribute leadership or provide counsel to other Christians. They assist with special needs or ministries that they are suited for.

What problem or attitude toward serving would you like God to change in you?

Our Attitude to Ministry

How would you summarise the key thoughts from Phil 2:1-4?

Because we are so blessed being in Christ, we should love other Christians and be united with them. We ought to put aside any selfish desires, and be humble; treating others better than ourselves.

What prevents us from looking to the interests of others? (Phil 2:3-4)

Our natural inclination is to look at ourselves first, and to consider ourselves before others. Only God's word and His Spirit can enable us to overcome this sinful and insidious trait.

What does it mean that we are to have the same attitude as that of Jesus? (Phil 2:5)

He put aside His glory to serve and redeem us. We are to set aside our self-interests to serve others.

What are some tangible ways in which we can develop these attitudes in our lives? (Phil 2:5-8)

We can read God's word, and in particular, study Christ's life and follow His example.

What words capture the attitude modelled by Christ in Phil 2:5-8?

He wasn't a "grasper"; He was humble; He served; He was obedient to God (even if it cost Him).

What do you think it would take for us to be more like Christ, who served us?

We need to be filled with Christ's Spirit, and we need to be touched afresh with who we are in Christ and the blessings we have. Also, practically, we should pray for ourselves, and look for opportunities to serve.

Summary: God has called us to serve and minister to each other; as we do, we serve Him.

3.2 The Ministry of Spiritual Gifts

Aim: To show that spiritual gifts are given to every Christian and that they are essential for accomplishing God's work in His church and helping each believer grow in Christ.

Discuss: Many Christians have lots of questions when it comes to spiritual gifts, such as: What are spiritual gifts? Who receives spiritual gifts? How are we to use our spiritual gifts? What's the difference between spiritual gifts and natural talents? Do spiritual gifts even exist anymore?

Why do we often have questions on spiritual gifts?

Many Christians are confused in regard to what the Bible teaches about spiritual gifts. We have also been impacted by bad teaching on this subject; especially from some churches who have misused the gifts. In this and subsequent studies we shall consider spiritual gifts in the health and growth of Christ's church.

What are Spiritual Gifts?

How would you describe spiritual gifts to a new Christian?

Spiritual gifts are spiritual abilities for spiritual purposes given by the Holy Spirit to Christians. They are not to be confused with natural talents or abilities that we receive at birth and develop throughout our life.

What does Paul wish for believers regarding spiritual gifts? (1 Cor 12:1)

He doesn't want us to be ignorant or unaware of them. We need to know about them and what they're for.

Amongst Christians, who receives spiritual gifts? (1 Cor 12:4-7)

It's not just pastors or missionaries; we all do. To "each one" God gives spiritual gifts through His Spirit.

How do we decide what spiritual gifts we will receive? (1 Cor 12:7-11)

We don't decide; God decides and gives the gifts He chooses for each one of us. It's according to His sovereignty and according to His grace. God knows what gifts are needed in each local church.

There are many spiritual gifts. The New Testament doesn't give an exhaustive list of them all.

Which spiritual gifts are listed in 1 Cor 12:8-10, 1 Cor 12:28, Eph 4:11 and Rom 12:6-8?

1 Cor 12:8-10 (wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, miracles, prophecy, distinguishing spirits, tongues, interpreting tongues); 1 Cor 12:28 (apostleship, prophecy, teaching, miracles, gifts of healing, helps, administration, tongues); Eph 4:11 (apostleship, prophecy, evangelism, pastoral care, teaching); Rom 12:6-8 (prophecy, service, teaching, exhortation, giving, leadership, mercy)

NB: apostleship is not a spiritual gift that is given anymore. It was only given at the start of the church.

In reality, we all have one or more spiritual gifts? Which are yours?

NB: Many Christians are not aware of the spiritual gifts they have received. By faith, we need to believe that we have been given some, and through being involved in church, we need to discover what they are.

Can we ask for spiritual gifts? (cf. 1 Cor 14:1-3, 13)

Paul encouraged the Corinthian Christians to ask and seek for gifts; eg, gifts that are helpful, such as prophecy. He even urged those who spoke in tongues to pray that they may be able to interpret, as that would benefit God's people. We are to ask, but what we receive is up to God's sovereign will.

Why are Spiritual Gifts Given?

Why does God give us spiritual gifts? (1 Cor 12:7)

God gives us spiritual gifts for the common good. They are not for our benefit, but for other's benefit.

Why hasn't God given all the gifts to one person? (1 Cor 12:12-30)

In His wisdom, God has given each one certain gifts, but not all, so that we all have a different role to play (just like the members of our body). We are to serve one another, and depend upon one another.

According to 1 Pet 4:10, why has God seen to it that everyone has at least one gift?

He has done this as an expression of His grace, and to ensure that we all function in the body of Christ.

Read Eph 4:11-14. Why has God given us spiritual gifts according to this passage?

He has given us spiritual gifts to help equip each other for works of service, to build each other up in Christ's kingdom, to unite us and mature us in Christ, and to help us be stable and settled in Christ.

Sadly, and against God's will, spiritual gifts can lead to disharmony in a church. Why?

Some reasons: denial of gifts; ignorance of them; misuse of them; disobedience to Spirit's leading; envy.

What conclusions can we draw about church life from the Bible's teaching on spiritual gifts?

Since no one has all the gifts, and no gift is given to everyone, we must work together. Those who sit on the side-lines are being disobedient, and those who want to be in the spotlight through gifts are disobedient too.

Summary: Spiritual gifts are given to all Christians for the benefit of all, and for the glory of God.

3.3 Spiritual Gifts – Part 1

Aim: To understand each spiritual gift listed in the New Testament, and how it is to be used.

Discuss: Imagine a family with a permanent Christmas tree in their house. Under that tree sits a pile of presents - each one purchased with love and thoughtfulness, then carefully wrapped and put under the tree. It would be a shame if the presents remained there, beautifully wrapped but never enjoyed as the packages of love they were intended to be. The receivers would never experience the gifts, the givers would never be appreciated, and the family would never benefit from the use of the gift.

Our church was not designed to be a house full of unwrapped gifts. When we know the gifts God has given us and use them for the common good, the receiver becomes fruitful and fulfilled, the church is blessed, and God is glorified. This study will help us understand what the spiritual gifts are in Eph 4:11, and how they are to be used in the church. In the following studies we will consider the other gifts.

Apostleship (Ephesians 4:11; Acts 1:21-22; 1 Cor 9:1-2)

The gift of apostleship was a restricted gift. In what sense? (Rev 21:14)

It was restricted to the Lord Jesus' twelve apostles; those who had been eye-witnesses of the resurrection. Many believe Paul was the twelfth apostle, and not the one the disciples appointed to replace Judas Iscariot in Acts 1:21-26. Paul saw the risen Jesus, and was clearly an apostle (1 Cor 9:1-2, 15:6-9).

What did a person with the gift of apostleship do? (Acts 1:8; Ephesians 2:20)

They were witnesses of Christ's death and resurrection, and they had the very important job of laying the foundation of the church, with Jesus being the cornerstone.

Was the term apostle used for others apart from the twelve? In what sense? (Acts 14:14)

Some of Paul's associates were called apostles, because the term can also be used to mean: one sent by the church for a special mission. However, in terms of the gifts, apostleship was restricted to the twelve.

Prophecy (Preaching): A special gift and calling to proclaim a divine message publicly, interpret the times, and to proclaim God's word with power and clarity in a timely manner.

Note: People often equate prophecy with predicting the future. While the gift of prophecy sometimes includes a look into the future through the Scriptures, it is mainly about applying God's truth to the present.

Why do you think Paul placed prophecy in such high esteem? (1 Cor 14:1-5, 24-25)

He saw the benefits it produced for the church. It is for edification (building up), for exhortation (correction and repentance) and for consolation (comfort).

What is the blessing of the gift of prophecy according to 1 Cor 14:23-25?

It has the ability to convict a lost sinner of the reality of God and his own sin, and it can lead them to repent and believe in Jesus; and become a worshipper of God.

Evangelism: The divine enablement to effectively communicate the message of Christ to unbelievers in a winsome way so they can respond in repentance and faith and be saved.

Philip was an evangelist (Act 21:8). How did he exhibit this gift? (Acts 8:26-40)

He was led by the Spirit and could clearly explain Christ from the Scriptures and lead people to faith.

What's the difference between the gift of evangelism and the responsibility we have to evangelise?

We all are responsible to evangelise (2 Tim 4:5), but some have been enabled to powerfully communicate the message of Christ to others such that God uses them to bring many to Himself (Acts 2:40-41).

Pastoring: The God-given ability to guide, care for, nurture and feed the body of Christ.

What characterises a pastor's heart? (Phil 2:19-21; 2 Cor 11:28)

They have a concern for the welfare of God's people, and are moved to do all they can for them.

What metaphor is used to describe the exercising of this gift? (John 21:15-17; 1 Peter 5:1-4)

A pastor shepherds God's people, copying the Good Shepherd Himself who shepherds His people (Psa 23).

Teaching: The divine gift of being able to understand, clearly explain, and apply the Word of God.

In what ways is a person with the gift of teaching to apply God's truth? (2 Tim 3:16-17)

They use God's Word to teach, bring reproof, correction, and train themselves and others so that God's people may not lack in understanding, but be enabled to live holy lives.

What instructions are given for those who teach in 2 Tim 2:15, Jam 3:1 and 1 Pet 4:11?

Teachers need to be careful that they accurately explain God's Word. If they don't, they can harm God's people, for which God holds them responsible. They are to speak the Word as if God were speaking.

Summary: Through spiritual gifts, God grows and builds up His Church (Eph 4:12-13).

3.4 Spiritual Gifts – Part 2

Aim: To understand each spiritual gift listed in the New Testament, and how it is to be used.

Discuss: *The church is made up of many separate individuals, but all gifted with spiritual gifts. Why?* Spiritual gifts help us work together with other believers so that the church can function as one body. Our gifts also distinguish us as valued participants who can make a unique contribution to the life of the church.

The last study covered the spiritual gifts of apostleship, prophecy, evangelism, pastoring, teaching. This study will consider leadership, administration, giving, helps, mercy, hospitality and encouragement.

Leadership – Rom 12:6-8: To rule over God's people responsibly, with the aim of caring for God's flock.

What are the main obligations of those with the gift of leadership? (Rom 12:8; Heb 13:17)

They are to be diligent in their leadership; ie, responsible and devoted. In their leadership they are to particularly watch over God's people, protecting and guarding them from spiritual danger.

What characterises those with the gift of leadership? (Matt 20:25-28; Heb 13:7)

They are humble servants who do not lord it over others. They also set an example for others to follow.

Administration – 1 Cor 12:28: A form of leadership but in the area of church governance; i.e., making sure the church is governed decently and orderly.

Why was the gift of administration so vital to the ministry of the early church? (Acts 6:1-4)

It allowed the apostles to minister without being burdened with administrative responsibilities.

What do we see in Tit 1:5 about what the gift of administration results in?

It results in good order being established in church, which includes overseeing the appointment of right positions in church. This is all in line with God's character and what He desires (1 Cor 14:33, 40).

Giving – Rom 12:8: The ability to contribute money and resources in a generous and cheerful manner, over and above what one will normally give.

What is the difference between this gift and our normal giving to the Lord's work?

The difference is one of degree; not kind. We are all to share in financially supporting the church and people in need, but those with the gift of giving do so with unusual generosity and cheerfulness. Those with this gift are blessed by God and entrusted with money and resources that they share with others.

Consider Luke 21:1-4, Act 4:36-37, 2 Cor 8:1-5 & Phil 4:15-16. What do we observe about giving?

The gift of giving has nothing to do with how wealthy a person is. People with this gift even give over and above their means, with gladness. They have a heart to help those (especially believers) who are in need.

Helps – 1 Cor 12:28: A person with a gift in this area performs practical and necessary tasks that help and assist members of the body of Christ in need, and does so with thoughtfulness and care.

How did Epaphroditus exhibit the gift of helps? (Phil 2:25, 29-30)

He was a tireless worker and helper who enabled Paul to accomplish his ministry.

What tasks could be done around our church by a person with the gift of helps?

Preparing communion emblems, maintaining the church property, filing and printing material, etc.

Mercy – Rom 12:8: To have compassion and a heart of love for people who are in need through their struggles and sufferings in life, and are moved to do something about it.

In what ministries of the church would the gift of mercy be especially valuable?

Assisting those in the church who are sick, grieving, burdened and troubled. A person with such a gift has great patience to care for those in need, and to remain committed to helping them on an ongoing basis.

Hospitality – Rom 12:13: Such people with this gift are able to be hospitable over and above the hospitality shown by Christians in general – they are very capable in providing meals or lodgings.

What can we learn from Lydia's example about hospitality to other Christians? (Acts 16:14-15)

Although only a new believer, she was eager to share her home with the apostles, and care for them.

What do we learn about the gift of hospitality in 1 Tim 5:9-10 and Heb 13:2?

Those with the gift of hospitality excel in showing care for strangers and visitors that come to church.

Encouragement/Exhortation – Rom 12:8: To reassure and strengthen those who are discouraged.

Why is this gift such a blessing in church? (cf. Barnabas: Acts 4:36, 9:26-27, 11:22-23, 14:21-22)

It brings about acceptance and unity in the church, it causes believers to be built up and to be active for the Lord, and it helps those who are struggling or weak in the faith to not give up (cf. 1 Thess 5:11-14).

Summary: Through spiritual gifts, God grows and builds up His Church (Eph 4:12-13).

3.5 Spiritual Gifts – Part 3

Aim: To understand each spiritual gift listed in the New Testament, and how it is to be used.

Discuss: *Why has God given us spiritual gifts? (Eph 4:12; 1 Cor 12:4-7)*

There have been given so that they may be used to equip the saints, build up the body of Christ body and to be a blessing to each other (for the common good). They are not for our own benefit.

This is our third and final study on spiritual gifts. (Note: There are more spiritual gifts than the ones we have studied – the Bible doesn't give us an exhaustive list of spiritual gifts)

Knowledge – 1 Cor 12:8: The ability to have spiritual insight and understanding of spiritual truths.

What do those with the gift of knowledge do? (2 Tim 2:15) Why? (1 Tim 4:16)

They rightly handle God's truth to keep the church sound in the Gospel and protected from heresy.

Wisdom – 1 Cor 12:8: The ability to apply spiritual knowledge effectively and practically.

What's the difference between the gift of knowledge and the gift of wisdom?

The gift of wisdom is the ability to practically apply knowledge for the benefit of God's church. It leads to godly behaviour and right priorities, because of God's enabling in helping one see things rightly.

Faith – 1 Cor 12:9: To trust God's will and act on it with unwavering belief in His ability.

What's the difference between the faith we possess as believers and the gift of faith? (1 Cor 13:2)

None of us can become a Christian without faith in Christ (Rom 5:1), but those with the gift of faith believe God for the unusual, the extraordinary, the supernatural (cf. the example of Abraham in Rom 4:18). Such faith causes them to be unmoved in their trust in God, regardless of opposition and doubts.

Healing – 1 Cor 12:9: Those with this gift are specially used by God as an instrument of His healing.

Is this gift operational within the church today? Was it only reserved for the apostles? (Acts 8:4-7)

It wasn't just the apostles whom God chose to be instruments of His healing. God also may choose members of His church as instruments of His healing today.

The gift of healing, like some other gifts,, have been terribly abused in the modern church. How?

There are those who claim to have this gift, but are charlatans. They can be spotted by their self-promotion. Those with the genuine gift do it humbly, for God's glory and according to God's will.

Miracles – 1 Cor 12:10: A person with this gift obtains from the Lord the ability to perform exceptional feats (not just healing people). This gift always authenticates the message of Christ and glorifies God.

What special temptation would a person face who has been entrusted with this gift?

They would face the temptation of being proud. Such gifts need to be used humbly, for God's glory.

Discernment – 1 Cor 12:10: The gift of being able to distinguish between the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error, and to identify deception within the body of Christ. It is more than just wisdom.

Consider the exercise of the gift of discernment in Act 5:1-4 and 13:6-10. What do we learn?

This gift identifies deception in the church, and those who are false teachers and who hinder the Gospel.

What harm might come to a church if people with discernment neglect to use their gift?

Deceivers would be able to mingle in the church unhindered, and bring about disharmony and division.

What does 1 Tim 4:1-3 indicate will happen in the end times if we do not exercise this gift?

People will fall away from the faith. This gift helps us to remain faithful to God's truth and His Gospel.

Tongues – 1 Cor 12:10: To speak in an unlearned language miraculously (Acts 2:5-8).

Why are other spiritual gifts more important than the gift of tongues? (1 Cor 14:2-5)

Tongues build up only the person who is speaking. Unless interpreted, it is not beneficial to the church.

The gift of tongues has been the most abused gift of all. This was the case in the church at Corinth, and also in our present day. In what way is it abused?

Many people claim they speak in tongues, but it's nothing more than babble (it's not a genuine language). Also, some teach that if you don't speak in tongues you are not saved. This is very wrong (1 Cor 12:30)

Interpretation – 1 Cor 12:10: This gift is the divine enablement of interpreting an unlearned language.

What special instructions does Paul give for the gift of interpretation? (1 Cor 14:10-12, 26-28)

If tongues is being practiced in church, then the gift of interpretation must also be exercised. If the gift of interpretation is not present, then tongues is not to be practiced, for tongues won't benefit the church.

Summary: Through spiritual gifts, God grows and builds up His Church (Eph 4:12-13).

3.6 Identifying, Using and Developing Your Spiritual Gifts

Aim: To help us find the proper ministry in which to use our gifts.

Discuss: *Does it make a difference which church ministry you are involved in?*

Yes! Generally speaking, when we are in a church ministry that we are not gifted for, and it's not God's will for us, we will struggle in it. There will be little joy, and the ministry will become quite burdensome. On the other hand, when we are involved in a church ministry that we are gifted for, we will have joy.

Note: We may serve the Lord in a wrong area because nobody else will do it. If this is the case, it is best to transition out of it and pray for others to be involved – who are gifted for the ministry you were doing.

Discovering our spiritual gifts is the first step toward effective Christian service. This study will consider identifying our gift, as well as developing it. A "Spiritual Gift Survey" will be given out as well.

Identifying Your Spiritual Gifts

How can spiritual gifts be best identified?

They are best identified by being an active Christian, who seeks to serve the Lord in your local church.

As you get involved in Christian service, what two things can affirm your gifts?

1. Other believers will observe your service, and affirm you if they see your giftedness in a certain area.
2. As you serve the Lord, you will find that you will have a greater sense of joy when you are doing Christian ministries that fit your spiritual gifts; it won't be a burden, but a joy.

We have a "Spiritual Gift Survey" to do, if you wish (please hand these out to each person). They are to be filled out in your own time. What do we need to be aware of as we fill this survey out?

A "Spiritual Gift Survey" can never replace the "better" way of discovering our spiritual gifts through being involved in Christian service. Nevertheless, it can be helpful in identifying our gifts, or affirming what we believe our spiritual gift is.

Note: Please also give out the accompanying "Observation Assessment Form for Spiritual Gifts". Once you do the survey and the "Observation Assessment Form" consider the following questions:

Do others affirm your gifts? Can you affirm them as well? Are you using your spiritual gifts?

Using and Developing Your Spiritual Gifts

Read Matt 25:14-30. This parable is not just about spiritual gifts or natural talents. It's about all that God has blessed us with. But if we should apply this parable just to spiritual gifts, what can we learn?

God has given to each of us spiritual gifts in order for them to be used for the benefit of His church. We are responsible before the Lord to use them, in order to glorify God and to give a return for what the Lord has invested in us. One day, before Christ, we will have to give an account of how we used our gifts.

Read Acts 18:24-28. What do you see in this story about the development of spiritual gifts?

Apollos had the gift of teaching, but Priscilla and Aquila helped him to develop it. Their gifts helped strengthen his gift, so that God could use Him more effectively and powerfully.

What are some ways you could develop your spiritual gifts and those of others? (2 Tim 1:6)

You could be active in encouraging people in their gifts, or you could talk with somebody who has the same gift as you, and work together in using your gift more effectively.

Misuse of Gifts

Read 1 Cor 12:4-11, 14-30. In what way can spiritual gifts be misused?

This passage addresses the misuse of gifts in the Corinthian church. There are four ways this can happen:

- 1) Using our gift for personal satisfaction only, rather than for the common good (v. 7).
- 2) Not using our gift, perhaps because we doubt its validity, importance, or impact (vv. 8-11).
- 3) Thinking our gift to be more important than the gift that others have (v.21).
- 4) Believing that everyone should have my gift, otherwise they are a "lower Christian" (vv.28-29)

What other hindrances can affect the fruitfulness of our gifts? (cf. 2 Tim 1:6, 1 Cor 13:1-3)

Not developing our gifts or using them fully (2 Tim 1:6); not using them in love (1 Cor 13:1-3); not walking in the Spirit by repenting of our sins (the gifts operate hand in hand with the Spirit - 1 Cor 12:11).

Conclusion

Read 1 Pet 4:10-11? Are you a good steward of your gifts? Do you use your gifts well?

Why is it important that we identify our gifts and use them well? (1 Cor 3:10-17)

One day before Jesus, we will not have to answer for our sins, but for how well we served Him.

Summary: God has given us spiritual gifts for His glory and the benefit of His people – use your gift!

Handout: Spiritual Gift Survey (Handout for study 5.6)

Instructions for Spiritual Gift Survey: Place a tick by those statements that are true, and best describe you when it comes to Christian service. Total the number of items ticked in each section.

Note: This survey is only a guide as to what your spiritual gift may be, and not all the gifts are listed.

- A**
- More expressive and assertive rather than submissive/tolerant/inhibited
 - Feels responsible to confront people with truth
 - Strong convictions and willing to stand alone
 - Able to apply biblical truths to everyday situations
 - Willing to experience brokenness before God and then be used to challenge others
 - Messages bring conviction and change in the lives of others
 - More serious than light-hearted about life and its problems
- SECTION A TOTAL**

- B**
- More patient/tolerant/empathetic rather than nervous and confronting
 - Willing to spend much time caring and nurturing a group of people
 - Desires and has needs for intimate spiritual relationships
 - Tendency to compromise rather than go to either extreme
 - Compelled to lead by example and model
 - Spiritually develops others patiently and responsibly
 - Willing to renounce personal interests for the sake of others
- SECTION B TOTAL**

- C**
- Thorough and careful, skilled in details
 - More composed than nervous, more objective than subjective
 - Able to see the overall picture and anticipate possible implications
 - Clarifies goals and develops strategies to accomplish them
 - Feels frustration and sadness at disorganisation
 - Able to identify and effectively use resources to accomplish tasks
 - Concerned for the productivity of kingdom work more than personal desires
- SECTION C TOTAL**

- D**
- Loves people and relates well
 - Strong desire to share their faith with unbelievers
 - Discerns spiritual needs in others
 - More sympathetic than indifferent
 - Communicates the gospel with clarity and effectiveness
 - Committed to placing new converts in the body of Christ
 - Enjoys building relationships with unchurched people
- SECTION D TOTAL**

- E**
- Devoted to God's kingdom
 - Desires to give quietly without public notice
 - Gives gifts of enduring value
 - Wrestles with being faithful in issues of money management
 - Able to give liberally and joyfully
 - Desires to give to advance God's kingdom
 - Feels a part of the work to which they give
- SECTION E TOTAL**

- F**
- _____ Genuinely enjoys providing accommodation for others in need
 - _____ Appreciates every guest the Lord brings into their home
 - _____ Concerned with meeting a need; not making an impression
 - _____ Tends to be easy-going and feels comfortable around strangers
 - _____ Fulfilled by serving people who cannot pay them back
 - _____ Enjoys all classes of people and feels at ease with them
 - _____ They migrate to new people in the church

_____ **SECTION F TOTAL**

- G**
- _____ People seem to wait on your decisions
 - _____ Able to motivate others toward a goal
 - _____ Consciously sets an example for others
 - _____ Influences others to be all God wants them to be
 - _____ Confident, practical, applies common sense
 - _____ Feels alone in making certain decisions
 - _____ Able to live with disagreement

_____ **SECTION G TOTAL**

- H**
- _____ Have a soft heart for others, especially for those in need
 - _____ Others easily confide in you
 - _____ Strong desires to remove the causes of people's hurts
 - _____ Very empathetic, patient and tolerant
 - _____ Able to express love in tangible ways
 - _____ Reacts harshly when people are hurt, displaced, rejected, or dealt with unjustly
 - _____ A positive faith that causes them to persevere to the end in helping others

_____ **SECTION H TOTAL**

- I**
- _____ Identifies needs and desires to help meet them personally
 - _____ Easy-going, loyal and helpful
 - _____ Enjoys serving when it frees others to better accomplish their ministry
 - _____ Avoids public, up-front ministry and tends to work behind the scenes
 - _____ Has trouble saying no, which often results in over-involvement
 - _____ Tendency to feel inadequate and unqualified for spiritual leadership
 - _____ They are committed to see a task carried through to its end

_____ **SECTION I TOTAL**

- J**
- _____ Studies, understands, and shares truth from God's Word
 - _____ More self-disciplined than spontaneous
 - _____ Gathers truth and presents it in an organised manner
 - _____ Listens with a discerning ear to the teaching of others
 - _____ Logical and rational; makes decisions based on facts
 - _____ Enjoys researching an idea and effectively communicating it to others at their level
 - _____ Able to stimulate others to understand truth and obey it

_____ **SECTION J TOTAL**

- K**
- _____ More tolerant and sympathetic rather than confronting and indifferent
 - _____ Tends to be positive and full of faith
 - _____ Strong desire to see people fully mature spiritually
 - _____ Enjoys strengthening the weak and reassuring the unstable
 - _____ Views trials as divine opportunities for growth
 - _____ Likes to challenge and is willing to rebuke to cause growth in others
 - _____ Spontaneously discerns needs and encourages individually those in the trenches

_____ **SECTION K TOTAL**

- L**
- _____ Others come to them for counsel about questionable matters, trusting in their judgement
 - _____ Able to distinguish between what is of God and what is of Satan; between truth and falsehood
 - _____ Have insight which they are cautious to share except if it benefits the ministry
 - _____ They are able to sense when something is not right when others are not able to
 - _____ Their evaluation of someone or something, not readily apparent, is later proven to be correct
 - _____ Can see through a phoney before most other people
 - _____ Able to detect subtle errors in someone else's thinking

_____ **SECTION L TOTAL**

- M**
- _____ When others say something is impossible, they trust God can do it
 - _____ Without hesitation or indecision they trust God in difficult circumstances
 - _____ Encourage others to trust God when they are defeated and discouraged
 - _____ Experience answers to prayer that seem, from a human point of view, impossible.
 - _____ They have an ability to visualise things that God wants to accomplish in the future
 - _____ Others are challenged by their ability to trust God.
 - _____ They have a pioneering spirit and are not easily discouraged

_____ **SECTION M TOTAL**

- N**
- _____ They enjoy wrestling with biblical problems and researching the issues
 - _____ They enjoy defining their theological position on certain issues
 - _____ People with difficult biblical questions seek their understanding
 - _____ New insights and understanding of difficult subjects come easily to them
 - _____ Are quick to know what a passage of Scripture is saying before others do
 - _____ Have a great desire to share with others the meaning of difficult passages
 - _____ See the acquisition of biblical truth as the most effective way to help others

_____ **SECTION N TOTAL**

- O**
- _____ Able to reduce biblical truths to practical principles for living
 - _____ They find it easy to clarify people's problems and give them biblical solutions
 - _____ Find it easy to illustrate truth that they want to communicate
 - _____ More concerned about how to apply God's Word than simply understanding it's message
 - _____ Know what to do when dealing with difficult problems and situations when others are not sure
 - _____ A close presence of God and personal confidence when important decisions need to be made
 - _____ More excited about the application of biblical truth than the truth itself

_____ **SECTION O TOTAL**

List the sections with the three highest scores (highest to lowest). Write in the corresponding gift.

<u>Score</u>	<u>Section Letter</u>	<u>Spiritual Gift (see key below)</u>
1		
2		
3		

Key: A – prophecy; B – pastoring; C – administration; D – evangelism; E – giving; F – hospitality; G – leadership; H – mercy; I – helps; J – teaching; K – encouragement; L – discernment; M – faith; N – knowledge; O – wisdom

Handout: Observation Assessment Form For Spiritual Gifts

Directions: Read each of the descriptions below. Using these definitions, mark one of the following letters in the each of the spaces provided.

Y = Yes, definitely true, certain gift

P = Perhaps, possibly true, potential gift

N = No, definitely do not have this gift

? = I don't know

_____ **ADMINISTRATION:** The divine enablement to make sure the church is governed decently and orderly, and the special ability to plan and execute procedures that increase its organisational effectiveness.

_____ **DISCERNMENT:** The divine enablement to distinguish between the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error, and to identify deception within the body of Christ.

_____ **ENCOURAGEMENT:** The divine enablement to reassure, strengthen, and affirm those who are discouraged or wavering in their faith.

_____ **EVANGELISM:** The divine enablement to effectively communicate the message of Christ to unbelievers so they can respond in repentance and faith.

_____ **FAITH:** The divine enablement to trust God's will and act on it with unwavering belief in His ability.

_____ **GIVING:** The divine enablement to contribute money and resources to the work of the Lord in a generous, cheerful manner, over and above our normal tithing.

_____ **HELPS:** The divine enablement to perform practical and necessary tasks that help and assist members of the body of Christ in need, and to do so with joy.

_____ **HOSPITALITY:** The divine enablement to care for God's family by providing food or shelter, with a warm and loving heart.

_____ **KNOWLEDGE:** The divine enablement to have spiritual insight and understanding of spiritual truths.

_____ **LEADERSHIP:** The divine enablement to direct and rule with the responsibility to protect, help, care for, and give aid to God's flock.

_____ **MERCY:** The divine enablement to have compassion and a heart of love for people who are desperately in need through their struggles and sufferings in life, and to be moved to do something about it.

_____ **PASTORING:** The divine enablement to guide, care for, and nurture individuals or groups in the body of Christ as they grow in their faith.

_____ **PROPHECY:** The divine enablement to proclaim the divine message publicly, interpret the times, and to proclaim His truth with power and clarity in a timely and culturally sensitive way.

_____ **TEACHING:** The divine enablement to understand, clearly explain, and apply the Word of God to the lives of listeners.

_____ **WISDOM:** The divine enablement to apply spiritual knowledge effectively and practically.

A. Look back at those gifts you marked "Y". List, in order, the top three gifts marked with "Y".

1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____

B. List the top three gifts from the "Spiritual Gift Survey".

1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____

C. Compare the two lists. What can you conclude about the spiritual gifts you may have?

1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____

Are you ready to use your gifts? Or if you are already using them, are you developing them further?

3.7 The Ministry of Giving

Aim: To help us appreciate the important ministry of giving in the New Testament church.

Discuss: When a parent observes their child being generous and willing to share, he or she is pleased with the child's behaviour. However, when the child refuses to share, this grieves the parent.

God looks at our use of money in much the same way. When we give gladly and freely, it pleases Him. When we hold back and are stingy, it grieves God who has given us everything.

In this study, we will consider the important church ministry of giving.

The Blessing of Giving

In the New Testament, the church was known for its giving. What do we learn from Acts 4:32-37? Christians with means, like Barnabas, sold property and gave the proceeds to the apostles so that they could meet the needs of the poor. They did this out of love for fellow believers and out of love for God.

What act of giving do we read about in Phil 4:15-18?

The Philippian church supported the apostle Paul in his ministry by their giving, enabling Paul to be free to minister God's Word. This church was being persecuted, and had little means, yet they gave liberally.

Part of the teaching of the apostle Paul is found in Acts 20:35. What did he teach?

He taught Jesus' words that it is more blessed to give than to receive; ie, as Christians we are to be givers and not takers. This includes in the area of giving money to help the needy and supporting God's church.

An Example of Giving

What do we know about the Macedonian churches that might encourage us to give? (2 Cor 8:1-6) Even though the Macedonian churches suffered extreme poverty, they gave beyond their ability, and pleaded for the privilege of being able to give. We too should not let poverty stop us from giving.

What four important principles about giving are highlighted in 2 Cor 8:7-15?

- 1) We are to abound in giving; it's a gracious work and a wonderful ministry (v.7)
- 2) We are to be sincere in our love for fellow believers by giving (v.8) – cf. also 1 John 3:16-18
- 3) We are to keep our promises and financial commitments in giving (vv.10-12)
- 4) We are to give so that there is equality in God's church (vv. 13-15)

What should inspire us to give generously? (2 Cor 8:9)

Our Lord Jesus' example should inspire us to give. Though He be rich, He became poor and sacrificed Himself, so that we, who are poor, might become rich.

Teaching on Giving

What do we learn from the apostle Paul in 2 Cor 9:6-7 in regard to giving?

We are to be generous givers; not stingy givers. We are to be cheerful givers; not regretful givers.

What does God do when we give with a right and good heart? (2 Cor 9:7-8)

God is pleased when we give generously and cheerfully. He also will reward us by causing His grace to abound to us, meeting our needs so that we have a sufficiency. He is no man's debtor.

Why does Paul sum up his discussion on giving the way he does in 2 Cor 9:15?

The greatest gift ever given was when God gave us His Son. For this we are truly thankful. But this greatest gift, given in love and in amazing grace, should inspire us to give. Christians should give.

What principle about giving can we draw from Jesus' warning to the Pharisees? (Matt 23:23)

Jesus affirms the giving of the tithe to God, but also addresses our heart attitude in giving. Our giving is not to be done legalistically, nor with a cold heart. We are to give out of a heart of love for God.

What do we learn from Jesus about giving in the story from Luke 7:36-47?

The woman gave much for she loved much; and she loved much because she had been forgiven much. Our giving to the Lord reflects our love and appreciation for what He has done for us.

Read Luke 21:1-4. What does Jesus teach about giving from this story?

It does not matter how much you have ... it's what you do with what you have, even if it's a little, that concerns God. Sacrifice, when it costs us, will bring God's reward.

Although not commanded in the New Testament, what principle for giving is set in the Old Testament? What was this giving for? (Gen 14:18-20; Gen 28:20-22; Num 18:20-21; Mal 3:10)

The tithe (10%) was the minimum standard for giving in the Old Testament. It was given to God's house in order for it to function well. If we would give similarly to God's church, it would function well also.

Summary: All Christians are to be engaged in the ministry of giving – God gives, and so should we.

3.8 The Ministry of Giving – Money Matters

Aim: To consider the ministry of giving in the context of the Bible's teaching on money.

Discuss: A man with only two dollars to his name, sat in church one day praying. He decided to place his last two dollars in the offering, believing that God would honour his faith and bless him. As the man walked out of church he came across a business opportunity that made him a quick fortune.

The man returned to the church a year later. He told a young man about how he had been destitute a year ago, but after praying, he deposited his last two dollars in the offering, and how from this act of faith, God had made him into a millionaire. The young man responded, "You gave all the money you had?" The man proudly replied, "That's right!" Then the young man said, "I dare you to do it again!"

Discuss: When God blesses us with financial means, how giving are we? How do we view "our" money?

Paul's Teaching on Money (1 Tim 6:6-10)

We won't be good givers if we don't live out 1 Tim 6:6-10. What's the first thing we need to develop, according to 1 Tim 6:6-8?

We need to learn to be content with what we have; rather than coveting and craving for things. We even need to be content with having our basic needs met by God; and not all the other things our world offers.

In Phil 4:11-13, what else do learn about contentment? (cf. also Psa 37:25)

We can know contentment regardless of our circumstances. Whether we have plenty or little, we can be content, if we would rely on the Lord to meet our needs, and if we would recognise His care over us.

How does contentment help us in the area of giving?

It stops us from being tight-fisted, and enables us to be generous. We will never be able to give generously and cheerfully (2 Cor 9:7) if we are not content.

How can 1 Tim 6:7 help us in the area of giving?

Since we can't take anything with us when we die, logic tells us that we should not be accumulating wealth, but using it well while we have the opportunity to do so.

In 1 Tim 6:9, Paul addresses the danger of pursuing riches. What are they?

It leads to sacrificing our principles and compromising our standards in order to protect our riches, and to gain more riches. In the end, we end up in spiritual ruin, as a result of making our riches an "idol".

Why is it dangerous to love money? (1 Tim 6:10)

It's a cause or root of all kinds of evil. Notice that the verse does not say that money or wealth itself is evil; it's the love of it. The love of money will subtly take over our life and lead us away from Christ.

What advice does Paul give to those who have wealth in 1 Tim 6:17-18?

They are not to be arrogant by thinking that their wealth makes them better than others, nor are they to put their hope in riches. Instead they are to keep in mind that God has given them everything, and they are to share that wealth with others. They are also to be rich in loving God and doing good.

Jesus' Teaching on Giving & Money

How are we to give, and who should we be giving to? (Matt 6:1-4)

We are to give humbly; not to be honoured by men, but by God alone. We are expected to help the poor.

What does Jesus teach us on riches in Matt 6:19-21?

We are to build up treasure in heaven, rather than treasure on earth. The best way to do that is to use the treasure we have been entrusted with, for God's glory and for the benefit of others; ie, to be giving.

What danger does Jesus highlight in regard to riches in Matt 6:22-24?

The love and desire for riches can blind us and ensnare us, so that we end up serving riches, and not God.

Consider Luke 12:13-21. What warning is Jesus giving?

We are to be on guard against greed. If our purpose is to accumulate wealth, it will turn us away from God. Not only that, there is no permanence with our wealth. It can be taken any time, and so can our life.

Instead of coveting and craving for riches, how should we live life according to Luke 12:29-34?

We are not to worry, for God will provide for us. We are to seek God's kingdom first, and everything else will be given to us. We are also to give to others. By doing this, we will store up treasure in heaven.

Read Luke 16:10-13. What do we learn in this passage about wealth and how we should use it?

With the wealth we have been entrusted with, we are to be faithful in its use (ie, by giving). God is testing us. If we manage our riches well, then He will entrust us with eternal riches in the Kingdom to come.

Summary: **Your attitude toward money will determine how giving you are, and more importantly, your walk with the Lord - is He your Lord, or not?**

3.9 Church Ministry - Motives Matter

Aim: To help us understand that we are to give and to use our spiritual gifts with right motives.

Discuss: Say a person begins a new job. They get a good pay, but within a few months, they become unhappy in their job. The work is challenging and they don't feel motivated to put in a full day's work. So, they start cutting corners and taking longer breaks. But one day they discover that their boss is a multi-millionaire, who gives very generous bonuses. Overnight, they become a model employee.

What do you make of this employee's motives?

As a Christian, what motivates you to serve God and others? Are they God-honouring motives?

The Heart of the Matter

No matter how spiritually gifted we are, or no matter how much we give, when it comes to serving and church ministry, what kind of heart are we to have in all that we do? (1 Cor 13:1-3)

We are to have a heart of love. Without love, our greatest acts and endeavours are nothing in God's eyes.

What do we learn about the love we are to have toward each other in 1 Cor 13:4-7?

We are to love each other with patience, kindness, gladness and humility. We are to be thoughtful, selfless, gentle, and forgiving. We are to think well of others, bearing all things and enduring all things.

What's so important about love according to 1 Cor 13:8-13?

The opportunity to use our spiritual gifts will come to an end one day, but love endures forever. Love has and will always be more important than any spiritual gift we may have.

What do we learn in 1 John 3:16-18 in regard to giving?

We are to love each other practically; giving to support a fellow believer, even if it costs us. Our love for each other is even to be where we are willing to lay down our life for each other; as our Lord did for us.

The Goal of the Matter

In the ministry of spiritual gifts and giving, or anything else, what's to be our goal? (Matt 5:14-16)

We are to do everything to bring glory to God.

How can we glorify God according to Matt 5:38-42?

We can be gracious to those about us, even if they treat us badly. We can give, even beyond what is expected; and in our giving, not expect things back. This pleases and glorifies God.

Read Matt 5:43-48. How are we to behave? What is our goal?

We are to love our enemies, doing good to those who hate us, in order to be like our heavenly Father, in order to reflect His glory to those about us.

In Matt 6:1-4, why did Jesus criticise the Pharisees for their acts of charity?

They were making a show of their generosity in order to be seen by men and to be praised.

Isn't it sufficient just to "do good deeds"?

The end never justifies the means. God is more concerned about why we do a certain deed, rather than the deed itself. When we perform good deeds from wrong motives, they are unacceptable (cf. Isa 64:6).

Why did Jesus say that such people as the Pharisees had received their reward in full? (Matt 6:2)

God will not reward those who act with wrong motives. He wants us to work behind the scenes humbly and faithfully before Him. When we do things for self-glory, what we receive from people is our reward.

What did Jesus mean by saying the left hand should not know what the right is doing? (Matt 6:4)

We are not to broadcast our good deeds to others; nor to dwell upon them and be puffed up with pride.

From what we have considered, what can cause us to have wrong motives when we serve?

- 1) We may serve to get the praise of man, or to make ourselves feel good.
- 2) We may serve in order to gain reward for our service (ie, to put God in debt to us).
- 3) We may serve to be better than others, and to then put ourselves in a position to boast before others.
- 4) We may serve because we feel we have to, and we serve with a begrudging heart.

What should our attitude be when serving God according to Luke 17:7-10?

We are to serve lovingly and humbly with no regard for reward; we really are unworthy servants.

Why did Paul serve the Lord with all his heart according to 1 Cor 15:9-10?

He served the Lord with all his heart, in response to God's amazing grace to him. He served out of love.

Why should you serve the Lord? Why should you give? Why should you use your spiritual gifts?

We should because of what the Lord has done for us. It's our way of expressing our love and thanks to Him.

Summary: Our motive for serving is of the utmost importance to God. We are to serve Him and each other in love, and with a heart that wants to see God glorified through us.