

HILLSONG CHURCH SOUTH AFRICA

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WELCOME HOME

We want to say the hugest welcome to YOU!

We are so glad that you could join us. We hope you've had a wonderful experience and that you've felt right at home.

We believe that every person matters to God and that He has an incredible plan and purpose for you.

As a church, we've put together this 21-day guide to help you in your journey forward with Jesus.

**Lots of love
Phil and Lucinda
Lead Pastors
Hillsong Church South Africa**

JESUS LOVES YOU

A big congratulations on making a decision to follow Jesus.

We believe that the journey of getting to know Jesus is best done in community. You probably have many questions, that's why we've developed this 21-day guide to help you grow in your relationship with Jesus, and also to help you find your place in our church.

This is just the beginning ...

To be made whole, or to be saved is to submit to God and His plan and purpose for our lives. It means turning from our old ways and turning to Jesus, to ask Him for forgiveness from our sins and to receive new life in Him.

Romans 10:9 says that 'If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.'

Salvation is God's free gift to us and we become His children. It is an irrevocable acceptance into the family of God and an empowerment to live life wholly and fully with the purpose of reflecting God to the rest of His creation.

If you are not sure whether you are right with God or you know in fact that you need Jesus in your life, you can choose to follow Him right now by praying a prayer of surrender to Jesus.

Dear Jesus, I'm praying this prayer because I know that I have done wrong by living without You. I am sorry and I trust that You will forgive me. I accept Your love and grace for me and ask that You would be my Lord. Help me believe in You and love You every day, and help me to show the world what You are like and how great Your love is.

In Jesus Name. Amen.

WHAT DO WE BELIEVE?

WE BELIEVE that the Bible is God's Word. It is accurate, authoritative and applicable to our everyday lives.

WE BELIEVE in one eternal God who is the Creator of all things. He exists in three Persons: God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. He is totally loving and completely holy.

WE BELIEVE that sin has separated each of us from God and His purpose for our lives.

WE BELIEVE that the Lord Jesus Christ as both God and man is the only One who can reconcile us to God. He lived a sinless and exemplary life, died on the cross in our place, and rose again to prove His victory and empower us for life.

WE BELIEVE that in order to receive forgiveness and the 'new birth' we must repent of our sins, believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and submit to His will for our lives.

WE BELIEVE that in order to live the holy and fruitful lives that God intends for us, we need to be baptised in water and be filled with the power of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit enables us to use spiritual gifts, including speaking in tongues.
WE BELIEVE in the power and significance of the Church and the necessity of believers to meet regularly together for fellowship, prayer and the 'breaking of bread'.

WE BELIEVE that God has individually equipped us so that we can successfully achieve His purpose for our lives which is to worship God, fulfil our role in the Church and serve the community in which we live.

WE BELIEVE that God wants to heal and transform us so that we can live healthy and blessed lives in order to help others more effectively.

WE BELIEVE that our eternal destination of either Heaven or hell is determined by our response to the Lord Jesus Christ.

WE BELIEVE that the Lord Jesus Christ is coming back again as He promised.

DAY 1: WHO IS GOD?

The moon revolves around the earth, but the earth revolves around the sun. In our own lives, we're all tempted to shrink God to moon-size, where He revolves around us. But the Bible paints a different picture of God: a God so bright and glorious that He has a way of becoming the centre of our existence, not just a religious compartment on the side. Although the world of the Bible and our modern world are totally different, the good news is that the God the Bible describes has not changed at all. All the accumulative descriptions of God in the Bible serve as a compass of unchanging reality as we seek to find out who God is. Let's read one person's encounter with Him.

What does the Bible teach?

It was in the year King Uzziah died that I saw the Lord. He was sitting on a lofty throne, and the train of his robe filled the Temple. 2 Attending him were mighty seraphim, each having six wings. With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. 3 They were calling out to each other, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Heaven's Armies! The whole earth is filled with his glory!" 4 Their voices shook the Temple to its foundations, and the entire building was filled with smoke. 5 Then I said, "It's all over! I am doomed, for I am a sinful man. I have filthy lips, and I live among a people with filthy lips. Yet I have seen the King, the Lord of Heaven's Armies." 6 Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a burning coal he had taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. 7 He touched my lips with it and said, "See, this coal has touched your lips. Now your guilt is removed, and your sins are forgiven." 8 Then I heard the Lord asking, "Whom Should I send as a messenger to this people? Who will go for us?" I said, "Here I am. Send me." Isaiah 6:1-8

What does it mean for me?

What is God like? We see He is: 1) The eternal King (v1). Though earthly kings may come and go, God remains on His throne. 2) High and exalted (v2). He is incredibly great. 3) Holy (v3). This means that He is absolutely pure and totally unique. 4) LORD (v3). The Hebrew word is 'Shaddai' which means the one who is powerful to act on behalf of those who desperately call out to Him. 5) Creator (v3). He created the whole universe. 6) Glorious (v3). God's glory is the magnificent radiance of His perfect character. His glory fills the universe. How should we respond in His presence? When we truly encounter Him, we worship Him like these angels do (v3), tremble in awe (v4), own up to our sinfulness (v5), receive His forgiveness and purifying touch (v7) and find ways to tell others about how amazing He is (v8).

What can I do?

Do you believe that God is really like the God described here? If your life was compared to the earth, is God more like a moon or a sun to you?

Want to read further?

Read Isaiah 40:12-40 and Psalm 103.

WE BELIEVE that the Lord Jesus Christ is coming back again as He promised.

DAY 2: WHO IS JESUS?

The questions we like to ask about God are endless: Is God real? Is what we know about Him really true? What does He have to do with my life?

The Bible may not answer every question about God and will often lead us to ask more, but one of the areas in which the Bible is quite definite, is the answer to the question: who is Jesus?

Jesus commends the Apostle Peter's confession of Him as 'the Messiah, the Son of the Living God' (Matthew 16:16), because Jesus knew that who He is – and could be to us – has the power to change our lives. Jesus is so unique because two worlds collide in Him: Heaven and Earth, the Divine and the human.

Yes, His Name is the name above all names, and His star-breathing, storm-calming, miracle-working power is second to none. Yet, He is also the human Jesus, the personal friend who knows what we are going through and cares about us. That's why the Bible also calls Him 'Emmanuel', God with us.

What does the Bible teach?

"For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. John 3:16

And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God's love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God's love. Romans 8:38

What does it mean for me?

So does Jesus care about you? Yes He does! How do we know this? Often we disqualify ourselves from God's love because of our history, our failures and shortcomings. Sin has separated us from God and we can never make up for our sin by self-improvement or good works. So how can we accept what we have not earned? The Bible says that nothing in all of creation can separate us from the Love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:38). And to accept God's love is to trust His patient, forgiving and gracious stance towards us. Only He has the power to free us from guilt, shame and condemnation to give us a life of wholeness. All we have to do is turn to Him.

What can I do?

Accept His love today. Allow Him to love you just the way you are. He doesn't just love you but He also delights in you.

Want to read further?

Understanding your new identity in Christ is an incredibly freeing experience, you can read more about it in the following passages: 2 Corinthians 5:17; Philippians 3:8-11.

DAY 3: WHO IS THE HOLY SPIRIT?

H₂O can exist in three different ways (water, gas, ice) and yet be the same substance. In the same way, God reveals Himself to us in three: Father, Son and Holy Spirit (see Matthew 28:19). There's only one God, not three. Mysteriously, He is all three at the same time. Let's look at the Holy Spirit. The Spirit comes to live in us when we become Christians. A sailing boat needs wind or else it will not move. The Holy Spirit is the wind in the sails of each Christian's life.

What does the Bible teach?

But in fact, it is best for you that I go away, because if I don't, the Advocate won't come. If I do go away, then I will send him to you.

8 And when he comes, he will convict the world of its sin, and of God's righteousness, and of the coming judgment. 9 The world's sin is that it refuses to believe in me. 10 Righteousness is available because I go to the Father, and you will see me no more. 11 Judgment will come because the ruler of this world has already been judged. 12 " There is so much more I want to tell you, but you can't bear it now. 13 When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own but will tell you what he has heard. He will tell you about the future. 14 He will bring me glory by telling you whatever he receives from me. 15 All that belongs to the Father is mine; this is why I said, 'The Spirit will tell you whatever he receives from me.' John 16:7-15

What does it mean for me?

Who is the Holy Spirit? He is called 'Counsellor' (v7) which means comforter, strengthener, advisor and helper.

He's also called 'the Spirit of Truth' (v13). Why is He given to us? The Holy Spirit is your helper (v7). Jesus could only be in one place at a time, but through the Holy Spirit, He can be with millions of people at the same time. That's why it's good that Jesus went back to heaven (v7).

What does He do?

He can convince non-Christians to turn from their sin to God (v8-10). He helps us understand the truths of the Bible (v13). He communicates the will of God to us (v14). He leads us to worship and glorify Jesus (v14). He allows us to experience God's wonderful grace (v15). That's why knowing and obeying God is impossible without the Holy Spirit! Thank God for this wonderful friend and gift!

What can I do?

In what ways have you been aware of the Holy Spirit's activity in your life? Pray and ask the Holy Spirit for more of His activity in your life.

Want to read further?

Ezekiel 37:1-10 gives a powerful picture of the enlivening effect that the Spirit has on believers. Also see John 14:16-17.

DAY 4: THE CROSS

In World War 2 a group of scientists were constructing the atomic bomb. One of the mechanics dropped a spanner into a radioactive device. Knowing that this would cause the bomb to explode in seconds, one of the scientists reached in and grabbed the spanner. He saved the lives of all, but lost his own life because of radiation exposure. It's a story that echoes the message of the cross, where Jesus died for our sins so we wouldn't have to.

What does the Bible teach?

It was nine o'clock in the morning when they crucified him. 26 A sign announced the charge against him. It read, "The King of the Jews." 27 Two revolutionaries were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left. 29 The people passing by shouted abuse, shaking their heads in mockery. "Ha! Look at you now!" they yelled at him. "You said you were going to destroy the Temple and rebuild it in three days. 30 Well then, save yourself and come down from the cross!" 31 The leading priests and teachers of religious law also mocked Jesus. "He saved others," they scoffed, "but he can't save himself! 32 Let this Messiah, this King of Israel, come down from the cross so we can see it and believe him!" Even the men who were crucified with Jesus ridiculed him. 33 At noon, darkness fell across the whole land until three o'clock. 34 Then at three o'clock Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" which means "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?" 35 Some of the bystanders misunderstood and thought he was calling for the prophet Elijah. 36 One of them ran and filled a sponge with sour wine, holding it up to him on a reed stick so he could drink. "Wait!" he said. "Let's see whether Elijah comes to take him down!" 37 Then Jesus uttered another loud cry and breathed his last. 38 And the curtain in the sanctuary of the Temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. 39 When the Roman officer who stood facing him saw how he had died, he exclaimed, "This man truly was the Son of God!" Mark 15:25-39

What does it mean for me?

Jesus died a horrible, unfair death for all to see. But something unseen and far worse happened. He, the sinless one, experienced the punishment our sin deserved so that we could be forgiven. That's why He felt abandoned by His Father (v34). When He 'breathed his last', the temple curtain tore in two - on its own (v38). What does this mean? Long before Jesus came, the Jews built a temple. God lived in it, in the Most Holy Place. No one could enter through the curtain except the high priest once a year. This reminded the people that their sin was serious and separated them from God. But as Jesus died, the curtain was supernaturally torn. This means that the barrier between sinners (that's us) and God was destroyed by the sacrifice of Jesus! The door is now open for us to live closely to God, despite our past sins, which are now forgiven. What good news! Jesus offers freedom from guilt and a close relationship with God too. Of course, this only applies to us if we receive his blood-bought forgiveness and walk through the open door, by putting our faith in Jesus and the cross.

What can I do?

Have you put your faith in Jesus' death and the forgiveness of your sins? Have you experienced the fullness of His resurrection?

Want to read further?

See Hebrews 10:19-22 and Isaiah 53 (a remarkable prophecy about the suffering of the coming Messiah).

DAY 5: FAITH IN CHRIST ALONE

A young girl wanted to get closer to God. One night God gave her a dream. In the dream she wanted to climb a high cliff to get to God at the top. She tried and tried but could not get to the top. Tired and sad, she was ready to give up and climb down. Then she noticed a trampoline at the bottom of the cliff. She let go and, bouncing off the trampoline, landed at the very top with God. How do we get close to God? Let go. And jump.

What does the Bible teach?

“Don’t let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, and trust also in me. 2 There is more than enough room in my Father’s home. If this were not so, would I have told you that I am going to prepare a place for you? 3 When everything is ready, I will come and get you, so that you will always be with me where I am. 4 And you know the way to where I am going.” 5 “No, we don’t know, Lord,” Thomas said. “We have no idea where you are going, so how can we know the way?” 6 Jesus told him, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me. 7 If you had really known me, you would know who my Father is. From now on, you do know him and have seen him!”

8 Philip said, “Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied.”

9 Jesus replied, “Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and yet you still don’t know who I am? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father! So why are you asking me to show him to you? John 14:1-9

What does it mean for me?

We can’t get to God by climbing the cliff of our own moral and religious efforts. Jesus came to set us free from the lie that we can save ourselves. We can only get to God through faith in Jesus and His death for our sins (v6).

Why are there so many world religions?

Answer: They are all attempts to reach God through effort. Buddhism has the Eightfold Path. Islam has the Five Laws. Hinduism has Karma. Judaism has the Torah. Although these religions offer elements of truth and beauty that should be cherished, they wrongly assume that we can earn our way to God. They all hold out a ‘ladder’ to God.

What makes Christianity unique?

Answer: Although religion is humanity’s attempt to reach God, Christianity is God’s attempt to reach humanity. Since we can’t get to Him through our efforts, He comes to us as we trust in His undeserved grace! Christ is a kind of ‘trampoline’ of grace. As we trust in Christ we can overcome troubled hearts (v1), the fear of death (v3), and the ignorance of who God really is (v7). In Jesus alone we find the way, the truth, real life, and a personal relationship with God as our Father (v6). What amazing grace!

What can I do?

Have you stopped trusting in your own ability to earn God’s acceptance? Do you now trust in the trampoline of Jesus alone, and His undeserved grace, for your acceptance with God? Is anything stopping you from jumping?

Want to read further?

See Ephesians 2:8-10 and Romans 10:2-4 to see how religion and good works can’t save us, but God’s grace can.

DAY 6: SALVATION

A Spanish dad wanted to make peace with his runaway son in Madrid. He took out an ad in the El Liberal newspaper: 'Paco, meet me at Hotel Montana at noon, Tuesday. All is forgiven. Papa.' Paco is a common name in Spain, and when the father went to the hotel he found 800 young men named Paco waiting for their fathers. Deep down inside we all long for a home where we are loved without conditions. Let's look at God's offer of grace to us:

What does the Bible teach?

To illustrate the point further, Jesus told them this story: "A man had two sons. 12 The younger son told his father, 'I want my share of your estate now before you die.' So his father agreed to divide his wealth between his sons. 13 "A few days later this younger son packed all his belongings and moved to a distant land, and there he wasted all his money in wild living. 14 About the time his money ran out, a great famine swept over the land, and he began to starve. 15 He persuaded a local farmer to hire him, and the man sent him into his fields to feed the pigs. 16 The young man became so hungry that even the pods he was feeding the pigs looked good to him. But no one gave him anything. 17 "When he finally came to his senses, he said to himself, 'At home even the hired servants have food enough to spare, and here I am dying of hunger! 18 I will go home to my father and say, "Father, I have sinned against both heaven and you, 19 and I am no longer worthy of being called your son. Please take me on as a hired servant."' 20 "So he returned home to his father. And while he was still a long way off, his father saw him coming. Filled with love and compassion, he ran to his son, embraced him, and kissed him. 21 His son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against both heaven and you, and I am no longer worthy of being called your son.' 22 "But his father said to the servants, 'Quick! Bring the finest robe in the house and put it on him. Get a ring for his finger and sandals for his feet. Luke 15:11-22

What does it mean for me?

Sin separates us from the God who loves us (v13). In the end it hurts us as much as it hurts God (v14,15). It's never too late to come home though. If we come to our senses, turn from our sin and put our trust in God (v17-20), then we'll be welcomed with compassion, open arms, forgiveness, joy and blessing (v20-25). This story is a stunning picture of salvation and the relationship God desires to have with us.

Here's another story. A father, returning from the shop, caught his little girl with sand in her mouth. He tried threatening and begging her to spit it out but she refused, since she liked the taste so much. He then held out the ice-cream he had bought her and she spat out the sand immediately. When God tells us to leave sin and follow Him it's not because He wants to take away our fun. It's because He has something much better for us. He offers us forgiveness, eternal life and a personal relationship with Him.

What can I do?

Is there any sin or pain that keeps you from coming home to God? From the story in Luke, how is God different to your earthly father?

Want to read further?

See Ephesians 2:1-10 for more insight into what we are saved from, and what we are saved into.

DAY 7: RESURRECTION

Has somebody close to you died? If so, then you'd know how depressing and final death is. In fact, there's one thing we can be sure of – we are all going to die. When Jesus' friends saw Him die a terrible death, they were devastated. That's because they forgot He had made a promise to come back. Have you ever wondered if Jesus is still alive, if Christianity is true, and if there is life after death? One spectacular event in history answers all your questions.

What does the Bible teach?

Early on Sunday morning, as the new day was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went out to visit the tomb. 2 Suddenly there was a great earthquake! For an angel of the Lord came down from heaven, rolled aside the stone, and sat on it. 3 His face shone like lightning, and his clothing was as white as snow. 4 The guards shook with fear when they saw him, and they fell into a dead faint. 5 Then the angel spoke to the women. "Don't be afraid!" he said. "I know you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. 6 He isn't here! He is risen from the dead, just as he said would happen. Come, see where his body was lying. 7 And now, go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead, and he is going ahead of you to Galilee. You will see him there. Remember what I have told you." 8 The women ran quickly from the tomb. They were very frightened but also filled with great joy, and they rushed to give the disciples the angel's message. 9 And as they went, Jesus met them and greeted them. And they ran to him, grasped his feet, and worshiped him. 10 Then Jesus said to them, "Don't be afraid! Go tell my brothers to leave for Galilee, and they will see me there." Matthew 28:1-10

What does it mean for me?

What does the resurrection mean to us? It means Jesus really is God. That's why the women worshipped Him (v9). That's why they were bold enough to tell everyone (v10). It means Christianity is true. Josh McDowell, an atheist, once tried to prove that the resurrection of Jesus didn't happen, but after looking at the historical evidence, he was totally convinced that it actually did happen. He became a Christian and wrote a best-selling book *The Resurrection Factor* that proves the resurrection as a fact of history. It means we can be sure about eternal life. In the same way Jesus lived beyond death, He promises we will be given eternal life if we trust in Him. It means Jesus is alive. This sets Jesus apart from all the founders of other religions. Only He has no grave! It means we can be blessed. Jesus said to a witness of His resurrection, 'Because you've seen me you've believed; but blessed are those who have not seen me - and yet have believed.' (John 20:29)

What can I do?

What does the resurrection mean to you?

Want to read further?

See 1 Corinthians 15:12-22. Read Revelation 1:9-18 to see the Risen One face-to-face.

DAY 8: FOLLOWING JESUS

‘Just do it!’ This is Nike’s motto, but it also describes the pulse of our generation. Today, millions of people call themselves Christians but don’t ‘just do it’. They don’t really seek after and obey the God they claim to believe in. The earliest Christians didn’t call themselves Christians, but rather they were called disciples, or followers of Jesus. Let’s see some people who had a unique opportunity to follow Him and just did it.

What does the Bible teach?

From then on Jesus began to preach, “Repent of your sins and turn to God, for the Kingdom of Heaven is near.” 18 One day as Jesus was walking along the shore of the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers—Simon, also called Peter, and Andrew—throwing a net into the water, for they fished for a living. 19 Jesus called out to them, “Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!” 20 And they left their nets at once and followed him. 21 A little farther up the shore he saw two other brothers, James and John, sitting in a boat with their father, Zebedee, repairing their nets. And he called them to come, too. 22 They immediately followed him, leaving the boat and their father behind. 23 Jesus traveled throughout the region of Galilee, teaching in the synagogues and announcing the Good News about the Kingdom. And he healed every kind of disease and illness. Matthew 4:17-23

What does it mean for me?

It means six things: 1) Get stunned by His wisdom and strength. Why else would these people have followed Him so eagerly (v20)? Jesus has the wisdom and strength we need to live life at its best. 2) Start a personal relationship with Him. This event was the beginning of an eternity of friendship with Jesus for these people. Jesus wants to be our friend too. 3) Copy His example. Later on people commented on how much these men reflected Jesus in their lives (see Acts 4:13). Jesus wants to, and is able to, make us more like Him too. 4) Believe and obey His teaching. These disciples took His teaching seriously. It affected how they lived (v17-23). Jesus’ teaching can also lead us to think properly and live passionately. 5) Join Him on his mission to reach people. He promised Peter and Andrew He would use them to change other people’s lives (v19). That promise applies to us too. 6) Give Him your highest loyalty. They left their jobs and families at once (v22). Whatever we give up is nothing compared to what we gain. The most important decision we can make is to ‘just do it’ and follow Him.

What can I do?

Have you decided to follow Jesus? If not, why not? Which of the six above aspects of following Jesus challenges you most?

Want to read further?

See Luke 5:1-11 for the longer version of some of this story.

DAY 9: EXTERNAL BENEFITS

A man once sailed in a ship across the sea. He could only afford the ticket so when everyone went to meal times, he sat alone, eating stale bread. When they arrived at their destination, the captain asked him, 'Why did you never come to meals? They were part of the price of the ticket.' This story reminds us of so many people who think trusting in Jesus only provides a ticket to heaven. To be a Christian means we have great benefits in this life too.

What does the Bible teach?

For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God.

15 So you have not received a spirit that makes you fearful slaves. Instead, you received God's Spirit when he adopted you as his own children. Now we call him, "Abba, Father." 16 For his Spirit joins with our spirit to affirm that we are God's children. 17 And since we are his children, we are his heirs. In fact, together with Christ we are heirs of God's glory. But if we are to share his glory, we must also share his suffering. Romans 8:14-17

What does it mean for me?

If we trust and follow Jesus, what happens? We receive the Holy Spirit (v14). He is the presence of God who comes to live in us. We receive a brand- new identity as a child and heir of God (v16,17). We don't need to be fearful of rejection from God ever again. We know who we are because we know whose we are. We receive an invitation to enjoy God as our loving Father (v15). We can now relate to Him as Abba (which means 'Dad'). We receive the promise that God will never stop loving us, no matter what (v35-39). These are incredible promises. Sadly, many Christians either forget them or struggle to believe them. This sounds like the story of the ugly duckling that just didn't seem to fit in with the other ducks, until it found out it was really a beautiful swan. The discovery made it spread its wings and fly for the first time! Let's use our meal ticket and start eating from God's table. Let's use our wings and begin flying on God's promises.

What can I do?

Do you believe these promises? Has your faith been based on your changing feelings or on the unchanging facts of God's Word?

Want to read further?

Read Ephesians 3:14-19 for more about God's love.

DAY 10: THE BIBLE

God didn't write the Bible. But He did inspire its 40 writers, including a poet, a king, a shepherd, a doctor, a tax collector and a fisherman, who wrote different books over 1600 years. The Old Testament (39 books) was written before Jesus. The New Testament (27 books) was written after He came. God made sure they wrote what He wanted them to and that it contains the truth of who God is, what He's done and is still doing, and how to have a relationship with Him. The historical world of the Bible has changed, but its message remains as true and relevant today as it ever did.

What does the Bible teach?

9 How can a young person stay pure? By obeying your word. 10 I have tried hard to find you—don't let me wander from your commands. 11 I have hidden your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you. 12 I praise you, O Lord; teach me your decrees. 13 I have recited aloud all the regulations you have given us. 14 I have rejoiced in your laws as much as in riches. 15 I will study your commandments and reflect on your ways. 16 I will delight in your decrees and not forget your word. 17 Be good to your servant, that I may live and obey your word. 18 Open my eyes to see the wonderful truths in your instructions. 19 I am only a foreigner in the land. Don't hide your commands from me! 20 I am always overwhelmed with a desire for your regulations. 21 You rebuke the arrogant; those who wander from your commands are cursed. Psalm 119:9-21

What does it mean for me?

Why get into the Bible? It keeps us pure (v9) and sin-free (v11). It brings us joy (v14) and wonder (v18). It nourishes our souls, like honey feeds our bodies (v103). It guides us in decision-making, like a path leads us when we're lost (v105). It gives us understanding (v104). How do we get into the Bible? Obey it (v9). Memorise parts of it (v11). Speak it aloud to yourself and others (v13). Treasure it (v14). Think about it often until it becomes part of you (v15). Don't neglect it (v16). Ask God to open your eyes as you read and hear it (v18). Long for it (v20). Be humble, not arrogant, as you receive it (v21). Find pleasure in it (v103). It's not enough to get into God's Word and be informed. God's Word needs to get into us until we're transformed! Every time you read or hear it, ask God to speak to you through it.

What can I do?

What part has the Bible played in your life so far? How can you get more of the Bible into you?

Want to read further?

See Joshua 1:6-9 and 2 Timothy 3:14-17 for more. Ask one of our team about our amazing Evening College, which will help you dig deeper into God's Word.

DAY 11: THE CHURCH

If you take a burning log from the fire, it soon dies out. It needs other pieces of wood to keep burning brightly. In the same way, our passion for God dies out if we try to follow Jesus alone and don't connect with a church that loves God. In heaven the headlines are not about politics or movie stars. They're about what's happening to God's Church all over the world. The Church is God's family. It exists to reflect Him and His message in the community in which it's placed. It's not a building or a meeting. It's people. We belong not only to God, but also to each other. The Christian life is about togetherness. No lone rangers allowed! Let's take a look at church at its best:

What does the Bible teach?

41 Those who believed what Peter said were baptized and added to the church that day— about 3,000 in all. 42 All the believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, and to fellowship, and to sharing in meals (including the Lord's Supper), and to prayer.

43 A deep sense of awe came over them all, and the apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders. 44 And all the believers met together in one place and shared everything they had. 45 They sold their property and possessions and shared the money with those in need. 46 They worshiped together at the Temple each day, met in homes for the Lord's Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity— 47 all the while praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people. And each day the Lord added to their fellowship those who were being saved. Acts 2:41-47

What does it mean for me?

This story tells us how to be the church. Devote yourselves to being taught and living out God's Word. Do everything you can to understand and obey the Bible better together. Build strong relationships. Don't only go to meetings; get into each other's homes and lives. Break bread together. Eat bread and wine/juice together, remembering Christ's death (see 1 Corinthians 11:23-29). Pray to and praise God together. Draw close to God together, expecting Him to reveal more of Himself and His ways to you. Care for each other. Try help each other, especially the hurting. Draw in outsiders. Keeping God to ourselves is selfish, so share your faith with others, inviting them to come along to certain gatherings. Don't give up. Every church is an imperfect bunch of people connected to a perfect head, Jesus. He gives us the grace to not be critical of leaders and each other. He wants us to be part of the solution, not the problem.

What can I do?

What experience have you had of church? Do you know of a church that is like this in some way? What's stopping you from joining in?

Want to read further?

See Hebrews 10:24-25 for more. See 2 Timothy 4:2-5 for warnings about the danger of churches teaching errors. To understand why Christians break bread together read 1 Corinthians 11:23-29.

DAY 12: PRAYER

It's said that early Sudanese converts to Christianity committed to praying everyday. Each one had a separate spot in the thicket where he would pour out his heart to God. Over time the paths to these places became well worn. As a result, if one of these believers began to neglect prayer, it was soon apparent to the others. They would kindly remind the negligent one, 'Brother, the grass grows on your path.'

What does the Bible teach?

6 But when you pray, go away by yourself, shut the door behind you, and pray to your Father in private. Then your Father, who sees everything, will reward you. 7 "When you pray, don't babble on and on as the Gentiles do. They think their prayers are answered merely by repeating their words again and again. 8 Don't be like them, for your Father knows exactly what you need even before you ask him! 9 Pray like this: Our Father in heaven, may your name be kept holy. 10 May your Kingdom come soon. May your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven. 11 Give us today the food we need, 12 and forgive us our sins, as we have forgiven those who sin against us. 13 And don't let us yield to temptation, but rescue us from the evil one. Matthew 6: 6-13

What does it mean for me?

How should we pray? Cut out distractions and focus on God who is with you. He is eager to respond to your prayer (v6). Be real. Don't try to impress Him with fancy religious talk (v7). Express gratitude, sorrow, curiosity, love, anything. Why should we pray? There's so much stuff to pray about: focus on who God is and tell Him how much you love Him (v9). Think about what He wants for you and the world around you; then invite Him to have His way (v10). Ask Him for what you need, even small things (v11). Say sorry for any sins you've committed (v12). Give Him your pain and forgive those who've wronged you (v12,14). Ask Him for protection from temptation and the devil (v13). When should we pray? 'Pray continually' (1 Thessalonians 5:17). You can keep talking to God non-stop. Push through the times when it seems like He's not listening. He is. Also, realise that not everything you ask for, you really need or are ready to receive. Be patient. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you pray. Stay connected.

What can I do?

How much do you pray? How can you make your prayer life more interesting and real? Why not try reading Psalm 42 aloud to God, making it your prayer to God?

Want to read further?

See James 4:2 and Matthew 26:42 to see why some prayers are not answered.

DAY 13: THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT

When they asked Michelangelo how he made his statue of David he is reported to have said, 'I looked inside the marble and just took away the bits that weren't David.' God is our master Sculptor. He wants us to become more like Jesus. He wants to chip away everything that's not like Christ in us. When we were saved we received Jesus' innocence and righteousness, but not His character. That takes time, obedience and the help of the Holy Spirit to develop.

What does the Bible teach?

16 So I say, let the Holy Spirit guide your lives. Then you won't be doing what your sinful nature craves. 17 The sinful nature wants to do evil, which is just the opposite of what the Spirit wants. And the Spirit gives us desires that are the opposite of what the sinful nature desires. These two forces are constantly fighting each other, so you are not free to carry out your good intentions. 18 But when you are directed by the Spirit, you are not under obligation to the law of Moses. 19 When you follow the desires of your sinful nature, the results are very clear: sexual immorality, impurity, lustful pleasures, 20 idolatry, sorcery, hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissension, division, 21 envy, drunkenness, wild parties, and other sins like these. Let me tell you again, as I have before, that anyone living that sort of life will not inherit the Kingdom of God. 22 But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these things! 24 Those who belong to Christ Jesus have nailed the passions and desires of their sinful nature to his cross and crucified them there. 25 Since we are living by the Spirit, let us follow the Spirit's leading in every part of our lives. Galatians 5:16-25

What does it mean for me?

Jesus was, and still is, loving, joyful, peaceful, patient, kind, good, faithful, gentle and self-controlled (v22-23). That's why He is so good to others. Imagine you're a fruit-bearing tree. As you stay close to the Holy Spirit and obey Him (v25), you'll bear the fruit of Jesus' character. You don't have to try to be good – just do your best to stay close to the Holy Spirit. He'll work in you to stir up new desires for purity and love, and a new hate for sins that, though bringing you pleasure briefly, bring longterm hurt to you and others.

What does it mean to keep in step with the Spirit (v25)? It means we obediently listen to His voice that communicates through the Bible and our conscience. When we're tempted, we'll feel His gentle warning in our heart. We must obey Him! If we do, we'll feel His peace and joy. If we disobey, He'll be grieved (Ephesians 4:30). If we sin, He will then lovingly urge us to repent. We must not harden our hearts against Him. The more we keep in step with Him, the more of Him we'll experience, and the more like Jesus we'll become.

What can I do?

How aware are you of the Holy Spirit's activity in you? Which of the nine fruits are you needing most? Pray for these.

Want to read further?

See Romans 8:28-29, 2 Corinthians 3:17-18 and 1 Timothy 4:12.

DAY 14: TRUST

Pilots flying through thick clouds sometimes experience something called 'vertigo'. This means they lose their sense of whether they're flying upwards or downwards. Many, following their untrustworthy senses, have crashed into the ground. But good pilots rely on the equipment that tells them exactly what angle they're flying at. In the same way, many Christians give up on faith because feelings like doubt, guilt, fear and worry overwhelm them. In those times, we should distrust our feelings, and rather trust in God's unchanging promises and faithfulness and learn to fly the right way up.

What does the Bible teach?

35 As evening came, Jesus said to his disciples, "Let's cross to the other side of the lake." 36 So they took Jesus in the boat and started out, leaving the crowds behind (although other boats followed). 37 But soon a fierce storm came up. High waves were breaking into the boat, and it began to fill with water. 38 Jesus was sleeping at the back of the boat with his head on a cushion. The disciples woke him up, shouting, "Teacher, don't you care that we're going to drown?" 39 When Jesus woke up, he rebuked the wind and said to the waves, "Silence! Be still!" Suddenly the wind stopped, and there was a great calm. 40 Then he asked them, "Why are you afraid? Do you still have no faith?" 41 The disciples were absolutely terrified. "Who is this man?" they asked each other. "Even the wind and waves obey him!" Mark 4:35-41

What does it mean for me?

Jesus sets us off in a direction (v35). Then, as we obey Him, a storm often comes and things go wrong (v37). When this happens we often feel like Jesus is doing nothing to help us, and doesn't seem to care (v38). But He does! Since He's in control, He doesn't panic. That's why He could sleep. Our lack of trust in Him makes us fearful (v40) and we doubt that He really cares for us (v38). But He can end the storm any time. Why does He allow storms to come our way? He does this to develop our faith in Him. Faith that is untested is not real faith. In the midst of every storm, remember that God's grace can and will sustain you.

How do we grow in trust? We remind ourselves that Jesus is with us. He does care. And He's made promises He will keep. He has the power to change any situation. But until He does, we must trust Him. If we don't, our emotions may overwhelm and shipwreck us. It's better to hold onto promises God makes to us in His word. Promises like, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you' (Hebrews 13:5).

What can I do?

What promises in the Bible mean the most to you? What storms have you experienced? How did you handle them? How can you grow your trust in God's faithfulness?

Want to read further?

Read Romans 4:18-21 and Hebrews 11:1-12 for more about faith.

DAY 15: GENEROSITY

You can't see the stars well when you're next to bright lights. In the same way, you easily drift from your devotion to God and your faith in Him when you're captivated by money and the privileges it brings. You then dream of having even more money - hoping it will bring good things in life, and the respect of people. If this is a major goal in your life then you're in real danger. You need to step back from the bright lights of money and things, and see God's glory afresh.

What does the Bible teach?

5 These people always cause trouble. Their minds are corrupt, and they have turned their backs on the truth. To them, a show of godliness is just a way to become wealthy. 6 Yet true godliness with contentment is itself great wealth. 7 After all, we brought nothing with us when we came into the world, and we can't take anything with us when we leave it. 8 So if we have enough food and clothing, let us be content. 9 But people who long to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many foolish and harmful desires that plunge them into ruin and destruction. 10 For the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. And some people, craving money, have wandered from the true faith and pierced themselves with many sorrows. 11 But you, Timothy, are a man of God; so run from all these evil things. Pursue righteousness and a godly life, along with faith, love, perseverance, and gentleness. 1 Timothy 6:5-11

What does it mean for me?

Why is loving money (and what it can get you) dangerous? You can't take it with you to heaven (v7). It is the root of all evils (v10). Loving money will cause us to break God's commands in many ways, because we will do anything to get it – even lie, cheat, steal or use others for personal gain. It can make us turn from God (v10). It promises happiness but it brings pain, ruin and destruction in the long-term (v9). It's uncertain and temporary and easy to lose (v17).

How can we use money in a God-pleasing way?

Realise that we can be content with very little (v8). Put your hope in God, not money (v17). Enjoy all God gives you, seeing it as a generous gift (v17). Ask God for what you need. Give generously (v18) to needy people and to the church you're part of, underwriting the God-given vision of the church. Focus on the eternal riches that come from obedience to Christ in this life (v19). You can't take money to heaven with you, but when invested in the advance of God's kingdom, you can send it on ahead of you. Don't run after wealth. Rather, run after God and use any money He trusts you with in a way that pleases Him.

What can I do?

Do you put your trust in wealth or God? How can you better use money and things in a way that brings praise to God?

Want to read further?

See Malachi 3:6-12, Matthew 6:19-34 and 2 Corinthians 9:6-12 for more.

DAY 16: WORK

Ted was a talented soccer player who played really poorly. His father never watched him. Then his father died. Curiously, he started to play really well. He never missed practices. When his coach asked him what had changed he said, “Now that my father is dead, he may be watching me play – I don’t want to let him down.” Let’s read about how God, our heavenly Father, watches over us, and how this should inspire hard work in us.

What does the Bible teach?

And whatever you do or say, do it as a representative of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through him to God the Father. Colossians 3:17

22 Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything you do. Try to please them all the time, not just when they are watching you. Serve them sincerely because of your reverent fear of the Lord. 23 Work willingly at whatever you do, as though you were working for the Lord rather than for people. 24 Remember that the Lord will give you an inheritance as your reward, and that the Master you are serving is Christ. 25 But if you do what is wrong, you will be paid back for the wrong you have done. For God has no favorites. 1 Masters, be just and fair to your slaves. Remember that you also have a Master—in heaven. Colossians 3:22-4:1

What does it mean for me?

In those days, up to half of the known world were slaves. So most of the Christians were really poor. They lived on hand-outs from the wealthy masters. They felt unmotivated to work. Without a vision for their work, they felt used by their ‘masters’. Even today, our work and duties can sometimes feel like slavery. But as Christians we can learn to please God in our work. How should we do work in a God-pleasing way? Do everything with God’s help and for God’s glory (v23). God wants to help you develop your knowledge and skills. Do it for God, not people (v23). Don’t focus mainly on pleasing people (like bosses, lecturers or teachers). Please God first. This will push you to work hard when no one, except God, is looking (v22). Put your whole heart into whatever you do (v23). The way to success is hard work. However, overworking doesn’t please God either (see Psalm 127:1-2). Work towards a vision (v24). Ask God to help you have a vision for your life and work wisely towards it. A great vision will inspire great sacrifices, which will result in great rewards. Don’t abuse power over others (4:1). God wants equal opportunity for all. That’s why Christians led the way in ending slavery a long time ago.

What can I do?

Would you say you’re a hard-worker? How can you be motivated to work harder? Alternatively, how can you make sure you don’t overwork? What are some of the dreams you believe God has given you to pursue?

Want to read further?

See Proverbs 5:6-11.

DAY 17: MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Why are you on this planet? Answer: To reflect Christ's character and to do the will of God. If Christ is the hope of the world, then God's people are the messengers and models of that hope. Following Jesus means we're on a mission with God to bring change to our world, starting with the people around us.

What does the Bible teach?

11 "God blesses you when people mock you and persecute you and lie about you and say all sorts of evil things against you because you are my followers. 12 Be happy about it! Be very glad! For a great reward awaits you in heaven. And remember, the ancient prophets were persecuted in the same way. 13 "You are the salt of the earth. But what good is salt if it has lost its flavor? Can you make it salty again? It will be thrown out and trampled underfoot as worthless.

14 "You are the light of the world—like a city on a hilltop that cannot be hidden. 15 No one lights a lamp and then puts it under a basket. Instead, a lamp is placed on a stand, where it gives light to everyone in the house. 16 In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father. Matthew 5:11-16

What does it mean for me?

How can we be salt (v13)? Salt only works if it leaves the salt-shaker and makes contact with the food. God has a mission field for you – it's the people in your family, community, place of study or work. If you try to represent Christ but have lost your love for Him and His ways, then you'll make no impact. Your ungodly life and attitudes will speak so loudly that no one will hear your words. But a life that is 'salty' with a passion for God and His ways will make others thirst for God.

How can we be light?

Light should be made obvious to all, not hidden. Following Jesus is a very personal thing, but it's not a private thing. Let your light shine before people (v16). How will people respond? Some will hate you (v11-12). But they really hate the light of God within you which exposes their darkness. So don't take it personally.

Look forward to the rewards from God for persevering in suffering (v12). Some, however, will see your good deeds and be drawn to the God that motivates you (v16).

What can I do?

How do you feel about being salt and light? How can you begin to see the people in your world as your mission field? Who are the people that you are trying to reach for God? Who can you invite along to church?

Want to read further?

See Mark 5:19-20.

DAY 18: SHARE YOUR STORY

Look around. Non-Christian people surround you. How can you reach them? One way is by being real. Reality TV is the trend that looks at the real lives of other people. Our generation doesn't want second-hand or made-up stories. They want reality. That's why one of the most powerful ways to influence other people towards God is simply to tell them how you came to know God and what He has done in your life since then. The most unbelieving friends may listen if you do this.

What does the Bible teach?

1 "Brothers and esteemed fathers," Paul said, "listen to me as I offer my defense." 2 When they heard him speaking in their own language, the silence was even greater. 3 Then Paul said, "I am a Jew, born in Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, and I was brought up and educated here in Jerusalem under Gamaliel. As his student, I was carefully trained in our Jewish laws and customs. I became very zealous to honor God in everything I did, just like all of you today. 4 And I persecuted the followers of the Way, hounding some to death, arresting both men and women and throwing them in prison. 5 The high priest and the whole council of elders can testify that this is so. For I received letters from them to our Jewish brothers in Damascus, authorizing me to bring the followers of the Way from there to Jerusalem, in chains, to be punished. 6 "As I was on the road, approaching Damascus about noon, a very bright light from heaven suddenly shone down around me. 7 I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?' 8 "Who are you, lord?' I asked. "And the voice replied, 'I am Jesus the Nazarene, the one you are persecuting.' 9 The people with me saw the light but didn't understand the voice speaking to me. 10 "I asked, 'What should I do, Lord?' "And the Lord told me, 'Get up and go into Damascus, and there you will be told everything you are to do.' 11 "I was blinded by the intense light and had to be led by the hand to Damascus by my companions. 12 A man named Ananias lived there. He was a godly man, deeply devoted to the law, and well regarded by all the Jews of Damascus. 13 He came and stood beside me and said, 'Brother Saul, regain your sight.' And that very moment I could see him! 14 "Then he told me, 'The God of our ancestors has chosen you to know his will and to see the Righteous One and hear him speak. 15 For you are to be his witness, telling everyone what you have seen and heard. 16 What are you waiting for? Get up and be baptized. Have your sins washed away by calling on the name of the Lord.' Acts 22:1-16

What does it mean for me?

Paul tells some unbelievers his God-story. Learning from him, what should we say? Firstly, tell people a little of how your life was before you became a Christian (v1-5). Then, explain the events that led you to become a follower of Jesus (v6-11). Lastly, tell them how your life has changed since then (v12-16). Never feel like your experience of God is not radical enough. Some people, like Paul, meet God powerfully, but most meet Him less dramatically. Just tell your story and trust that some people will connect with it. Keep it simple. Let the focus shift from your life to God's grace. However, if you speak about God's work in you, but your life hasn't begun to change, don't be surprised when people ignore what you say.

What can I do?

Practise telling your God-story by writing it down or by telling a Christian friend. What was life like before? Then what happened? What's life like now? Now step out and ask God for an opportunity to tell someone.

Want to read further?

Read Romans 4:18-21 and Hebrews 11:1-12 for more about faith.

DAY 19: SERVING

Imagine you are at the front of a long queue waiting your turn, when suddenly the queue turns around and the people at the back go first. That is just what Jesus does in his kingdom. He makes the first last and the last first. In this world, the greatest person is the one who is most served by others, but in God's kingdom the greatest person is the one who serves others most (Mark 10:42-45). We will never reflect God in this world like we should unless we learn how to have a servant-heart toward the people around us.

What does the Bible teach?

1 Before the Passover celebration, Jesus knew that his hour had come to leave this world and return to his Father. He had loved his disciples during his ministry on earth, and now he loved them to the very end. 2 It was time for supper, and the devil had already prompted Judas, son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus. 3 Jesus knew that the Father had given him authority over everything and that he had come from God and would return to God. 4 So he got up from the table, took off his robe, wrapped a towel around his waist, 5 and poured water into a basin. Then he began to wash the disciples' feet, drying them with the towel he had around him. 6 When Jesus came to Simon Peter, Peter said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" 7 Jesus replied, "You don't understand now what I am doing, but someday you will." 8 "No," Peter protested, "you will never ever wash my feet!" Jesus replied, "Unless I wash you, you won't belong to me." 9 Simon Peter exclaimed, "Then wash my hands and head as well, Lord, not just my feet!" 10 Jesus replied, "A person who has bathed all over does not need to wash, except for the feet, to be entirely clean. And you disciples are clean, but not all of you." 11 For Jesus knew who would betray him. That is what he meant when he said, "Not all of you are clean." 12 After washing their feet, he put on his robe again and sat down and asked, "Do you understand what I was doing? 13 You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and you are right, because that's what I am. 14 And since I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash each other's feet. 15 I have given you an example to follow. Do as I have done to you. 16 I tell you the truth, slaves are not greater than their master. Nor is the messenger more important than the one who sends the message. 17 Now that you know these things, God will bless you for doing them. John 13:1-17

What does it mean for me?

Why should we serve others? It is love in action (v1). In God's kingdom we exist for the benefit of others (v10). Jesus modelled it and told us to do it (v15). If we serve others, we will be blessed by God (v17). Jesus said that it is more of a blessing to give than it is to receive (Acts 20:35).

Why should we serve people?

We should serve people because we love them (v1). We must remember who we are in God, and who God is in us (v3). This knowledge enables us and makes us feel secure, which in turn empowers us to humble ourselves before others. We should find practical ways of serving others (v5). Serving is not the way to greatness. It is greatness.

What can I do?

How do you feel about serving others? What holds you back? In what ways can you serve the people in your group, and the needs of the larger church?

Want to read further?

See Mark 10:42-45 and Philippians 2:1-4 and 1 Peter 4:10-11.

DAY 20: SOCIAL ACTION

One of the tragic errors in the church in the last century is the teaching that the New Testament mainly concerns itself with getting people into heaven. That's not true. Just think of Jesus' declaration: 'The Kingdom of God is here.' And think of the prayer we are meant to pray: 'Let your Kingdom come.' It's as clear as day that Jesus didn't come just to get people into heaven, but heaven into people. First we ourselves start to enjoy the wholeness of God at work in our broken lives. Then we become conduits of that wholeness into other people, especially the people who are most broken in society.

What does the Bible teach?

225 One day an expert in religious law stood up to test Jesus by asking him this question: "Teacher, what should I do to inherit eternal life?" 26 Jesus replied, "What does the law of Moses say? How do you read it?" 27 The man answered, "'You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your strength, and all your mind.' And, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" 28 "Right!" Jesus told him. "Do this and you will live!" 29 The man wanted to justify his actions, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" 30 Jesus replied with a story: "A Jewish man was traveling from Jerusalem down to Jericho, and he was attacked by bandits. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him up, and left him half dead beside the road. 31 "By chance a priest came along. But when he saw the man lying there, he crossed to the other side of the road and passed him by. 32 A Temple assistant[b] walked over and looked at him lying there, but he also passed by on the other side. 33 "Then a despised Samaritan came along, and when he saw the man, he felt compassion for him. 34 Going over to him, the Samaritan soothed his wounds with olive oil and wine and bandaged them. Then he put the man on his own donkey and took him to an inn, where he took care of him. 35 The next day he handed the innkeeper two silver coins, telling him, 'Take care of this man. If his bill runs higher than this, I'll pay you the next time I'm here.' 36 "Now which of these three would you say was a neighbor to the man who was attacked by bandits?" Jesus asked. 37 The man replied, "The one who showed him mercy." Then Jesus said, "Yes, now go and do the same." Luke 10:25-37

What does it mean for me?

Following Jesus means that we learn to love the people around us (v27), especially people who are hurting (v37). In this story, the religious people (the priest and Levite) were too busy or uncaring to help, while a person of low class in society (the Samaritan) lovingly did what he could. God wants us to rise to the occasion and care for the needy, doing what we can and encouraging others to join in (v35). Being a Christian is not just about loving God. It's about loving people. The kind of faith 'that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress' (James 1:27). Don't forget Mother Teresa's warning: 'The poor don't need us as much as we need the poor.' That's because serving broken people draws us closer to the God who loves them.

What can I do?

How do you feel about being more compassionate towards hurting people? What holds you back? How can you wisely start helping others? Are there any compassion ministries in your church in which you can get involved?

Want to read further?

See Matthew 25:31-40 and 1 John 3:11-18.

DAY 21: MAKING PEACE

A man once built a fence between himself and his neighbour, whom he didn't like. Then God told him to make peace. With tears in his eyes, he broke the fence down and, using the same wood, made a path from his door to the neighbour's door. Our world is hurting because of the fences of hostility, prejudice and superiority. All around us, God calls us to change fences into paths.

What does the Bible teach?

8 But now is the time to get rid of anger, rage, malicious behavior, slander, and dirty language. 9 Don't lie to each other, for you have stripped off your old sinful nature and all its wicked deeds. 10 Put on your new nature, and be renewed as you learn to know your Creator and become like him. 11 In this new life, it doesn't matter if you are a Jew or a Gentile, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbaric, uncivilized, slave, or free. Christ is all that matters, and he lives in all of us. 12 Since God chose you to be the holy people he loves, you must clothe yourselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. 13 Make allowance for each other's faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others. 14 Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds us all together in perfect harmony. 15 And let the peace that comes from Christ rule in your hearts. For as members of one body you are called to live in peace. And always be thankful. Colossians 3:8-15

What does it mean for me?

Why overcome division and hostility between people? When we follow Jesus we are no longer mainly identified by our class, culture, race or gender, but by our new identity in God (v10) as God's loved and chosen people. That means that a Christian in Nigeria has more in common with a Christian in the USA or China than they do with their non-Christian Nigerian friend! We are united by our common relationship with God. That's why our race, culture, class, gender, level of education and level of wealth are not enough to divide us. Christ is all and is in all (v11). How do we seek peace? Be set free from anger and hate (v8). Become compassionate, kind, humble, gentle, patient, forgiving and loving (v12-13). Most importantly, allow God's love to bind us together in unity and peace (v14-15). Change must start with the church (v12). If God's people don't know how to make peace, then there's no hope. Become a peacemaker (Matthew 5:9). The Holy Spirit will guide and strengthen you.

What can I do?

How have you experienced prejudice or hostility in your family, community or place of work? What changes must happen in your heart? Do you need to forgive anyone or ask for forgiveness? What practical steps can you take to become a peacemaker?

Want to read further?

See Ephesians 2:14-22 for more.