



ADVANCE GROUP MENTORING GUIDE







Advance Group Mentoring Guide
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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

9

YEAR ONE

17

SESSION ONE	WELCOME TO ADVANCE	19
SESSION TWO	THE IDENTITY OF AN EVANGELIST	23
SESSION THREE	THE MESSAGE OF AN EVANGELIST	27
SESSION FOUR	THE TASK OF AN EVANGELIST	31
SESSION FIVE	THE POWER OF AN EVANGELIST	35
SESSION SIX	THE DEVOTION OF AN EVANGELIST	39
SESSION SEVEN	THE SUBMISSION OF AN EVANGELIST	43
SESSION EIGHT	THE CHARACTER OF AN EVANGELIST	47
SESSION NINE	THE OPPORTUNITY OF AN EVANGELIST	51
SESSION TEN	THE COMMITMENT OF AN EVANGELIST	55
SESSION ELEVEN	THE INSPIRATION OF AN EVANGELIST	61
RETREAT		65

YEAR TWO

69

SESSION ONE	THE CHALLENGE AND FRUIT OF EVANGELISM	71
SESSION TWO	THE CHALLENGE FROM GOD - WORSHIP AND OBEDIENCE	75
SESSION THREE	THE FRUIT IN THE DISCIPLE - FAITHFULNESS AND SELF-CONTROL	79
SESSION FOUR	THE CHALLENGE FROM OURSELVES - PERFORMANCE AND COMPARISON	83
SESSION FIVE	THE FRUIT IN THE MESSAGE - GOODNESS AND PEACE	87
SESSION SIX	THE CHALLENGE FROM THE WORLD - FEAR AND PERSECUTION	93
SESSION SEVEN	THE FRUIT IN THE MESSENGER - KINDNESS AND JOY	99
SESSION EIGHT	THE CHALLENGE FROM THE ENEMY - TEMPTATION AND ACCUSATION	103
SESSION NINE	THE FRUIT IN THE METHOD - GENTLENESS AND PATIENCE	109
SESSION TEN	THE CHALLENGE FROM THE FAMILY - FELLOWSHIP AND DISTRACTION	115
SESSION ELEVEN	THE FRUIT IN THE WORLD - LOVE	121
RETREAT		125

SESSION ONE	PRACTICAL EVANGELISM - CONVERSATION	131
SESSION TWO	PRACTICAL EVANGELISM - APOLOGETICS	135
SESSION THREE	PRACTICAL EVANGELISM - CRISIS	139
SESSION FOUR	NEGLECTED TOOLS OF EVANGELISM - PRAYER	145
SESSION FIVE	NEGLECTED TOOLS OF EVANGELISM - LISTENING	149
SESSION SIX	NEGLECTED TOOLS OF EVANGELISM - THANKSGIVING	153
RETREAT		157

APPENDICES

OTHER SESSION IDEAS	161
ADVANCE DEEPER: WHAT IS EVANGELISM	168
THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SHARING YOUR FAITH AND SHARING THE GOSPEL	171
GOSPEL DOCTRINE	173
GOSPEL NARRATIVE	174
YOUTH GOSPEL TALK EXAMPLE	175
GOSPEL METHODS	177
CHART: THE ROLE OF THE EVANGELIST	179
TEN SIMPLE STEPS FOR STARTING AN ADVANCE GROUP	180
ADVANCE FAQ	182
EASTER TO PENTECOST	183
YEAR ONE REFLECTION	184
YEAR TWO REFLECTION	186
YEAR THREE REFLECTION	188
ACCOUNTABILITY FORM	190

INTRODUCTION

“

For I am not ashamed of the
GOSPEL,
because it is the
POWER OF GOD
that brings
SALVATION
to everyone who believes.

ROMANS 1:16



**THE GOSPEL.
THERE IS NO PLAN B.**

**THE GOSPEL IS
GOOD NEWS TO BE
PROCLAIMED AND HAS
LOST NONE OF ITS
POWER TO SAVE.**

**ADVANCE EQUIPS,
ENCOURAGES,
AND EMPOWERS
THE CHURCH FOR
EVANGELISM THROUGH
SMALL GROUP
MENTORING, WHILST
ALSO STIRRING
AND DEVELOPING
EVANGELISTIC GIFTING
IN THOSE CALLED AS
EVANGELISTS.**

Advance is a global movement to support the whole church in taking the whole gospel to the whole world for the whole of God's glory.

Through monthly meetings, those in Advance groups receive teaching, sharpen one another through discussion, and share openly about their personal and spiritual lives. Updates and encouragements are shared with each other, between group sessions about opportunities group members have had to share the gospel and to support each other along the way.

We call this journey Gospel Formation, that as we respond to and root ourselves in Christ through his gospel, God brings transformation to our lives that cannot be contained. We overflow as gospel people into the world around us

After the first year of being part of an Advance group, each group member is encouraged - whilst remaining part of their original group - to start their own new Advance group of up to 12 others who want to grow in passion and ability to share the gospel.

Advance has grown from the first group in Manchester, England, into a global movement of thousands of groups meeting each month around the world. They are all committed to fanning into flame a passion for the gospel, a heart for the lost, and a commitment to evangelism through practical and spiritual support. Advance seeks to grow the number of Christians who will unashamedly and confidently share the gospel in any and every opportunity that God provides each day.



THE GOSPEL FORMATION JOURNEY

FIVE PRINCIPLES OF THE MOVEMENT

.....

1. COMMITMENT

Monthly meetings should be made a diary priority by group members. It is essential that when people join a group, they commit to the meetings. Groups should be encouraged to treat these sessions as sacred – members should do everything they can to avoid other engagements that might draw them away once the date is agreed. A deep commitment to being prepared for the work God has called us to is a foundational element of the Advance group journey.

2. SHARPENING

Each monthly session gives significant time to studying the Bible for a deeper knowledge of the gospel. Sessions also include opportunities for healthy critique of one another’s understanding and application of evangelism and the gospel, primarily through times of discussion.

3. ACCOUNTABILITY

Honest self-evaluation through feedback questionnaires and open sharing within group sessions is designed to ensure that Advance group members live accountable and holy lives as we attempt to be faithful to living and sharing the gospel. Vulnerability and honesty in your group can take time to develop but should be encouraged and led by the example of the group leader.

4. COMMUNITY

Keeping each other up to date with gospel opportunities, prayer requests and stories of salvation via email and/or group text messaging ensures groups support each other as a community. Staying connected between sessions also creates a more familial dynamic in the group.

5. MULTIPLICATION

Advance members should be committed to exploring the idea of multiplication, with a view to group members taking on their own group (while continuing in their original group) after their first year. The Advance resources (like this one) should make this process as simple as possible.

IS IT FOR ME?

.....

The Bible tells us that the role of the evangelist is a specific gift from God for the building of his church (Ephesians 4:11-12). The evangelist will be fruitful in drawing people to Christ as they share the gospel, but they will also be fruitful in equipping and stirring the whole church to be faithful witnesses of the gospel.

However, Advance groups are not only for those who consider themselves gifted as, or called to the role or ‘office’ of the evangelist. Advance groups are for any who want to be transformed by the power of the gospel, that as God works in us he will also work through us for his glory. This is Gospel formation - to become Jesus people who reveal Jesus to people.

- “The early Christians knew Jesus risen and
- their evangelism overflowed. When we have
- full hearts and Jesus comes into the centre...
- the whole thing will overflow.”

MICHAEL GREEN

We use the word ‘evangelist’ in the Advance Group Guide to refer to anyone engaging in evangelism, not just those who recognise a specific gift or call to be an evangelist.

These three simple questions will help you decide whether starting (or joining) an Advance group is for you:

FAITH

Do you have faith that the gospel has lost none of its power, and is the only way by which a person can know true life and salvation?

CLARITY

Do you desire for the gospel to be revealed to the world around you through your life and from your lips?

INVITATION

Do you long to extend an invitation to the hope of the gospel, and see people move into eternal relationship with Jesus?

If your answer to those questions is ‘yes’ then invite some others to join you on a journey of gospel formation together, and with this guide in hand, see where it leads.

THE SESSION GUIDE



This guide includes session material for at least three years of running Advance group sessions once a month. If you are an experienced evangelist, or confident in leading groups of this nature, you may want to use the session material merely as a jumping-off point – adding and adapting the content to meet the needs of your group and utilising your own experience. Or, if you are new to all this, then feel free to follow

the sessions word-for-word and instruction-for-instruction – they’ll give you all you need to grow together as a group.

YEAR ONE

The first twelve sessions are designed to give an understanding of the gospel, evangelism, and the character of an evangelist. The sessions are split into sections that cover five characteristics of an evangelist (after the introductory session – Session One).

**SESSIONS TWO – FOUR:
BIBLE-TEACHING EVANGELISTS –
KNOW THE GOSPEL DEEPLY**

We must know the message we proclaim as deeply as possible. To do this we must be committed to reading and studying God’s Word so that our proclamation is not based on our own ideas and assumptions but on what God says. We are called and commissioned not only to be evangelists, but Bible-teaching evangelists who share truth rather than opinion. These three sessions will consider the gospel and evangelism in light of what the Bible teaches us about the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

**SESSIONS FIVE – SIX:
PRAYERFUL EVANGELISTS –
ACT IN THE SPIRIT’S POWER**

We are to submit to the power of the Holy Spirit for the task of evangelism, for it is not our power but the power of God which brings salvation. We should commit to living prayerfully, asking God to provide opportunities to share our faith and see lives transformed as a result. These sessions explore the spiritual life of an evangelist and provide opportunities to explore our devotional lives and the direct impact they have on our evangelism.

**SESSIONS SEVEN – EIGHT:
ACCOUNTABLE EVANGELISTS –
LIVE A HOLY LIFE**

Holiness is at the heart of the gospel. Sharing the transforming power of the gospel in an authentic way means living accountable lives, where our life ‘on-stage’ matches our life ‘off-stage’. Cheering each other on in success and standing with one another in failure is crucial as we seek to grow as holy people

sharing a holy message. These sessions focus on the holiness of the evangelist, affirming the need for accountability and the position of humility as a chief characteristic of those who serve Jesus.

**SESSIONS NINE – TEN:
COMMITTED EVANGELISTS –
BE INTENTIONAL IN THE TASK**

Intentionality is key to evangelism. We must be aware of – and seize – everyday opportunities to share God’s love, not simply telling the Jesus story, but inviting those who hear it into the new life it offers and helping them to start on a journey of discipleship. These sessions explore two distinctive elements in evangelistic gifting: increased opportunities to boldly share the gospel every day, and a willingness to call people into God’s kingdom as the purpose of each gospel opportunity.

**SESSION ELEVEN:
INSPIRATIONAL EVANGELISTS –
STIR THE CHURCH TO WITNESS**

As we share the gospel message with a world who needs it, we must also stir the church to do the same. Evangelism is the business of every Christian, and so encouraging and stirring the church to the task must also be a commitment of any evangelist. This session explores the evangelist’s role as an encourager for the church to keep Christian witness central to who we are as followers of Jesus.

SESSION TWELVE: RETREAT

Each Advance year comes to an end with a retreat of some kind, and Session Twelve offers a framework and some suggested content for giving your group the opportunity to reflect on all they have learnt this year, all that has been done in and through you by God, and to look ahead together at what’s next.

YEAR TWO

The twelve sessions of Year Two alternate between exploring the challenges and the fruit of evangelism.

SESSION ONE: INTRODUCTION

This first session looks at the themes of challenge and fruit that will be explored this year.

**SESSION TWO:
THE CHALLENGE FROM GOD**

This session explores God’s challenge to us that we would worship him obediently in spirit and truth, and what that means for our evangelism in the world.

**SESSION THREE:
THE FRUIT IN THE DISCIPLE**

In this session we look at what it means to live with self-control – not out of religious duty, but a desire to be faithful to the one who is eternally faithful to us.

**SESSION FOUR:
THE CHALLENGE FROM YOURSELF**

This session is focused on the pressure we can place on ourselves to ‘perform’ to certain standards and levels of success, and the dangers of comparison.

**SESSION FIVE:
THE FRUIT IN THE MESSAGE**

Session Five considers the fruit at the heart of the gospel message – the goodness of the King of all creation, who offers the world the peace of his perfect kingdom instead of the chaos of our rebellion.

**SESSION SIX:
THE CHALLENGE FROM THE WORLD**

This session looks at the challenges we can face from the world – the fear of man that can make us ineffective, and the threat or reality of serious persecution.

**SESSION SEVEN:
THE FRUIT IN THE MESSENGER**

In Session Seven we unpack what it means to be messengers who go into the world with God’s kindness, revealing the joy of knowing Jesus in all that we say and do.

SESSION EIGHT: THE CHALLENGE FROM THE ENEMY

This session deals with the challenge of spiritual warfare and how we can be aware of, and fight, the enemy. Satan tempts us with various forms of sin that can blunt and disqualify our ministry, and he loves to deceive and accuse us in an attempt to destroy our faith.

SESSION NINE: THE FRUIT IN THE METHOD

Session Nine explores how any evangelistic method we use will be empowered by the Spirit's work in our lives as we go with humility and gentleness into the world, expectant that God will accomplish what only he can do through our efforts.

SESSION TEN: THE CHALLENGE FROM THE FAMILY

The final challenge we explore is from our own church family. We remember the importance of fellowship so that we don't become isolated, and our role to continually stir the church to remember the gospel and our joyful responsibility to be its messengers whenever distraction or apathy may take hold.

SESSION ELEVEN: THE FRUIT IN THE WORLD

The final session of Year Two before the annual retreat focuses on what it means to see the lasting fruit of love in our lives and in the lives of those with whom we share the gospel message.

SESSION TWELVE: RETREAT

Like Year One, Year Two concludes with a retreat. Session Twelve will give you the framework and content, as well as further ideas for this time together. It's a chance to be creative and commit more time to this session than your usual group would allow as you reflect on your second year as an Advance group and how God has been at work.

YEAR THREE

In the third year, your Advance group will begin to move away from the prescribed material of the first two years, instead being presented with

multiple options and resources for how you can develop your group in more personalised ways.

Year Three provides six further sessions, each related to the practice of evangelism, which can be explored in any order. There is also a retreat session that you can use at the end of your third year.

Along with the six full sessions and the retreat, there are a further fourteen session ideas to consider.

Year Three is all about options as you look to increasingly tailor your group development to your specific needs, while continuing to commit to the five core principles of Advance.

RUNNING A GROUP



Encourage a group of up to twelve people to meet once a month for around two hours. Single-gender groups often work best when it comes to accountability, but are not essential.

LEADER OR FACILITATOR?

You may be wondering whether you are the best person to lead an Advance group. There are two ways to think about running a group: as a **leader** or as a **facilitator**.

Leaders are usually people with some experience of evangelism, and probably some experience of leading others in teaching and discussion.

Facilitators are people who want to launch an Advance group without becoming its leader - they take responsibility for starting the group and then walk through the session material on behalf of the group (or agree to share the responsibility along the way).

Whether bringing your own experience to the group or relying completely on the material in this guide, leading an Advance group has more to do with commitment to the core values than anything else. Either way, it is important the group feels like a peer learning experience where everyone grows together.

For a simple ten step guide to starting an Advance Group see page 178.

SESSION BREAKDOWN

Each session begins with a brief Introduction and a one-line summary – the **Session In A Sentence**.

The **Session Background** offers context for the session. You should read this *before* leading a session as it will give you a deeper understanding of the overall shape of the session. You may want to incorporate some of this material into the session if you have time to do so, but its primary purpose is to aid you as you prepare to lead your group through the session.

Each session starts with a time to **Catch Up**. In the early sessions this is about getting to know each other and exploring how the group will work. As the sessions progress, more time is given to sharing stories with each other and feedback from the previous session's **Application**.

Then it's time for **Prayer**. There is no guidance on how long this should take, and no real right or wrong way to do it. You could pray as a whole group or with partners, for a short or extended time.

The main **Teaching** section follows and includes scripture references, quotes and points for discussion. This is where you'll most need to keep an eye on the clock. There is still more discussion time ahead, and, crucially, you will need to leave space for the accountability section at the end of the session. Don't let that time get squeezed by labouring a teaching point a little too much!

After the **Teaching** section is the **Discussion** section, which includes a few questions and a quotation relating to the topic of the session. You likely won't have time to discuss everything here, but we've included more content than you'll need so you can pick and choose what would be most helpful. Don't feel like you have

to rush through this section to get it all done – instead, just focus on a few elements.

Each session features an **Application** section towards the end, which is something for the group to do before the next session. Feel free to use your own ideas here if you'd prefer.

Another **Prayer** time follows, this time with some guidance on what to pray for in light of the session, but how you go about this and for how long is up to you.

Finally, each session ends with an **Accountability** time, which involves a specific reflection relating to the session along with self-evaluation sheets which should be completed, shared, and prayed over. You can make photocopies of the sheets from the back of this guide or download a PDF version from advancegroups.org.

If you haven't already set a date for the next meeting, be sure to do this before the end of your time together. It's always easier to agree this in person. The **Don't Forget...** section includes a little reminder of something your group can engage with on the website or a feature of Advance that may help them along the way.

Advance sessions work best over the course of two hours. You'll notice a suggested time beside each session section, but feel free to adapt these timings for your group, and the length of your group meeting as a whole.

OPTIONAL SESSION ELEMENTS

SPECIFIC PRAYER FOCUS

Take time for the whole group to pray for a few individuals within the group – praying over their lives, family, ministry and anything else they suggest. If you have a larger group, you could try to work through everyone every three meetings or so, and then start again.

PRACTICAL EXERCISES

You may want to head out onto the streets for an hour and put some of the discussion and prayer to use in personal evangelism, or some other practical expression of evangelism. The groups are designed to help us prepare

for evangelism, but time can also be given to actually practising evangelism, too! It is important that our evangelism equipping is not simply all information and inspiration, we should also get practical. Not only does this give opportunities for the end game of our Advance sessions to be achieved – faithfulness in sharing the gospel – but in our practice we learn things that we cannot learn simply through teaching and discussion. Be sure to give time for debriefing and feedback from these experiences.

GUEST CONTRIBUTORS

If you have access to a speaker or guest who could contribute to the teaching and discussion time and bring different experiences or something fresh to the group, then invite them along to share with your group.

HELPFUL TIPS FOR RUNNING A GROUP

1. Schedule group meetings as far ahead as you can and keep the dates sacred (six+ months ahead if possible). An online tool like doodle.com can be helpful for this.
2. WhatsApp, Signal, Facebook Messenger, Telegram or any other instant messaging apps work well for group communications, prayer requests and salvation stories between group times. Be sure to choose something everyone in the group is comfortable using and, as the group leader, set an example for regular engagement by contributing as often as you can. Share your stories, ask people for their prayer requests, and give links to resources, podcasts and YouTube clips. If you lead the charge, others will engage.
3. Food can be a great way to bring people together and connect, so why not run your Advance sessions around a meal?
4. Get your group thinking about starting their own groups early on, and when other potential group members are too late to

join yours you can connect them with the new groups that launch from your own.

5. Meet in a space where people will be comfortable discussing, praying and sharing during the accountability time. A public space like a coffee shop works well for some, but others might prefer more privacy. Consider your meeting space carefully. Online meetings can work well, but where possible, try to meet in person.

EASTER TO PENTECOST

In the month of Easter each year, you can postpone whichever session you are currently on by one month, and instead use the special Easter To Pentecost session, available at the QR code below. This session will help your Advance group engage effectively with the annual global initiative of reaching at least one person with the good news each week between Easter and Pentecost.

For more information on the Easter to Pentecost initiative, turn to page 183.



**SCAN HERE TO
DOWNLOAD YOUR
EASTER TO PENTECOST
SESSION!**

YEAR ONE

“

In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge:

PREACH THE WORD

Be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage - with great patience and careful instruction.

For the time will come when people will not put up with SOUND DOCTRINE. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what THEIR ITCHING EARS WANT TO HEAR. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.

But you, KEEP YOUR HEAD in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry.

2 TIMOTHY 4:1-5

SESSION ONE

WELCOME TO ADVANCE

Use your first group meeting as an opportunity to get to know one another and establish the framework for what the group will be. Along with this introduction, you will begin a dialogue about what evangelism is and explore the five characteristics needed to do the work of an evangelist.

SESSION IN A SENTENCE

Through the first twelve sessions of Advance, we will grow together in five evangelistic characteristics, encouraging and equipping each other as we rely on God's empowerment for the task.

SESSION BACKGROUND

A good place to welcome people to the Advance journey and to start a discussion about evangelism is to remember that the call to evangelism is *personal*. Look at how Jesus calls Andrew and Peter to follow him in Mark 1:16-18. He calls to the young fishermen from the shore and asks them to lay down their nets (their trade) and follow him, for he will teach them how to fish for people. Does God call you using those exact same words today? Unless you share the same career path as those two brothers, it is unlikely. Jesus called out to Andrew and Peter personally, using the fishing metaphor as a connection point.

God calls each one of us personally to his mission, by connecting our passions to opportunities to make sense of who God is. Whether you're a musician, artist, scientist,

nurse, business owner... Whatever your vocation or gifting, God can use it to create opportunities for you to proclaim his good news.

The goal of evangelism is to connect people to God's good news. More fully though, the message of evangelism is a call to put our faith in Jesus Christ – to trust and be obedient to him, that we would turn from our rejection of God to an acceptance of his lordship. When we recognise that we are created for him, we understand what worship is, and experience the transforming power of the Holy Spirit in our lives. We find wholeness when we turn our lives into living expressions of worship through obedience, sacrifice, faith and love (Galatians 5:13-26).

In Exodus 8:1, God instructs Moses to go to Pharaoh with the message, 'Let my people go...' Today, God's desire is to set captives free from sin. Like Moses, we are asked to go into the world and declare a message of freedom: there is no need to be enslaved any longer, for God has made it possible for us to live in freedom through Jesus and by the power of his Spirit (Romans 8:2). The purpose of evangelism is as it was for Moses and the people of Israel – worship.

- 'Let my people go, so that they may worship me.'

EXODUS 8:1

We are to be worshippers who witness so that others may come to worship and witness.

SESSION GUIDE

CATCH UP (20–30 MINS)

Take time to introduce everyone in the group and begin getting to know one another. You could use an ice-breaker activity, or just go round the group and ask people to share some basic information about themselves. After this, present in your own style or read through the Introduction section on page 9 as a way of explaining what the group will be and how it will run in the coming months.

PRAYER

Take some time to commit your whole Advance journey to the Lord, as well as any specific prayer needs that may have arisen during the catch up time.

TEACHING (20–30 MINS)

Work through the following teaching material in your own way, either by reading it word for word, or by reworking it into your own presentation.

- ‘However, I consider my life worth nothing to me; my only aim is to finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me – the task of testifying to the good news of God’s grace.’

ACTS 20: 24

Put simply, ‘to evangelise’ means to ‘proclaim good news’. The good news is the message of Jesus: that sinful, or rebellious, humanity has been reconciled to God through the saving work of Jesus Christ. We can know eternal life today and forever, and enjoy restored relationship with God because Jesus took on himself the death we deserved.

Look at these two definitions of evangelism:

- ‘The **proclamation** of the **historical, biblical Christ** as **Saviour and Lord**, with a view

- to **persuading** people to come to him **personally** and so **reconciled** to God.’

THE LAUSANNE COVENANT

- ‘Evangelism is the **Holy Spirit-empowered** proclamation of the **Good News of Jesus Christ** to a **sinful** world in the hope that they **might** accept the forgiveness of God and **know his Lordship, love and life today** and **forevermore**’

Discuss: What can we learn about the task of evangelism from these short summaries (some words highlighted for specific discussion)?

Evangelism requires a verbal message, a presentation of the risen Jesus, and an invitation for the listener to receive and accept the good news. But while words are undoubtedly essential to evangelism, we must endeavour to go beyond verbal communication alone.

Evangelism is a spiritual activity, effective only when God moves in power. If evangelism was just about changing people’s minds, we could simply rely on persuasion. But evangelism is about salvation: through our sharing the message, the Spirit of God convicts, gives faith, and begins transformation of hearts. Evangelism without the power of the Spirit is merely marketing.

- ‘Unless there is a demonstration of the power of the Spirit, the proclamation of the gospel will be in vain. It will not be evangelism.’

DAVID WATSON

Conversely, and to paraphrase the evangelist Leonard Ravenhill, we can have confidence that any method of evangelism can work if God is at work in it.

The purpose of evangelism is to form disciples – worshippers who worship in spirit and in truth (John 4:23). Therefore, evangelists must be authentic worshippers themselves. It’s been said that worship and evangelism are two sides of the same coin, and it’s true that our witness

to the world is an act of worship – an act of obedience and devotion to our king.

These Advance group sessions will help you to mature as an authentic worshipper and see you grow in five core characteristics of an evangelist.

BIBLE-TEACHING EVANGELISTS

We must know the message we proclaim as deeply as possible. To do this we must be committed to the reading and study of God's Word, so that our proclamation is not based on our own ideas and assumptions about the gospel, but on what the Word of God teaches.

PRAYERFUL EVANGELISTS

We are to submit to the power of the Holy Spirit for the task of evangelism, for it is not our power but the power of God which brings salvation. We should commit to living prayerfully, asking God to provide opportunities to share our faith and see lives transformed as a result.

ACCOUNTABLE EVANGELISTS

Holiness is at the heart of the gospel. Sharing the transforming power of the gospel in an authentic way means living accountable lives, where our life 'on-stage' matches our life 'off-stage'. Cheering each other on in success and standing with one another in failure is crucial as we seek to grow as holy people sharing a holy message.

COMMITTED EVANGELISTS

Intentionality is key to evangelism. We must be aware of – and seize – everyday opportunities to share God's love, not simply telling the Jesus story, but inviting those who hear it into the new life it offers and helping them to start on a journey of discipleship.

INSPIRATIONAL EVANGELISTS

As we share the gospel message with a world who needs it, we must also stir the church to do the same. Evangelism is the business of every Christian, and so encouraging and stirring the church to the task must also be a commitment of any evangelist.

Discuss: Consider these five core characteristics. Where do you identify your own strengths and weaknesses in each area?

DISCUSSION (15 MINS)

Explore the following questions and/or the discussion quotation:

- What is our role in evangelism and what is God's role in evangelism?
- How do we ensure we are authentic evangelists *and* authentic worshippers?
- How do you hope to grow in the coming months through this Advance group?

• 'If sinners will be damned, at least let them leap to hell over our bodies. And if they will perish, let them perish with our arms about their knees, imploring them to stay. If hell must be filled, at least let it be filled in the teeth of our exertions, and let not one go there unwarned and unprayed for.'

CHARLES SPURGEON

APPLICATION (5 MINS)

Come up with your own biblically-sound definition of evangelism (preferably with references to scripture) and send it to the group (see **Messages and Dates** below). The goal here is not a word-perfect definition, but to express how you now understand evangelism based on this session and some further thought and reflection. If there is time in the next session you could look at a couple of these definitions in more detail together.

PRAYER

Give thanks to God for his amazing gospel. Thank him that he chooses to make you part of his saving work in the world. Pray he would empower you to be his messengers in word and action, as you worship him in spirit and truth. Ask him to help you to grow in the five characteristics of an evangelist as you move

forward and grow together in this Advance group.

ACCOUNTABILITY (15 MINS)

Look through the accountability forms together, fill them out and share together in pairs or smaller groups. Finish by praying for one another.

MESSAGES AND DATES (10 MINS)

Close this session by asking everyone to download and log into a messenger system that works for everyone in the group. WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger are both free and work well. Create a group that you will use to communicate between sessions, with updates, prayer requests, testimonies and so on.

Finally, set the dates for as many of the upcoming sessions as you can. Six months in advance is ideal so that everyone can commit to the dates early and make them a diary priority.

DON'T FORGET...

Every group member can register themselves as being in an Advance group at ***advancegroups.org*** and receive a monthly email update with encouraging stories from Advance groups around the world, links to great resources and the latest news from the movement.

SESSION TWO

THE IDENTITY OF THE EVANGELIST

In this session, you will explore the identity of an evangelist as it relates to the identity of God himself and his gospel story.

SESSION IN A SENTENCE

The identity of an evangelist is rooted in the identity of God the Father: we are his messenger children.

SESSION BACKGROUND

At the peak of Billy Graham's ministry, Christian young people were inspired to follow his example and become preachers of the good news. Over the last twenty years there has been a perceptible shift in the aspirations of Christian young people. Where once the role of an evangelist was seen as the pinnacle of Christian service, the more common aspirations for Christian young people today are often to become a worship leader, youth worker or church pastor.

The church has certainly benefitted from talented musicians, film-makers and other creatives using their gifts to facilitate others in personal and corporate worship, and God has been celebrated and glorified through the efforts of these faithful people. However, before somebody can become a true worshipper – a worshipper in spirit and truth (John 4:23) – they must have heard and responded to the gospel (Romans 10:14-17).

Similarly, the role of pastor or teacher is essential to discipleship and is not to be sidelined. But the pastor will have no

congregation to look after if the seats become empty due to a lack of missional engagement and evangelism in the world.

Bringing people to a place of true worship requires us to explain the gospel to them, and with that in mind none of us should shirk our responsibility to share the good news with the world, by witnessing to our faith in Christ to all people in the power of the Spirit (Acts 1:8). The Bible teaches that *all* believers are called to *do the work of an evangelist* (Matthew 28:19; 2 Timothy 4:5), yet there are those who are specifically called to *be* evangelists (Ephesians 4:11). For these people especially, proclaiming the gospel isn't simply day-to-day witness, but a primary focus of their lives.

SESSION GUIDE



CATCH UP (20–30 MINS)

Take time to catch up with one another – sharing stories, encouragements, feedback on opportunities and anything else that would encourage the group. Ask the group to share their biblical definitions of evangelism (Session One – Application) and discuss them together for a few minutes as a recap from the last session. For smaller groups this can be done as a whole group exercise, for larger groups you may want to split into smaller groups for discussion. It may also be worth covering the basics of how the group works for anyone who missed the first session.

PRAYER

Commit the time to the Lord and pray over any situations, positive or challenging, arising from the catch up time.

TEACHING (20–30 MINS)

Work through the following teaching material in your own way, either by reading it word for word or by reworking it into your own presentation.

‘In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction. For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry.’

2 TIMOTHY 4:1–5

What does it mean to be *called* to be an evangelist? Aren't all believers called to share the good news of Jesus Christ with the world? Jesus' great commission in Matthew 28 appears to be a blanket call to *all* of his followers to go into the world and make disciples. But then we come across a short passage in Ephesians 4 (vv. 11–12) that highlights the specific role of the evangelist alongside that of pastor, teacher, prophet and apostle, each of which is to be used to build the body of Christ. We also encounter a man named Philip in Acts who is given the specific title of evangelist (Acts 21:8). What are we to make of the calling of the evangelist? Is it for everyone or for a specific few?

You may know the words of 2 Corinthians 5:17, where Paul talks about becoming a new creation through Christ. You might have even used this verse when you have shared the gospel previously. However, we don't often go on to quote the rest of the passage:

‘Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.’

2 CORINTHIANS 5:17–20

Discuss: How does this Bible passage relate to the definitions of evangelism that were shared at the start of today's session?

God is in the business of reconciling creation back to himself and wants us – his reconciled people – to be ambassadors for his transformational message. This is not just for ‘professional’ evangelists, this is a call for all believers. However, this ambassadorship can look very different in practice from individual to individual.

Think about it like this: in a football (soccer) team, every player is pursuing the aim of winning the match. However, the strikers are those who are specifically tasked with scoring goals. This doesn't mean that other players can't and won't score from time to time, but the primary function of the striker in the team is to score.

Another illustration that might help would be to think of a wedding day. Any guest with a smart phone could take a great picture to capture memories of this special day, and some of these photos may well even make it into the couple's official photo album. And yet, the bride and groom will also bring in a professional to capture the day, using their skill, equipment, and singular focus on the day to capture some great images.

As the church we are all pursuing the restoration of God's perfect kingdom. We all have a role to play in witness and evangelism. But there are some who are specifically called to prioritise

evangelism, most likely at the cost of other pursuits. These are the *evangelists*, like Philip whom we read about in Acts 21:8.

If some of the following statements ring true with you, then the calling of the evangelist could be upon your life:

- You long to see the lost saved.
- You are compelled to proclaim the gospel 'in season and out of season'.
- You persevere in the task no matter what hardships come upon you.
- You will not compromise the integrity of the message you share, no matter what the itching ears of your audience may want you to say.
- You are utterly single-minded in reaching the lost with the powerful, transformational, saving message of the gospel.
- You have had prophetic words spoken over you about being an evangelist.
- You are a clear communicator.
- You find yourself praying for the lost regularly.
- You are willing to go wherever the gospel takes you.
- You desire to help others share their faith.
- You have seen people give their lives to Christ having shared the gospel with them.
- You like and have compassion for people.

Discuss: Spend some time talking through these statements and which of them ring true for you. If there is an evangelist in your group, ask them to share how they came to the realisation of their gifting and role.

The Bible tells us that God desires for no-one to perish (2 Peter 3:9). The evangelist is compelled to go into the world having the same heart as the Father. We do not share the gospel

simply out of duty, we share it because our hearts are in line with our heavenly Father's. The evangelist's identity is not found in their role, but in their new identity as a child of God, having become his heirs (John 1:12).

Regardless of gifting or calling, no-one has the power to save themselves or anyone else. We can only be the messengers – for it is God alone who saves. He invites us to share in his heart for the lost as we grow to know him more fully as our loving heavenly Father and reveal his saving power to the world.

• • • • • 'Let us celebrate our smallness and walk in the power of the Spirit, because evangelism is rooted in the supernatural power of God! Let us keep learning the truth of the gospel and its profound relevance to everyone we meet, because evangelism is rooted in God's truth! Let us remember that love is the source and the means of reaching others – that nothing can pry open closed or resistant minds and hearts to the gospel more than expressing the love and compassion of Jesus, because evangelism is rooted in Christ's love!'

REBECCA MANLEY PIPPERT

DISCUSSION (20 MINS)

1. Is there a difference between personal witness and evangelism?
2. If all are expected to *do the work* of an evangelist, why are there those who are called to *be* evangelists?
3. Evangelist or not, how do we develop the Father's heart for the lost for ourselves?
4. How could you help encourage those who think evangelism is only for the 'professionals' to become 'ministers of reconciliation' themselves?

APPLICATION (5 MINS)

We do not share the gospel simply because we are evangelists any more than those who are not called as evangelists are exempt from sharing it. All believers should share the gospel as a natural response to who God is and what he has

done in their lives. As we are transformed by the Father's love, so we long for others to know that same transforming love for themselves.

Over the next month, work through the Gospel of Mark in your daily devotional time and pay attention to one of Mark's main themes - that Jesus is the Son of God, a servant who has come to do the will of the Father. As you read and re-read the Gospel with this perspective, ask God to affirm your true identity - not rooted in your gifting or ministry calling, but in who he is and what he has done.

PRAYER

Give thanks to God, our heavenly Father, that he desires for no-one to perish and has made the way by which all can be saved through trust in Jesus Christ. Spend some time praying for each other - that God will bring more clarity to your calling as an evangelist, that he might provide more opportunities to share the gospel, and that you would have more boldness as you do so.

ACCOUNTABILITY (15 MINS)

In pairs or small groups, ask each other if you consider yourself to be an evangelist (someone who is called to do the work of the evangelist). Provide space to reflect on the call of God in your life, and what being faithful to that calling means for you.

To finish, complete accountability forms, share in pairs or smaller groups and pray for one another.

DON'T FORGET

The Global Network of Evangelists have a helpful quiz for you to discover your evangelism style. Scan the QR code below to complete the quiz.



SESSION THREE

THE MESSAGE OF THE EVANGELIST

In this session we explore the message of the gospel itself. What is the gospel? Do we have a sufficient understanding of the message we preach to communicate it clearly?

SESSION IN A SENTENCE

The message of evangelism is Jesus Christ: Christ come, Christ crucified, Christ risen and Christ returning.

SESSION BACKGROUND

St Augustine famously declared, 'You have made us for yourself O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.'

The gospel moves people from despair, darkness, brokenness and hopelessness, into joy, light, love and hope. The gospel moves restless hearts to fulfilment in their creator. Tragically, though, it seems that many followers of Jesus have lost confidence in the power of the gospel today. There are many reasons why believers don't share the gospel with others: fear, feelings of inadequacy, and hoping someone else will do it, all play a part. These reasons all find their root in the same place – a lack of understanding about what the gospel actually is, and a lack of trust in its power.

In Romans 1, Paul boldly declares, 'I'm not ashamed of the gospel,' and then immediately goes on to qualify why this is so: 'because it is the power of God to bring salvation to everyone who believes' (Romans 1:16). Understanding that the gospel is the power of God to bring

salvation is to understand something of who God is, what he has done, and what that means for the world. It's all wrapped up in the reality of who Jesus Christ is. This is not detached or abstract philosophy with no significance beyond the lecture hall or debate room. For one thing, understanding the gospel helps us to approach foundational questions about our existence and the identity of the God who created us. Questions such as:

Who Am I?

Everyone asks this question in some way. What is the meaning of life? Is there purpose? What is my identity? The gospel answer is that you are a child of God, created and loved by him. In many contexts around the world today, the primary concern of a person is no longer, 'What will happen when I die?' but, 'Who am I while I am alive?'

Who Is God?

There are many religions in the world. Even if God exists, how can we possibly know who he is and that we are worshipping the right one? God has made himself known through creation, through the Bible, through the experiences of Christians all over the world, and through the person of Jesus Christ. He is the creator and sustainer of life, the king of the universe, a perfect and loving heavenly Father who longs to bring a broken and rebellious humanity back into relationship with himself.

Who Is Jesus Christ?

Jesus is the most compelling figure in all of human history. Few historical scholars doubt that Jesus existed, but who was he? A wise teacher? A con man? A mad man? Actually,

Jesus is who he says he is: the saviour of the world who, through his life, death and resurrection, has made it possible for a person to become a child of God and know the eternal king eternally.

While these types of question can serve as a starting point for a conversation about the gospel, they don't necessarily lead us to a fully sufficient understanding of what the gospel means. Rather, they are connection points on which we can begin to build a relationship. We must dig deeply into scripture to ensure that through these questions we can point to the full and powerful gospel of Jesus Christ.

SESSION GUIDE

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CATCH UP (15–25 MINS)

Take time to catch up with one another, sharing stories, encouragements, feedback on opportunities and anything else that would encourage the group. Ask the group to share about their journey through the Gospel of Mark over the last month (Session Two – Application). Use this time to explore and affirm our true identity as children of God because of the saving work of God's eternal Son, rather than a ministry calling. The response to our identity is to become ministers of reconciliation on behalf of the family, seeking out the lost so that they too may know that they can come home.

PRAYER

Commit the time to the Lord and pray over any situations, positive or challenging, arising from the catch up time.

TEACHING (25–35 MINS)

Work through the following teaching material in your own way, either by reading it word for word, or by reworking it into your own presentation.

- 'And so it was with me, brothers and sisters.
- When I came to you, I did not come with
- eloquence or human wisdom as I proclaimed
- to you the testimony about God. For I

- resolved to know nothing while I was with
- you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.'

1 CORINTHIANS 2:1-2

Paul shows his commitment to the truth and power of the Jesus story by declaring, 'I decided while I was with you to know nothing but Jesus Christ and him crucified.' This is the heart of the gospel: that God himself stepped into the mess of our world in the person of Jesus Christ, lived a perfect life, died upon a cross to take the death we deserved, and rose again on the third day, breaking the curse of death once and for all. Salvation and true life are found through faith in him alone. We share this truth not merely to bring about changed *minds*, but to bring about new life – a transformation that can only be achieved by faith in Jesus Christ.

This session will explore what the gospel is. Use the following sections (found at the back of this guide) to spark discussion about what we believe the gospel to be.

GOSPEL DOCTRINE (PAGE 173)

The systematic layout of the gospel.

GOSPEL NARRATIVE (PAGE 174)

Broadly speaking, the same gospel is presented here as in the more systematic approach, but with more emphasis on a narrative explanation that reads more like a story.

YOUTH TALK AND GOSPEL METHOD (PAGE 175)

There are various explanations of the gospel in the gospel methods listed, each with its own focus on a particular part of the gospel narrative and a way of presenting it for someone to hear it with clarity.

Ensuring we are proclaiming the truth of the gospel is imperative. Remember: we can't save anyone, the *gospel* is the power of God to bring salvation (Romans 1:16). If our gospel messages are watered-down, one-dimensional attempts to appeal to the heart of the listener, we might see lots of hands up 'responding' to the message, but what have they really responded to?

The gospel message brings with it some incredibly challenging ideas. It describes us all

as 'sinners' and claims we are broken beings who deserve death. The good news of the gospel is so good because it is the saving response to a human condition that is so bad.

Our concept of how loving and gracious God is will hinge on how much of a problem we think our sin is. People struggle with the idea of a God who judges us for our sin and the thought of a loving God who would allow people to go to hell. It's easy to be tempted to play down these aspects of the gospel, or to ignore them completely, but this won't do. Our evangelism has a responsibility to unpack the problem of sin so that the power of the cross and the hope of the resurrection is understood for what it really is – the undeserved grace of God given lovingly to his children and the *only* hope for humanity.

Sin is a great problem solved by a greater God. To water down one is to weaken our perception of the other, and so we must commit to the truth – no matter how challenging it seems.

Another area that can easily be missed is the idea that we are to die to our self-centredness, to take up our cross and follow Jesus with everything we have (Matthew 16:24). The call to a life defined by sacrifice is often minimised in favour of a 'God will make you happy' message. Similarly, any attempt to add, subtract, or rely on our own communication skills to win people over will only end up turning the true and powerful gospel of salvation into no gospel at all.

- 'The spiritual power in the gospel is denied when we augment or adjust the gospel into no gospel at all. When we doubt the message alone is the power of God for salvation we start adding or subtracting, trusting our own powers of persuasion or presentation.'

MATT CHANDLER

We must be sure to avoid presenting the gospel in ways that miss the questions people are asking. For example, younger generations today are often more concerned with questions of 'now' – purpose, identity, and justice – rather than the 'not yet' idea of what happens when we die, and so the way we present the gospel message should bear this in mind. The way we package our message will change with the times, but its content – its essential truth – remains the same. We must know the gospel

deeply if we are to attempt to present it clearly. We are not seeking to offer good ideas or advice, but the authentic gospel of Jesus Christ in the power of the Spirit.

Prioritising daily Bible study is vital for every believer, but especially for those who are communicating its truth on a regular basis. How can we claim to have revelation from scripture if we are not allowing it to feed our lives every day? We are called not only to be evangelists, but Bible-teaching evangelists.

DISCUSSION (20 MINS)

1. How well do you think you understand the gospel?
2. What are the challenges of explaining the gospel well today?
3. How can we create connection points with contemporary listeners?
4. What does it actually mean to be a 'Bible-teaching' evangelist?

- 'The gospel is the lifeblood of Christianity, and it provides the foundation for countering culture. For when we truly believe the gospel, we begin to realise that the gospel not only compels Christians to confront social issues in the culture around us. The gospel actually creates confrontation with the culture around – and within – us.'

DAVID PLATT

APPLICATION (5 MINS)

Encourage every member of the group to start or continue a daily reading plan using the YouVersion phone app or other Bible reading notes. Our engagement with scripture is essential if we are to grow as followers of Jesus and understand the gospel deeply so that we can share it simply.

Using the material about the gospel in this booklet and your Bible, produce a concise explanation (3-5 points) of the gospel with supporting Bible verses that you can share with the group at the next session. This task is not

a test, it is a devotional activity – a way for you personally to make sense of the truth of the gospel. The Gospel Doctrine on page 173 might be helpful.

PRAYER

'Lord Jesus, thank you that you came and lived a perfect life, that you took our place upon the cross, and that through your resurrection we can share in new life. Help us to trust in you and to grow in your love. Help us to understand your Word more fully, to know your gospel more deeply and to be able to share it simply and truthfully with those around us. Thank you for the opportunities you give us, and please equip us to be faithful to those opportunities as we spend time in your Word and in your presence.'

ACCOUNTABILITY (15 MINS)

Be honest with one another about your Bible reading habits. In small groups or pairs, discuss your daily reading habits – good or bad – and some of the things you love about reading God's Word and some of what you find difficult. Think carefully about what a new season of Bible engagement could look like for you and set a target – stretch yourself a bit, but don't feel the need to bite off more than you can chew and set yourself up for failure. Ask your accountability group to check in with you next month to see how you've been getting on. Remember, it's not just about a Bible reading target, it's about the joy of knowing God and his gospel more fully day by day.

To finish, complete accountability forms, share in pairs or smaller groups and pray for one another.

SESSION FOUR

THE TASK OF THE EVANGELIST

What are the differences between preaching and proclaiming? This session is an opportunity to explore these ideas biblically and practically, encouraging each other to develop and sharpen verbalisation skills - whether for interpersonal conversation or preaching - in complete submission to the Holy Spirit's power.

SESSION IN A SENTENCE

The task of the evangelist is to verbalise the gospel as revealed through God's Holy Word by the power of the Spirit.

SESSION BACKGROUND

According to tradition, St Francis of Assisi once said:

- 'Preach the gospel at all times, and if
- necessary use words.'

This is a popular quotation for illustrating the importance of living a life marked by the gospel. But there are two problems with it. Firstly, there's no real evidence that St Francis said it at all - at least he never wrote it down. Secondly, and more importantly, it simply doesn't hold up as a statement. While it's right that our lives should demonstrate the good news about God's kingdom in the same way as our words, preaching the gospel is by very definition a word-based process. The sentence could be reframed more helpfully as:

- 'Preach the gospel at all times, and, *because*
- it is necessary, use words.'

The words 'preach' and 'proclaim' have everything to do with words - they are *verbal* declarations. You may live a perfect 'gospel' life, but if you never articulate the hope you have in Jesus then how will the world know the reason for your life being lived as it is?

- 'To remain silent and let others interpret our
- actions is wrong; God himself did not do
- this. The pivotal points of God's redemptive
- action in history are accompanied with
- verbal revelation.'

WILL METZGER

Preaching was crucial to the spread of the gospel as recorded in the New Testament (Acts 2:14), yet there are some today who believe that preaching is old-fashioned and no longer the best way to communicate the gospel to the world. We surely want to be creative in our preaching and engaging in our communication (perhaps exploring other avenues of communication, such as film-making, or songwriting), but the Bible compels evangelists to hold onto preaching that helps listeners to both understand the message and have an opportunity to respond to an invitation to Christ's lordship as a central element of the task of sharing the gospel (1 Corinthians 1:21; 2 Timothy 4:1-2; Mark 1:17; Luke 9:23).

Not all believers are called to be *preaching* evangelists. For most believers, evangelism and personal witness will look like interpersonal conversations, and this will be the primary way

in which the gospel is verbalised or 'proclaimed' to others.

Either way, we must always remember that as essential as words are to evangelism, they alone will not do. Words spoken from an unsubmitted life will ring hollow and hypocritical, and words separate from the power of God's Spirit will lack the power of God to bring salvation to all who believe (Romans 1:16).

With this in mind, evangelism should involve three things:

Proclamation: Through which we explain who Jesus is.

Demonstration: Through which we live out who Jesus is.

Invitation: Through which we offer the opportunity to trust in who Jesus is.

SESSION GUIDE

CATCH UP (10–20 MINS)

Take time to catch up with one another, sharing stories, encouragements, feedback on opportunities and anything else that would encourage the group. Ask one or two volunteers to share their gospel presentation (Session Three – Application) and offer feedback. Don't forget to be positive!

PRAYER

Commit the time to the Lord and pray over any situations, positive or challenging, highlighted in the catch up time.

TEACHING (20–30 MINS)

Work through the following teaching material in your own way, either by reading it word for word, or by reworking it into your own presentation.

- '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... for, "Everyone who calls on the
- name of the Lord will be saved." How, then,
- can they call on the one they have not
- believed in? And how can they believe in the
- one of whom they have not heard? And how
- can they hear without someone preaching
- to them? And how can anyone preach
- unless they are sent? As it is written: "How
- beautiful are the feet of those who bring
- good news!"

ROMANS 10:9, 13–15

There's a lot of talk about proclamation in the Bible: there are at least 33 different Greek words that we usually translate as 'preaching' or 'proclaiming'. In this passage from Romans, we find Paul using the word 'preach' in reference to sharing the good news. For Paul, preaching is vitally important, and he tells Timothy to keep preaching a priority in his ministry (2 Timothy 4:1–2). We see on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2) an example of how God chooses to use preaching to bring people to faith in him – thousands were saved not merely by encountering supernatural signs and wonders (tongues of fire, speaking in other languages), but through hearing Peter's Spirit-filled proclamation.

The Greek word from which we get 'evangelism' essentially means to *proclaim the good news* – an inherently verbal activity. But preaching can be perceived as a little old-fashioned in today's culture, with a preference for 'friendship' or 'personal' evangelism methods where relationship-based conversation is the focus. Some throw out the need for a verbal dynamic almost entirely and prefer to witness in actions only, with missional activity based around social action projects as the method through which God's love is revealed. And yet, as Paul asks in Romans, if believers never offer any explanation for the source of our loving action into the world, or of the hope that we have, how will anyone ever come to know the truth about Jesus and willingly trust him as Lord?

Discuss: If we know that proclamation is important to the task of being an evangelist, how do we ensure that the message of the gospel is communicated clearly enough for listeners to understand it and have an opportunity to meaningfully

respond to what they have heard? What part does preaching play?

The best practice for our evangelism is not to be found in an 'either/or' from the options above, but in recognising the value of a diverse approach that reflects our own diversity. Using our words is essential though.

Whether we're engaging in public communication (like preaching) or personal communication (like conversation) there are always ways we can develop the clarity of our message. Knowing our audience and their context is important as it helps us to think carefully about any illustrations or connection points that may help them engage with and understand what we share. For example, if we're preaching the gospel to a group of teenagers, we may use different words and cultural connection points than when having a one-to-one conversation with a pensioner. The message of the gospel itself doesn't change, but the way we articulate it, the illustrations we use, and the cultural references we employ can be tailored for the people in front of us. In short, *what* we preach does not change, but *how* we preach does.

This is why preparing ourselves to share the gospel is an important part of our Christian walk. If we only rely on the same old gospel talk every time we get up to preach we are likely to become stale and lazy preachers. If we always rely on the same method of gospel explanation, we are unlikely to engage different kinds of people in conversations that help them discover Jesus. First and foremost, we should approach our preparation prayerfully, asking God to speak through us by his Spirit and give us the words to say. We should also be prepared to communicate the gospel in different ways that attempt to take into consideration the people we might come into contact with.

Discuss: Look at the following characteristics for verbalising the gospel and think of how you might apply them to your own evangelistic opportunities. How might this preparation be a worshipful act?

We should proclaim:

- **Clearly:** Clarity is the ultimate aim of good communication. To explain clearly, we should have a good understanding of the gospel itself, knowing it deeply enough that we can present it accurately with simplicity.
- **Spiritually:** For dead hearts to be revived by the message of the gospel the Spirit of God must be at work – so our preaching must be in submission to the Spirit's power for the task.
- **Lovingly:** We are not winning people to our own ideas and wisdom, but to the singular reality of Jesus Christ. We should preach with humility, giving respect to the one we share about (God), and with compassion for those we share with (his children).
- **Boldly:** Humility doesn't negate boldness as we offer the truth of the gospel. We can speak with conviction and confidence in the truth of our message whilst still being kind, gentle and humble.
- **Uniquely:** Christ is to be presented as unique before all others, and remain the central focus of our gospel conversations.
- **Personally:** We can demonstrate the truth of the gospel by sharing about its impact in our own lives, building bridges to the listener and their circumstances.

Whether we are speaking in a conversation or preaching from a platform, we should bear each of these points in mind. However, one characteristic that is unique to a conversational opportunity is listening. We should always be ready to listen well to those we speak with. Don't simply wait for your turn to speak, ask good questions in response to what you hear, be inquisitive not dismissive, and don't feel like you need to offer answers to every question you are asked or refute every point you disagree with. Conversations are journeys, and often unfamiliar ones. As with most unfamiliar journeys, we need a map to help us find our way. Really listening to your conversation partner will provide that map and in time the destination may become clearer for those you speak with (See the sessions on *Personal Evangelism* and *Listening Evangelism* in Year Three for more on this).

As helpful as these characteristics may be for our proclamation, it is important to remember that no amount of skilful articulation will actually bring someone into the kingdom of God, only God himself can do that. Our communication must make space for the Holy Spirit to move in power. In the last session, we looked at Paul's commitment to know and preach the Jesus story in 1 Corinthians 2. In the very next verses, Paul goes on to share his commitment to proclaiming the Jesus story in the power of the Spirit so that new faith might rest on God rather than human reason:

- 'My message and my preaching were not
- with wise and persuasive words, but with a
- demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that
- your faith might not rest on human wisdom,
- but on God's power.'

● **1 CORINTHIANS 2:4-5**

We long to worship God in spirit and truth (John 4:23) and our evangelism should be no different. We declare his truth in the power of the Spirit as worshippers giving testimony to the one we worship so that others may come to worship him.

DISCUSSION (20 MINS)

1. Is preaching still relevant today?
2. What are your strengths and weaknesses as a communicator?
3. How do you prepare for a gospel presentation compared to a gospel conversation? Do you approach the content differently?
4. What role does listening play in your proclamation?

- 'The difference between good preaching
- and great preaching lies mainly in the work
- of the Holy Spirit... We should do the work it
- takes to make our communication good and
- leave it up to God how and how often he
- makes it great for the listener.'

● **TIM KELLER**

APPLICATION (5 MINS)

Find a suitable YouTube clip of a gospel talk that you could critique, both in terms of style and content. Ask the group to watch the clip between sessions, make notes, and be ready to discuss next time, perhaps using the six tips from this session as a framework for evaluating some of the strengths and/or weaknesses of the gospel presentation.

PRAYER

Pray together for the Spirit of God to work through your humble offering of communication. Give thanks that God has chosen to make you a mouthpiece for his message and ask him to help you to live the gospel authentically so that the words from your mouths are not detached from the state of your hearts. Pray for those who will hear the message – that God would prepare their hearts and move them to a place of revelation from which they can choose to trust in him.

ACCOUNTABILITY (15 MINS)

In pairs, spend some time discussing your own attitude to communication in evangelism. Have you neglected good preparation for public or personal evangelistic opportunities? Have you avoided verbalising the gospel in favour of an action-only approach? Be honest with each other about where you might need to reset a little in the area of verbalising the good news and prayerfully commit to this before the Lord.

Complete accountability forms, share in pairs or smaller groups and pray for one another.

SESSION FIVE

THE POWER OF THE EVANGELIST

We long to see spiritually-dead hearts revived. This session explores what it means to be spiritually-empowered through prayer, leading us to an authentic revival in our own hearts that in turn we can offer to the world.

SESSION IN A SENTENCE

Prayer is a bedrock of evangelism, and it puts the power where the power belongs – not in human effort but in the hands of God.

SESSION BACKGROUND

The presbyterian minister and missionary Arthur Tappan Pierson made this striking assertion: ‘There has never been a spiritual awakening in any country or locality that did not begin in united prayer.’

We’d be hard-pressed to find an example that contradicts his statement. It describes God’s mandate to his people throughout scripture and the promise of what will follow. During Solomon’s reign, God speaks to the rebellious Israelites and offers them hope in the face of their chaotic disobedience and the inevitable disastrous consequences that follow:

- ‘...if my people, who are called by my name,
- will humble themselves and pray and seek
- my face and turn from their wicked ways,
- then I will hear from heaven, and I will
- forgive their sin and will heal their land.’

● **2 CHRONICLES 7:14**

In the same way, the gospel of Jesus is an opportunity to humbly relinquish lordship over our own lives, submit to Christ, confess that he is Lord and allow him to bring us healing and new life. We move from rebellion (our sin), to revelation (of God’s truth), to repentance (faith in God), to revival (transformation that offers transformation to others).

The meaning of the word ‘turn’ used in 2 Chronicles is the same as the word we translate in the New Testament as ‘repent’. Jesus began his preaching ministry with a call to do exactly that (Mark 1:15). The Israelites’ problem in 2 Chronicles is the same as our own today – we too frequently look to other gods (including ourselves) in an attempt to command our own destiny. This disobedience can only lead to death, brokenness and chaos. God has been calling us to turn back to him from the moment we turned away. The gospel reveals that despite our rebellion, hope is found in the grace of God, and our humble response to him.

Pleading with a judge usually involves a plea of innocence in the hope of being exonerated, but here we are told to bow before the eternal judge and admit our guilt. Only then can we be pardoned. Justice demands punishment of our guilt in light of the appalling reality of our rebellion against a holy king, but God instead extends pardon to us via the perfect justice of the cross. Instead of death, we are offered healing, restoration and life. God *revives* the humble.

Another example of the power of prayer and unity (with God and with one another) for revival is found in the story of Job. The turning point

for Job is not when he gets a heavy perspective check from God, but when he obediently prays for the friends who had been part of the problem of distorting his perspective in the first place. At this point in the story, Job lifts his eyes from his own circumstances, graciously prays for others (who have wronged him) and is restored (Job 42:10).

Revival starts with one person choosing obedience to their heavenly Father and declaring their allegiance to the kingdom of peace. It takes just one person to declare that Jesus is Lord in word and action, relying on the Holy Spirit to empower them to be born again. By the grace of God, revival starts with us – and by that same grace, revival can spring up wherever a once-rebellious people unite in humility to call upon the power of God to heal the land.

SESSION GUIDE

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CATCH UP (15–25 MINS)

Take time to catch up with one another, sharing stories, encouragements, feedback on opportunities and anything else that would encourage the group. Use this time to talk about the gospel talk clip exam (Session Four – Application). What did people find helpful or unhelpful? What have we learned from the example that will help us to grow as proclaimers of the good news?

PRAYER

Commit the time to the Lord and pray over any situations, positive or challenging, highlighted in the catch up time.

TEACHING (20–30 MINS)

Work through the following teaching material in your own way, either by reading it word for word, or by reworking it into your own presentation.

- ‘I urge, then, first of all, that petitions,
- prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be
- made for all people – for kings and all those

- in authority, that we may live peaceful and
- quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This
- is good, and pleases God our Saviour, who
- wants all people to be saved and to come to
- a knowledge of the truth.’

1 TIMOTHY 2:1–4

In his first letter to Timothy, Paul gives his protégé some clear instructions for the worshipping life of the church in Ephesus. Paul tells him to give priority to prayers and intercession for all people, because it pleases God. It pleases God because he wants all people to know the peace of his kingdom. Prayer is the way by which we call upon God to do what *only* he can do – bring peace in chaos and bring life from death.

Prayer is a bedrock of evangelism because it is where we seek God’s power for the task, putting the power where the power belongs – not in human effort but in the hands of God.

- ‘The Bible is God’s Word; it is his story of his
- work in bringing rebellious men and women
- back to himself. It tells, not of man’s seeking
- a lost God, but of God seeking lost men.
- The Bible does not present an art of prayer; it
- presents the God of prayer, the God who
- calls before we answer and answers before
- we call.’

EDMUND P. CLOWNEY

United States founding father Benjamin Franklin once said, ‘By failing to prepare you are preparing to fail.’ We must prepare our hearts for evangelism through prayerful submission and petition to God.

We could reframe the saying as:

- ‘By failing to prayerfully prepare for
- evangelism, we are preparing to fail in
- evangelism.’

Even with faithful prayer and a spiritually-empowered gospel message, people can still choose to reject the gospel. But the power of salvation is God’s alone, and we can trust God to be at work through our prayers even when we don’t immediately see an outcome. The outcome of our evangelism is in the hands of the one who hears our message and God himself. Our success and failure in evangelism isn’t

measured by how many people are saved, but by our obedience to do what God asks us – to pray and to proclaim.

Our primary motivation to pray is that God commands us to do so. However, this motivation should mature from responding to God's simple command as we grow in relationship with our heavenly Father, to the extent that we would lovingly desire to glorify him and seek his goodness and blessings for our own lives and for those we pray for. We discover God's will more clearly as we know him more fully. The more we pray, the more we know God. The more we know God, the more we desire to pray so that his will may be done on earth as in heaven.

What is the state of our prayer lives? For some, prayer comes naturally. For others, it takes more effort. Preachers could ask themselves this question to self-evaluate: 'Do I find it easier to preach or to pray?' How often would you happily continue to preach beyond your allotted sermon time, and how frequently do you continue to pray beyond the limits of your regular devotion/quiet time? What about singing worship songs? Many find it easy to get lost in the music and experience of corporate singing, yet not so when it comes to prayer.

If we want to be effective in evangelism we need to be prayerful people, whether it comes naturally or not. The length of our prayers doesn't matter, but the sincerity does. As we continue to sincerely petition the Lord for his transforming work in our own lives and the lives of others, we find that our capacity to spend longer in his presence will grow. This time will honour him, be good for us, and be a blessing to others.

Discuss: The Westminster Shorter Catechism describes prayer as, 'an offering up of our desires unto God, for things agreeable to his will, in the name of Christ, with confession of our sins, and thankful acknowledgement of his mercies.' How does this description shape your understanding of prayer, specifically in relationship to evangelism?

Beyond offering to pray for others as part of our evangelism, we can understand and apply

prayer in at least three ways when it comes to preparing ourselves to share the gospel:

First, as part of the process through which we can **grow in maturity** as children of God and as disciples of Jesus Christ who help others to grow likewise (Ephesians 4:14-16).

Second, as the way by which God's power can bring **opportunities to witness** and work through us and shift our evangelism from merely marketing the Christian faith to **stirring hearts** from death to life (Colossians 4:2-6).

Third, as the way by which we can be **equipped with spiritual armour** to defend against the attacks of the enemy as we go onto the front lines of spiritual battle, and to **open the eyes** of any who may have been deceived by his schemes that they may instead see and know the light of Jesus (Ephesians 6:10-20).

Just as Paul did with Timothy, let us urge and encourage each other to be prayerful for *all* people, and that it would be pleasing to God as we submit to his power in the hope that the world would come to know and submit to his saving truth.

DISCUSSION (10 MINS)

1. What are your prayer habits or disciplines before preaching the gospel or engaging with a specific witnessing opportunity?
2. Do you use prayer within the task of your evangelism? If so, how?
3. How do you understand and deal with the issue of 'unanswered' prayer, and how would you help someone understand this idea if asked while sharing your faith with them?

● 'The coming revival must begin with a great revival of prayer. It is in the closet, with the door shut, that the sound of abundance of rain will first be heard. An increase of secret prayer with ministers will be the sure harbinger of blessing.'

ANDREW MURRAY

PRAYER AND ACCOUNTABILITY, PART ONE (20–30 MINS)

In pairs or threes, spend some time reflecting on your prayer life, patterns and habits. Be honest with each other about your strengths and weaknesses in your approach to prayer and resolve to grow in making space for personal prayer each day.

Pray together in the following three ways.

1. Pray for each other. Pray that God would help us to be a humble people who grow daily in our relationship with him.
2. Spend time praying for your community, town or city. Pray for the lost to be saved and ask God to heal our land. (Broadly: 'God, give me opportunities to share today; God, stir hearts to life today').
3. Spend time praying for yourself. Pray to be equipped in the full armour of God as you head out onto the front line.

APPLICATION (5 MINS)

Write a list of at least five friends, family members, colleagues or even strangers that you are aware of who do not yet know Jesus as Lord. Keep this on your phone, in your wallet, in your Bible or somewhere accessible where you will see it every day. Faithfully pray for these people every day, asking God to revive them and bring them to trust in him.

ACCOUNTABILITY, PART TWO (15 MINS)

Complete accountability forms, share in pairs or smaller groups and pray for one another to close.

DON'T FORGET...

We love to hear how God has been at work in your prayer and through your evangelism. You can share your stories with us at **advancegroups.org** and encourage others in their journey as you do.

SESSION SIX

THE DEVOTION OF THE EVANGELIST

How do we maintain authenticity in our lives and our evangelism? Building on our exploration of prayer in the previous session, here we explore the importance of the full devotional life in our Christian walk and our evangelism.

SESSION IN A SENTENCE

Devotion moves us to a place of holiness as we spend time with our holy, heavenly Father, which in turn prepares us to be effective ambassadors of the kingdom, carrying a message of hope on our lips that is shown to be authentic by the transformation of our hearts.

SESSION BACKGROUND

Returning from their annual pilgrimage to Jerusalem for the Passover festival, Mary and Joseph realised that Jesus was missing. After three distressing days, they were eventually reunited with their son, finding him with the teachers in the temple precincts. Jesus was sat among the wise teachers, learning from them, but also contributing and astonishing them with his remarkable understanding of scripture at just 12 years of age. When asked by Mary why he would worry his parents by wandering off as he did, Jesus appears confused by the question.

Jesus' confusion is prompted because he rightly assumes that you can only be lost or missing if those trying to find you don't know where you are. How could they not have known that he would be in his Father's house? This is the natural place for him to be. It would be like

looking everywhere *except* the White House when trying to track down the US president, only to be baffled when you find him at his desk in the Oval Office, and asking exasperatedly, 'Where have you been?'

Luke recounts specific language in Jesus' response to Mary that reveals his claim to a unique relationship to God: 'Didn't you know I had to be in **my Father's** house?' (Luke 2:49). There seems to be no equivalent to this statement anywhere in scripture, apart from when Jesus is speaking. Jesus' first recorded words see him declaring that he is the Son of God.

The work of the cross means we can be adopted into God's family. We are given the right to be called children of God by faith in Jesus, so the question for us becomes: how natural is it for us to spend time in *our* Father's house?

It is in the place of devotion that we discover more fully who we truly are. We grow. We are refined. We are emboldened. We are convicted of our wrongdoing. We are instructed in our purpose. We are fulfilled in our existence. Through devotion we are made holy as he is holy. Devotion is central to the Christian life because it forms holiness, and it is crucial to the task of evangelism because the gospel is to be lived and proclaimed by a holy people.

God is asking us as we come into his presence, not with exasperation, but delight: 'Where have you been?'

SESSION GUIDE

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CATCH UP (10–20 MINS)

Take time to catch up with one another, sharing stories, encouragements, feedback on opportunities and anything else that would encourage the group. Reflect on your prayer lists (Session Five – Application, Part Two) and any updates since you began faithfully praying for those people every day.

PRAYER

Commit the time to the Lord and pray over any situations, positive or challenging, highlighted in the catch up time.

TEACHING (25–35 MINS)

Work through the following teaching material in your own way, either by reading it word for word, or by reworking it into your own presentation.

- 'Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.'

MARK 1:35

We 'devote' ourselves to all sorts of things in life. We might devote ourselves to family and friends, to upholding positive values, to pursuing dreams. We might be devoted to a hobby, a sports team, or getting a high score on whatever the latest mobile gaming craze may be.

Jesus was devoted to his family and friends too. He was devoted to Joseph, learning the family trade from him. He was devoted to his mother, ensuring that the apostle John would take responsibility to care for her after his death, resurrection and ascension. He was devoted to fellowship with his friends, seemingly spending more time with them than he did preaching to the multitudes.

With this clear devotion on display, what does Jesus mean when he says he came to set families against each other (Luke 12:53)? We can

begin to make sense of it in light of his *primary* devotion to his Father in heaven, a devotion which came at the cost of all other devotions, no matter how virtuous they might have been. Jesus was not saying that it is wrong to love your parents, or that he specifically wanted to tear families apart for the sake of it. Jesus knew that anything that takes your primary devotion away from God will ultimately lead to unholiness. It is through our devotion to God that we are made holy.

Discuss: What are some things that can easily pull your devotion away from God? Talk especially about things that are not bad in and of themselves, but can easily become distractions from or barriers to submission to God.

It is possible to become more devoted to evangelism than to Jesus himself! But we exist to worship the king – not a ministry or calling. We must be grounded in spiritual living that listens effectively to God and is devoted to him above all.

No matter the demands of his ministry or earthly relationships, Jesus prioritised his personal relationship with his Father, taking the time to retreat, pray and listen. For Jesus, being with his Father was the most natural place for him to be. Mark's gospel tells us of three such occasions of retreat. Spend some time reflecting on these passages:

MARK 1:35–39: RISING EARLY TO PRAY IN A SOLITARY PLACE

What does this teach us about receiving instruction from God?

MARK 6:45–46: RETREATING TO THE MOUNTAINTOP TO PRAY

What does this teach us about being refreshed by God?

MARK 14:32–41: PRAYING IN GETHSEMANE BEFORE BEING ARRESTED

What does this teach us about bringing the weight of our circumstances to God?

Informal and spontaneous prayer throughout the day is great, but setting aside intentional time to pray and read the Bible is crucial. Some are great at praying and not so good at opening the Bible; others have a great Bible study ethic but come unstuck when it's time to pray. It can be really effective to combine the two by reading a chapter or more of scripture and then praying over what the passage says and how it can be applied to our lives. It's also important to spend time adoring and offering thanksgiving to God, and bringing your requests and your needs to him.

Jesus had no need to confess any sin, but confession is a central part of the prayer he teaches his disciples: 'Forgive us our sins...' (Matthew 6; Luke 11). David's prayer of confession and repentance in Psalm 51 is a great example for our own approach to humbling ourselves before God in repentant prayer when necessary.

The first step towards holiness is recognising that God is holy and that we are not. We need him, and as we take the time daily to step into his presence, the transforming power of his love will ensure that we are never the same again. It is this transformation that stands as the strongest evidence that the gospel is true and has the power to save. As we proclaim the goodness of God and share the Jesus story, those we reach can grow in confidence of the authenticity of our gospel message by examining the work of God through our wholly-devoted lives.

Jesus has made the way for us to be holy through the saving work of the cross, calling us to die to our old life and put our trust in him. As we walk into new life, Jesus has shown us what it looks like to pursue holiness through daily devotion to the Father. We are not perfect, and we will not always get it right in life, but as we bend the knee before our gracious and holy king, we can make ourselves available for his grace to heal and his power to help that we might become holy as he is holy.

DISCUSSION (15 MINS)

1. Do you make enough space for daily devotion in your life? What are some of your good habits, and what habits might need some work?

2. Do you notice a correlation between the health of your devotional life and the quality of your evangelism?
3. How can you open yourself up to more instruction, refreshment, perspective and repentance through intentional devotion in the coming weeks?

'The purpose of [spiritual] Disciplines is freedom. Our aim is the freedom, not the Discipline. The moment we make the Discipline our central focus we will turn it into law and lose the corresponding freedom... Let us forever centre on Christ and view the spiritual Disciplines as a way of drawing us closer to his heart.'

RICHARD FOSTER

APPLICATION (5 MINS)

Begin praying through the Psalms, spending a few minutes every day reading and praying on top of any other Bible study and prayer time. If you can, stretch yourself to keep it up for a whole month or an entire year. You can do this by simply opening your Bible and working through the Psalms one by one, or by following a devotional plan such as Tim Keller's *My Rock; My Refuge: A Year of Daily Devotions in the Psalms*.

PRAYER

Give thanks to our heavenly Father that he desires relationship with his children. Commit prayerfully to a life of devotion that moves us from being spiritual tourists to being children who dwell in the Father's house and in his presence. Ask God to help us become holy as he is holy, and that the transformation of our lives would be the foundation upon which our evangelism is built.

ACCOUNTABILITY (15 MINS)

Discuss in pairs what things in your life can threaten to - or already have - become an idol for you and take away your primary devotion from God. Gently question each other as a way of helping to look beyond any blind spots you might have. Complete accountability forms, share in pairs or smaller groups and pray for one another.

SESSION SEVEN

THE SUBMISSION OF THE EVANGELIST

In this session we will expand upon the idea of holiness explored in the previous session, specifically as it relates to the identity of God, the hope of the gospel and the life of the Christian. We will explore accountability as being crucial to the journey of a disciple.

SESSION IN A SENTENCE

God desires for his people to be holy as he is holy, and it is through submission to the Holy Spirit and accountability in community that we can grow in holiness.

SESSION BACKGROUND

The words *holiness* and *holy* appear more than 700 times throughout the Bible. Holiness is a central theme of the Bible, and God desires for it to be a central reality of our lives.

God is holy, which means he is set apart. He is perfect, sovereign and unique, and there is no other like him. We are not holy: every single one of us has fallen short of the perfect standard of our holy God. The writer to the Hebrews tells us that only the holy will see the Lord (Hebrews 12:14) and Jesus tells us that the pure of heart will see God (Matthew 5:8). Our lack of holiness is a major problem for humanity if we are going to have any hope of a relationship with God. How can the unholy become holy, acceptable to the Lord and able to dwell in his kingdom?

The good news is that Jesus has provided the way by which an unholy people can enter the

presence of the perfect holy God and dwell with him forever (Ephesians 5:25–26). Those who put their trust in Jesus share in his holiness, stepping into a brand-new life. True life is *holy life*.

Holiness is also the theme of Jesus' message about saltiness in Matthew 5:13. In the same way that salt is useless if it loses its flavour, our message is hopeless if we lose our distinctive holiness. Even though our lives are an unfinished work this side of eternity, we are called to live differently so that the world might recognise the authenticity of the message we proclaim.

- 'God's love for us in Christ, as poured out by
- the Spirit (Romans 5:5), has brought us into
- fellowship with Him and the Son; from there,
- we have come to behold the beauty of His
- holiness, and by beholding it, we become as
- lovely as He is.'

JACKIE HILL PERRY

The gospel is a holy message, testifying to a holy God who acted in a holy way to make it possible for an unholy people to be restored to their true identity – as the holy people of a holy kingdom.

SESSION GUIDE

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CATCH UP (10–20 MINS)

Take time to catch up with one another, sharing stories, encouragements, feedback on opportunities and anything else that would

encourage the group. Ask the group to share about their experiences of reading prayerfully through the Psalms (Session Six – Application).

PRAYER

Commit the time to the Lord and pray over any situations, positive or challenging, highlighted in the catch up time.

TEACHING (30–40 MINS)

Work through the following teaching material in your own way, either by reading it word for word, or by reworking it into your own presentation. There are three core scriptures for this session.

1. GOD ALONE IS HOLY

'I will make known my holy name among my people Israel. I will no longer let my holy name be profaned, and the nations will know that I the Lord am the Holy One in Israel.'

EZEKIEL 39:7

The Bible reveals who God is so that we can know and worship him in spirit and truth. As we read we discover that he is the one true God. Though indivisible, he exists in triune nature, (Father, Son and Holy Spirit). He is perfect. He is eternal. He is king.

But what the Bible makes especially clear about God is that he is holy. Holiness is the primary characteristic of God. It means that there is no one like him and that he is set apart from all others: no other being can match up to his identity, to his character, or to the reality of who he is. And it is this characteristic God desires for his people – that we would become a holy people, set apart in our worship and obedience to him, a people of righteousness and purity (Leviticus 11:45). Our lack of holiness – our rejection of God's holiness – has created a catastrophic problem for humanity. God's kingdom is a perfect kingdom, but we have chosen imperfection and exclusion from his presence.

2. THE HOLINESS OF JESUS MAKES POSSIBLE THE HOLINESS OF HIS PEOPLE

'...but because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood. Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them. Such a high priest truly meets our need – one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens. Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself.'

HEBREWS 7:24-27

We are made in God's image and have the potential to be a holy people, but our rebelliousness gets in the way. If God were to allow even the smallest fragment of imperfection into his kingdom, it would cease to be perfect. So, our rejection of holiness excludes us from the holiness of God and the blessings of his kingdom.

The gospel tells us that Jesus stepped in to be our substitute on the cross, taking the death that we had chosen for ourselves. He was able to take our place because he is perfectly holy (without sin or blemish). The unpayable debt of the world's rebelliousness has been charged to the account of the perfectly obedient Jesus. He has settled the debt that we could never have paid through the inexhaustible treasure of his holiness. Now, when God looks at those who put their trust in Jesus Christ, he sees not the imperfection (unholiness) of man, but the perfection (holiness) of Jesus.

Think about it like this: can you think of a time when you wore a piece of clothing that made you feel especially good about yourself? Perhaps you were getting dressed up for a special occasion, and as you stepped out of the house you felt a little more confident. When we put our trust in Jesus, the Bible tells us God credits the righteousness of Jesus to us and we are *clothed* in his perfection (Romans 5:18; Philippians 3:9; 1 Corinthians 1:30).

Paul tells us that instead of gratifying the desires of the flesh, we should 'clothe ourselves with Christ,' literally wearing his goodness (Romans 13:14). Compare this to James, who implores his

readers to rid themselves of (better translated 'take off') all moral filth (James 1:21). We are to take off the former things that were against God and give them to Christ, and in a great exchange he replaces them with his own righteousness.

Have you ever been turned away from somewhere because you didn't meet the standard of the dress code? The entry requirement for God's perfect kingdom is perfect holiness, which we do not possess. But as an imperfect people we can enter his perfect kingdom because we now fit the 'dress code' through Christ. Nothing less than perfection will do, but nothing less than the perfection of Christ is offered for to us to wear. On the day we finally enter the full reality of the kingdom, we won't be bringing our imperfection with us, but the clothing of righteousness.

3. SUBMISSION TO THE SPIRIT AND SELF-DISCIPLINE PRODUCE HOLY LIVING

- 'You were taught, with regard to your
- former way of life, to put off your old self,
- which is being corrupted by its deceitful
- desires; to be made new in the attitude
- of your minds; and to put on the new self,
- created to be like God in true righteousness
- and holiness.'

EPHESIANS 4:23-24

God desires for us to grow in maturity, not repeating the same mistakes over and over as we live for him today. We are covered by his grace, but the evidence of sincere and authentic faith is transformation and growth (discipleship). We must not be content to wear the righteousness of Christ as a get-out-of-jail-free card, but choose to honour the cost of the righteousness we wear by living in obedience to the one who paid the price for us. This is our discipleship journey: moving from our initial moment of new birth (justification) to an ongoing development of new life (sanctification).

Not only does this give us an assurance of the future eternal perfection that awaits us, but it gives us the means by which we can live differently today.

The transformation that takes place in the life of a disciple is powerfully expressed by Paul's exploration of the spiritual fruit that flows from

the life of a true follower of Jesus (Galatians 5:22-23). The final facet of the fruit mentioned is self-control, or self-discipline. God, by his Spirit, empowers us with self-discipline – but we have to partner with him (Philippians 2:12-13).

Here are four practical things we can do to grow in holiness and obedience to God:

DEVOTION

The more time we spend in God's Word, the more we will know who God wants us to become. Likewise, by spending time in prayer we can also ask God to help us overcome our weaknesses and temptation. To spend time with Jesus is to learn what it means to be holy while being empowered to become so.

SELF-AWARENESS

As we read the Word, so the Word reads us, helping us to examine our own lives and become increasingly self-aware. This self-awareness helps us to recognise our weakness, and means that we can begin to deny ourselves the things that cause us harm.

COMMUNITY

Being watchful of the life that we live is not only achieved through self-awareness. By committing to Christian fellowship and community, we open ourselves up to loving examination by those around us. Investing in community breeds opportunities for others to speak into your life, and for you to do likewise. Being open with others might bring challenges, but the risk of vulnerability should not deter us from the biblical ideal of journeying graciously together to grow as individuals and as the family of God.

CONFESSION

James tells us to confess our sins to one another, not for absolution but accountability (James 5:16). Finding a group of trusted friends with whom you can be completely honest and transparent about your struggles, temptations and failures is essential. The enemy wants to keep your struggle in the dark where he can twist it into shame, but God is calling us to journey together, helping to hold one another to account by bringing our failures into the light where he can restore and redeem. Failure

need never be final with God: accountability is a way by which we can deal with our struggles in humility and submission to his grace.

As evangelists, the message we proclaim is not just about seeing responses but creating disciples who grow and mature – a holy people (Colossians 1:28–29). It is authentic disciples who will carry God's message with integrity and power into the world. It is a holy task for a holy people.

DISCUSSION (15 MINS)

1. How would you describe the holiness of God to someone who doesn't know him?
2. How do we 'clothe ourselves' in Christ?
3. What helps you to be, or hinders you from being, authentically accountable to others?

● 'If you think you can walk in holiness without keeping up perpetual fellowship with Christ, you have made a great mistake. If you would be holy, you must live close to Jesus.'

● **CHARLES SPURGEON**

APPLICATION (5 MINS)

If you don't already have a small group of trusted friends (separate to the accountability aspect of this Advance group) that you meet up with regularly and to whom you can be completely honest, open and accountable, think about who you could do this with and get something organised as soon as possible. If you are already doing this, share with someone else who isn't why it is important for you, and help get them set up with any advice, encouragement or tips you can offer.

PRAYER

Recognise and celebrate God's holiness in prayer. Seek his forgiveness for our rebellion, and give thanks that because of Jesus' saving work we can share in his righteousness. Ask that God would continue to work in your life to make you holy. Commit to living with discipline in submission to the Spirit's power as you seek to grow as disciples and become ever more

fit-for-purpose as a holy people with a holy message.

ACCOUNTABILITY (25 MINS)

In pairs, use this time as an opportunity to confess to one another any way in which you find yourself falling short repeatedly. By bringing this to the attention of the other person, resolve to ask each other from time to time about how you are getting on in this area and continually pray for one another.

Complete accountability forms, share in pairs or smaller groups and pray for one another.

SESSION EIGHT

THE CHARACTER OF THE EVANGELIST

The most holy Christians are the most humble, so what does it look like to have humility in our evangelism?

SESSION IN A SENTENCE

Humility is a chief virtue of any ambassador of God's kingdom: modelled for us perfectly in Jesus, refined and empowered within us by the Holy Spirit to the glory of our Heavenly Father.

SESSION BACKGROUND

From the moment the angel Gabriel tells Mary she is expecting a child, humility – a central theme of the Jesus story – emerges. Mary worships God and gives thanks to him that he has been mindful of her, his servant, in her *humble* state. In other words, she says, 'I'm just an ordinary girl... why would God want to use me?'

Have you ever wondered why God would use you?

Sometimes we can become self-assured in our gifts and talents, believing that God chooses to use us because of these things. God's call is for our character, not our talent, and the character that pleases him most has humility at its centre. Mary continues in her praise by singing of how her holy God scatters the proud and lifts up the humble. As a young Jewish woman, her knowledge of the Old Testament would have supplied her everything she needed to make this claim about God with confidence. And now she was experiencing this reality for herself. God has always chosen to use the humble for his purposes in the most unexpected ways, defying

the wisdom of the world and revealing his power and grace through the least likely people. The first step towards being used for great things by God is in realising our total reliance upon him.

Jesus' birth couldn't have taken place in more humble circumstances. The king of kings was laid in a manger – an animal feeding trough! The riches of the birth of a king were replaced with the poverty of the birth of a nobody. Our reconciliation to the creator of all things was initiated in staggering humility.

Wherever we look in scripture – whether it's Isaiah 53, where we hear about the suffering servant of the Lord who will be pierced for our transgressions, or Jesus' declaration about coming to serve rather than be served, or the washing of his disciples' feet, or his submission to his Father's will in the garden of Gethsemane, or his allowing himself to be beaten, mocked and crucified when, with a single word, he could have wiped out anyone who caused him harm – the Bible presents a portrait of a servant king who defeats the curse of human pride by the power of holy humility.

God rescues his people in the very way he intends for them to live. Pride led us to destruction, and humility will bring us back.

● 'For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.'

● **2 CORINTHIANS 8:9**

SESSION GUIDE

CATCH UP (10–20 MINS)

Take time to catch up with one another, sharing stories, encouragements, feedback on opportunities and anything else that would encourage the group. For smaller groups, ask each person to share one win and one struggle since the last meeting. For larger groups, select four or five people to share specific testimonies since last meeting.

PRAYER

Commit the time to the Lord and pray over any situations, positive or challenging, highlighted in the catch up time.

TEACHING (25–35 MINS)

Work through the following teaching material in your own way, either by reading it word for word, or by reworking it into your own presentation.

- ‘Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.
- In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:
- Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;
- rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.
- And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!’

PHILIPPIANS 2:3–8

To paraphrase C.S. Lewis: ‘Being humble doesn’t mean thinking less of yourself, it means thinking of yourself less.’

The Bible doesn’t ask us to be self-deprecating or to have low self-esteem. You are cherished and loved by God – and called his precious child. But there is a fine line: thinking too highly of ourselves puts us in danger of the kind of pride that got humanity into the sin business in the first place. To think too little of ourselves is to reject the identity that God has bought for us, whereas to think too much of ourselves is to fail to recognise the sovereignty and kingship of God.

Pride sits at the heart of all sin. Proverbs tell us that, ‘When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with humility comes wisdom’ (Proverbs 11:2). The Bible’s wisdom literature repeatedly affirms the virtue of humility as the opposite posture of pride and celebrates the blessings that flow from it.

We live in an age of self-promotion. Can you imagine if David had slain Goliath today? The temptation for a blood-still-fresh, severed-head victory selfie would be strong! Many of us would surely welcome songs to be written about our achievements, movies to be made and titles to be bestowed, yet not once in all of David’s psalms does he mention his victory, a point to which the great evangelist D. L. Moody drew attention in a famous sermon on humility. Today, at the first sniff of greatness we are encouraged to champion ourselves, to build our status and our platform. But God does not ask you to build a ministry or to elevate yourself to a position. He’s far more interested in your character, and how you might be elevated to his purposes through humility (Luke 14:11).

Jesus took the lowly road, the position of the servant. He is the king who came not to be served but to serve (Mark 10:45). Notice what John says about Jesus immediately before the washing of his disciples’ feet:

- ‘Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist.’

JOHN 13:3–4

Knowing that all things were under his power, and knowing the fullness of his identity, Jesus chose to be a servant to demonstrate the

will of his Father. You may have done a Bible study on this which involved actually washing one another's feet. Yet washing someone's feet today doesn't quite do justice to the full significance of what Jesus was showing his disciples. It's hard for us to comprehend just how uncomfortable it would have made them to have their rabbi - their messiah - undertaking this duty as a mark of his humility and servant heartedness.

Think of it like this: you hear a knock at the door to find the ruling monarch of your nation on your doorstep. They proceed to come into your house, pick up your baby and begin to change its very full nappy. The stench is awful and you look on in horror as your baby's waste makes contact with royal hands. And yet the monarch looks completely at ease with the situation, even enjoying their time with the child, in this unpleasant but necessary activity.

Don't forget that as Jesus was washing his disciples' feet, he knew that Judas was about to betray him. He knew that Peter was going to deny him. He knew that his followers were still often prideful and weak men, and yet in his power and majesty he humbled himself before them, setting an example for them to follow. Not merely were they to wash each other's feet, but they were to become humble servants in all things.

There's a well-known anecdote about Charles Spurgeon, who, upon seeing one of his preaching students step up to the pulpit with a little too much arrogant swagger only to come down afterwards crestfallen at how badly the sermon had gone, supposedly remarked: 'If you'd gone up the way you came down, you might have come down the way you went up.'

No matter the grandeur of our calling, the impressiveness of our gifting, the size of our opportunity, or the reputation of our ministry, we are powerless to save anyone. The wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23), but the wages of humility is life (Proverbs 22:4). Through the humble suffering servant who took our place on the cross, we can now place our trust in him and take up our own cross by humbly dying to our old prideful existence. We can move from death to life. Humility is not merely a virtue, it is the only appropriate response we can make to Jesus when we recognize he is Lord.

- 'For the LORD takes delight in his people; he crowns the humble with victory.'

PSALM 149:4

Humility in evangelism does not mean that we pander to people, water down the gospel, or back off from sharing the truth where it might cause offence. The gospel is often an offensive message to hardened hearts. Equally, boldness in evangelism does not mean that we ram the gospel down people's throats with little consideration of how we might help them to truly understand the hope we carry. Humility in evangelism means at least the following four things.

Discuss: Take some time to talk through these four areas of humility in evangelism. How might you apply these principles?

1. HUMBLY SERVE THE LORD

Our primary responsibility and desire should be to serve God, however challenging, uncomfortable or costly it may be. Are we willing to put on the nature of a servant and be obedient to our master?

2. HUMBLY EMPTY YOURSELF

Humility involves emptying ourselves so that we can be filled with the Holy Spirit. This is a humble act in itself, but when we invite the Spirit to take up residence in our lives, we move from being committed to humility to being empowered for it.

3. HUMBLY ACCEPT HIS WORD

Humble yourself before God's Word. Learn to read it well and accept it on its own terms, not forcing it to say what you want it to say to suit your needs. Humbly seek to hear God's truth, no matter how challenging it may prove to your preconceived or culture-shaped ideas. Discovering God's truth and applying his wisdom requires humility.

4. HUMBLY SERVE THE LOST

Proclamation is essential, but we must also love those to whom we proclaim. We must serve those in need. As we aim to love people

well we must listen to them well. If all we ever do is speak at them, then we are likely to miss important connection points between the gospel and their lives and minimize the possibility of a meaningful relationship with them.

By honouring God, making space for his Spirit to work in us, and building upon the truth of his Word we can be effective servants into the world – who meet practical needs, listen well to people (a massively neglected area of evangelism), and faithfully proclaim the Jesus story. If we want to be fruitful in our evangelism, our starting posture must be humility before the Lord. D.L. Moody put it this way in his sermon on humility:

- 'I have a pear tree on my farm which is very
- beautiful; it appears to be one of the most
- beautiful trees on my place. Every branch
- seems to be reaching up to the light and
- stands almost like a wax candle, but I never
- get any fruit from it. I have another tree,
- which was so full of fruit last year that the
- branches almost touched the ground. If we
- only get down low enough, my friends, God
- will use every one of us to His glory.'

DISCUSSION (15 MINS)

1. Are there areas of your life in which you struggle with humility?
2. Is there an inherent conflict between sharing the gospel with boldness and sharing it with humility?
3. How can we lovingly address a lack of humility, or the presence of false humility, in others?

- 'I am persuaded that love and humility are
- the highest attainments in the school of
- Christ and the brightest evidences that he is
- indeed our master.'

JOHN NEWTON

APPLICATION (5 MINS)

Think carefully about how you could serve and bless those around you in an unexpected and costly way. Does your church or ministry employ

a cleaner? Tell them to take the day off to spend with their family or in spiritual retreat and do their tasks for them. Be the first to make tea or coffee in the office each day. Tip your waiter generously after a meal and write them a note expressing the love of God to them... Be creative and be intentional.

On the one hand, none of these things could capture the full effect of Jesus washing his disciples' feet, but on the other, neither should they simply be so-called 'random acts of kindness'. These are the intentional actions of thoughtful, loving and humble people who see opportunities all around to bless others in ways that point back to the suffering servant. We don't do these things to win favour with God or look good in front of others (maybe think twice before shouting about the things you do on social media). We do them both as a way in which we can learn to grow in humility, and as a natural product of the humility that God is growing in us.

PRAYER

Give thanks for the humility of Christ and his example of servant-heartedness. Ask God to help you see yourself as he sees you, and that you might grow in humility and wisdom daily. Pray for each other, that you would be bold and humble in your proclamation of the gospel.

ACCOUNTABILITY (15 MINS)

Invite anyone who struggles with pride to acknowledge this – which is admittedly a hard thing for a prideful person to do – and pray with and for them, that God would help you all grow in humility and develop servant hearts.

Complete accountability forms, share in pairs or smaller groups and pray for one another.



SESSION NINE

THE OPPORTUNITY OF THE EVANGELIST

One mark of evangelistic gifting is the ability to see - and a desire to seize upon - any and every opportunity to share the gospel with those around us. In this session we will explore how we can make the most of every opportunity.

SESSION IN A SENTENCE

We should always be ready to seize upon any gospel opportunity that comes our way, explaining the good news with clarity in every situation and circumstance.

SESSION BACKGROUND

Peter tells us that we should always be ready to share the gospel with anyone who enquires about the hope we have (1 Peter 3:15). Paul tells Timothy to be ready to preach the gospel in every season and circumstance of life (2 Timothy 4:2), and writes elsewhere that we must make the most of every opportunity (Colossians 4:5). Jesus demonstrates a lifestyle of readiness to serve and share at all times. Sometimes that means looking in unexpected places to see an opportunity (as with Zacchaeus in Luke 19:1-10), being ready in socially-challenging situations (like with the Samaritan woman in John 4:1-26), being bold in places of privilege (remember the sinful woman at the Pharisee's house in Luke 7:36-50), sharing with social outcasts (like healing lepers in Luke 17:11-19), or declaring truth during your own suffering (as with the thief on the cross in Luke 23:39-43)... and so the list goes on.

Billy Graham's crusades - through which he preached to more people than any other person who has ever lived - were the most famous aspect of his evangelism. But this wasn't the only way in which he shared the gospel throughout his life. Whether meeting with presidents or royalty, appearing on mainstream talk shows, bringing aid to areas hit by natural disaster, ministering to troops overseas, or sharing with individuals he met along the way, he was always ready, prepared and willing to share the gospel with those he met.

Billy Graham's evangelistic preparedness wasn't motivated by a heightened interpretation of the great commission. His motivation to see and seize upon any and every opportunity came from having truly understood, received, and submitted to the gospel himself.

One mark of those gifted as evangelists is that they are likely to have a (super)natural compassion for the lost that extends beyond the satisfaction of fulfilling an evangelistic engagement or preaching opportunity. An evangelist is desperate for everyone to hear and receive the gospel, and, even under threat of rebuke and harsh consequences, would not be able to stop themselves from talking about Jesus at every opportunity (Acts 4:18-20). But the truth is, the more *any* believer - not just those gifted as evangelists - understands the good news for themselves and lives within its precious grace, the more they will grow in compassion for the lost, to share in God's own compassion as we grow into new life in his own image.

The remarkable true story of Desmond Doss, told in the Hollywood film *Hacksaw Ridge*,

reveals a man who was compelled to enlist as combat medic during the Second World War, but who refused to pick up a gun under any circumstances because of his devout faith in God. Deployed to the Japanese island of Okinawa, Doss found himself behind enemy lines on 'Hacksaw Ridge'. Under heavy fire from the enemy, yet able to hear the cries of the wounded – both American and Japanese – Doss began to save anyone he could, which involved lowering them down from the ridge using a makeshift rope pulley system. Doss was shot in the arm by a sniper and was later discovered to have seventeen pieces of shrapnel in his body, and yet he kept going for as long as he was able, to save as many as possible.

Interviewed about this incredible feat years later, Doss explained that whenever exhaustion kicked in and he felt that he couldn't help anyone else he prayed, 'Lord, help me get one more.' Doss saved at least 75 men that day.

Doss's prayer is the cry of the evangelist. It is the cry of all who share the heart of God for the lost. 'Lord, through every opportunity, however hard or costly, help me get one more.'

SESSION GUIDE

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CATCH UP (10–20 MINS)

Take time to catch up with one another, sharing stories, encouragements, feedback on opportunities and anything else that would encourage the group. For smaller groups, ask each person to share one win and one struggle since last meeting. For larger groups, select four or five people to share specific testimony since last meeting.

PRAYER

Commit the time to the Lord and pray over any situations, positive or challenging, highlighted in the catch up time.

TEACHING (20–30 MINS)

Work through the following teaching material in your own way, either by reading it word

for word, or by reworking it into your own presentation.

• 'One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer – at three in the afternoon. Now a man who was lame from birth was being carried to the temple gate called Beautiful, where he was put every day to beg from those going into the temple courts. When he saw Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for money. Peter looked straight at him, as did John. Then Peter said, "Look at us!" So the man gave them his attention, expecting to get something from them. Then Peter said, "Silver or gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk."'

ACTS 3:1–6

It's easy to miss opportunities. Many of the regrets people face in later life revolve around missed opportunities – the things they wish they had done if only they had had the confidence to try, or had they worried less about what people might think of them.

The world of social media has given rise to a particular phenomenon – the 'Fear Of Missing Out', or FOMO. In a constantly-connected world, we can always see what other people are doing – and when it looks like others are having a better life experience than ours, FOMO can kick in. Generally speaking, FOMO is considered to be an unhelpful and often unhealthy side-effect of our connectedness, but how about when we read the Bible? Have you ever experienced FOMO as you've read about what Jesus disciples and the early church got up to in the book of Acts?

Reading about the Apostles in the New Testament can leave you feeling like you are missing out on the same level of adventure that they experienced in sharing the gospel. While most of us don't crave the scary stuff – like being stoned to death(!) – we would love to see and experience more of the signs and wonders that accompanied the apostles' ministry.

In Acts 3, Peter and John find themselves presented with an everyday situation: a lame beggar is asking them for some money. It would have been easy for the apostles to simply walk

past this unfortunate man, or to have given a small donation and moved on.

Look at how specific the language is here: instead of moving on, Peter and John look right at him. The NRSV translation sees Peter and John looking *intently* at the man, who in-turn *fixed his attention* upon them in expectation of receiving something.

Discuss: How intently are you looking at the world around you? How good are you at seeing and seizing upon the opportunities that arise to share the gospel?

The lame man saw an opportunity to get the thing he thought he needed most: money. Fortunately for him, the apostles were paying attention to the opportunity in front of them, meaning they were able to give him what he really needed most: Jesus. It was a love for the lost that caused Peter and John to stop, not simply a compassion for his disability or social status.

The Bible tells us that he who honours God will in turn be honoured by God (1 Samuel 2:30). This is never more true than when we honour God in life's 'small things'. As we prove to be trustworthy in the secret place – in the smaller, less noticeable areas of life – God entrusts us with bigger things. That could be a bigger platform, but why settle only for a bigger audience? Better than a larger platform is a greater demonstration of the Holy Spirit's power in our lives. The full measure of the Spirit of the living God is available to you today as you submit to the Lord, but he seems to entrust it most fully and most often to those he knows will use it best for his service. Anyone in the Israelite army could have defeated Goliath with God's help, but it was David who stepped up and proved trustworthy in the specific task, and so the road to the throne was set.

If you want the full adventure, be faithful in the little things, those everyday opportunities, and see what God does. If you are struggling to get motivated about seizing those opportunities, ask God to take you out of your comfort zone and press on with *choosing* to be intentional even when you don't feel like it. If you are feeling guilty about missed opportunities and feel like you're letting God down, remember that God

doesn't want you to feel guilty about missed opportunities, he wants you to love the lost out of your love for him.

Not one of us is perfect. The apostles made mistakes in their evangelism and surely missed opportunities along the way. The point is not to hold ourselves to an impossible standard that piles on the pressure, but to hold ourselves in the incomparable love of God that piles on the grace. It is from this reality that we grow, maturing to become increasingly faithful to the opportunities he puts in front of us day by day.

D.L. Moody famously said, 'God has given me a lifeboat and said... "Moody, save all you can."' Your capacity to row, to see those drowning and pull them from the water is found in your love for God, and his love for the world.

Here are three practical suggestions for how to become more aware of everyday opportunities and to be faithful in them:

1. JOURNAL

There are many helpful aspects to keeping a journal. With opportunity in mind, write down details about your day. Who do you spend time with at work? Do you walk past the same homeless person regularly in your city? Who do you speak to at the school gates? Writing in your journal will keep these people fresh in your mind so that you can keep them in prayer, and it can also be used as a personal accountability check: are you being intentional about faith-based conversations with them over time? Have conversations been trivial for weeks, or have you made attempts to go deeper? If you feel able, you could also ask accountability partners to read your journal and ask you questions about these areas too.

2. CHALLENGE

Why not set challenges for yourself if you struggle to seize daily opportunities? For example, 'This week I want to talk to at least one stranger about Christ.' The challenge can be practical as well as proclamational, and should stretch you beyond your normal practice of evangelism.

3. ADVENTURE

Shift your mindset from duty to adventure. We have an evangelistic responsibility and we want

to be obedient to what God asks us to do, but without love we are missing the point. Think of the opportunities in your week ahead not simply as a burdensome duty, but as the high point of adventure. Many people in the nine-to-five grind – even those who love their jobs – can't wait for the weekend to come. Could we be people who can't wait for the next opportunity to share Jesus with the same anticipation? If we can, we will begin to embrace the adventure with a healthy mindset, so that even when it's challenging, we can dust ourselves off and go again.

In the words of Martin Luther,

- 'If he has faith, the believer cannot be
- restrained. He betrays himself. He breaks
- out. He confesses and teaches this gospel to
- the people at the risk of life itself.'

DISCUSSION (20 MINS)

1. Have you ever missed an obvious opportunity? What did you learn from the experience?
2. What are the biggest challenges you face in seizing every opportunity to share the gospel?
3. How do you intentionally *create* opportunities for sharing the gospel that otherwise might not be there?
4. Discuss the three suggestions from the teaching (Journal, Challenge, Adventure). Do you see the value of these things and could you implement them?

- 'Here is the principle – adapt your measures
- to the necessity of the people to whom you
- minister. You are to take the gospel to them
- in such modes and circumstances as will
- gain for it from them a hearing.'

CATHERINE BOOTH

APPLICATION (5 MINS)

Be intentional this month about seizing opportunities that you might usually walk past or choose not to engage with. Is there an old friend you could reach out to? Could you take

some extra time to sit and talk to a homeless person? Do you regularly get coffee from the same barista, and if so could you turn the conversation to Jesus?

It is almost certain that everyone in the group will be able to think of an opportunity in their regular week in which they could be more intentional about sharing Jesus. Commit to taking this opportunity between yourselves and hold each other to account for how you got on next month. Remember, this isn't just about setting arbitrary goals and targets, but changing habits and patterns of behaviour. What starts out as intentional practice can develop into natural behaviour over time.

Consider starting a journal.

PRAYER

Thank God that he provides us with opportunities to proclaim his gospel and share our faith with others. Ask him to provide some specific opportunities in situations where you have been hoping for breakthrough, and for general opportunities day by day. Pray for each other that you will be perceptive of the opportunities around you, and faithful to each one as it arises.

ACCOUNTABILITY (15 MINS)

In threes, discuss some obvious opportunities that you have ignored. Talk about why you think this is and really try to get to the root of the issue. Seek forgiveness from God where necessary, and encourage each other in practical ways so as to make progress in seizing these opportunities in the future.

Complete accountability forms, share in pairs or smaller groups and pray for one another.

DON'T FORGET...

Encouragement between groups is an essential part of the journey, stay active in your communication (via whatever messenger platform your group has chosen), celebrating successes and breakthroughs, sending out and responding to prayer requests and cheering one another on.

SESSION TEN

THE COMMITMENT OF THE EVANGELIST

The Bible is the revelation of the invitation from God to turn away from our rebellion and into relationship with him, through faith in Jesus Christ. How do we ensure that we are not only explaining and presenting what the gospel is, but boldly calling people to respond to and act upon what they have heard?

SESSION IN A SENTENCE

The task of evangelism is a commitment to proclaiming the full message of the gospel, which includes an invitation to the listener to change direction and experience true life through faith in Jesus Christ.

SESSION BACKGROUND

Imagine a bridegroom at the front of the church on his wedding day. He looks around the beautifully-decorated building, full of his excited friends and family in anticipation of the entrance of the bride. The woman of his dreams is due to arrive at any moment. Ten minutes go by and the bride hasn't arrived. 'It's customary for the bride to be late,' he thinks to himself. Twenty minutes go by and there's still no sign of her. He laughs nervously. Thirty minutes go by and there is *still* no bride and no word as to why she is late. Now he begins to panic a little as the murmurs of the gathered crowd begin to rise. Forty-five minutes go by, then an hour, and still no bride. The murmuring amongst the guests has reached fever pitch. What on earth is going on? Is she just running ridiculously late or has

she done the unthinkable and decided not to come at all?

The groom's mind begins to race through all the potential reasons for why she hasn't arrived, and then, suddenly, his stomach sinks as the realisation hits him. He never actually asked his bride to marry him.

An invitation is essential if the opportunity you have for someone requires a response. The shortest version of Jesus' gospel message is recorded by Mark as follows: "'The time has come,'" he said. "The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!" (Mark 1:15).

The word 'repent' can cause a few problems - mainly because many people don't know what it really means. Repent has often been associated with a 'turn or burn' approach to gospel preaching, meaning that many hear in it only a pronouncement of judgement. For many people today, the word repent doesn't sound like a 'good news' word.

But when we properly understand it, the word 'repent' holds an amazing revelation of the truth of the gospel. It literally means to have a change of mind, to change the course of your life. 'You are going the wrong way,' Jesus is saying, 'but because of me you can go the right way - the way of truth that leads to the Father.' Repentance *is* good news because it offers anyone who hears it an opportunity to know life instead of death. We have brought judgement on ourselves by our rebellion against God: repentance is both the fire alarm to alert us to

this reality and the invitation to discover Jesus as the truth that can set us free.

Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel explain that repentance (conversion) has three elements:

- 'First, it is a turning from something, which
- includes specific sins, false gods, or simply
- a life lived for oneself (1 Thessalonians
- 1:9; Revelation 9:20, 21 and 16:11). Second,
- conversion is a product of the will of God
- and his gracious working in the world
- (Acts 11:18; Romans 2:4; 2 Corinthians
- 7:10; 2 Timothy 2:25; 2 Peter 3:9). Third,
- conversion is a turning to someone, a
- commitment of one's whole life to God in
- Jesus Christ (Acts 14:15; 1 Thessalonians 1:9;
- 1 Peter 2:25). It is thus a total reorientation,
- whether spectacular or undramatic, sudden
- or gradual, emotional or calm, in which a
- person transfers his or her total allegiance
- to God.'

The first preachers of the gospel were careful to include an opportunity for their listeners to respond to their message, just as Jesus did. An appeal for repentance was made as the climax of the preaching of the Jesus story (Acts 2:37-39; 3:25-26; 4:12; 5:31; 10:43).

The gospel extends an invitation for humanity to stop running away from God. Through faith in Jesus Christ we can turn around and face God - and as we do so, allow our minds to be changed by the truth of who he is, seeing our lives transformed by the power of his Spirit.

SESSION GUIDE

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CATCH UP (10-20 MINS)

Take time to catch up with one another, sharing stories, encouragements, feedback on opportunities and anything else that would encourage the group. Share about extra opportunities you encountered in light of the last session (Session Nine - Application).

PRAYER

Commit the time to the Lord and give thanks for the opportunities you've had in the last

few weeks to share the gospel. Pray for those who have put their trust in Jesus through those opportunities.

TEACHING (30-40 MINS)

Work through the following teaching material in your own way, either by reading it word for word, or by reworking it into your own presentation.

- 'When the people heard this, they were cut
- to the heart and said to Peter and the other
- apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?"
-
- Peter replied, "Repent and be baptised,
- every one of you, in the name of Jesus
- Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And
- you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.
- The promise is for you and your children
- and for all who are far off - for all whom the
- Lord our God will call."

ACTS 2:37-39

Invitation is as much a part of the gospel message as the cross itself. Having experienced the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, Peter began to preach to the gathered crowd. Through the power of the Spirit at work in his preaching the audience was 'cut to the heart' as they heard the message of the gospel.

Can you imagine here the story taking a different turn? Just as the crowd are ready to put their trust in Jesus, Peter says, 'Thank you and goodnight!' and walks off for a well-deserved post-preaching meal with his friends. The crowd, left moved by his message but confused about how to apply it to their lives, wander away back to their lives with more questions than answers, having had no opportunity to put their faith in the Jesus Peter told them about.

Thankfully that's not what happened! Peter invited a response and called the crowd to repent - giving them a concrete way to act upon the message they have understood and to respond to the call of the Spirit they have experienced in their hearts. The full gospel includes an invitation to repentance, and an explanation of how to act upon what has been heard. The disciples were thoroughly committed to preaching the full gospel. So should we.

For those of you who regularly prepare sermons or talks, you'll know how important it is to include some ways to apply your message to everyday life. Jesus' preaching, and that of the apostles, was full of application. Jesus' first gospel presentation in Mark – a call to 'repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand' – is pretty much all application: he is saying, 'You are going the wrong way, you need to turn around and experience a transformation!'

Throughout the gospels Jesus repeatedly extends an invitation: 'Come to me all who are weary' (Matthew 11:28), 'Come and see' (John 1:39), 'Come and follow me' (Matthew 4:19), 'Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink' (John 7:37), 'Come and eat' (John 21:12).

These invitations are not arbitrary or trivial. They reveal Jesus' identity to the world and have real consequences when taken up or rejected. The defining aspect of an invitation is that it demands a response. Even to sit on the fence is to reject the invitation, for only a 'Yes' brings acceptance of the invitation and the blessings that follow.

Discuss: Take a look at these three biblical examples of invitation and discuss them as a group:

1. THE CALLING OF THE DISCIPLES (MARK 1:17)

The call of Jesus is personal

2. THE CALL UPON THE RICH YOUNG MAN (MATHEW 19:16-22)

The call of Jesus is costly

3. THE CALLING OUT OF THE DEAD (JOHN 11:43)

The call of Jesus is powerful

The opportunity to respond to the gospel is the most important aspect of our preaching. To proclaim the gospel authentically, we must always make room for an invitation to accept Jesus as Lord and Saviour.

This can be tricky – and some gospel opportunities seemingly lend themselves

better than others to inviting a response. So how can we faithfully 'invite' a response in our evangelism, whatever context and situation we find ourselves in? Whether from a platform or in a one-to-one setting, we should be committed to not simply asking people if they want to come to a Sunday church service (although do this by all means), but committed to inviting people into the kingdom of God. We don't find a step-by-step guide for this in scripture, but these principles offer a good place to start:

ASK DIRECT QUESTIONS

Keep your questions direct and simple. Having explained who Jesus is and what it means to follow him, you could simply ask: 'Would you like to put your trust in Jesus Christ today and begin new life in relationship with him?', or: 'Is there anything stopping you from putting your trust in Jesus today?'

If you used an illustration or parable that connected with your audience, use this as a focal point. For example, if sharing from the story of the prodigal son: 'God is calling you home today. Do you want to come home into the Father's embrace, just as the prodigal son did?' This question helps you to see if the listener is open to saying yes to Jesus. Next, you can bring more clarity about their response, but your initial question should be direct, simple and connected to the message you have already shared.

TAKE THE TIME NEEDED

When speaking to a crowd, wait for as long as you feel led to let the Spirit touch people's hearts. How long it takes (or how awkward it feels!) is largely irrelevant. What matters is that people have time to consider what has been shared, and that you allow the space for God to do what he wants to do. In one-to-one situations, it may be that the person needs time and space to think and therefore you can arrange to meet up again at another time to explore this again. Remember, we are not trying to force or coerce a response, we are looking for God to move in his timing. Be open to letting the response play out in the time that is needed.

MAKE THE EXPECTATION CLEAR

Explain what will happen if the person says 'yes' and what they are being invited into. For

example, explain that you will pray together, perhaps that you will give them a Bible and a reading plan, and that you will connect them with your/a church. Make it clear that their life may not instantly change for the better, but that through daily devotion to Jesus the fullness of the life that he offers will come into sharper focus. Explain something of the practical next steps, and the spiritual reality of the life of discipleship that follows our first response to Jesus.

CELEBRATE ACCEPTANCE, BE GRACIOUS OF REFUSAL

As a person indicates they want to accept the invitation, be affirming and joyful. Don't let it be manufactured – if you are not *genuinely* joyful at this response you may be getting ahead of yourself to be sharing the gospel in the first place! Equally, if the person says a qualified or outright flat no, be gracious and humble. Try to leave the person who refuses the invitation with an open-ended invitation that they can accept on their own should God reveal himself to them at another time, and if possible give them some contact details for yourself or a local church that they could connect with should this happen.

One of the most common reasons people don't respond to the gospel message is that no-one asks them to. One of the most common reasons evangelists don't call out a response is a fear that no-one will respond and then they (or the gospel) will look foolish. But the power of salvation is not yours, and even Jesus had people walk away from him and reject his invitation. We are simply called to be faithful to the gospel message, invitation and all, whatever follows next. In fact, the invitation of Christ is for us to come and die to ourselves, to take up our cross and follow him (Matthew 16:24). That means dying to ourselves in our evangelism too, whatever the cost and however foolish we may look.

● 'The gospel is God's summons, through the act of preaching, to the listener to make a decision which will usher him into a new dimension of existence.'

● **MICHAEL GREEN**

Jesus and his apostles offered invitation as they proclaimed the gospel, and so must we. Whatever the response, we can be assured that

we have been faithful to the gospel message and its central call to repentance and trust in Jesus Christ. God will take care of the rest.

DISCUSSION (15 MINS)

1. Is it possible to authentically preach the gospel without offering a response to faith in Jesus?
2. What do you find easy/difficult about the response aspect of evangelism?
3. What have you learned about how to help people to respond to the gospel as you have shared the gospel?

● 'Repentance is not just the gateway into relationship with the triune God; it is the pathway for that continuing relationship, as Luther wrote: 'the entire life of believers should be one of repentance'. The Christian life involves a lifelong relationship, and as long as we are in this fallen world repentance will be an enduring part of our lives.'

● **MARK J. BODA**

APPLICATION (5 MINS)

Be intentional about extending an invitation to respond to the gospel every time you share it. Perhaps you are a platform preacher who has been struggling in this area. Experiment with different ways of calling out a response and don't be afraid of looking foolish if no one responds. Equally, you may be someone who is great at initiating and having conversations with people about Jesus, but are struggling to make a connection to the next steps. Step out in boldness this month and ask at least one person off the back of a gospel-centred conversation if they want to put their trust in Jesus.

PRAYER

Give thanks to God for the invitation he offers us each to be reconciled to him. Ask him for boldness as we share the gospel, and that we would be clear and confident in calling people to repentance – helping them see not

condemnation but hope. Pray that hearts might be receptive to this invitation.

ACCOUNTABILITY (15 MINS)

In pairs, discuss which area(s) of your life you think might need a bit of work in terms of 'dying to yourself'. We can all struggle with areas of idolatry, or character deficiencies that need work. When thinking of extending the gospel invitation to others, let's also consider the same invitation afresh that God offers us – to die to ourselves and follow him. Encourage and pray for one another as you share in this area.

Complete accountability forms, share in pairs or smaller groups and pray for one another.

SESSION ELEVEN

THE INSPIRATION OF THE EVANGELIST

The ministry of the evangelist is not only to preach the gospel into the world but to stir the whole church to evangelism. In this session we explore how we can all play a role in being fire-starters in the church to help encourage and equip those around us to be faithful to God in evangelism.

SESSION IN A SENTENCE

Alongside proclaiming the gospel to the world, an evangelist will also be committed to stirring the church to evangelism by encouraging and equipping all believers for works of service.

SESSION BACKGROUND

Since the advent of social media, a new form of celebrity has developed: the so-called 'influencer'. These are people who have developed such a following on a social media platform (particularly YouTube) that they are able to exert a mass-appeal influence over people. It's not an entirely new concept - celebrities from the entertainment and sports world have been telling us for years through advertising what to wear, eat, drink and smell like. But this generation of celebrities are arguably the first to have gathered a following for the purpose of influence itself.

Paul tells us in Romans not to conform to the influences of this world, but to be transformed by the renewing of our minds through submission to the Holy Spirit (Romans 12:2). As God's holy people, we are the original

influencers, with a message that brings life, freedom and hope.

In Session Seven, we reminded ourselves that salt with no flavour is good for nothing. A social media influencer's power hinges on how many followers they have and how well those followers engage with whatever they promote. For the church, our distinctiveness is far more important, and to lose it is far more costly. A social media influencer may lose their fame and career as they fade in influence, but if the church fades in influence and loses its distinctiveness, the world will miss opportunities to see the gospel lived out and hear it proclaimed in a way they can understand.

Evangelists are passionate to see the world receive the gospel, but they must also be passionate to continuously stir the church to bear gospel influence in the world. After all, there is no 'plan B' when it comes to the gospel, and the church of Jesus Christ are its only ambassadors. Whenever the church forgets this or becomes distracted, evangelists and those who are passionately engaged in evangelism in any capacity can lovingly fuel and stoke the fires of evangelism once more so that the influence of the gospel can shine brightly for all to see: that the whole church would take the whole gospel to the whole world for the whole glory of God.

SESSION GUIDE

CATCH UP (10–20 MINS)

Take time to catch up with one another, sharing stories, encouragements, feedback on opportunities and anything else that would encourage the group. Share about your experiences inviting people to respond to the gospel in light of the last session (Session Ten – Application). Have you had opportunities to be intentional in this area since last time? If so, what has been the result?

PRAYER

Commit the time to the Lord and pray over any situations, positive or challenging, highlighted in the catch up time.

TEACHING (20–30 MINS)

Work through the following teaching material in your own way, either by reading it word for word, or by reworking it into your own presentation.

- ‘So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.’

EPHESIANS 4:11-13

Even those who have a huge platform need some inspiration in life, as Hollywood action hero Dwayne ‘The Rock’ Johnson testified in an interview:

- ‘When I was eight years old, I saw *Raiders of the Lost Ark* in Charlotte, North Carolina. I walked out of there and was so inspired. I loved the movie, and I knew I wanted to be that guy.’

Discuss: Have you ever encountered someone so inspirational that you

immediately wanted to do what they do/ be like them? What was it about them or what they were doing that had this impact upon you?

Whether from a family member, historical figure, pop culture icon or even a fictional character, we can find inspiration in all sorts of places. Some of this inspiration affects the hobbies and careers we pursue and can even shape our character and worldview. Sometimes it works the other way – you can see someone so talented that it actually discourages you from pursuing something: ‘What’s the point, I’ll never be as good as them!’

There are many inspirational biblical figures, and it’s good to look to heroes of the faith both on and off the pages of the Bible – especially as we realise that, as impressive as they may be, they were just ordinary people being faithful to God. Knowing that the reason Moses could speak in power to Pharaoh had nothing to do with his oratory skills, and everything to do with his faithfulness to the call of God and submission to his power, is encouraging as it is inspiring. God is the same, so we could do the same things too.

Ultimately there is only one person who can inspire *and* empower us. In Jesus we have both the perfect model for what our lives should be, and the perfect power by which we can hope to live in such a way. As we are compelled by the example and teaching of Jesus, and as we are empowered by him for our life of faith, we should be considering the potential influence we have upon those around us.

Paul teaches in Ephesians 4 that Jesus has blessed the church with different gifts that are useful for his kingdom purposes. Evangelists are listed alongside apostles, pastors, teachers (or pastor-teachers) and prophets, and Paul states that people who hold the gifting to fulfil these callings are to equip the church for works of service and to build up the body of Christ.

- ‘...somewhere, an idea emerged and became very popular in the Christian community... It is that the ministry of the church is to be done by the paid, professional, theologically-trained clergy. According to this view, the whole purpose of the laity is to receive the benefits of ministry, in terms of preaching, counselling, comfort, and those

- other things that we seek to provide in the church. But the reason why certain gifts are given for leadership is to equip the believers for ministry. The church is to be a mobilised army.'

R.C. SPROUL

It would be a mistake to look at the ministry roles in Ephesians 4 and conclude simplistically that they refer to certain special people in our churches. Paul's letter reveals something far better. These ministries exist because the *church* is special, and God is at work through ordinary people to ensure that it grows to maturity as one body. We take care of those in our church community while reaching those outside of it. Everybody gets to play.

We have a responsibility to use our gifts well, and that means being intentional about being inspirational. It also means that, by the humility and holiness we have explored in previous sessions, we must lead the way in protecting against any misuse of these gifts that can cause division in the church. Pride, ego, envy and the abuse of power are each a shortcut to division.

Discuss: Who in your church is most likely to be considered inspirational, and with that in mind what roles and functions in the church do you see people aspiring to today? Perhaps it's to become a pastor or youth worker, a worship leader or a Bible teacher. Are people aspiring to witness and evangelism, and if not, why not?

Here are five ways in which we can attempt to inspire others - whether we consider ourselves to be evangelists or not - to share the gospel faithfully:

1. PROCLAIM THE GOSPEL

One of the best ways to inspire people to share the gospel is to do so regularly in our gatherings. Another way is to invite our Christian brothers and sisters to come to events where we are preaching (not least for their prayerful support, but also to build their faith as they see its power at work as people encounter Jesus for the first time), or to come with us where/when we know we will have opportunity for gospel conversations with someone. As we

share the gospel either publicly or personally we can constantly affirm that evangelism is a privilege and joy for all believers.

2. PREPARE TESTIMONY

Help people to think through their own testimony and the impact God has had upon their life from the time they first met him until now. How did they first come to put their trust in him, and what has he been doing in their life recently? Deliberately preparing personal testimony is both a great way to inspire and equip each other for evangelism and an act of worship as we give God thanks for what he has done in our lives.

3. PRIORITISE STORYTELLING

In our gatherings and conversations we should regularly share stories about our evangelistic activity. Celebrate and be encouraged when you see God at work through you, and choose to think positively and constructively about what you can learn from situations that didn't seem to go so well. As your community hears stories of God at work through ordinary people just like them, they will grow in confidence that God could use them too.

4. PRACTISE TOGETHER

It might seem odd to 'practise' evangelism by role playing with each other, but it is actually a great way to prepare for conversations we might have and help to build people's confidence. We wouldn't expect someone to drive a car on a public road without any practice or support, and neither should we expect people to witness without offering them an opportunity to grow in confidence through practising and learning together.

5. PROVIDE OPPORTUNITY

Through your church and in your wider friendship group, make opportunities for people to get involved in evangelism. Organise local and international mission opportunities, invite people to be part of a ministry team at events you are running, or take a few friends out for a couple of hours of street evangelism. The ways in which you could do this are numerous: run some training before you go and debrief when you get back. In time people will become more comfortable taking the experiences of

these 'formal' opportunities into their everyday lives and their evangelism will move from an organised mission week to an everyday opportunity.

However we go about doing it, let us commit to stirring and helping our brothers and sisters in Christ step into the fullness of their identity as the messenger children of God.

DISCUSSION (15 MINS)

1. What does it mean to build up the church in the way that Paul describes in Ephesians?
2. How do we maintain our distinctiveness in the world as followers of Jesus, and in the church as passionate evangelists?
3. Other than the five ways we explored in this session, how can we inspire others to evangelism?

APPLICATION (10 MINS)

Hopefully you will have a desire to stay in this group beyond the end of its first year and continue to journey together to grow as evangelists into Year Two. But with inspiring the church to evangelism in mind, now could be a good time to consider what it would look like to run your own Advance group alongside being in this one.

Multiplication is a core principle of the Advance movement because it should be our desire as evangelists to encourage others in their evangelism. Take some time to compile a list of people who might be interested in following the same journey you've been on and then begin reaching out in the coming weeks. Use your experience from this group and the Advance resources to help you plan and organise your own group.

PRAYER

Spend time praying for the local church, that all within it would be faithful to the gospel call on their lives. Pray for opportunities to encourage others, and pray to commission each member of the group to not only proclaim the gospel to

a world in need, but to inspire and equip other followers of Jesus to do the same.

ACCOUNTABILITY (15 MINS)

Have you ever felt frustrated or angry at the church or people within it for what you perceive as a lack of evangelistic action or even heart for the lost? It's understandable to feel this way but the enemy can so easily twist these feelings into lingering resentment, superiority or even outright unforgiveness. Chat about this idea as a whole group and then pray in pairs for soft hearts towards our brothers and sisters, and wisdom in how to encourage them to faithful witness.

Complete accountability forms, share in pairs or smaller groups and pray for one another.

DON'T FORGET...

The Global Network of Evangelists offers support, fellowship and equipping to evangelists all around the world. Visit their website at evangelist.global to find out more and as you head towards the end of your first year of Advance, consider applying to join the network as part of your ongoing Advance journey.

RETREAT

The climax of the first year of an Advance group is time spent in retreat. How you decide to do this is up to you, but here you will find suggestions for how to spend the time together in keeping with the general principles of Advance group meetings and to bring the first year to a focused end.

HOW TO RUN AN ADVANCE GROUP RETREAT

The general idea is to get away from your normal location and set aside a longer period of time than you would normally for your Advance group sessions. If you can only spare a morning, afternoon or evening, then do what you can in this time, but retreating for a whole day is especially beneficial.

Here are some ideas of what to do during your retreat.

KEY SCRIPTURE

The following passage from Colossians will work well as a key scripture for your time together if you are looking for a specific focus during the retreat:

- 'Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful
- and thankful. And pray for us, too, that

- God may open a door for our message,
- so that we may proclaim the mystery of
- Christ, for which I am in chains. Pray that
- I may proclaim it clearly, as I should. Be
- wise in the way you act toward outsiders;
- make the most of every opportunity. Let
- your conversation be always full of grace,
- seasoned with salt, so that you may know
- how to answer everyone.'

COLOSSIANS 4:2-6

Within this short passage there are twelve things that Paul presents which can be explored and affirmed for our evangelism:

1. Be devoted (*devote yourselves to prayer*)
2. Encourage spiritual fellowship (*pray for us too*)
3. Rely on God (*God may open a door*)
4. Commit to proclamation (*we may proclaim the mystery of Christ*)
5. Desire clarity (*that I may proclaim it clearly*)
6. Accept sacrifice for the Gospel (*for which I am in chains*)
7. Rely on the wisdom of heaven (*be wise*)
8. Seize opportunities (*make the most of every opportunity*)
9. Speak and listen (*conversation*)

10. Be gracious and humble (*always full of grace*)
11. Be distinctive (*seasoned with salt*)
12. Be prepared (*that you may know how to answer everyone*)

How you study the passage together or alone (see below), how you bring these points out, and how you discuss them together is entirely up to you depending on how you are running your retreat time. But keep this passage and these points in mind as you look at the suggested activities below.

WORD

A key aim of the Advance group is to help each other grow as evangelists who are committed to the Word of God. This retreat time is a great opportunity to go deeper into his Word.

EXTENDED BIBLE READING (SOLO READING)

Extended time spent with the Word of God is never time wasted. Taking the time to read through all of Mark's gospel or one of the New Testament letters in one sitting is a great way to get a full perspective on the contents of that book. If it is a shorter book, why not re-read it multiple times, praying and reflecting between each reading, making notes, and then going again? You could all choose to read the same thing, or have a few different options that people then share about their time of reading and reflection.

BIBLE STUDY (GROUP READING)

There are a number of ways that you could facilitate Bible study together on the retreat. Perhaps you will want to revisit some of the key passages you have explored over the Advance group sessions. Alternatively, you may feel led to a particular passage or theme that will set the tone for the retreat. As ever, be sure to keep it in line with developing each other as evangelists.

BONUS SESSIONS AND OTHER ADVANCE RESOURCES

One of the bonus sessions available on the Advance website (advancegroups.org/blog) could be used to run a regular Advance group session as part of your retreat. You may also have your own ideas for how you could run an Advance group session in the same format we have been using.

Equally you may want to look at a One Thing blog on the Advance website which features a number of different evangelists sharing the one thing they wish they had known when they had started to preach the gospel. These short pieces make for excellent discussion starters.

PRAYER

Set aside significant time for prayer during the retreat. Plan for prayer times with a specific focus, as well as time for both praying through scripture and spontaneous prayer. Whatever else you do in prayer during the retreat, the following three focuses are recommended.

PRAYING FOR EACH OTHER

Be sure to pray for one another as a primary element of your time together. Ask people to share one area they are feeling thankful to God for and one area in which they need provision or breakthrough. Encourage people to be specific and honest in their requests, and don't rush through each person but dedicate real time to one another. Be sure to keep a note of words and encouragements that come from this time.

PRAYING FOR THE LOCAL AND THE GLOBAL

Take time to pray for your local context and also the global spread of the gospel. If there are specific situations you have a heart for in either a local or global context then pray for them. Lift up individuals, churches, ministries, missionaries, situations from the news and so on.

PRAYING FOR THE ADVANCE JOURNEY

Give thanks for the journey that you have been on in this group, reflecting on personal growth and stories of fruitfulness and salvation. Ask the Lord to continue the work in you that he has begun, and that you would be transformed into

his image with ever increasing glory (you could pray through 2 Corinthians 3:17-18).

WORSHIP

Time spent in God's Word, prayer and fellowship are all part of worship. But spend time in additional specific acts of collective devotional worship – whether it's through singing or other creative expressions.

SUNG WORSHIP

If you have someone who is musically talented, invite them to lead a time of sung worship. Alternatively, there are many great collective worship apps and videos available online, many of which are free. A quick YouTube search for your favourite worship songs will likely bring up a version of the song with lyrics that can be played for the group to sing along to. There is power in the people of God joining together in song to declare his glory.

STORIES AND PRAISE

Spend time sharing stories of how God has been at work in your life this year – stories of growth, breakthrough, evangelistic opportunity and fruit. After each story spend time praising God through prayer, song or any method that works for your group as you seek to give thanks to God for who he is and what he has done/is doing.

COMMISSIONING

Another way in which you could share in a corporate act of worship would be to commission each other before God in the evangelistic task that he has called you to and empowered you for. At the end of this first year of your Advance group it will be encouraging and affirming to recognise this milestone, so give thanks to God for it and pray over each other as you look to go again with the gospel for the salvation of the world and to the glory of God.

ANNUAL REFLECTION

Using the form found on page 184 create space to reflect on the questions provided, fill in the form and pray over the answers given. This can be done individually or as a group.

FELLOWSHIP

As we gather together, we grow in friendship with and trust of one another. The fellowship of your Advance group has hopefully been a blessing to each person, and on retreat you can continue in your commitment to hold each other to account and your enjoyment of each other's company.

ACCOUNTABILITY

Accountability has been a core part of every session so far, and in this final session of the year, once again commit to the same process to ensure you are living holy and humble lives.

FASTING/FEASTING

You may want to commit to a period of fasting as part of the retreat, or base your time together around meals through which you can gather together and make space for discussion. There is no right or wrong way to do this – all that matters is that it helps you achieve the goals of your retreat time.

ACTIVITIES

You may want to plan an activity together – for example, if you are retreating into nature somewhere, go on a walk together and fold some of the devotional activities above into this time. If based in a more urban environment, you could visit an art gallery together and do the same thing, using some of the art as a stimulus for reflection and devotion.

Equally, you might want to do something simply for fun together – a team activity, sport, entertainment option... Whether it's fellowship to encourage devotion, or fellowship to enjoy each other's company and grow in relationship with each other, invest in quality time with each other.

NEXT STEPS

The first year of Advance is done. Before you bring the year (and the retreat) to a close, be sure to look at the next steps for this group and the new groups that will launch from this one.

THIS GROUP

Create space for people to share about how the Advance group experience has been for them. Share feedback about how you've all grown and

developed, and think about what the biggest learning has been from the year. Encourage each other in these things.

Pray and give thanks for the first year of Advance and commit what is ahead to the Lord.

Take the opportunity to set dates for starting Year Two together.

NEW GROUPS

It will also be worth picking up on the development of new groups that was started in the last session. Check how people are getting on with the possibility of starting their own group, and if there are new groups going to start, pray for them.

However you run your retreat time, keep the core values of Advance in focus, reflect on the journey you have been on as a group, and pray for what lies ahead the future.

YEAR TWO

“

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ,
the new creation has come:

**THE OLD HAS GONE,
THE NEW IS HERE!**

All this is from God, who
RECONCILED US TO HIMSELF
through Christ and **gave us the ministry
of reconciliation:** that God was reconciling the
world to himself in Christ,
**NOT COUNTING PEOPLE'S
SINS AGAINST THEM.**

And he has committed to us the message of
reconciliation. **We are therefore Christ's**
AMBASSADORS,
as though God were making his appeal through us.

We implore you on Christ's behalf:
Be reconciled to God.

2 CORINTHIANS 5:17-20



SESSION ONE

THE CHALLENGE AND FRUIT OF EVANGELISM

This session sets up the second year of Advance by exploring the challenges we face in our evangelism and the fruit of the message we carry.

SESSION IN A SENTENCE

We want to be fruitful messengers of the gospel but as we go into the world we will face challenges.

SESSION BACKGROUND

In the Greek myth of Herakles, the son of Zeus is tasked with twelve seemingly impossible labours to overcome. Being half man, half god, he eventually manages to accomplish these tasks and establishes himself as the most famous hero in all of Greek literature – so famous and revered that the Romans would eventually claim him as their own, renaming him 'Hercules'. His name lives on today in the very idea of taking on and succeeding in a huge task – 'a herculean effort'.

Ancient mythological stories were told for a variety of reasons, including for entertainment and as a way to pass on moral values. But figures such as Hercules were also supposed to be inspirational to those who heard of their deeds.

Christians don't need to look to flawed mythological figures for inspiration to persevere in the 'herculean' task of being God's faithful messengers to an often hostile and dark world. We look to the reality of the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Jesus doesn't

merely inspire us in what it looks like to continue on in challenge, persecution and suffering, but tells us that he is actually *with us* as we face these things (Matthew 28:20). He is both the model for persevering faith, and the one who sustains and empowers us on the journey.

Psalms 1 offers us a simple and profound truth. There is a way to life and a way to destruction. All who root themselves steadfastly in God, no matter what storms come their way, can know true life and produce good fruit from it. The harvest of these lives doesn't depend on the ever-changing circumstance of the world – which can toss you around in the wind to the point of destruction – but the unchanging truth of God himself. We can be planted in streams of living water, and it is that water that will see us not just survive the storm, but be fruitful in it.

Challenge and fruit (struggle and progress) often go hand and hand. The greatest suffering of God – Jesus on the cross – brought about his greatest success on our behalf, that we could have restored relationship with him and know true life. Our daily response to the circumstances of life as Christians is to delight in God even as we recognise the reality of the struggles we face. In doing so, we will not wither even when life is painful and our evangelism feels overwhelmingly challenging. We will persevere to proclaim to a world facing the beyond-herculean challenges of identity crisis, suffering, idolatry, and death that there is a beyond-herculean God-man who is no mere myth – he is the historically and presently real Jesus Christ, the saviour of the world.

SESSION GUIDE

CATCH UP (10–20 MINS)

Take time to catch up with one another, sharing stories, feedback on opportunities and anything else that would encourage the group. Check in with each other to see if anyone has launched their own Advance group yet – if so, celebrate and pray for them and their group. Encourage others to keep thinking about starting a group of their own this year.

PRAYER

Pray to commit the time to the Lord and over any situations, positive or challenging, arising from the catch up time.

TEACHING (30–40 MINS)

Work through the following teaching material in your own way, either by reading it word for word, or by reworking it into your own presentation.

- 'A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, by their fruit you will recognise them.'

MATTHEW 7:18–20

In our first year together, we focused on the kind of character that God is looking to develop in his people, not least those who will be his gospel ambassadors. This year, we will turn our attention to the fruit of the gospel we carry into the world alongside the challenges we can face as we do.

John Wesley preached more than 40,000 sermons in his lifetime, travelling more than 4,000 miles a year on horseback to do so! Even a brief look at Wesley's diaries would reveal the extent of challenge, obstacle and persecution he faced as he took the gospel the length and breadth of Britain in the eighteenth century. These challenges would make for bitter reading if not set alongside the reality of how the gospel changes people's lives. The struggle may be

real, but when it comes to the gospel, the struggle is worth it.

The life of someone like John Wesley is a helpful reminder of both the joy and the challenge of what it looks like to serve God on the front lines of evangelism. But what about your own experience?

Discuss: What are some specific challenges you have faced in your evangelism?

Sometimes, challenge can be a good thing – like the challenge of counting the cost of our daily faith, developing self-discipline, prioritising the worship of God above other idols and distractions, fellowship with other believers and working out how to stir and equip others for works of service.

There are other experiences which are not *good things* in themselves – persecution from the world, the fear of man, temptation and accusation from the enemy, idolatry around performance and comparison to others. And yet, these challenges can still be used by God in his grace to help us grow as we persevere on the road of obedient faith.

How do we face the challenges that we encounter, and develop spiritual perseverance that will see us continue in God's calling and service rather than be crushed by it? Even though it might sound overly simple, the answer is to follow Jesus.

In both the first and the last chapters of John's gospel, Jesus invites his disciples to 'follow me'. In between these two callings the disciples face physical danger, failure, disappointment, persecution, disagreement, and a variety of other challenges. After Jesus' ascension to heaven, the disciples work out what it means to follow Jesus as they preach the gospel and give birth to the church – but they still face the same challenges as before! Except there are two big differences. First, having seen Jesus resurrected, they no longer know Jesus as a messiah figure, but as Lord and God. Secondly, they have been given a gift by him that changes everything.

Following Jesus means *knowing* Jesus. When soon-to-be disciple Nathanael first hears about Jesus of Nazareth, he quickly writes him off with a comical put-down: 'Nazareth? Can anything good come from there?' But Nathanael quickly moves from insult to insight when he meets Jesus for himself and experiences his prophetic power first-hand (John 1:43-50). Nathanael's encounter with Jesus moves him from writing Jesus off to following him.

Every journey has a starting point and every relationship has a 'hello'. In time, Nathanael and his friends discover who Jesus really is and, as confusion gives way to confidence, his original put-down gives way to proclamation: 'Nazareth? Let me tell you what good came from there!'

Discuss: How have you seen Jesus transform you as you have followed him? What fruit can you see?

Following Jesus means that even when everything in the world seems to be against us, we can find true joy in our relationship with him. We don't merely survive our challenging circumstances, we thrive. We do this by receiving the gift he offers us – the gift of the Holy Spirit, and the fruit that flows from it.

- 'But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace,
- forbearance [patience], kindness, goodness,
- faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.
- Against such things there is no law.'

GALATIANS 5:22-23

This is the effect of God at work in our lives, the evidence of character and virtue that flow when we give ourselves completely to God's presence and power.

The challenge of evangelism is not found in the individual problems, obstacles, persecutions and difficulties that litter the road of service before us, but in the full reality of what it means to know and follow Jesus day by day.

It is not uncommon to hear people refer to the 'fruits' (plural) of the Spirit, but in the original language (Greek) the word 'fruit' is singular (and translated as such in our English Bibles). Does this distinction matter? Perhaps Paul wanted to be understood as speaking of one spiritual

fruit (one life) with nine discernible attributes ('graces' or 'virtues' as they are sometimes described). This is Paul's expression of what the Christian life looks like.

Over the coming sessions of Year Two we will break down the fruit of the Spirit in such a way that will help us understand it as a whole. It is worth stating that while we separate the segments of the one fruit in the sessions to come, in order to explore them more closely, it is not possible to separate them in our lives.

When it comes to the effect of God's Spirit in your life and the fruit that flows from it, God is all or nothing. That's his call on your life in every area (Matthew 16:24-27). While we may see greater gains and successes in certain areas of our character at certain times, we should desire to grow in all these ways, to be consistently real in our representation of his glory. In our own strength this would be impossible, which is why it's the fruit of the Spirit rather than the fruit of the person!

- 'Following Jesus is simple, but not easy.
- Love until it hurts, and then love more.'

MOTHER TERESA

We could never love the world enough to fix it, but God can. When we commit to the simple but costly reality of following Jesus we can love beyond our own capacity. We can love beyond our circumstances. We can love beyond any challenge we are facing. We can love with the strength of heaven, the love that has the power to save the world. We can love with the full flavour and power of the fruit of the Spirit.

We could adjust Mother Teresa's quote to help us keep the main thing the main thing:

- 'Evangelism is simple, but not easy. Proclaim
- the gospel until it hurts, and then proclaim
- some more.'

DISCUSSION (15 MINS)

1. What does it truly mean to follow Jesus?
2. What is the power of declaring Jesus as Lord in the midst of our challenges?

3. How do you recognise and celebrate the fruit of your faith?

- ‘When the darkness of dismay comes,
- endure until it is over, because out of it will
- come that following of Jesus which is an
- unspeakable joy.’

- **OSWALD CHAMBERS**

APPLICATION (5 MINS)

At the start of this second year of Advance, make a fresh commitment to following Jesus by praying for the fruit of the Spirit to be outworked in your life day by day. If you started a prayer diary in Year One, make use of it as part of this practice, noting challenges you face in your evangelism and how God’s spiritual fruit is revealed in your responses. If you haven’t started a diary yet, now is the perfect time.

ACCOUNTABILITY AND PRAYER (15 MINS)

Fill in accountability forms, share in pairs or smaller groups and pray for each other.

‘Lord, thank you that you are with us always. Help us by your grace to follow you in every season and through whatever challenges we face. Would your Holy Spirit at work in our lives lead to ever more fruit within us and through us.’

Take some time to pray together through some of the challenges that arose during the discussion time and through the accountability form. Pray the fruit of the Spirit over each other that God would help you grow daily in love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

DON'T FORGET... (10 MINS)

If you haven’t already, set the dates for as many of the upcoming sessions as you can. Six months or more is advised so that people can commit to the dates early and make them a diary priority.



SESSION TWO

THE CHALLENGE FROM GOD – WORSHIP AND OBEDIENCE

In this session we will explore what it means to worship God in spirit and truth, and how our evangelism will flow from our worship.

SESSION IN A SENTENCE

God is looking for worshippers who will worship in spirit and truth – a holy people who will count the cost of following Jesus and be obedient to him in all things, not least the proclamation of his hope into the world.

SESSION BACKGROUND

Every human being will answer a basic worship question with their lives. The question is not, 'Will you worship?' for everyone worships something. The question is: 'What or who will you worship?'

The French philosopher Blaise Pascal famously proposed the idea of a God-shaped hole:

● 'What else does this craving, and this helplessness, proclaim but that there was once in man a true happiness, of which all that now remains is the empty print and trace? This he tries in vain to fill with everything around him, seeking in things that are not there the help he cannot find in those that are, though none can help, since this infinite abyss can be filled only with an infinite and immutable object; in other words by God himself.'

● **PASCAL**

We were made for worship, and if we do not fill the worship void in our lives with its proper object – God himself – we will always be unfulfilled. We would be like a car that's never been driven, a meal that's never been tasted, a football that's never been kicked, or a symphony that's never been heard. We would exist, but we would be unfulfilled in our purpose.

● 'If I find in myself desires which nothing in this world can satisfy, the only logical explanation is that I was made for another world.'

● **C.S. LEWIS**

We were made to inhabit the kingdom of God where worship of the king is the ultimate reality of life, love and fulfilment. Worship is our right and proper response to God as we turn from rebellion against him to relationship with him.

What does worship look like? The most frequently used word in the New Testament for worship is *proskuneo*, which means to 'bow with reverence before and pay homage to' the one who is worthy. The second most translated word for worship is *latreuō* which means 'to serve'.

Think about the implications of these words as you come across them translated simply as 'worship' when you read the Bible. Think about the implications of these words as your church leader invites you to stand and 'worship' next time you gather.

Whenever we encounter the word worship, we should remember that God alone is worthy of our full submission, obedience, service and

gifting. In response to God's own sacrifice, we offer our own as we bow before him and say, 'Here I am Lord, you are worthy, may your will be done in my life as I serve you for your glory, whatever the cost.'

God desires for us to worship him in spirit and in truth (John 4:24). God has given us the truth in Jesus Christ and has given us his Spirit by whom we are empowered to worship our holy God as his holy people.

This is the worship he desires.

SESSION GUIDE

CATCH UP (10–20 MINS)

Take time to catch up with one another, sharing stories, feedback on opportunities and anything else that would encourage the group. Ask how people have been getting on with prayer around the fruit of the Spirit and their prayer diaries (Session One - Application). Continue to encourage each other in this.

PRAYER

Pray to commit the time to the Lord and over any situations, positive or challenging, arising from the catch up time.

TEACHING (35–45 MINS)

Work through the following teaching material in your own way, either by reading it word for word, or by reworking it into your own presentation.

- 'Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God - this is your **true and proper worship**. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is - his good, pleasing and perfect will.'

● **ROMANS 12:1-2, EMPHASIS ADDED**

Discuss: How is worship expressed in your life and church community?

To pursue our evangelistic ministry while neglecting our daily devotion, our commitment to love our families, and our responsibility to meet the needs of those around us would be to fall into the trap of offering something to God that on the surface might look good, but under the surface would be deficient.

Before God is looking for evangelists, he is looking for worshippers.

- 'It is often said that the church's priority task is evangelism. But this is really not so. Worship takes precedence over evangelism, partly because love for God is the first commandment and love for neighbour the second, partly because, long after the church's evangelistic task has been completed, God's people will continue to worship him eternally, and partly because evangelism is itself an aspect of worship, a "priestly service" in which converts "become an offering acceptable to God."'

● **JOHN STOTT**

The core message of the evangelist is to call people to worship only the one who is worthy. It isn't possible to divide our worship - either we worship God, or we worship something else. Only God is worthy of our worship, and only through worshipping him will we achieve true life and fulfilment.

As evangelists, our challenge is to make sure that we worship God first - before our ministry, before our talent, before anything else.

It's easy to fall into the trap of thinking that worship is simply about singing songs to God. While music is an amazing tool for expressing our worship to God, it is just that: a tool. The essence of worship is faithfulness - or put another way, **obedience**.

The most frequently-used word for 'worship' in the New Testament is *proskuneo*, which carries ideas of submission and obedience. It's like falling on your face before God and saying, 'Lord, only you are worthy of worship. I adore and revere you. I submit my life to you, I give my life to you, let my life be an offering of worship

to you.’ This kind of worship honours God for who he is and submits in obedience to his authority.

Discuss: Here are five ways we can practically develop our worship mindset. How do they bring evangelism into focus?

1. TIME IS FINE

We often use the expression, ‘now we will have a time of worship’ in our church gatherings to mean that we are going to sing together. This could be unhelpful, as it promotes the idea that our sung worship is the total expression of our worship. What would happen if we referred to other aspects of our response to God as a ‘time of worship’? Why not get a group together from church to have a ‘time of worship’ this weekend by going out on the streets to offer to pray for people and share your faith in Jesus with them? The more we connect our evangelism with our worship, the more we will experience worship for what it is – a pleasing response from our lives to God.

2. AMAZE WITH PRAISE

Our praises to God should amaze us as we celebrate who he is and what he has done. But how often do the songs we sing become too familiar or too generic? What could happen if we were specific with our praise, prioritising testimony, so that people can be amazed by what God is doing in people’s lives? How might our worship look if we wrote songs that could only be sung by our own community because they speak of specific things God is doing among us? The fruit of our evangelism is a wonderful focal point for celebrating who God is as we continue to be amazed by his saving power at work among us.

3. SPECTATE TO PARTICIPATE

By definition, any expression of corporate worship involves participation – whether it’s reciting a creed, singing a song, or celebrating a testimony. But before we participate, we often need to spectate first. We need to learn the melody of a new song before we can join in with the singing. How would it look if we encouraged people to come and see evangelism in action? Would it help them to become more confident,

and give them the chance to see ‘success’ and ‘failure’? Starting as an observer is a great way to get into worship – especially evangelism.

4. HOLY AS HOLY

Both the gospel and our worship are centred on holiness. God’s desire is that we would be holy as he is holy, to be a holy people who worship him and the glory of his holiness. How often do we talk about holiness in connection with the gospel or our worship? We are used to devoting time that is ‘set apart’ to worship God – could we do the same with our evangelism?

5. CONFRONT THE COMFORT

It can be all too easy to reduce our worship to a series of experiences to enjoy. Sacrifice lies at the heart of true worship. We can only worship God because the sacrifice of Jesus has made our worship possible through restored relationship with him. In what ways do we ‘count the cost’ of our worship to God? In which areas of our lives is God calling us out of comfort to obediently serve him as an offering of sacrificial worship to him?

True biblical worship is rooted in the cost and delight of our response to God in every moment of our lives – and, this side of heaven, it will always involve seeking and saving the lost as part of that response.

- ‘The highest form of worship is the worship of unselfish Christian service. The greatest form of praise is the sound of consecrated feet seeking out the lost and helpless.’

BILLY GRAHAM

DISCUSSION (15 MINS)

1. What is worship?
2. Why is holiness central to worship?
3. How do worship and evangelism work together?

APPLICATION (5 MINS)

Consider the five practical suggestions from the session and how you can apply them to your life

and church. Revisit Session Eight of Year One (The Character of the Evangelist) and take some time to consider why holiness is so central to both the gospel and the worship that flows in response to it.

PRAYER

'Heavenly Father, help us to worship you in spirit and truth. Would the worship we offer you reflect your own love and sacrifice. As we offer our lives to you as a living sacrifice, would that worship reveal the hope of your truth to the world around us, that the sound of our worship would be the sound of your church living out and speaking out the gospel in the power of your Spirit.'

ACCOUNTABILITY (15 MINS)

Fill in accountability forms, share in pairs or smaller groups and pray for each other.



SESSION THREE

THE FRUIT IN THE DISCIPLE – FAITHFULNESS AND SELF-CONTROL

In this session we will explore the spiritual fruit of faithfulness and self-control. What does it mean to be faithful to God? How does self-control play out in our lives?

SESSION IN A SENTENCE

Jesus challenges every person to take up their cross and follow him in complete faithfulness, which includes being faithful to proclaiming the truth of the gospel when it's inconvenient.

SESSION BACKGROUND

Marriage is probably the most universally-recognised commitment to faithfulness. Across history and cultures, people make a commitment of total fidelity to another person out of their love for them. Faithfulness is a key aspect of marriage, and the self-control of each partner is essential for faithfulness to be achieved.

There are several passages in the New Testament which refer to the church as the bride and Christ as the groom (2 Corinthians 11:2-3; Ephesians 5:22-31; Revelation 19:7-8; 21:2-14), all of which mirror the image found in the Old Testament of Israel being God's bride (Jeremiah 2:2; Hosea 2-3). The implication could not be clearer: in the same way that marriage is a commitment of exclusive faithfulness between husband and wife, so are God's people to be faithful to him, as he is perfectly faithful to them.

Those who dedicate their lives to Christ by becoming nuns are sometimes known

metaphorically as being 'married' to Jesus. They forego the possibility of marriage to anyone else in favour of complete and undivided faithfulness to God. As profound as such a calling is, we should resist the thought that somehow those called into a monastic life have a greater calling of faithfulness upon their lives than anyone else.

Look at how Peter encourages believers to respond to God:

● 'His divine power has given us everything
● we need for a godly life through our
● knowledge of him who called us by his
● own glory and goodness. Through these
● he has given us his very great and precious
● promises, so that through them you may
● participate in the divine nature, having
● escaped the corruption in the world caused
● by evil desires.

● 'For this very reason, make every
● effort to add to your faith goodness;
● and to goodness, knowledge; and to
● knowledge, self-control; and to self-control,
● perseverance; and to perseverance,
● godliness; and to godliness, mutual
● affection; and to mutual affection, love.'

2 PETER 1:3-7

We could never be perfectly faithful to God, but because of his Spirit at work in our lives, we have what we need to live faithfully in response to him day by day. Living in a way that honours Christ involves two things: **trust** and **treasure**.

We **trust** God to give us his power, and we **treasure** that power by putting it to work in

our lives. Look again at the list Peter offers us for our response to God. Think of each of these things as something to trust God for, and treasure enough to put into practice in our lives:

- Goodness
- Knowledge (of God's truth and character)
- Self-control
- Perseverance
- Godliness (holiness)
- Mutual affection
- Love

Each of these things can be given to us by God's power, and each of these things needs to be exercised in our lives day by day.

This is where we meet God in his perfect faithfulness and provision for our lives. We put his provision into action in our daily experience as we seek to offer faithfulness back to him as we lovingly live for him.

By his empowering, we can become the faithful bride his perfection desires.

SESSION GUIDE

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CATCH UP (10–20 MINS)

Take time to catch up with one another, sharing stories, feedback on opportunities and anything else that would encourage the group. Ask if anyone has begun to implement any of the five practical suggestions about worship from the last session in their lives and/or church community (Session Two – Application).

PRAYER

Pray to commit the time to the Lord and over any situations, positive or challenging, arising from the catch up time.

TEACHING (30–40 MINS)

Work through the following teaching material in your own way, either by reading it word for word, or by reworking it into your own presentation.

- If we die with him, we will also live with him;
- if we endure, we will also reign with him.
- If we disown him, he will also disown us;
- if we are faithless, he remains faithful, for he cannot disown himself.

2 TIMOTHY 2:11-13

In the last session we explored what it means to be obedient to God, to worship him in spirit and truth. The fruit of our obedience is faithfulness.

But Paul reminds Timothy of the problem we all face: we are unfaithful to God, and our unfaithfulness is a catastrophic problem because it brings chaos into the peace of his creation. But there is good news. God is perfectly faithful, and his faithfulness is not based in any way on our own! The consistency of his faithfulness means that peace wins over chaos.

God is always faithful to us – it is a fundamental reality of who he is. Look at what these Psalms have to say about God's faithfulness"

- 'But you, O Lord, are a God of compassion and mercy, slow to get angry and filled with **unfailing love** and **faithfulness**.'

PSALM 86:15 (NLT)

- 'Your **unfailing love** will last forever. Your **faithfulness** is as enduring as the heavens.'

PSALM 89:2 (NLT)

- 'For the Lord is good. His **unfailing love** continues forever, and his **faithfulness** continues to each generation.'

PSALM 100:5 (NLT)

Do you notice the link between God's love and his faithfulness? It gets better still...

- 'For the law was given through Moses, but God's **unfailing love** and **faithfulness** came through Jesus Christ.'

JOHN 1:17 (NLT)

Jesus is the physical embodiment of God's love and faithfulness, given to us so that we can move from unfaithfulness to faithfulness.

Jesus is the greatest commitment to love and faithfulness the world has ever seen.

According to *Psychology Today*, marriage – the globally-recognised commitment of love and fidelity – is the process by which two people make their relationship **public, official** and **permanent**. When Jesus died on the cross, God made his faithfulness to the world **public, official** and **permanent**. He committed himself to us as a perfect husband, that we might come back into relationship with him even though we had acted as an unfaithful spouse. When Jesus rose from the grave, God made his faithfulness to dwell within us forevermore as the gift of new life.

When we question God's faithfulness to us in light of the challenges we face – whether that question comes from the devil, the world, or our own flesh – asking: 'Are you really sure that God loves you, that he is faithful?' we can continue to point to the cross, the sign of his unfailing love and faithfulness and say:

'Yes, I'm sure.'

Pray: Take a moment to pray and thank God for his faithfulness, and if you are aware of any challenges that members of the group are facing, commit these things to the Lord. Ask for his help to trust him in the trial.

What does it look like for us to respond to God in faithfulness?

Sometimes our commitment to faithfulness can hinge on our feelings, which change day by day, but God wants *all* of us, *all* of the time. He's after complete commitment, complete obedience, complete faithfulness, in the good times and the bad, anchored in the hope of the cross.

Faithfulness means living with **integrity**, which can best be described as **living consistently**. Integrity is about being intentional with our faith, about choosing the right way – the faithful way – even when it hurts, even when it costs us more than we think we can afford to give. Living with integrity helps us move away from hypocrisy and shows the world that we are prepared to live for greater things, no matter what the personal cost.

Spiritual discipline is not just about giving things up. God wants to be in relationship with us, to help and guide us, and to reveal his purposes for our lives. Spiritual discipline helps us in our relationship with God when we commit to praying, studying his Word, worshipping, meditating, fasting, and giving. Through these disciplines we begin to find our identity in Christ more fully, and our obedience to God brings about transformation.

Discuss: Many view Christianity as a strait jacket, restricting fun and limiting flourishing, but Jesus says that he came to give us a rich and satisfying life. How do these two things get disconnected, and how do faithfulness and self-control help us?

There's a very good reason self-control is an aspect of the fruit of the Spirit. God is asking us to think carefully about the things in our lives that do not glorify him, especially those things which lead us into sin. Jesus is quite clear on this front:

- '...if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it
- off and throw it away.'

MATTHEW 5:30 (ESV)

Before you start reaching for the hacksaw, realise that Jesus is calling us to identify the areas of our lives that lead us away from him and to cut ourselves off from them.

Think of your own life and the areas where maybe you need more discipline. It might not be an obvious area relating to the substances you put in your body or the images you allow into your eyes. You may find that you need to think about being more disciplined with how you express opinions on social media, with making time for spiritual practices such as prayer and Bible study, with not overpromising and underdelivering, with time-keeping, with choosing to think the best of people, and so on...

The challenge from God is not just faithfulness to *him* in our lives, but faithfulness to his *gospel* in our evangelism. As we live for him faithfully, so we will also speak of him faithfully. To be truly faithful to God is to live in the fulness of the life he has for us – to work out, live out and speak

out our faith as a love offering to the one who loves us unflinchingly.

DISCUSSION (20 MINS)

1. How has God demonstrated his faithfulness in your life?
2. What do you think of when you hear the words 'discipline' and 'self-control'?
3. What are the areas of your life in which you struggle to be faithful to God?
4. How might living a self-controlled life impact your evangelism?

ACCOUNTABILITY (20 MINS)

Alongside filling out your accountability forms, ask each other the questions relating to these four key areas of our lives as we think about faithfulness and self-control.

TIME

We live in a busy world. There is so much competition for our time, which is our most valuable commodity. For some, busyness has even become a badge of honour, but we have to face up to two important questions. First, are you busy with things that really matter? Second, who ever said it was good to be busy?

RELATIONSHIPS

How disciplined are you in your relationships? The time you spend with your family and friends is one aspect, but what about the *quality* of the interactions that you have with them? It's one thing to be *in their presence*, another thing entirely to actually be *present with them*.

MIND

We are bombarded with imagery, information and ideas all day long. Our minds are constantly being fed, but are we filling them with junk food instead of healthy nutrients? Being disciplined in the things we watch, look at, read, say and think about is deeply important. What needs to get cut out in your life to keep your mind healthy?

SPIRIT

How do we discipline our spirit? By submitting our spirit to God's Holy Spirit. Ask yourself this simple question: what does it look like for me to truly submit my spirit to his Spirit each day?

Fill in accountability forms, share in pairs or smaller groups and pray for each other.

PRAYER

'Faithful God, thank you for your unflinching love. I am sorry for the times when I do not live faithfully for you. Help me to have more self-control in my life. I want to know you more and commit to spending more time with you every day. I ask forgiveness for the times when I sin, and I give over to you the areas of my life that I struggle to have discipline in. Thank you that you will never let me down, and that you are always with me. I pray that you will help me live in a way that honours you and encourages others. Amen.'

APPLICATION (5 MINS)

Be sure to let your most trusted friend know the area of your life that you need to either lay down or pick up, so that they can hold you to account. Ask them to check in with you over the coming weeks and to ask you the following three questions:

1. How has it been going so far?
2. Are you seeing God at work in the process?
3. What have you learned or discovered so far?



SESSION FOUR

THE CHALLENGE FROM OURSELVES — PERFORMANCE AND COMPARISON

In this session we will explore a challenge that often originates within ourselves: the challenge of comparison and finding value in performance rather than in the grace and love we receive from God.

SESSION IN A SENTENCE

Comparison is one of the easiest ways to blunt and kill our calling and potential, but learning to trust in the sufficiency of Christ in all things brings freedom to follow his call – despite our limitations and beyond our talents.

SESSION BACKGROUND

Sometimes the greatest expectations are the ones we place on ourselves. Rarely do they come from a vacuum, but rather they are influenced by family, community, culture or society. When it comes down to it, the person who is hardest on us is... us.

Israel had a comparison problem. Even with their long history of God coming through for them, time and again, leading them out of slavery, leading them through battle after battle, and leading them into the promised land, there was still something missing. They wanted a king.

Royalty was far more important in the ancient world than it is in the world today. A monarch would lead their nation in a number of specific and important ways as a representative of their gods. For example, Egyptian pharaohs were expected to bring cosmic order to existence, bridging the gap between divinity and humanity

through their reign. One common expectation of the role of ancient kings is to defend their land and where necessary lead the nation into battle – at times, literally leading the charge.

Israel looked at the nations around them and realised they didn't have a king of their own. Even though their God was the King of kings, they coveted an earthly figurehead who could go toe-to-toe with the kings of other nations. Through the prophet Samuel they asked God if they could have an earthly king of their own (1 Samuel 8).

Comparison often leads to us dethroning God. It usually starts in a subtle way. If we compare favourably, we dethrone God and our ego and self-sufficiency take his place. If we compare unfavourably, we dethrone God by believing even he is not powerful or loving enough to use us in our weakness. Israel wanted a king who would be the divine representative of God, but subtly and inevitably this road would lead to a diminishing of their trust in the Lord and an over-reliance on their trust in men.

Israel's story also has something to teach us about performance. Rather than rooting their identity in their loving and faithful God, they were looking to demonstrate their value through how they were performing in the world's eyes.

We can easily fall into the same trap, measuring our performance in any number of ways:

- Ministry performance: How successful we are
- Leadership performance: How respected we are

- Work performance: How busy we are
- Sacrificial performance: How generous we are
- Spiritual performance: How disciplined we are
- Moral performance: How holy we are
- Family performance: How relational we are
- Intellectual performance: How cultured we are
- Talent performance: How skilled we are

We should aim to be diligent in these areas and to give our best, but we should not find our value and identity in them. We find our identity and value in God – enabling us to live and serve with passion, grace and humility.

SESSION GUIDE

CATCH UP (10–20 MINS)

Take time to catch up with one another, sharing stories, feedback on opportunities and anything else that would encourage the group. Ask the group to share how they have been getting on with their accountability commitment from the last session (Session Three – Application).

PRAYER

Pray to commit the time to the Lord and over any situations, positive or challenging, arising from the catch up time.

TEACHING (40–50 MINS)

Work through the following teaching material in your own way, either by reading it word for word, or by reworking it into your own presentation.

- ‘As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at

the Lord’s feet listening to what he said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, “Lord, don’t you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!”

“Martha, Martha,” the Lord answered, “you are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.”

LUKE 10:38–42

Martha gets so caught up in trying to serve Jesus that she forgets to be blessed by his presence. Not only that, but she gets frustrated when she compares her efforts to her sister Mary who seems to be leaving all the hard work to her. Performance and comparison are revealed in this story to be a barrier to the presence of God. And yet in all our effort and evaluation against others’ efforts, Jesus offers us a simple but deeply profound reminder: ‘My presence is enough.’

Each of us can find ourselves struggling under the pressures of our lives, especially when it comes to performing to a certain standard. For many, performance results in putting food on the table for our families. Performance is need.

For others, performance is about getting ahead and achieving more than a colleague, peer or rival. Performance is success. Performance is about the achievement of aspiration. Performance is often about ego.

Discuss: How do you evaluate ‘performance’ in your life? What about in evangelism?

Comparison is a sure-fire way to ruin your character. Compare favourably and you build up your ego and give your pride muscles the workout they really don’t need. Compare unfavourably and you crush your own spirit, demotivating yourself. There will always be a more charismatic preacher, better-read theologian, more natural conversation starter, committed prayer, better-looking version of you.

Comparison isn't always negative. At times it can be helpful to watch how others are learning and growing. Observing others and learning from their successes and failures is a natural part of the human experience, but the difference between positive observation and negative comparison is found in the roles of **inspiration** and **condemnation**.

As we see others doing well, are we **inspired** to keep going on our own journey? As we see others struggling are we **inspired** to help them where we can? Or, as we see others doing well, do we **condemn** ourselves for not doing as well? As we see others struggling, do we **condemn** them for not being as 'good' as us?

It can be a fine balance to keep our hearts in check, so here are six things we can watch out for as we seek to be faithful in serving the Lord and avoid some of the pitfalls of comparison and the pressure to perform.

Discuss: Talk through the following points, and if any of these are a particular problem for anyone in the group, make a note of them and return to them in the accountability time later, where you will have a chance to pray for each other.

WATCH OUT FOR DISCOURAGEMENT

Discouragement is the first problem with comparison. If we compare unfavourably to those around us, then we can quickly become discouraged and ineffective. We mustn't let unfavourable comparison steal the joy of our calling, and blunt the effectiveness of the witness God has positioned *us* to be faithful in. Instead of being discouraged by others' successes, we should celebrate each one as a win for the kingdom of God. We must choose to give thanks for the kingdom win of others instead of lament for our personal frustration and limitation. If we honour the Lord with the posture of our hearts in this way, we will discover a joy that transcends performance.

WATCH OUT FOR ENCOURAGEMENT

The problem of encouragement goes hand-in-hand with the problem of discouragement. We don't usually consider encouragement to be a problem, but when we

are encouraged through favourable comparison to others we can all too easily end up feeling superior, 'getting high' on our own success. We should be careful not to massage our own ego by indulging in the thought that we are 'better' in some way than someone else. We must be generous in giving our time, skills, gifting, and resources to those who have a call similar to our own but who are growing in their gifting.

WATCH OUT FOR TALENT

Comparison can cause us to put too much stock in talent or gifting. While talent can be used to glorify God, we should never be under the illusion that talent itself is going to get the job done in evangelism. Performance based on talent can quickly lead to minimising the power of God. Not only that, but often those with a talent for preaching or communication are lifted up as the gold standard for evangelism. But God is far more concerned about character than skill sets. Thank God for every talent you have that can be used for his glory, but ask him to bless you even more abundantly with the wisdom and grace of heaven that you might steward his gifts faithfully.

WATCH OUT FOR FALSE HUMILITY

Humility is essential in evangelism, but false humility can be toxic. As we compare ourselves to others and evaluate our performance, it can be all too easy to project humility while cultivating a need for affirmation. Ask yourself this question: How do you demonstrate humility in response to success? One way to evaluate this can be to consider how you respond when receiving a compliment. Do you dismiss and downplay, or say thank you and offer it back to the Lord in worship? Dismissal can be seen as a humble response, but true humility doesn't dismiss, true humility graciously receives and lovingly redirects to God.

WATCH OUT FOR RESULTS

How do you evaluate evangelistic success? If you are a full-time evangelist you may even feel the pressure to get 'results' (i.e. number of responses) to justify your calling. If you measure success in evangelism by numbers, you are in danger of taking credit for something you have no right to claim credit for. Only God has the power of salvation. Temptation to validate our calling or ministry can take hold and we can

become 'evang-elastic' as we report back the fruit of the response, saying to ourselves: 'Well, ten raised their hands, but a dozen sounds more biblical and I'm sure there were some who responded in their hearts...' We mustn't play this game of deception. God doesn't need us to prove his greatness by massaging the numbers to make them sound more impressive. And were those numbers being reported as a mark of *his* greatness rather than ours? Success in evangelism is not based on people being won to Christ, but in being faithful to the task of revealing him to the world around us. God will take care of the rest.

WATCH OUT FOR PEOPLE PLEASING

Sometimes our performance can be based on a desire to please people rather than God, but we are under no obligation to outwork our witness to the world for the pleasure of anyone except our heavenly Father. The 100m sprinter and Christian missionary Eric Liddell famously won a 400m gold medal at the 1924 Paris Olympics after choosing to run that event instead of his usual discipline to avoid competing on a Sunday. God was the most important thing in his life, and he was prepared to sacrifice a shot at Olympic gold to hold on to his Christian principles. Running was an important part of his life, but not because of his or anyone else's pleasure. He said, 'When I run, I feel God's pleasure.' We mustn't settle for anything less than the pleasure of the Lord – it will elevate our own pleasures and passions from being merely activities on this side of heaven to worship that will resonate throughout eternity.

Our goal in being Christlike is not to **compare** ourselves to him, but to **remain** in him and as we do, to **reveal** him (John 15:5-8). It is about his presence – to sit at his feet day by day and say, 'Lord you are enough.' When we serve from a place of performance, we open ourselves to pressure – often a pressure that builds until it explodes in an unhealthy way. But when we serve from a place of presence we discover the passion of God for us, we become more passionate about him, and we can serve passionately in the world.

Jesus will always be greater, but with his Spirit at work in us we can reveal his greatness precisely because we compare unfavourably to him in our own strength. By his grace and power, he makes his perfect presence known through our transformed yet work-in-progress lives.

DISCUSSION (20 MINS)

1. How do you evaluate the success of your ministry?
2. What might cause you to feel the need to 'perform' to a certain standard?
3. Who are you most likely to compare yourself to and why?
4. How can you protect yourself from 'condemnation' and instead press into 'inspiration'?

ACCOUNTABILITY (20 MINS)

Return to some of the six areas of weakness from the teaching section and honestly reflect on your own struggles in any of these areas by discussing together in pairs or threes.

Fill in accountability forms, share in pairs or smaller groups and pray for each other.

PRAYER

'Father God, help us to see ourselves as you see us and to learn that our identity is not based on the fame of our name, our achievements, the number of likes and follows we have online, or our earthly success, but on the fact that we are your children. Would this identity be a blessing to the world as it reveals you as the one to be known. Help us delight in you and to desire your presence above all things. Thank you that you love us perfectly as we are and that you love us perfectly enough to help us grow into who you created us to be. Amen.'

APPLICATION (5 MINS)

Over the coming weeks, reflect on one of the following verses each day and remind yourself who God says you are. Ground yourself in his identity. Share what you discover about your identity with someone each day, even using it as an opportunity for witness about the identity that they too can know in relationship with God.

- Genesis 1:27
- Romans 8:37
- 1 Corinthians 3:16
- 2 Corinthians 5:17
- Ephesians 2:10
- 1 Peter 2:9
- 1 John 3:1-2



SESSION FIVE

THE FRUIT IN THE MESSAGE – GOODNESS AND PEACE

In this session we will explore the spiritual fruit of goodness and peace and how they sit at the very heart of the gospel message.

SESSION IN A SENTENCE

At the heart of the gospel is the truth of God's perfect goodness which leads to perfect peace – bringing hope to a chaotic, anxious and suffering world.

SESSION BACKGROUND

Awards ceremonies are commonplace in the entertainment industry. The worlds of film, television and music host a series of international awards shows each year to highlight the brightest and best within their respective industries. It must be a special feeling to receive recognition, validation and acceptance from your professional peers.

Acceptance speeches are a delicate art. Pitch it right and you can come across as witty, humble and sincere. Pitch it wrong and you can leave behind a sour taste of ego, arrogance and worthiness. One of the most-ridiculed Oscar acceptance speeches was from actress Sally Fields when she won her second Academy Award in 1985:

'I haven't had an orthodox career and I've wanted more than anything to have your respect. The first time I didn't feel it but this time I feel it and I can't deny the fact that you like me, right now, you like me!'

Sally Fields' acceptance speech was ridiculed because she was too open in admitting that what she wanted was the acceptance of her peers. It felt needy. In truth though, Fields was honestly expressing what most people are probably thinking and experiencing – the need to be liked and accepted. If we can be 'good enough' we will be accepted, and if we are accepted, we can know peace.

Our desire for acceptance is wrapped up in our quest for identity, and the most fundamental of all human questions: 'Who am I?'

What do you think an awards ceremony in heaven would be like? Perhaps there would be awards for the most righteous, the kindest, the most humble and the most loving... To secure a nomination in any category you would presumably need to live the life of a saint, or, more likely, Jesus would just sweep the board every year. And yet, the amazing reality is that God has already held an awards ceremony of sorts. There was one ultimate prize available, and the announcement of the result came as a great surprise. We all won.

● 'But because of his great love for us,
● God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive
● with Christ even when we were dead in
● transgressions – it is by grace you have been
● saved. And God raised us up with Christ and
● seated us with him in the heavenly realms
● in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming
● ages he might show the incomparable
● riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness
● to us in Christ Jesus.'

● **EPHESIANS 2:4-7**

Jesus is our prize and through him we are forever accepted by the love of God. We are forever kept in his peace. It's a prize that we didn't get for being 'good'. This prize was given to us precisely because we are *incapable of being good enough* in our own human strength or striving.

- 'For it is by grace you have been saved,
- through faith – and this is not from
- yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by
- works, so that no one can boast.'

EPHESIANS 2:8-9

Jesus' good news brings with it peace, confidence and the security that we have been accepted by him and can move forward into full life through his grace. We can now be part of the solution in the world where we were once part of the problem.

The presence of Jesus is a prize that doesn't reveal our goodness, but the goodness of God. It is a prize that restores godly peace to humanity who once chose war with God.

SESSION GUIDE

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CATCH UP (10–20 MINS)

Take time to catch up with one another, sharing stories, feedback on opportunities and anything else that would encourage the group. Ask how the group found the process of reading the identity verses each day (Session Four – Application). Was this an encouragement? Did it directly lead to anyone having any gospel conversations as they shared their own identity discovery with others?

PRAYER

Pray to commit the time to the Lord and over any situations, positive or challenging, arising from the catch up time.

TEACHING (35–45 MINS)

Work through the following teaching material in your own way, either by reading it word

for word, or by reworking it into your own presentation.

- 'A good tree can't produce bad fruit, and
- a bad tree can't produce good fruit. A
- tree is identified by its fruit. Figs are never
- gathered from thorn bushes, and grapes are
- not picked from bramble bushes. A good
- person produces good things from the
- treasury of a good heart, and an evil person
- produces evil things from the treasury of an
- evil heart. What you say flows from what is
- in your heart.'

LUKE 6:43-45 (NLT)

Our lives present plenty of opportunities for anxiety. Every day, the news presents us with something else to worry about. The world is an unstable place. Jobs come and go with the fluctuation of the economy, governments rise and fall, once-beautiful relationships grow stale or fractious, and the best doctors in the world can't save you from the inevitability of death.

In a temporary and chaotic world, we are faced with the impossible problem of finding hope within transient and unstable things, with finding peace in an unpredictable and seemingly random existence.

But this isn't how the world is supposed to be. The world is supposed to look like its creator, like it did when God finished his creation work and declared it 'very good'.

How many times in the past week have you heard God referred to as good? We say it regularly in our prayers, our worship songs, our creeds and our affirmations to others. The Bible regularly and consistently presents the idea that God is good as the core of his identity and reality. Goodness isn't an attribute of God, he is goodness itself.

Without God, objective moral values cannot exist. Without an absolute lawgiver saying that an action like murder is *always* wrong, we could make a claim that on some occasions it could be okay. Because God is the king of the universe, he sets the framework based on his own character. When he declares something 'good', it's because he is good. When he says something is evil, it's evil because it is counter to his perfect goodness.

Sometimes people misunderstand this point and assume it means that those who don't follow God can't be good in any way. Not so - we are all made in the image of God who is good. The point is that goodness only makes sense if God is real. If he's not, then all ideas of right and wrong are subjective - we make it up as we go. But we know in our gut and our heart that this is not the case - we sense there is an objective standard for our morality. Not only that, but without God our ideas of whether we are good or bad have no anchor. Are the things I do good or bad? Do they make me a good or bad person? Who gets to decide which is which?

There is only one way to escape this endless cycle of moral philosophy: taking God at his (good) word.

Even those who want to trust and believe that God is good can struggle with the idea of God's goodness set alongside the sufferings and evils we see in creation. If God is so good, why is there suffering? If God is peace, why is there chaos? This is a powerful and deeply important question because it is asked in response to one of the few uniform experiences of humanity: we all experience pain. We all suffer.

There are many helpful ways to approach the question of suffering, but here are four points for reflection:

1. THE WORLD WAS NEVER MEANT FOR SUFFERING

When God created the world he looked at it and said it was good. Through our rebellion against his perfection we have brought chaos into the peace of God's creation. Suffering entered the world. The reason it hurts so much is that we were never created to suffer.

For those who don't believe, the question of suffering is an even harder problem to solve because there is no objective reason to assume suffering is wrong or bad (only that it *feels* bad). In a random universe, suffering is the inevitable reality of random processes. In a created universe, suffering is the inevitable reality of rebelling against the perfection of the creator. In a random universe there is no real hope even though we suffer. In a created universe, there is a perfect hope even though we suffer.

2. THERE IS HOPE BECAUSE OF JESUS

God loves us and cares about our suffering. God does not abandon us to suffering, but meets us in our sufferings by choosing to suffer. He is the God who understands our suffering through Jesus' saving work on the cross. We have been saved from sin (rebellion) and death and can now know true life and have a present and future hope that helps us persevere, even in the face of our greatest sufferings. Being a follower of Jesus doesn't mean you stop suffering - in fact, Jesus says his followers may even experience more suffering for following him (John 16:33). Being a follower of Jesus means we are not alone in our suffering. He is with us, and our suffering is not in vain, nor will it put us to shame.

3. WE CAN BE THE SOLUTION TO THE SUFFERING IN THE WORLD

God is calling his people to be his light in the world, to reveal hope where there is despair. Having given us the solution to suffering through the cross, he tells us to offer that solution to the world. We are to be God's hands and feet on the earth, bringing goodness until the day he restores this world to the perfect state in which he originally created it. Empowered by the Holy Spirit we can bring comfort, healing, and hope.

4. ONE DAY EVERYTHING WILL BE PUT RIGHT

God's perfect justice will be restored and everything will be made right forevermore on the day Jesus returns. The Bible tells us that there will be no more sorrow or pain, and that every tear will be wiped from our eyes. We will live in the perfection of God's peace and in his presence for all eternity.

Discuss: What resonates with you from these four points about your own suffering? How might you help someone who doesn't yet know Jesus to journey through their own?

The gospel gives us peace in the chaos of the world. Paul tells us to equip ourselves with the gospel as shoes that can carry us into the world as people graced with peace:

- 'For shoes, put on the peace that comes
- from the Good News so that you will be fully
- prepared.'

• **EPHESIANS 6:15 (NLT)**

Peace is not simply an emotional state. It is a spiritual quality that God desires for us to be clothed in through the power of his good news. It is fruit that flows from a life that trusts in God, even in the most chaotic and confusing circumstances of life.

Once we understand that we can find peace through the saving work of Jesus, his Spirit enables us to go into the world and live with new confidence and authority. Jesus says that *all* authority in heaven and on earth has been given to him, and he sends us out into the world to make disciples in that authority, and in the power of his Spirit (Matthew 28:16-20; Acts 1:8). When we clothe ourselves with peace, we are prepared for the darkness of the world. Whatever unpredictability it may throw at us, we can live confidently in Jesus' strength. That doesn't mean everything gets instantly easy, but it does mean we can be prepared to face the trials, challenges, and chaos of life with confidence and hope.

We will also be better equipped to tackle injustice. There are many in the world who don't know God and yet have a deep sense of grief at injustice, even going so far as to devote their time and resources to fighting against these things. We can applaud these people for their justice efforts and we can partner with them and unite in our objection to the injustice we see that offends God above all. But through the goodness of the gospel, we can also reveal that there is a greater righteousness than our own. A greater power than the abuses of power in this world. A greater hope than the despair of injustice. True justice belongs to God.

Discuss: How does the goodness and peace at the heart of the gospel help us in responding to the injustices we see around us?

As we begin to act and speak out against injustice, so we may encourage others to do the same. As we reveal God's goodness, we invite

others to encounter his true justice and true peace.

DISCUSSION (20 MINS)

1. How do we know that God is good?
2. How can we cultivate the goodness of God in our lives?
3. What does it mean to be an ambassador of peace when it comes to evangelism?
4. How do evangelism and social justice work together?

- 'So letting your sinful nature control your mind leads to death.

- But letting the Spirit control your mind leads to life and peace.'

• **ROMANS 8:6 (NLT)**

APPLICATION (5 MINS)

Be the answer to someone's need in the coming weeks. Reveal the goodness of God within someone's struggle and suffering by being present with love, kindness and service. Even the smallest act of love can have a big impact in the life of someone who is experiencing difficulty. This could look like:

- Running errands for someone housebound with illness or disability.
- Visiting an elderly person in your community who longs for relational interaction.
- Listening to someone who is struggling without the need to offer 'advice' in response.
- Sharing about your Advance experience with someone struggling with the idea of evangelism (or even start a new group that they can join).
- Praying with or reading the Bible with someone.
- Offering a public encouragement to someone on social media.

- Blessing someone with a gift.
- Cooking someone a meal.

PRAYER

'Father God, you are good. I am sorry, Lord, that I do not always live in a way that shows your goodness to others. Help me maintain a pure heart and be wise about how I fuel my heart, mind and soul. Thank you that you love me as I am, and that I can know true peace because of that. Give me the confidence and wisdom to stand up for justice, and in so doing, reflect something of your goodness that the world may be changed by it. In the name of Jesus. Amen.'

ACCOUNTABILITY (15 MINS)

Fill in accountability forms, share in pairs or smaller groups and pray for each other.

SESSION SIX

THE CHALLENGE FROM THE WORLD – FEAR AND PERSECUTION

This session considers how we can persevere in light of the challenges faced as we witness into the world – specifically the fear of man that can grip and blunt us, and persecution that can take many forms and lead to hurt and discouragement.

SESSION IN A SENTENCE

Every Christian will face persecution against and opposition to their faith, and the Bible gives clear instruction on how to persevere in every trial – not trivialising persecution, but acknowledging it and practically working through our response to it.

SESSION BACKGROUND

It is estimated that there are more Christian martyrs around the world today than at any other point in history. The Christian persecution advocacy organisation Open Doors suggests that at least one in ten Christians around the world face serious persecution for their faith. Right now, somewhere in the world, a follower of Jesus is suffering to the point of imprisonment, torture, or death.

Persecution can take a variety of forms. In essence, persecution is the experience of cruel or hostile treatment by another because of your faith. For many Christians the persecution they experience is limited, perhaps coming in the form of workplace bullying or unpleasant social interactions as people negatively react to your Christian faith. As frustrating and upsetting as this can be, we should always be sober to

the fact that there are many Christians around the world whose experience of persecution is much graver. Any hostility to our faith can be challenging, but we should be careful not to play the victim as Christians when we are in fact the victors in Christ.

Jesus makes it clear that those who follow him will face persecution (John 15:19–20). This can be an alien concept to many Christians who seek to make their faith as comfortable as possible, but true faith lived out in the world will always find opponents who rally against the offensive nature of the gospel and its unique and ultimate claims.

On the way to face trial and martyrdom in Rome, Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch, wrote the following letter to Christians facing persecution:

- ‘Pray continually for the rest of humankind
- as well, that they may find God, for there
- is in them hope of repentance. Therefore
- allow them to be instructed by you, at
- least by your deeds. In response to their
- anger, be gentle; in response to their
- boasts, be humble; in response to their
- slander, offer prayers; in response to their
- errors, be steadfast in the faith; in response
- to their cruelty, be civilised; do not be
- eager to imitate them. Let us show by our
- **forbearance** that we are their brothers and
- sisters, and let us be eager to be imitators of
- the Lord.’

Do you see the opposite spirit to which Ignatius is inviting his fellow believers to live in?

As we face anger, be gentle

As we face boasts, be humble

As we face slander, offer prayers

As we face errors, be steadfast in the faith

As we face cruelty, be civilised

Responding in this way means conquering our fear: the fear of pain and suffering, the fear of shame and humiliation, the fear of injustice and defeat, the fear of loss and death – the fear of man.

Ignatius urges believers to show *forbearance* rather than fear in response to the mockery, scorn, cruelty and persecution we may face as we are faithful to Christ. The dictionary defines forbearance as ‘patient self-control; restraint and tolerance.’ When conflict arises in our lives as a result of our faith in Jesus, are we able to show patient self-control, restraint and tolerance?

Not in our own strength. But in dying to ourselves every day, we have the hope of being reborn with a spirit of power, love and self-discipline – a sound mind rather than a fearful mind. The Holy Spirit empowers our forbearance and leaves us able to offer forgiveness to those who persecute us, just as Christ himself did upon the cross: ‘Forgive them, Father, for they know not what they do.’

May our faith-empowered forbearance do more than help us endure persecution and overcome fear – may it help to open the eyes of the blind.

SESSION GUIDE

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CATCH UP (10 MINS)

Take time to catch up with one another, sharing stories, feedback on opportunities and anything else that would encourage the group. Share stories of how you have met people’s needs in the past month (Session Five – Application).

PRAYER

Pray to commit the time to the Lord and over any situations, positive or challenging, arising from the catch up time.

TEACHING AND DISCUSSION (60+ MINS)

In this session, the teaching and discussion are bound together as we explore ten ways in which we can persevere through persecution, with space to discuss each point. Don’t feel the pressure to rush – be sure to create lots of space for discussion around the various ways we are encouraged to keep going in the face of persecution and trial. You may want to choose to explore only the ways which are most relevant to your group, or split this session into two and meet twice this month.

- ‘Consider it pure joy, my brothers and
- sisters, whenever you face trials of many
- kinds, because you know that the testing
- of your faith produces perseverance. Let
- perseverance finish its work so that you
- may be mature and complete, not lacking
- anything.’

JAMES 1:2-4

James calls believers to persevere in times of testing and suffering. He tells us that perseverance is something that will help us grow into maturity, and as we mature we will lack nothing for the life that God has for us. He even goes so far as to say we should consider it pure joy when trials come our way! James goes on to offer ten practical ways in which we can do so.

1. PERSEVERE IN JOY

- ‘Consider it pure joy, my brothers and
- sisters, whenever you face trials of many
- kinds, because you know that the testing of
- your faith produces perseverance.’

JAMES 1:2-3

The joy of the Lord is our strength, and it is never more needed than when we are facing persecution! Joy acts as an anchor for our soul. As a storm may drag a boat far from the safety of the shore, so may trials drag us from the

presence of God. Remembering the joy of our salvation in every circumstance helps us to stay rooted in that which is of first importance, the power, presence and peace of God.

Discuss: What does it look like to persevere in joy even when facing 'trials of many kinds'?

2. PERSEVERE IN PATIENCE

'Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.'

JAMES 1:4

Many of us treat patience as something passive. When difficulties come our way, we simply sit patiently and try to wait them out. But biblical patience – the patience that is fruit of the Spirit – is an active patience. To be actively patient is to be proactive in trusting God.

Discuss: What is the difference between a passive and an active patience?

3. PERSEVERE IN WISDOM

'If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.'

JAMES 1:5

One of the most important things we need is the wisdom of heaven, and never more so than when we are facing persecution. King Solomon was blessed by God with great wisdom because he had asked God for it above all other things, including long life and wealth (1 Kings 3:4-15). It can be hard to maintain a heavenly perspective when we are facing trials, so seeking the Lord's wisdom to help guide us is essential and he delights in blessing us in this way.

Discuss: How have you seen the wisdom of heaven help you at specific times of your life?

4. PERSEVERE IN FAITH

'But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. Such a person is double-minded and unstable in all they do.'

JAMES 1:6-8

Trusting God is essential if we are going to weather the storms of persecution. As flaming arrows fly our way, we extinguish them with the shield of faith (Ephesians 6:16). While we may be vulnerable to physical harm, there is no work of spiritual persecution that can overcome the one who trusts in the Lord. Our faith is built on grace: not only do we persevere in the faith we have, we continue to extend the grace we have received, especially to those who persecute us.

Discuss: How do you take up the shield of faith against the persecution you face and offer grace in response?

5. PERSEVERE IN DEVOTION

'Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires.'

JAMES 1:19-20

Our relationship with God means everything. When the world is against us, we must remember that he is for us. This remembrance begins in the secret place as we spend time in his presence – adoring him, seeking him, asking him for help and being formed into his likeness. When others mock us, do we listen to them or to God? Are we quick to speak in anger to those who persecute us, or in love back to our Father? In his presence we can be prepared to respond to the world, not in self-righteousness, but in the holy and gracious righteousness of God.

Discuss: When trial or persecution comes, how quick are you to prioritise devotion as an antidote?

6. PERSEVERE IN THE TRUTH

- 'Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you. Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says... whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it - not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it - they will be blessed in what they do.'

● **JAMES 1:21-22, 25**

When life gets tough, we can all-too-easily retreat into our comfort zone to make ourselves feel better. The things we eat, watch, play and consume can act as pleasure-bringing antidotes to the displeasure we experience in the trials we face. These things can easily become unhealthy in our lives, especially as we push into greater excess to ease our discomfort. How quickly do we get into the Word of God for comfort and direction? How instinctively do we allow the Bible to be our compass, our daily bread, the bedrock of truth upon which we can build our firm foundation while the sands of circumstance shift around us?

Discuss: Where do we find assurance and perspective when discomfort distorts our faith?

7. PERSEVERE IN HOLINESS

- "When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed.'

● **JAMES 1:13-14**

The devil tempts, God tests. Whenever the devil tempts you, his desire is that you would fail and your faith would be destroyed. When God tests you, his desire is that you would succeed and that your faith would be developed. Whether we are facing temptation or testing, our prayer can be the same: 'Lord help us to persevere in the holiness you have saved us for through your Son, and empowered us for by your Spirit.'

Discuss: What does it look like to live out holiness in the face of persecution?

8. PERSEVERE IN SERVICE

- 'Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.'

● **JAMES 1:27**

Persecution is designed to stop us in our tracks. It can make us afraid, apathetic or angry. Our best response therefore is to be *active*, continuing to serve selflessly, compassionately and graciously in the face of opposition.

Discuss: What is the power of persevering in service even while we are mocked or abused?

9. PERSEVERE IN HOPE

- Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him.

● **JAMES 1:12**

Paul encourages believers that 'our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us' (Romans 8:18). Paul goes on to say that this hope is not just for us, but as we persevere in hope we will reveal that same hope to a world in need. Hope is a powerful force that has often been shown most clearly in the face of the greatest suffering.

- 'Suffering is not an embarrassment to the Christian faith. It is the thread with which Christ's name is stitched into our lives.'

● **REBECCA MCLAUGHLIN**

Discuss: How might hope be revealed in the suffering of Christians?

10. PERSEVERE IN FELLOWSHIP

James' letter is not written to individuals in isolation, but to a church community. Fellowship is essential. Persecution should drive us to greater fellowship – not so that we would hide ourselves away from the harsh world outside, but so that we can refresh ourselves, encouraging and blessing one another, and then going together into the world to face trials and triumphs *together*.

Discuss: Does your church community make space for people to talk about the trials of life and Christian witness into the world? Do you pray for, encourage and support one another in this area? If not, what could this look like?

APPLICATION (5 MINS)

Visit the World Watch List on opendoors.org and choose a country to pray for each week. As we pray for our brothers and sisters around the world who are facing persecution for their faith, we can be encouraged that we never suffer alone. God is with us by his Spirit's power and through the prayers and actions of his church.

PRAYER

Give plenty of time to prayer, specifically focusing on three areas of persecution:

1. Pray for specific areas of persecution that individuals in the group are experiencing.
2. Pray for general areas of persecution that challenge the spread of the gospel in your context.
3. Pray for the persecuted church in the world.

ACCOUNTABILITY (15 MINS)

Fill in accountability forms, share in pairs or smaller groups and pray for each other.

DON'T FORGET...

Advance is a global movement – so visit advancegroups.org/global and alongside the Open Doors Watch List be sure to pray for all the nations where Advance Groups are meeting each month. If you know someone in another nation who would be blessed by Advance (whether we have groups there already or not) then connect them to us via the website.

SESSION SEVEN

THE FRUIT IN THE MESSENGER — KINDNESS AND JOY

This session will explore how we, as messengers of the gospel, need to live in the joy of our salvation and reveal the kindness of God to the world. What does it truly look like for our evangelism to be kind-hearted in word and action, and strengthened by the joy of the Lord?

SESSION IN A SENTENCE

God's kindness is powerful enough to restore a hopelessly-rebellious humanity back into a hope-filled relationship with him, and it is this same kindness that fills all believers with joy and releases our potential to be his servants in the world.

SESSION BACKGROUND

The Bible tells us that God 'regretted that he had made human beings on the earth, and his heart was deeply troubled' (Genesis 6:6).

God saw how much evil there was in the world – and it was *particularly* awful at this point, a real rock-bottom moment – and it broke his heart: so much so that he expressed the feeling that it would be better if humanity had not been created. We shouldn't be surprised at his reaction – the people's complete wickedness and lack of repentance was completely opposed to his nature.

Genesis 6:6 presents us with a question: what does it mean for God to 'regret'? One way to begin to find an answer is to remember that we are always limited to our human language

when talking about the divine. While we may never fully grasp the complexity of what's being described here, we can begin to understand the idea of God's regret as a human way of expressing how troubled and displeased he was by the evil before him.

The world should have ended in that moment of God's regret, but it didn't. Why? Because even though God was distressed by humanity's sinfulness, he still had an eternal perspective – defined by his overwhelming and indescribable loving kindness.

Despite our depravity, God does not abandon us to complete destruction – even though that is what we deserve. Every single one of us has fallen short of his standard (Romans 3:23). But God, in his loving kindness, gives us what we don't deserve: a second chance. Genesis 6 goes on to tell us that the reason why the world is not destroyed in an instant is because a man called Noah found grace with God.

There's an important detail here: the Bible doesn't tell us that Noah *earned* grace with God. God's grace fell upon Noah because God is gracious. Noah's righteousness was in response to God's grace, not the other way round. The grace given by God to Noah would not be wasted. We can never earn God's grace, it is offered freely and undeservedly to us because of the kindness of God.

It wasn't that Noah found potential hope in God's kindness, it was God's kindness that found the hope of potential in Noah.

As we go into the world carrying God's story, we are not offering the hope of God's kindness as an abstract idea. His kindness is already at work in our potential to serve him faithfully.

SESSION GUIDE

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CATCH UP (10–20 MINS)

Take time to catch up with one another, sharing stories, feedback on opportunities and anything else that would encourage the group. During the previous session (Session Six – Application) did you identify any other Advance groups meeting around the world that you know? Pray for them together.

PRAYER

Pray to commit the time to the Lord and over any situations, positive or challenging, arising from the catch up time.

TEACHING (45–50 MINS)

Work through the following teaching material in your own way, either by reading it word for word, or by reworking it into your own presentation.

- 'Since God chose you to be the holy people he loves, you must clothe yourselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience.'

COLOSSIANS 3:12 (NLT)

There is something powerful about a simple act of kindness that can have a transforming effect on the person it benefits. In recent years, Christian social action movements have often been based around donating 'hours of kindness'. In an increasingly individualistic society, kindness becomes one of the most powerful resources we have. Acts of kindness can see previously closed doors opened, cold hearts warmed, stubborn attitudes softened, and lives transformed.

Simple acts of kindness can be beautiful, but to truly reveal the kindness of God to the world,

our kindness must move beyond individual actions to the foundation of who we are as ambassadors of his kingdom. When Jesus takes his rightful place at the centre of our lives, we grow in spiritual kindness.

Putting Jesus at the centre of our lives goes beyond inviting him 'into your heart.' It involves choosing to submit to his lordship and allowing him to shape our character. Think of these two ways of offering an invitation to respond to the gospel:

1. Will you *accept* Jesus into your *heart*?
2. Will you *give your life* to Jesus?

Discuss: Which of these better explains what God is asking of us? Why?

You don't have to look far to see people living in hopelessness. It's one of the greatest tragedies of human existence. When Jesus took our sin on the cross, he took the hopelessness of the world upon himself. Because of this we need never feel hopeless again. Isn't that amazing? But still we see hopelessness. Perhaps you are even experiencing hopelessness today. Be reminded that God's kindness towards us through Jesus' sacrifice can wipe that hopelessness away forever and replace it with the anchoring hope of joy that goes beyond simple happiness.

Happiness is important to people. It's so important that the United States Declaration of Independence lists it among the sovereign rights of man: 'life, liberty and the *pursuit of happiness*.' Ask the people around you what they want most in life, and there's a good chance that happiness will feature in their answer.

But what is happiness, and how do we evaluate it in our lives? One person's happiness can be another person's misery – you don't need to look much further than the two sides of a football stadium after the final whistle in a championship match. The elation of the winning side is in stark contrast to the despondency of the losing team. Can we ever live in a world where everyone can be happy all the time?

Discuss: How do you evaluate happiness in your life? Is there a difference between the way you understand happiness and the way those who don't yet know Jesus might understand happiness?

Happiness is a temporary emotion. It can be tempting in our evangelism to promise that becoming a Christian will lead to a life of happiness. It's an enticing sales pitch. But it's not true. And there is nothing kind about deceiving people. The kindness of the gospel is not found in how nicely packaged we can make it, but in the power of its truth and hope.

Jesus didn't die to give us easy lives and permanent happiness. Jesus died so we could have life in place of death. One day, the life we choose will be perfected in eternity where there will be no sadness or pain (John 10:10; Revelation 21:4). But until either we die or Jesus returns, we are faced with the reality that we live in an imperfect world where people choose to reject God. Sadness is very much a part of life. The good news is that Jesus offers us a profound hope:

• 'So you have sorrow now, but I will see you again; then you will rejoice, and no one can rob you of that joy.'

JOHN 16:22 (NLT)

Jesus' death and resurrection have made it possible for us to have the joy of full, eternal life. No one can take away from us the joy of the Spirit. Our joy is different to happiness – our joy is spiritual and everlasting. Paul explains this to us:

• 'Therefore, since we have been made right in God's sight by faith, we have peace with God because of what Jesus Christ our Lord has done for us. Because of our faith, Christ has brought us into this place of undeserved privilege where we now stand, and we confidently and joyfully look forward to sharing God's glory.'

ROMANS 5:1-2 (NLT)

Paul is pointing out that wearing our faith well comes down to how much we put our trust in God in our everyday lives. When our trust is bigger than our emotional state of mind,

we react to life differently. No matter how tough things might get, we have hope in God's promises about the future. It doesn't mean that life gets easier, and it certainly doesn't trivialise the reality of the pain that we or others might experience, but it does mean that even in the most difficult times, we have *hope*. Paul goes on to say:

• 'We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they help us develop endurance. And endurance develops strength of character, and character strengthens our confident hope of salvation. And this hope will not lead to disappointment. For we know how dearly God loves us, because he has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with his love.'

ROMANS 5:3-5 (NLT)

This is not just about a positive mental attitude. It's about learning to trust God in every situation – especially when at first he might seem absent or indifferent. God assures us that he is always with us, and he is more invested in every situation we experience than we are!

Here's an outline of how we can maintain the Romans 5 mindset of joy in all situations:

- Bad things happen. Hard times come.
- We endure the rough times with God's help and learn through them.
- We grow in character, we become more like Jesus.
- We increase our confidence in a perfect heaven.
- We live to share heaven with others so they may know eternal joy.
- We become part of the solution to pain, where we were once part of the problem.

Discuss: Can you relate this outline of Romans 5 to an experience from your own life?

Our hope and joy rests in Jesus, not in our circumstances. It all starts and ends with him.

When we realise this, it changes our life – and in turn, it will impact those around us who witness our own change of heart, mind and attitude.

Our joy is at work when we proclaim the good news about the kindness of God and the hope we have in Jesus with our lips and our lives. Just like life, evangelism can be challenging, and the joy of the gospel is strength enough for us to keep going.

DISCUSSION (15 MINS)

1. How can we reveal grace and kindness to the world?
2. What do you think it means to bring heaven to earth today?
3. What role does joy play in our testimony as we explain how life is better with Jesus?

- ‘Here is an important distinction with far-reaching implications for Christian behavior. The deeds of Christians in this present time – however insignificant they may seem, however “vain” they may appear to those who value worldly success – are already being built into God’s advancing kingdom.’

FLEMING RUTLEDGE

APPLICATION (5 MINS)

Revisit your personal testimony. Consider how you talk about and express the joy of the Lord as a core part of your story of God at work in you. How much time is spent in your testimony explaining who you *were* and how much time is devoted to who you have *become*? Who gets the most glory in your testimony? Your past, your self or your king?

PRAYER

‘Father God, we are so humbled by the grace we have received from you. If we have ever taken your grace for granted, forgive us now. We ask your Spirit to help us to reveal your grace to the world around us. Lord Jesus, thank you that, because of your death and resurrection, we have a hope for the future, and an everlasting

joy in our hearts today. May your joy be our strength, impacting all that we are and all that we do.’

ACCOUNTABILITY (25 MINS)

Fill in accountability forms, share in pairs or smaller groups and pray for each other.



SESSION EIGHT

THE CHALLENGE FROM THE ENEMY – TEMPTATION AND ACCUSATION

In this session we will explore the challenge of temptation, both from the world and from the enemy, along with the accusations he throws at us to discourage, discredit and destroy our faith. How can we journey through temptation with faithfulness, and fight off accusation so that we can carry the gospel into the world as holy messengers?

SESSION IN A SENTENCE

The devil wants to destroy our faith and discredit our witness, but in God we are already victorious: we have been given the power of heaven to overcome both the challenges of the enemy and our own frailty.

SESSION BACKGROUND

The name *Satan* is a transliteration of the Hebrew word for *accuser* or *adversary*. Satan's accusations take two primary forms: **manipulative lies** and **condemning truths**.

Through his lies, Satan wants to manipulate our understanding of the truth. He will often attack our emotions in an attempt to move us from security in our knowledge of God to an insecure foundation of doubt and distrust. Think about a time when you haven't received an immediate or obvious answer to prayer: Satan will have been quick to whisper in your ear that your prayer remains unanswered because God isn't *really* trustworthy, or because he isn't really there.

Satan also confronts us with the truths of our failures and seeks to bring condemnation. The difficulty here is that Satan has a valid point – we *have* missed the mark, we have fallen short of the perfect standard of God. But his manipulation comes through fogging our vision with shame so that we cannot see God's grace in our failure. Satan wants us to forget that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1).

Marina Cantacuzino, author of *The Forgiveness Project*, notes that in all her hundreds of interactions with stories of forgiveness, it can be hard to pin down exactly what forgiveness looks like. She writes,

- '...the only thing I know for sure is that
- the act of forgiving is fluid and active and
- can change from day to day, hour to hour,
- depending on how you feel when you
- wake in the morning or what triggers your
- encounter during the day.'

MARINA CANTACUZINO, THE FORGIVENESS PROJECT

Satan loves to play on our complex human experience of forgiveness. He wants us to believe that God's forgiveness is as fluid and as active as our own, as subjective to fluctuating emotion as ours. But this is not true. God is *faithful* to forgive any and all who sincerely seek his grace (1 John 1:9). Our forgiveness flows from the perfect forgiveness of God.

- 'Forgiveness liberates the soul, it removes
- fear. That's why it's such a powerful
- weapon.'

NELSON MANDELA

Forgiveness is powerful – and the greatest power in our forgiveness is that it reveals the forgiveness and grace we have first received from God. Jesus makes it clear that if we don't forgive others, we are showing that we are not forgiven (Matthew 18:21-35). Forgiven people forgive people.

We face a powerful adversary who wants to steal and destroy our faith. Thankfully, we serve the all-powerful king of creation who wants to keep us in his love and gives us all we need to respond to Satan's accusations and manipulations.

We rebuke Satan's lies through the powerful and unchanging truth of God's Word. We rebuff Satan's shaming schemes through the faithfulness of God's forgiveness. And we rejoice that the one who is in us is greater than the one who is in the world (1 John 4:4).

SESSION GUIDE



CATCH UP (10–20 MINS)

Take time to catch up with one another, sharing stories, feedback on opportunities and anything else that would encourage the group. For smaller groups, ask each person to share one win and one struggle since your last meeting. For larger groups, ask four or five people to share a specific testimony since your last meeting.

PRAYER

Pray to commit the time to the Lord and over any situations, positive or challenging, arising from the catch up time.

TEACHING AND DISCUSSION (60 MINS)

This teaching section includes room for discussion throughout. Work through the

following teaching material in your own way, either by reading it word for word, or by reworking it into your own presentation.

- 'No temptation has overtaken you except
- what is common to mankind. And God
- is faithful; he will not let you be tempted
- beyond what you can bear. But when you
- are tempted, he will also provide a way out
- so that you can endure it.'

1 CORINTHIANS 10:13

God does not tempt: that is the devil's playground (James 1:13-15). God will test us – not to learn something about us that he doesn't already know, but that we might grow and learn through the process. Here's the difference: when the devil sends temptation, his hope is that we will always fail, but when God tests us, his hope is that we will always succeed. Both the method and the motive are different. Half the battle is being aware that we are in a battle. The other half is working out how to respond. Paul reminds us in 1 Corinthians that our response to temptation and our hope to overcome it is rooted in God himself.

We fight against three primary areas of temptation in our lives: the world, the flesh and the enemy. God equips and empowers us to overcome them all.

THE WORLD: THE EXTERNAL BATTLE

The world can be an attractive place. There are many treasures and pleasures in the world that are in no way counter to our faith. But there are also many that jostle for attention and threaten to dethrone Christ from his rightful place in our lives. These things either become too important to us, or lead us into sinfulness. Increasingly the world promises fulfilment as we drink deeply of its pleasures and promote ourselves, but God calls us to drink deeply of his living water and promote him (John 4:14).

THE FLESH: THE INTERNAL BATTLE

In our fallen world we are fighting against our own corrupted flesh. Paul says that the deeds of our flesh are immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing and more (Galatians 5:19-21). That's quite a list!

This list is the direct counterpoint to the fruit of the Spirit we are exploring in this year of Advance. Paul tells us that walking by the Spirit is the way to overcome the genuine challenges of our own fallenness. When we let the Spirit of God take control of our lives, we instead put on love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23).

Discuss: Which areas of temptation from the world and from your own flesh do you struggle with? How have you seen growth or victory in these areas?

THE ENEMY: THE SPIRITUAL BATTLE

Either discuss each of these areas of temptation as you go, or work through them all first and then have a longer time of discussion using the questions at the end.

Satan hates our faith. He hates that our faith leads us to worship God rather than himself. He will do whatever he can to get to our faith. He doesn't care about our finances, our health, our family, our career, or anything else about us, but he will manipulate and use all of those things if it gets him what he really wants: our destruction (John 10:10). Here are some of the ways in which Satan attacks us and how we can respond:

Satan will speak deceit into our lives - store up truth

The devil is liar. His lies are used to confuse and corrupt us, to pull us away from the life that God has for us and to lead us into death. We must build our faith on the solid foundation of the Word of God. The wise man builds his house upon the rock, but the foolish man upon the sand (Matthew 7:24-27). Every accusation from the enemy comes with an attempt to move our house from its firm foundation onto shaky ground so that the storms that come our way destroy our relationship with God.

To recognise and rebut the lies of Satan we must store up the truth of God's Word in our hearts and minds. Reading the Bible is essential, but what about memorising scripture? Choosing to store the truth of God in our hearts and minds is a powerful way to respond when Satan

attempts to confuse us with his lies (Psalm 119:11).

Satan will exploit our isolation - prioritise community

It's no coincidence that Satan waits until Jesus has been alone in the wilderness for forty days before he begins to engage with him (Matthew 4:1-11). It is when we are in isolation that Satan plans his strongest attacks. Jesus rebuffed Satan by standing firm on the truth of God's Word, and we can do the same. But we should also be strongly on our guard when we are isolated. It's why fellowship must be our priority: finding ways not to be alone after ministry, even something as simple as calling a friend to chat, can be a protection against the isolation attacks of the enemy.

Satan will encourage our shame - be accountable and trust in God's grace

The devil is a liar, but also uses some strategically-placed truths. He will remind us of the truth of our sin and failure so that he can trap us in defeat and despair. He will combine truth with lie: the truth of what we have done with the lie that this time there is no forgiveness for us. He takes the truth of our sin and through lies and manipulation draws us into the shadow of shame and debilitates us with condemnation.

Satan wants to put us under a curse from which we can never get out, but the curse of sin, shame and death has already been dealt with by Jesus. The blood of Christ washes us clean and gives us life (Romans 5:9). Condemnation is no more (Romans 8:1). Those who are in Christ have the gift of his Holy Spirit. Unlike Satan, when the Holy Spirit brings to mind our sin it is not to bring us to shame, but to bring us to repentance. We must hold ourselves accountable to the Spirit of God through trusted friends. We must not let the devil keep our failures in the dark, but let them come into the light where they can be met with hope and healing.

Satan will manipulate our doubts - seek out the mercy of gospel-centred fellowship

Jude tells believers to show mercy to those who doubt (Jude 22). This tells us three things:

1. Doubt will be present in our lives at times.

2. Doubt is not ultimately a good thing, otherwise it would not require mercy as a response.
3. We can support and encourage each other with love, humility and grace.

When Satan attempts to manipulate the inevitability of our human doubt, we should connect with brothers and sisters who can journey with us through our questions, ground us in the truth of the gospel and love us through prayer. Doubt itself is inevitable, but through the mercy of God at work in his people it need not be inevitable that our doubt crushes our faith.

Satan will offer us treasures – *delight in the Lord*

The external and internal temptations of the world and the flesh are areas in which Satan loves to play. He is an expert at telling us that we deserve something and asking why don't have it. The more we listen, the more we become unfulfilled in Christ: bitter and resentful, jealous of others, selfish and self-righteous.

What are we living for? If we settle for anything less than to be in the presence of the Lord, to delight ourselves in him, we will be at risk of being won over by Satan's promises of fortune and fulfilment in the world and the flesh. We all face temptation in this way. The grass often does look greener on the other side of the fence. If our roots run deep in the perfect soil of God's eternal kingdom, we will stay on the right side, so we must invest in our faith with deep devotion and realise that Christ truly is enough (Psalm 1).

Satan will play on our fear – *know the one in us is greater than the one in the world*

We live in a fearful world. Satan loves to exploit our fear, causing us to distrust God and making us ineffective in our witness. Every time Satan speaks into our fear, he is attempting to move the love of God aside. The opposite of love is not hate, but fear.

Fear steals peace. Fear ruins trust. Fear generates selfishness. Fear leads to apathy. Fear corrupts joy. Fear hides truth. Fear brings death.

When the Bible tells us, 'There is no fear in love. But perfect love casts out fear...' it is telling us

something profound and eternally important (1 John 4:18). God says we need not fear. We can choose love instead of fear.

Love gives peace. Love builds trust. Love generates selflessness. Love leads to passion. Love empowers joy. Love reveals truth. Love brings life.

The world is messy and complex. In our human frailty, we will undoubtedly experience fear, but we need not be defeated by it. We can rebuke the fear games of Satan and trust in the one who is greater, the one who is in us by his Spirit, the one who took fear upon himself on the cross so that one day we will never know fear again.

Discuss: In what areas of accusation and temptation do you need to be more intentional about your readiness to respond?

In all these areas let us listen to the warning of Peter as he writes:

- 'Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.'

1 PETER 5:8

Awareness allows us to recognise the attack. God enables us to respond in victory.

PRAYER AND ACCOUNTABILITY (30 MINS)

This session leaves extra time for accountability, so that we can be honest about the temptations we are facing and pray for one another.

In response to spiritual warfare, reflect prayerfully together on the following statements:

- When the whisper of the enemy says, 'You're not good enough,' we can respond, 'But Jesus is.'
- When he tries to convince us that God has let us down, we can respond that our faith is in

the unchanging and unwavering faithfulness of our Father.

- When the enemy taunts us with our past failures, we can respond that Jesus has taken our sin.
- When he points out the sin of today, we can respond, 'God's grace is sufficient.'
- When the enemy lies to us, we can respond with the truth of the Word of God.
- When his accusation seems too much to handle, we can respond to the enemy by calling upon the Holy Spirit to help us overcome, and by seeking out fellowship with our Christian family.
- In any and every accusation of the enemy, we can trust in Jesus who has already claimed victory through the power of the cross, and who responds on our behalf with the eternity-transforming words of victory and peace: 'It is finished.'

Spiritual warfare is not an attempt to gain the victory, it is standing firm in what we already possess in God.

Fill in accountability forms, share in pairs or smaller groups and pray for each other.

APPLICATION (5 MINS)

Think again about the role of accountability in your life. Do you honestly, transparently and vulnerably share your life with trusted people? Are you confessing your sin to another brother or sister in the Lord? Are you seeing progress in areas of sinfulness? If not, make yourself accountable to a couple of trusted friends and see if you can support one another.

Accountability is not a system for behaviour management. It is an opportunity for you to humbly grow your faith, and, through fellowship with other believers, thwart the schemes of the enemy, reset perspectives on the world, encourage one another in resisting the flesh – and best of all, delight in the presence of the Lord together.



SESSION NINE

THE FRUIT IN THE METHOD — GENTLENESS AND PATIENCE

In this session we will explore a posture of submission to God which helps us to grow in patience. How does the fruit of patience directly affect our ability to be compassionate in the world? How can we be spiritually gentle people even as we wait on God for breakthrough in areas of our own lives?

SESSION IN A SENTENCE

Through a posture of patience and submission to God, we are equipped to bring gentleness and compassion to a hurting world as we proclaim the gospel with our words and our actions.

SESSION BACKGROUND

True life is only possible for us thanks to God's abundant, overwhelming grace – his loving kindness. Having received grace from the Father through the Son, going on to reveal true grace to the world through the Spirit in our lives should be our natural response.

However, it's easy to abuse grace. We should never receive grace lightly from God. Grace is not a get-out-of-jail-free card that means we can live as we please simply because God is gracious and will forgive us.

Grace does not make our *sin* acceptable. Grace makes it possible for *sinners* to be accepted through true repentance – which is something very different.

If we abuse the grace we are offered by God, we will never enter into the fullness of relationship that he desires to have with us. The Bible goes so far as to say that abusing the grace of God in this way is outright denial of the lordship of Christ (Jude 4).

Treating grace in this way disregards Jesus' saving work upon the cross, ultimately pushing him away from his rightful place on the throne of our lives. Paul is clear about what God's grace has achieved for us and why it is so precious:

• 'He is so rich in kindness and grace that he purchased our freedom with the blood of his Son and forgave our sins.'

EPHESIANS 1:7 (NLT)

God's grace is not offered to deal with our individual sins (the symptoms) but to take care of our sinful nature (the cause). The gospel saves us from sin in the past, present and future:

- We are saved from the **penalty** of our sin in the past through the work of Jesus on the cross
- We are saved from the **power** of sin in the present through the work of the Spirit in our lives
- We are saved from the **presence** of sin in the future through the eternal reign of the Father and his coming kingdom

There will be times in our lives when we will need to ask God for forgiveness and receive his grace afresh. Martin Luther wrote that 'the entire

life of believers should be one of repentance' - meaning that we don't only repent to enter relationship with Jesus, but to remain in it day by day. God is gentle and patient with us even while he is offended by our sin (2 Peter 3:9). His compassion is wonderful. As we grow in our faith, our desire to root out areas of sin in our lives also grows, as we partner with God's Spirit to allow him to do his work (healing and delivering) while being faithful to what he asks us to do for ourselves (like fleeing temptation).

God's grace, seen in the death and resurrection of Jesus, covers and corrects our sinful nature, allowing us as imperfect creations to dwell in true relationship with the perfect creator. God is not trying to force us to live a certain way through his grace, he is making it possible for us to live the life we were created for in the first place: true life.

Another way we can abuse grace is to fail to offer the same grace we have received to others. It's true: this is an *abuse* of grace. Freely we have received, so freely we must give (Matthew 10:8). Sometimes we fail to offer grace to others because we are struggling to accept the truth that God forgives and accepts us - perhaps because we can't forgive and accept ourselves. Remember this: God is willing to forgive us for the death of his Son. We are all guilty of putting Christ upon the cross, but God does not hold it *against* us, he holds it *for* us. There is no sin, no rebellion, no failure that he cannot or will not forgive if we ask him, and that is also true for the rest of the world.

The grace of God is enough for us (2 Corinthians 12:9). We must not abuse it, but live in it humbly and joyfully by offering the very same grace we have received to the world - so that they may be blessed by the compassion of God.

SESSION GUIDE

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CATCH UP (10-20 MINS)

Take time to catch up with one another, sharing stories, feedback on opportunities and anything else that would encourage the group. Ask if any of the group would feel comfortable sharing their experience of accountability (Session

Eight - Application) to encourage the rest of the group.

PRAYER

Pray to commit the time to the Lord and give thanks for the opportunities that the group has had in the past month to share the gospel. Pray for those who have put their trust in Jesus through these opportunities.

TEACHING (30-40 MINS)

Work through the following teaching material in your own way, either by reading it word for word, or by reworking it into your own presentation.

- 'Be completely humble and gentle; be
- patient, bearing with one another in love.
- Make every effort to keep the unity of the
- Spirit through the bond of peace.'

EPHESIANS 4:2-3

Throughout our lives, We each have to put our trust in various things. Some things we put our trust in are more significant - like the doctors who treat us when we are sick, giving us advice and the right medicine to make us healthy, or the laws of physics and the skill of the engineers when sitting on an aeroplane at 35,000 feet. Others might carry more personal significance - like keeping a secret between friends.

No one likes to have their trust broken. And yet at some point we have all been let down in some way by somebody we trusted.

We can put our complete trust in God. He will never let us down. It's truly remarkable to know that the awesome God of all creation is interested in us as individuals. He loves each one of us perfectly.

During times of uncertainty or even suffering, our patience can be the first thing to go out of the window. What does that say about our trust in God? Complete trust in the almighty God and complete submission to his will develops spiritual patience in our lives. When we demonstrate our willingness to be patient in our walk with Jesus we demonstrate real faithfulness, real trust.

Worry, anxiety, distrust, fear, annoyance and anger – these are all things that are completely against patience. Can you see how damaging those things can be in your life? God's Word consistently speaks against such things.

Take a moment to look up these verses in the group and read them out to each other.

- Luke 12:22-26 (Worry)
- Philippians 4:6-7 (Anxiety)
- Proverbs 3:5 (Distrust)
- Hebrews 13:6 (Fear)
- Proverbs 12:16 (Annoyance)
- James 1:19-20 (Anger)

Discuss: Which of these verses challenge you the most? How many of the world's problems can you categorise under one of these headings?

Job is one of the most misunderstood books in the Bible. Job is a faithful worshipper of God who suffers incredible loss and personal affliction. Throughout his ordeal Job refuses to curse God for what has happened, but he does have some big questions – including the one we have probably all asked within our own sufferings: 'Why?'

God doesn't offer Job an easy answer – in fact, he asks Job more questions.

God asks Job if he was there when the stars were hung in the sky, or if he was present when the very fabric of reality came into existence. God reminds Job that human beings are created, and that he is the creator. Suddenly, the lightbulb flicks on for Job as he is reassured of the truth that, no matter what challenges the world throws up, God who hung the stars in the sky is still in control. God is good and he loves his people (Job 38-41).

If we want to persevere with patience through the ups and downs of life, this is the reality we must accept – as hard as that might seem. God's response to Job is a beautifully gentle rebuke. He simply offers Job the opportunity to reset his perspective.

The book of Job is not primarily a story of suffering, but a story of faithfulness and submission. Throughout his difficulties – even

as he wrestles with tough questions – Job finds a place of *submission* to God. It is in this submission that Job finds his peace restored, not through having all his questions answered. How often are we willing to be content without having all the answers we seek?

Job teaches us that, even though heart-breaking and difficult times may come, trust in God and submission to his authority enable and equip us to persevere. We can endure. We can become spiritually patient people who are not quick to anger, not quick to reject God when life doesn't go the way we'd hoped it would. We can become people who recognise that God's perspective is bigger than ours. After all, he was there when the stars were hung in the sky, and we weren't.

From this perspective Job is able to, 'rejoice in his confident hope and be patient in trouble,' as Paul instructs in Romans 12:12.

Paul also tells us in the same verse to keep on praying – an essential piece of the patience puzzle from which we can move in the direction of offering the gentle and compassionate perspective reset of God into the world. Prayer often brings with it perspective. Sometimes it's through ordering and articulating our thoughts and emotions as we speak them out to God, but more often it's because God meets us in our prayers. We won't always like or understand the responses that God gives (including silence), but we can be confident that he listens to us and that his response is always the right one.

It's also important that our prayers are not only focused on ourselves. The story of Job ends on a small detail that we can easily miss. After his perspective check, Job worships God – at which point God asks him to pray for his friends who had done a poor job of helping him in his difficulty, the friends who had misled Job about the identity and character of God. Job obediently prays for his friends, and the Bible tells us that as he does this his fortunes are restored.

What a remarkable detail. God reveals to Job (and to us) that patience and obedience go hand in hand – that choosing to prefer others, even as our own hearts are breaking, even as others have let us down, even as we wait for clarity for our own lives, brings rich blessing from God.

Did God's blessing of new family take all the pain away from Job of the loss of his first family? Surely not. Job would have carried grief with him for the rest of his life. Life often leaves us limping. But we are not left without hope. Job is given hope that no matter what is taken away, God brings something new. One day, goodness will be restored perfectly as the pain of our experiences will be forever healed. There will be no limping in heaven.

As we experience the transforming effects of spiritual patience in our lives, we can become the compassionately-gentle church that the world desperately needs. By patiently trusting God, we are able to go into the world to offer the God of breakthrough to others, even as we wait for our own breakthrough.

Discuss: Why does the spiritual fruit of patience go hand in hand with revealing the gentleness and compassion of God to the world?

In Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan, a Jewish man gets beaten by bandits and left for dead on the side of the road. A few people who you might have expected to help walk by and ignore him, but eventually a Samaritan offers help, even though the Samaritans and the Jews were enemies. Why does the Samaritan help the Jew?

'Then a despised Samaritan came along, and when he saw the man, he felt **compassion** for him.'

LUKE 10:33 (NLT)

Spiritual compassion is strong enough to overcome any barrier. If we only ever view compassion as something we do as a charitable act for those who seem to have an obvious and great need, we will never see true spiritual gentleness take root in our lives. 'Doing' charitable acts is worthwhile and laudable, but 'being' compassionate and merciful in every area of our lives – to all we encounter personally *and* to those we can impact from afar – is the true standard for all true followers of Jesus.

By the power of his Spirit in your life, God wants to give us the tools we need to show gentleness, compassion and mercy to the world for as long

as we are in it. As we patiently endure, we are empowered to love our neighbours and reveal the gentleness of God's grace to the world.

The call is clear.

“Now which of these three would you say was a neighbour to the man who was attacked by bandits?’ Jesus asked. The man replied, ‘The one who showed him mercy.’ Then Jesus said, “Yes, now go and do the same.”

LUKE 10:36-37 (NLT)

DISCUSSION (15 MINS)

1. If trusting God is the key to patience, how can we learn to trust God more?
2. What things in life cause you to lose patience?
3. What might compassion (gentleness) look like in evangelism?

'What then are we to do about our problems? We must learn to live with them until such time as God delivers us from them. We must pray for grace to endure them without murmuring. Problems patiently endured will work for our spiritual perfecting. They harm us only when we resist them or endure them unwillingly.'

A. W. TOZER

APPLICATION (5 MINS)

Use the 'penalty, power and presence' motif from the **Session Background** to focus your prayers over the coming month. Consider how it could be expressed in the gospel conversations you have in the next few weeks.

- We are saved from the **penalty** of our sin in the past through the work of Jesus on the cross
- We are saved from the **power** of sin in the present through the work of the Spirit in our lives

- We are saved from the **presence** of sin in the future through the eternal reign of the Father and his coming kingdom

PRAYER

'Father God, help us to put our complete trust in you. Thank you that you will never let us down. Help us to effect change in the world by setting an example of patience and revealing you as the hope for the world to trust in. We pray that in the hardest times of life, your Spirit will help us endure and keep our eyes fixed upon Jesus. Would our lives reflect the gentleness of the Father, so that people may know his mercy. Amen'

ACCOUNTABILITY (15 MINS)

Fill in accountability forms, share in pairs or smaller groups and pray for each other.



SESSION TEN

THE CHALLENGE FROM THE FAMILY – FELLOWSHIP AND DISTRACTION

In this session we will consider the challenge to evangelism that we might face from our church community. In diverse communities, not all will share our passion for evangelism. What should our response be? How can we be an encouragement to our brothers and sisters and remain in fellowship with a local community, even if we have a travelling ministry?

SESSION IN A SENTENCE

We must encourage our church family in the gospel, being quick to lovingly equip and affirm each other in taking it into the world, rather than choosing to forsake fellowship when our church family doesn't share our evangelistic passion.

SESSION BACKGROUND

Solitary confinement is a particularly unpleasant punishment used in prisons around the world. The impact of this kind of isolation has been studied extensively and the results make for grim reading. Those subjected to even short-term solitary confinement are at risk of high levels of anxiety, stress, depression, anger, panic attacks, violent outbursts, psychosis, paranoia, hallucination, memory problems, self-harm and suicide.

We shouldn't be surprised by these findings. Solitary confinement denies a person the very thing they were created for: relationship, community and fellowship. Whenever we

become isolated from these things the results are never positive.

Throughout human history, community has always been essential to survival. In tribal societies everyone has a clear role to play – from hunting and fighting off threats, to foraging and cooking, education, healthcare, and leadership. For most of us in the developed world today, community is about finding our identity: where do we belong and where will we be accepted for *who we are*?

The internet has made it possible for people to find *their* tribe. Whether it's fan groups for a pop star or television show, a sexual orientation, a hobby or skillset, a political, moral, or religious worldview, or an online community for fans of sloths, you will be able to find a tribe if you look hard enough. These communities can do plenty of good, but they carry an inherent problem: they can form a culture that treats community as commodity, where we become consumers of community rather than contributors within it. If we choose our community based on the value it gives us – and when we don't like it anymore, we leave to find another one – it has become all about us.

There are plenty of people looking for a community where they can find value because they feel isolated, alone and undervalued. The quest for identity, meaning and purpose is powerful because we were created to know all of those things through a relationship with our creator. When we step away from God's community, we experience disconnection that leads us to the same problems faced by the prisoners in solitary confinement.

The church represents the ultimate community – the perfect and eternal community of God himself, Father, Son and Spirit. But – being made up of people – the church is not perfect. We make mistakes, and at times church communities can be as isolating and painful as any other broken community in this world. But there is a hope within the imperfection. Hope comes as we remember that the church is not merely a group of people rallying around a shared interest, but the church is God’s plan for revealing himself to the world. If we make it about him rather than us, there is hope that his perfection, even *through our imperfection*, will be revealed.

- ‘While loneliness engenders despair and
- ever more isolation, togetherness raises
- optimism and creativity. When people feel
- they belong to one another, their lives are
- stronger, richer, and more joyful.’

• **VIVEK MURTHY, SURGEON GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES**

This is a powerful reality in any community setting, but it finds its truest form and hope in the community of God. We don’t just belong to one another – we belong to Jesus. Our community is stronger, richer and more joyful because it is about him rather than us.

To truly be the church means to truly be in Christ. We are baptised into the family of God and become one body, one community with many parts (1 Corinthians 12:12-13). Following Jesus means joining a diverse community where we each serve and play our part for the benefit of the whole (the whole glory of God). Christians should spend time alone (for example, in solitude for devotion) but we cannot live in isolation. From the community of the church, we are able to offer the world a glimpse of the perfect community of Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

SESSION GUIDE

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CATCH UP (10–20 MINS)

Take time to catch up with one another, sharing stories, feedback on opportunities and anything else that would encourage the group. Give extra

time to share about opportunities that arose over the last month in light of the previous session and any encouragements or challenges that came from them.

PRAYER

Pray to commit the time to the Lord and give thanks for the opportunities that the group has had in the past month to share the gospel. Pray for those who have put their trust in Jesus through these opportunities.

TEACHING (45–50 MINS)

Work through the following teaching material in your own way, either by reading it word for word, or by reworking it into your own presentation.

- ‘Let us hold unwaveringly to the hope we
- profess, for he who promised is faithful.
- And let us consider how we may spur one
- another on toward love and good deeds,
- not giving up meeting together, as some are
- in the habit of doing, but encouraging one
- another – and all the more as you see the
- Day approaching.’

• **HEBREWS 10:23-25**

Evangelists – or those who are especially passionate about evangelism – have sometimes been seen as mavericks (someone who operates in an unorthodox or independent way) in church communities. They might be the outlier in the community who is more concerned with what happens outside the church than inside. Some evangelists are even completely absent from local church fellowship – at best because of a busy itinerant ministry (not ideal), or at worst because of ongoing frustration with the church that leads them to self-exile (not acceptable). Neither is healthy, and neither helps the evangelist fulfil the primary purpose of their calling – to stir and equip the church for evangelism (Ephesians 4:11-12).

The writer of Hebrews urges believers not to give up meeting together. The language used could be read as strongly as not to *forsake* meeting. No matter what frustrations we might have, what diary commitments may arise, we must make space for fellowship so that we can be

encouraged and be an encouragement to our church family. We must not forsake the church for any reason.

Discuss: Whether you feel called as a full-time evangelist or are someone trying to be faithful to gospel witness day by day, how is your relationship with the local church? What is your personal church engagement?

The writer of Hebrews asks us to consider – to *pay attention to* – the ways in which we can help each other live in and live out the love of God. We are to be planted in his gospel and to be a planter of the gospel into the world. We must be fully engaged in our local church community, modelling what it looks like to be an accountable disciple-making disciple.

Sometimes the problem we face is not being disconnected from the church, but being distracted within it. As Jesus gives his final instructions to his disciples in Acts 1 – before the Spirit comes at Pentecost and the church was born – we see the disciples distracted in two key ways.

Open Acts 1 together, we will be looking at verses 1-11 together for the rest of this session.

● ‘Then they gathered around him and asked him, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?”’

ACTS 1:6

Here, the disciples are distracted by *what they don't know*. Jesus responds by telling them not to be distracted by the things that only God can know.

● “Men of Galilee,” they said, “why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.”

ACTS 1:11

Then, the disciples are distracted by *what has happened* and *what is still yet to happen*. After Jesus ascends they are confronted by two angels who ask them what they're doing.

How often are you or those in your church community distracted by what you don't know? How often are you distracted by things that *have* happened, or what you hope *might* happen, rather than concentrating on what God has called you to do right here and now?

What things distract you or those in your church family from being a witness for Christ? Perhaps:

- You don't think you *know enough* to share the good news
- You are *waiting for God* to send someone else
- You are distracted by *past failures*
- You are distracted by *future plans*
- You are side-tracked by *other passions* or *pressures*

Discuss: What things in your life and church community that distract you from gospel witness?

These distractions are disturbing because they pull us away from the fullness of life that God offers us. These distractions can lead us to fear, apathy, disempowerment and dispassion, and they put us in danger of being closer to the existence we have escaped than the life we have been saved for.

Rather than let these disturbing distractions take hold, we need to disturb the distractions in our lives by shaking things up and moving into the life God gives us and empowers us to live. The key to shaking off these distractions is found sandwiched between the two distractions of the disciples.

● ‘You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you and you will be my witnesses...’

ACTS 1:8

Four times in the first eight verses of this chapter, Jesus refers to the Holy Spirit. These four mentions serve as a powerful model through which we can disturb the distractions that dull us from what God has asked us to do,

and act as encouragements for the whole body of the church to serve together.

1. WE ARE GIVEN INSTRUCTION

'...after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles...'

ACTS 1:2

We must not be distracted by waiting – for gifting, a specific calling, or even for someone else to do it! God is already waiting for us to respond to the gospel call he has for every believer.

'We must let go of the life we have planned so as to accept the one that is waiting for us.'

JOSEPH CAMPBELL

Stop waiting. Go and tell people about Jesus! Be his witness in whatever area of life, ministry or circumstance you are in – he's already called you (Matthew 28:16–20). Listen to the Holy Spirit as he leads you and instructs you to be faithful to the grand call of being ambassadors of God's kingdom the world.

2. WE ARE BLESSED WITH A GIFT

'...wait for the gift my Father promised...'

ACTS 1:4

What is our response when we receive a gift? We say, 'Thank you.' We have the best gift possible in the Holy Spirit, and in receiving the gift, we adopt a posture of thankfulness – both as individuals, but also as a family, where we celebrate together what God has blessed his church with.

Thankfulness is essential if we are to disturb the distractions in our lives. If we live in a posture of thankfulness we will not lose focus on the life we have been saved for and the ways in which God is at work in us. Scripture repeatedly commands us to 'remember' – the instruction features in Matthew's account of Jesus' final charge to his disciples:

'And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age'

MATTHEW 28:20 (NRSV)

3. WE ARE BAPTISED WITH THE SPIRIT

'...you will be baptised with the Holy Spirit.'

ACTS 1:5

To be baptised with the Spirit means to submit to the presence of God. As we dwell in his presence we are changed. The gospel itself is the ultimate story of presence.

Walking in the Father's presence in Eden, rejecting his presence through rebellion, needing his presence to know life, Jesus coming to be present with us and reveal the Father, the restoration of our ability to enter his presence through the cross, the gift of the Holy Spirit taking up presence within us to enable us to live until we are perfectly in the presence of God for all time when his kingdom comes.

We are to be present with one another in Christian community that binds us together in the presence, fellowship and love of God. We are to be present in the world so that the presence of God can be made known.

4. WE ARE EMPOWERED

'You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you...'

ACTS 1:8

We must not be distracted by other people's gifting, charisma or calling. God has positioned us to serve where we are, and the same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead is alive in us (Romans 8:11). We should thank God for the diverse gifts he has given to our brothers and sisters in Christ rather than being distracted by them. Encourage one another in the ultimate gift that all believers have – the Holy Spirit, through whom ordinary people are used for the extraordinary mission of God.

The church is our family. Let us neither disconnect ourselves from or forsake the church, nor allow ourselves to become distracted within it from our witness. Instead, through faithful fellowship, would we be a

blessing to each other, spurring one another on to love the world. Let the gospel be lived and proclaimed in us by the power of the Spirit so that the world would know they can come home to the family of God through the Father's love.

And let us go with urgency, for as the great missionary Amy Carmichael reminds us:

- 'We will have all eternity to celebrate our
- victories, but only a few short hours to win
- them.'

DISCUSSION (15 MINS)

1. Why is local church engagement not optional for believers?
2. How do we encourage the church family in evangelism in a healthy and positive way?
3. What place does the church occupy in our gospel communication to the world?

APPLICATION (5 MINS)

Be in church this Sunday. Make yourself accountable to the leadership. Offer to serve beyond your gifting - preachers, help with car parking duty. Musicians, make yourself available to serve refreshments. Encourage evangelism in every way you can. Seek to be a blessing rather than a burden. Be humble within the life of the church and committed to fellowship with your brothers and sisters.

If you haven't started your own Advance group yet, talk to your church leadership and see if you could launch a group within your church as a way of encouraging your church in its evangelism.

PRAYER

Pray for your own church - that you would be a blessing to and be blessed by the fellowship.

Pray for the local church - that it would effectively disciple believers and be a witness in the local community.

Pray for the global church - that through it, the gospel of Jesus Christ would be revealed

across national, cultural, linguistic and historical borders as *the* hope of the world, for all people in all places at all times.

ACCOUNTABILITY (15 MINS)

Frame your accountability time around the church engagement question from earlier in the session and the application section. How will you encourage each other to stay committed and connected to the local church?

Fill in accountability forms, share in pairs or smaller groups and pray for each other.



SESSION ELEVEN

THE FRUIT IN THE WORLD – LOVE

In this session we will explore the love of God and why it is the chief virtue of the fruit of the Spirit. We'll discover why love should be the motivation for our evangelism.

SESSION IN A SENTENCE

Love is the chief virtue of the fruit of the Spirit, and it is on love we should build our lives and from which our evangelism should flow – for it is the very identity of God himself.

SESSION BACKGROUND

We love 'love.' But what *kind* of love do we love? For many, the idealised picture of love shown in Hollywood movies is what most readily stirs the heart. It often takes the form of perfectly imperfect romances that overcome the odds to result in a happy ending. But it's not the only kind of love we see in the movies, and movies are not the only outlet for this type of love story and expression. Throughout history – in music, art, theatre, poetry and storytelling of all shapes and flavours – love is present in some way. If our artistic and creative expressions are anything to go by it would be fair to say that human beings are love-obsessed.

For a world so obsessed with the idea of love, it's amazing how wrong we often seem to get it. The world is trapped in a cycle of weak, diluted, distorted and perverted imitations of love, while true love often sits on the sidelines of our lives, rejected because true love is costly.

Imagine having been without food or drink for days. Just when hunger and thirst threaten to

overwhelm you completely, the purest and most thirst-quenching fruit ever to be grown is placed on a table in front of you. The smell of the fruit is so good it is almost enough to quench your thirst there and then. Before you can consume the fruit, it needs to be peeled to give you access to the goodness inside. But instead of doing that you pick the fruit up and smash it into the table. From there you hit it as hard as you can a few times with your fists until all the juice inside is splattered across the table. You scrape up a little of what remains into a glass, but it doesn't even fill half of it. Needing a full cup to quench your thirst you decide to spit into the cup but soon run out of saliva. Still not enough. You have no choice but to top up the glass with the only source of fluid you have left – your own urine.

This is a horrible thing to read and think about. You may not even want to verbalise this in your group setting because it is so disgusting. But sometimes we need to express things in all their ugliness to realise the seriousness of the problem. We do ourselves and the world no favours in sanitising our sin and using comfortable language to describe horrid reality.

As disgusting as it sounds, if you were thirsty enough you would drink this horrible cocktail. The tragic irony is that if you had taken the time to peel the fruit and prepare it properly, instead of going for the quick 'smash and juice' option, you would have had the perfect drink for your thirst.

- 'The love of God! We have lost it to-day; we
- have turned our back on the ocean and are
- looking out over barren colourless hills for

- the ocean's fullness. We need converting
- again - turning round, and there basks the
- ocean's fullness, whose waves sparkle and
- ripple on fathomless deeps and fulnesses.'

OSWALD CHAMBERS

The world is so thirsty for love that it will choose the watered-down-with-saliva version of love over the perfect and true love of God because, although it is freely offered, accepting it comes at great cost. The cost is laying down the rights to the thrones of our hearts, letting love himself take his rightful place. The cost is to die to ourselves so that we can be reborn in him. In knowing him, we can know love.

- 'I still believe that love is the most durable
- power in the world. Over the centuries
- men have sought to discover the highest
- good. This has been the chief quest of
- ethical philosophy. This was one of the
- big questions of Greek philosophy. The
- Epicureans and the Stoics sought to answer
- it; Plato and Aristotle sought to answer it...
- I think I have discovered the highest good.
- It is love. This principle stands at the centre
- of the cosmos. As John says, "God is love."
- He who loves is a participant in the being of
- God. He who hates does not know God.'

MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR

The world is longing for Hollywood love because it is an echo of the true godly love that we were created to hold at the centre of our lives - the love that overcomes the odds of our destructive rebellion and results in eternal relationship. It's the ultimate happy ending.

SESSION GUIDE

CATCH UP (10-20 MINS)

Take the time to catch up with one another. How has church life been since the last session? Have you been engaging well this month and have you had opportunities to be a blessing in the community? Share stories, feedback on opportunities and anything else that would encourage the group.

PRAYER

Pray to commit the time to the Lord and over any situations, positive or challenging, arising from the catch up time.

TEACHING (40-50 MINS)

Work through the following teaching material in your own way, either by reading it word for word, or by reworking it into your own presentation.

- "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved
- you. Now remain in my love. If you keep my
- commands, you will remain in my love, just
- as I have kept my Father's commands and
- remain in his love. I have told you this so
- that my joy may be in you and that your joy
- may be complete. My command is this: Love
- each other as I have loved you. Greater love
- has no one than this: to lay down one's life
- for one's friends."

JOHN 15:9-13

God loves us.

We do not deserve his love, we are not worthy of it - and yet, there is nothing we can do to make God love us more, nor anything we can do that would make him love us less. He loves us perfectly, and from that love he made a way for our salvation - not because we earned it, but because he loves us and extends his perfect grace to us all (Ephesians 2:4-9). John 3:16, the most famous verse in the Bible, couldn't make it clearer that it was God's love for us that sent Jesus to the cross.

- 'If the depth of love is measured by the
- value of its gift, then God's love could not be
- greater, for his love-gift is his most precious
- possession - his only, eternally beloved Son.
- He could not love more.'

BRUCE MILNE

While freely offered, there is a cost to accepting God's love. In order for God's love to truly transform us, we must accept it fully and be prepared to say goodbye to our old life and enter into new life (2 Corinthians 5:17). We receive the free gift that God offers, but receiving it means we cannot stay the same. The wonder of God's love means we must give up

everything that is counter to life in him and walk into all that he desires for us to be.

- ‘...the Holy Spirit produces this kind
- of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace,
- patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,
- gentleness, and self-control...’

GALATIANS 5:22-23 (NLT)

In presenting his vision of a united Christlike character, Paul appears to arrange his list in three triads of virtues – with love being the first and most important:

- Love, joy, peace
- Patience, kindness, goodness
- Faithfulness, gentleness and self-control

- ‘Where love is present, the other virtues will not be far away; it is love that binds them all together in perfect harmony.’

F. F. BRUCE

Love binds all good things together because God is love and in him all good things are found. The love of God is both profoundly simple and overwhelmingly complex. We can know the truth of God’s love as we encounter him in a moment, but will spend a lifetime growing in knowledge of that same love and seeing its effects continuously at work in our lives.

There is a specific word used in the Old Testament for the love of God, the Hebrew word *hesed*. There is no single English word that can convey the full meaning of the word but here are just some of the ways the word appears in English in our translated Bibles:

- Steadfast love
- Mercy
- Loving kindness
- Grace
- Loyalty
- Fidelity

Discuss: How do these alternate words about God’s love shape your understanding of the love God has for you?

God’s love is unique. That’s why it needs a unique word like *hesed* to help us understand its never-ending wonder. What really distinguishes God’s love from any other is that it is holy – perfectly and unendingly true. His love never fails (Lamentations 3:22; Psalm 136). We show the world the fruit of love when we reflect the truth of God’s love in our own lives. God’s love makes us who we truly are: not the best version of ourselves, but the best versions of *himself* – his love makes us more like Jesus.

In John 15, Jesus’ love is revealed in two distinctive ways.

First, Jesus’ love for his Father is revealed in his obedience to him. Loving like Jesus means loving our heavenly Father faithfully and obediently, by dwelling in his presence and by knowing him.

Second, Jesus’ love for us is revealed in his willingness to take our place. Jesus says that there is no greater love than to lay down your life for your friends. Loving like Jesus means loving with more than emotion – it means loving with action. We are to love sacrificially, knowing that we have true joy in the resurrection.

Jesus is not offering us good advice about how to live better lives when he talks about love. He is both announcing and making the way by which we can have life which is made possible by the love of God himself.

In this announcement of love, Jesus is reminding us of the motivation for our evangelism. Evangelism is not only about obeying his great commission. It’s not about winning favour with God or looking good in front of other people. It’s because evangelism is the most loving thing we can do.

How do we carry this love into the world so that others are drawn into a loving relationship with God? We know that our words are important so that people can have clarity about who God is and what he has done (Romans 10:14, 17). We also know that Jesus is looking for us to love in action (1 John 3:16-18). With these two realities in mind, consider this summary of the explanation of the love of God found in 1 John and its implications for our evangelism (1 John 4:7-21):

- Love comes from God, for he *is* love.

- We did nothing to earn God's love.
- God's love is revealed to the world through Jesus Christ.
- Those who do not love do not know God.
- We must love each other, and God is revealed through this love.
- His Spirit empowers us to love and gives us confidence he is with us.
- We must rely exclusively on the love of God.
- Love drives out fear, and we can be confident of salvation through God's love.
- We love because God first loved us.

Discuss: How will these statements shape your evangelism?

You may have heard the expression 'love makes the world go round'. The sentiment is that love is a good force, something that keeps us progressing and flourishing in an often cold and cruel world. But the reality is better than the sentiment. Love makes the world go round because the one who set the world in motion IS love. In his love we find meaning, identity and hope. In his love we share true love with the world. Love empowers our evangelism because our evangelism is an act of love as we share the message of love with our lips and our lives.

Love makes the gospel go around the world.

DISCUSSION (15 MINS)

1. How would you describe true love?
2. Why is sharing the gospel the most loving thing we can do in the world?
3. Why should love be the motivation for our evangelism?

- 'Two things there are that move us to love God for himself: nothing is more reasonable; nothing is more profitable.'

ST BERNARD OF CLAIRVAUX

APPLICATION (5 MINS)

Spend some time this month reflecting on Psalm 136. The psalmist expresses gratitude to God, proclaiming who he is and what he does. How can you follow this same pattern in your own devotional life? How might it pour out into your witness?

PRAYER

'Father God, thank you that you loved us so much that you would send your son Jesus to die for our sins. I want your love to transform my life so that others may see you through me. I want to show your love to the world so that they might know the truth. Amen.'

ACCOUNTABILITY (15 MINS)

Fill in accountability forms, share in pairs or smaller groups and pray for each other.

RETREAT

The climax of each year of Advance is a time of retreat. How you decide to do this is up to you, but here you will find suggestions for how to spend the time together in keeping with the general principles of Advance group meetings and to bring the second year to a focused end.

HOW TO RUN AN ADVANCE GROUP RETREAT

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The general idea is to get away from your normal location and set aside a longer period of time than you would normally for your Advance group sessions. If you can only spare a morning, afternoon or evening, then do what you can in this time, but retreating for a whole day is especially beneficial.

Here are some ideas of what to do during your retreat.

KEY SCRIPTURE

The following passage from 2 Timothy will work well as a key scripture for your time together if you are looking for a specific focus during the retreat:

- 'In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus,
- who will judge the living and the dead, and
- in view of his appearing and his kingdom,

- I give you this charge: Preach the word;
- be prepared in season and out of season;
- correct, rebuke and encourage - with great
- patience and careful instruction. For the
- time will come when people will not put up
- with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their
- own desires, they will gather around them
- a great number of teachers to say what
- their itching ears want to hear. They will
- turn their ears away from the truth and turn
- aside to myths. But you, keep your head in
- all situations, endure hardship, do the work
- of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of
- your ministry.'

2 TIMOTHY 4:1-5

The passage features twelve distinctive ideas we can explore as we reflect on and persevere in the challenges we face in our evangelism:

1. Evangelism is achieved in God's presence and authority ('*In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus*')
2. God is our judge, not the world ('*who will judge the living and the dead*')
3. The task is urgent ('*in view of his appearing and his kingdom*')
4. We have been sent ('*I give you this charge*')
5. We proclaim the word, not our own ideas ('*Preach the word*')
6. Prepare yourselves for daily service ('*be prepared in season and out of season*')

7. Find balance in encouragement and challenge (*'correct, rebuke and encourage'*)
8. Humility is essential (*'with great patience'*)
9. Know and trust God's Word (*'people will not put up with sound doctrine'*)
10. Don't pander to culture and fashion (*'what their itching ears want to hear'*)
11. Keep perspective, prioritise devotion (*'keep your head'*)
12. Keep going, never give up (*'endure hardship'*)

How you study the passage together or alone (see below), how you bring these points out, and how you discuss them together is entirely up to you depending on how you are running your retreat time. But keep this passage and these points in mind as you look at the suggested activities below.

WORD

A key aim of the Advance group is to help each other grow as evangelists who are committed to the Word of God. This retreat time is a great opportunity to go deeper into his word.

EXTENDED BIBLE READING (SOLO READING)

Extended time spent with the Word of God is never time wasted. Perhaps 2 Timothy could be the focus of your time together beyond any study of 2 Timothy 4 as outlined above. The whole letter deals with instruction from Paul to Timothy around the task and challenge of doing the work of the evangelist. John Stott proposed a four-part overview of the book, which could be a good discussion or study focus:

Chapter One: Evangelist, Guard the Gospel (1:14)

Chapter Two: Evangelist, Suffer for the Gospel (2:3, 8, 9)

Chapter Three: Evangelist, Continue in the Gospel (3:13-14)

Chapter Four: Evangelist, Preach the Gospel (4:1-2)

Alternatively, taking the time to read alone through all of Mark's gospel or one of the New Testament letters in one sitting is a great way to get a full perspective on the contents of that book. If it is a shorter book, why not re-read it multiple times, praying and reflecting between each reading, making notes, and then going again? You could all choose to read the same thing, or have a few different options that people then share about their time of reading and reflection.

BIBLE STUDY (GROUP READING)

There are a number of ways that you could facilitate Bible study together on the retreat. Perhaps you will want to revisit some of the key passages you have explored over the Advance group sessions. Alternatively, you may feel led to a particular passage or theme that will set the tone for the retreat. As ever, be sure to keep it in line with developing each other as evangelists.

You could also work through the Advance 'Guardians of the Gospel' Bible study on 2 Timothy on YouVersion.



BONUS SESSIONS AND OTHER ADVANCE RESOURCES

One of the bonus sessions available on the Advance website (advancegroups.org/blog) could be used to run a regular Advance group session as part of your retreat. You may also have your own ideas for how you could run an Advance group session in the same format we have been using.

Equally you may want to look at a One Thing blog on the Advance website which features a number of different evangelists sharing the one thing they wish they had known when they had started to preach the gospel. These short pieces make for excellent discussion starters.

PRAYER

Set aside significant time for prayer during the retreat. Plan for prayer times with a specific focus, as well as time for both praying through scripture and spontaneous prayer. Whatever else you do in prayer during the retreat, the following three focuses are recommended.

PRAYING FOR EACH OTHER

Be sure to pray for one another as a primary element of your time together. Ask people to share one area they are feeling thankful to God for and one area in which they need provision or breakthrough. Encourage people to be specific and honest in their requests, and don't rush through each person but dedicate real time to one another. Be sure to keep a note of words and encouragements that come from this time.

PRAYING FOR THE LOCAL AND THE GLOBAL

Take time to pray for your local context and also the global spread of the gospel. If there are specific situations you have a heart for in either a local or global context then pray for them. Lift up individuals, churches, ministries, missionaries, situations from the news and so on.

PRAYING FOR THE ADVANCE JOURNEY

Give thanks for the journey that you have been on in this group, reflecting on personal growth and stories of fruitfulness and salvation. Ask the Lord to continue the work in you that he has begun, and that you would be transformed into his image with ever increasing glory (you could pray through 2 Corinthians 3:17-18).

WORSHIP

Time spent in God's Word, prayer and fellowship are all part of worship. But spend time in additional specific acts of collective devotional worship - whether it's through singing or other creative expressions.

SUNG WORSHIP

If you have someone who is musically talented, invite them to lead a time of sung worship. Alternatively, there are many great collective worship apps and videos available online, many of which are free. A quick YouTube search for

your favourite worship songs will likely bring up a version of the song with lyrics that can be played for the group to sing along to. There is power in the people of God joining together in song to declare his glory.

STORIES AND PRAISE

Spend time sharing stories of how God has been at work in your life this year - stories of growth, breakthrough, evangelistic opportunity and fruit. After each story spend time praising God through prayer, song or any method that works for your group as you seek to give thanks to God for who he is and what he has done/is doing.

COMMISSIONING

Another way in which you could share in a corporate act of worship would be to commission each other before God in the evangelistic task that he has called you to and empowered you for. At the end of this first year of your Advance group it will be encouraging and affirming to recognise this milestone, so give thanks to God for it and pray over each other as you look to go again with the gospel for the salvation of the world and to the glory of God.

ANNUAL REFLECTION

Using the form found on page 186 create space to reflect on the questions provided, fill in the form and pray over the answers given. You may also want to look back on last year's form to help you reflect on your growth. This can be done individually or as a group.

FELLOWSHIP

As we gather together, we grow in friendship with and trust of one another. The fellowship of your Advance group has hopefully been a blessing to each person, and on retreat you can continue in your commitment to hold each other to account and your enjoyment of each other's company.

ACCOUNTABILITY

Accountability has been a core part of every session so far, and in this final session of the

year, once again commit to the same process to ensure you are living holy and humble lives.

FASTING/FEASTING

You may want to commit to a period of fasting as part of the retreat, or base your time together around meals through which you can gather together and make space for discussion. There is no right or wrong way to do this – all that matters is that it helps you achieve the goals of your retreat time.

ACTIVITIES

You may want to plan an activity together – for example, if you are retreating into nature somewhere, go on a walk together and fold some of the devotional activities above into this time. If based in a more urban environment, you could visit an art gallery together and do the same thing, using some of the art as a stimulus for reflection and devotion.

Equally, you might want to do something simply for fun together – a team activity, sport, entertainment option... Whether it's fellowship to encourage devotion, or fellowship to enjoy each other's company and grow in relationship with each other, invest in quality time with each other.

NEXT STEPS

The second year of Advance is done. Before you bring the year (and the retreat) to a close, be sure to look at the next steps for this group.

THIS GROUP

Create space for people to share about how the Advance group experience has been for them. Share feedback about how you've all grown and developed, and think about what the biggest learning has been from the year. Encourage each other in these things.

Take a look at the Advance Group Mentoring Guide Part Three and encourage each other to start thinking about how to make this upcoming year truly bespoke for the needs of this group. Talk about what people are most excited about in the upcoming year together. If you haven't already, pray and give thanks for the second

year of Advance, and commit what is ahead to the Lord.

Take the opportunity to set dates for starting Year Three together.

NEW GROUPS

Make space to talk about the development of new groups that have been launched throughout this year. Multiplication is an important part of the Advance group journey. If you need any support in launching new groups, get in touch with us via the Advance website and your local Advance Ambassador will be in touch to support you in any way possible.

Ask how everyone is getting on with any groups they have started and pray over them.

However you run your retreat time, keep the core values of Advance in focus, reflect on the journey you have been on as a group, and pray for what lies ahead. Give thanks to God for the growth and fruitfulness you have experienced together and commit the future to him.

YEAR THREE

Welcome to Year Three of Advance.

This year you will tailor your group experience more than you did in Years One and Two. This section of the Group Mentoring Guide provides you with the resources, ideas and help you'll need to deliver a year of Advance group sessions that specifically meet the needs of your group.



SESSION ONE

PRACTICAL EVANGELISM

— CONVERSATION

This session explores the importance of seeing and acting upon every opportunity to share the good news - not just those provided from an organised mission, event, stage or platform.

SESSION IN A SENTENCE

The vast majority of our evangelism will take place in conversation, so we must be prepared to share the gospel clearly in every opportunity that God provides - not just when we have the chance to minister through a church mission, event or from a platform.

SESSION BACKGROUND

We engage in conversations with a variety of people every single day. Many of these are face-to-face, but technology means we can now converse in different ways with people all over the world in real time. While these digitally-based conversations may not offer the same level of personal connection as a face-to-face encounter in the same room, they have become a normal and invaluable way for us to connect with friends and strangers.

Preaching from a stage doesn't often allow for dialogue. We proclaim our message and hope that it takes root in the heart of the listener. In conversation there is scope for questioning, relationship building and - most importantly - for listening. Sometimes the one-directional word received from a platform can be rejected out of hand, whereas personal dialogue provides a greater opportunity to speak more

specifically and directly to the concerns of the listener.

There are more accounts in the Gospels of Jesus talking to individuals than there are of him preaching to the masses. 'What do you want me to do for you?' Jesus asks Bartimaeus in Mark 10:51. 'I want to see,' is the simple response that reveals his need as well as his belief that Jesus has the power to bring healing. This one-to-one encounter offers no explicit explanation of the gospel, but gives Jesus the opportunity to meet the needs of the seeker, who moves from blindness to putting his faith in Jesus.

Even Philip, the only person in the Bible to specifically carry the title of 'evangelist', is instructed by an angel of the Lord to minister one-to-one with an Ethiopian eunuch between mass preaching missions (Acts 8:26-40).

Jesus and the first evangelists were fully prepared to share the good news with the multitudes *and* with individuals. The question is: are we?

SESSION GUIDE

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CATCH UP (10-20 MINS)

Take time to catch up with one another, sharing stories, feedback on opportunities and anything else that would encourage the group. For smaller groups, ask each person to share one win and one struggle since your last meeting. For larger groups, ask four or five people

to share a specific testimony since your last meeting.

PRAYER

Pray to commit the time to the Lord and over any situations, positive or challenging, arising from the catch up time.

TEACHING (20–30 MINS)

Work through the following teaching material in your own way, either by reading it word for word, or by reworking it into your own presentation.

- 'Just then his disciples returned and were surprised to find him talking with a woman. But no one asked, "What do you want?" or "Why are you talking with her?"

- Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, "Come, see a man who told me everything I've ever done. Could this be the Messiah?" They came out of the town and made their way towards him.'

JOHN 4:27-30

When was the last time you spoke to a not-yet-Christian friend about your faith? How about a total stranger? Many preaching evangelists can find interpersonal witness quite challenging. Give them a microphone and a stage and they can preach all day, but when the Spirit prompts them to talk to a stranger in a coffee shop it can be a different story.

Discuss: Why do some who can boldly proclaim from a stage struggle in the one-to-one encounters? Do you thrive or struggle the one-to-one situation?

Jesus is interested in individual lives. For all the time he spent preaching to the crowds, the New Testament records him just as frequently engaging in one-to-one dialogue with people he met on his ministry travels, and some who intentionally sought him out. Whether he was preaching to the multitudes eager to hear his words, to angry religious folk trying to catch him

out, or to a diverse array of individuals – the rich and the poor, male and female, sick and healthy, religious and irreligious – Jesus shared the same message with power and conviction.

We can learn a number of key lessons from Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman in John 4.

1. BE READY FOR THE ENCOUNTER

For the Samaritan woman, this encounter was thoroughly unexpected – and potentially inappropriate – but Jesus is ready to talk to her, initiating the conversation with his physical need for water. How many conversations could we begin starting with something simple that we need? How do we talk to our plumber who has come to fix our shower? Or the barista serving our coffee? The doctor giving us a challenging diagnosis? There are opportunities all around us to speak, and while the encounter may take the 'seeker' by surprise, we should always be ready to offer the hope that we have in Jesus. Even if we're exhausted.

2. ENGAGE PERSONALLY AND POSITIVELY

Jesus treats the Samaritan woman with kindness, sensitivity and compassion. He genuinely engages her in conversation and makes personal connections to her life both through prophetic insight and through basic observation and situational awareness. He reveals the truth with compassion, showing us how we can engage in positive dialogue with those we meet.

3. LISTEN WELL

People will always have questions about what we believe, the difference it makes to our lives, perceived contradictions and hypocrisies, and so on. Instead of being placed on the back foot by these questions we should simply take the time to listen well and then offer a sincere response. Often this will mean asking questions of our own – as Jesus does with the Samaritan woman. Questions invite people to reflect upon the ideas we are presenting (and to reflect upon their own ideas too), rather than simply asking them to accept what we are offering wholesale. Jesus was a master of using questions in his evangelism, gently showing people the frailties

of their current worldview while offering them the truth in its place.

4. MOVE FROM MISUNDERSTANDING TO REVELATION

At first, the woman misunderstands what Jesus is saying to her (v. 11). Jesus perseveres until she experiences a moment of revelation. Misunderstanding and misinterpretation are a natural part of human dialogue. Don't panic, just persevere. We must keep building bridges for the other person until what we are saying is clear. This is all we are responsible for. It is the Spirit of God who turns comprehension into true revelation.

5. KEEP THE MAIN THING THE MAIN THING

It would have been easy for Jesus to get side-tracked with political and cultural conversation when the woman showed concern about the appropriateness of his request to her for water. Instead, he keeps the main thing the main thing so that the gospel conversation can move forward. In conversational evangelism there are many ways we can become side-tracked, but our aim (even if we have to take a few detours here and there) is to keep the cross of Christ central to our dialogue.

6. RECOGNISE THE POTENTIAL IN THOSE YOU TALK TO...

...to both receive the gospel and to become a witness for it. Those who have recently come to faith are often the most compelling evangelists. This should both challenge us - that we must never lose the infectious joy of our salvation - and inspire us that those we witness to can immediately become witnesses for Christ.

Not all of us may have a platform to preach from (or the calling and gifting to be a 'preaching' evangelist), we are all called to engage in evangelism. Most evangelism involves interpersonal conversation - individual believers talking with individual seekers. Jesus and his followers were committed to this kind of outreach, and we should be too.

DISCUSSION (20 MINS)

1. Why is listening so important when talking to people about our faith?

2. How can conversational evangelism change depending on whether the person is a friend or a stranger?
3. How can you be more intentional in seeking out opportunities for conversational evangelism?
4. How can you encourage and support those who find conversational evangelism difficult?

● 'Our struggles in evangelism are not primarily about methodology but about maturity. Do we have a heart for God and do we care about the things God cares about (lost people)? If we have God's heart, we will do whatever we can to advance his kingdom purposes in every conversation we have with our non-believing friends.'

● **NORMAN & DAVID GEISLER**

APPLICATION (5 MINS)

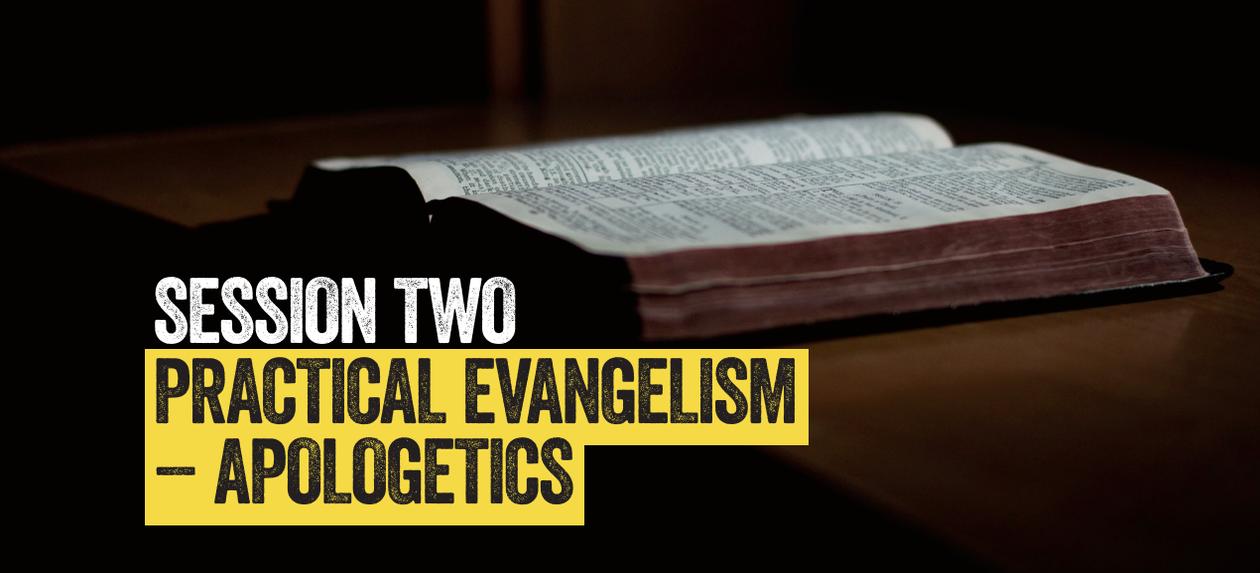
This week, talk to someone about your faith as part of an everyday conversation. Ask them if they have any questions about your faith and let them know you would be happy to chat, or ask them a question about who they think Jesus is and see where that leads.

PRAYER

Pray that God would help us to better see and act upon the potential around us each day to share his hope with those around us. Give thanks that God places these opportunities in front of us and that he is delighted to make us part of what he is doing in the world. Pray for those who struggle with one-to-one encounters - that God would help them to overcome any fears and anxieties they may have about this kind of evangelism, and that we would cheer each other on as we go.

ACCOUNTABILITY (15 MINS)

Fill in accountability forms, share in pairs or smaller groups and pray for each other.



SESSION TWO

PRACTICAL EVANGELISM

– APOLOGETICS

In this session we will look at using apologetics in our evangelism, considering how we may need to sharpen up to some of the things the world wants to talk about, while keeping the focus upon the cross of Christ.

SESSION IN A SENTENCE

Apologetics is a tool for evangelism that attempts to offer a response to any question from the world about our faith, and a defence of the gospel to those who object.

SESSION BACKGROUND

When people have questions it is our responsibility to present them with authentic answers that point to the truth of who Jesus is and what that means for our lives.

Christian apologetics means ‘a defence of the Christian faith.’ Apologetics has its roots in the Bible – from the word *apologia* in 1 Peter 3:15 to the construction and delivery of Paul’s speech to the Athenians in Acts 17. The Bible features more than one account of a well-reasoned or creative presentation of the Christian faith in response to questions, concerns and objections.

The task of apologetics is not primarily to make God plausible, but to connect people to the authenticity of his hope. We defend our faith so that those who question it may come to see their own fulfilment within Jesus Christ. Apologetics will never achieve this goal by itself – only God by his Holy Spirit can save – but it is a powerful tool for removing the barriers that can

prevent people from engaging in an opportunity to encounter Jesus.

- ‘Apologetics does not save; only Jesus
- Christ is able to do that. But apologetics can
- – and should – serve as a John the Baptist,
- making the paths straight, facilitating routes
- to the cross of Christ.’

J.W. MONTGOMERY

Apologetics defends against attempts to intellectually or spiritually remove Jesus from his throne. It can lead to challenging conversations, but we must remember that the point of apologetics is not to offend people, but to expose the limitations of any alternative to Christ. Apologetics is not limited to evangelism but can play a key role in our discipleship.

SESSION GUIDE

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CATCH-UP (10–20 MINS)

Take time to catch up with one another, sharing stories, feedback on opportunities and anything else that would encourage the group. For smaller groups, ask each person to share one win and one struggle since your last meeting. For larger groups, ask four or five people to share a specific testimony since your last meeting.

PRAYER

Pray to commit the time to the Lord and over any situations, positive or challenging, arising from the catch up time.

TEACHING (20–30 MINS)

Work through the following teaching material in your own way, either by reading it word for word, or by reworking it into your own presentation.

- 'But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord.
- Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.'

1 PETER 3:15

Peter calls us to be prepared to give an answer to all who ask us why we have the hope we have. At first, we should be able to explain the gospel clearly, but when we are asked further questions we should take time to answer them thoughtfully and meaningfully.

The foundational philosophical questions are usually the hardest to answer – questions like, 'Why are we here?' or 'Where did we come from?' or 'What is the meaning of life?' The gospel has answers for each of these, but they don't often come up directly. More often, we are asked to give our view on the Christian response to issues like sexuality, gender, or abortion. You may be asked to defend traditional faith positions against modern scientific understanding – like defending the Genesis account of creation in light of the theory of evolution. Other questions may explore claims about God's character – for example, 'Why does a good God allow suffering?'

Discuss: What kind of challenging faith questions have you been asked? How prepared have you felt to answer them?

It's a good thing that apologetics itself doesn't save anyone – otherwise the responsibility of salvation would rest in the strength of our own arguments! Apologetics can help people to move from wrong thinking to right thinking, but it is God himself who will bring a person to life

as they hear and respond to his call through our witness.

It's like we are standing with those we witness to on a road, at the opposite end of which is the empty cross of Christ. Along the road are potholes, blockages, walls, debris, sharp objects and so on. The cross itself is barely visible through a haze of fog. Apologetics is a way by which we can help a person journey down the road, sweeping away debris, filling in potholes, tearing down walls, removing blockages and clearing the fog to make the journey easier. We long to help the person get closer to the cross, for that's where they can encounter the risen Jesus and confess him as Lord of their life. Apologetics exists simply to make a way for the not-yet-believing person to encounter and believe.

Here are four things we must consider and commit to for success in apologetics:

1. ENGAGE WITH THE POWER OF PREPARATION

For some, apologetics will become a central focus of their evangelistic outreach – so studying theology, philosophy, the sciences, history, current affairs, world religion and other topics will become a necessary diet. For others, it's wise to stay on top of the kinds of topics that come up in our conversations, especially where we know someone who has a particular concern. This is to say nothing of our normal commitment to feasting upon the Word of God daily to grow in our understanding of him and the truth he has revealed to the world. Preparation in this sense is not simply preparation for speaking to the world about God, but to prepare ourselves to worship him effectively day by day. Apologetics is about discipleship, not just evangelism.

2. COMMIT TO THE POWER OF PRAYER

As in all forms of evangelism, prayer is essential. When it comes to apologetics, alongside praying that God would reveal himself to the people we are talking with, we must ask him to help us answer questions with gentleness and respect (as Peter tells us). We speak with gentleness to the person in front of us, but with respect to God – that we would not pander to the world in our answer, but represent God with integrity.

3. RECOGNISE THE POWER OF HUMILITY

Arrogance and belligerence are rarely helpful and attractive qualities. Answering a question with conviction does not mean we have to throw humility out of the window. Being humble in response to those we speak to does not mean we have to sacrifice our convictions on the altar of political correctness or polite conversation. Humility means we are prepared to accept we don't know everything. Sometimes simply saying, 'Good question, I don't know the answer to that,' is the best response we can give - God's ways are higher than our own (Isaiah 55:8-9) and we currently see in a mirror dimly (1 Corinthians 13:12). But through what God has revealed about himself, we can make sense of our existence as we explore his revelation - drawing conclusions about the truth it offers, living and speaking accordingly.

4. UTILISE THE POWER OF A QUESTION

First, we should let others know it is okay to ask us questions. Being happy to answer questions without taking offense creates brilliant opportunities for dialogue, especially with those who might be tentative or afraid to ask about something that matters to them. Second, we mustn't be afraid to ask our own questions. It's not about using clever questions to put people on the back foot, but to gently highlight weaknesses in their own pre-conceptions and thinking. Jesus was a master at asking questions as he ministered, asking significantly more than he answered!

No-one has ever been argued into the kingdom of God, or become a follower of Jesus merely because they lost a debate. But gentle and respectful apologetic dialogue can help to move people a little further down the road towards the cross, as we commit to intentionally engaging in the topics that matter to people as part of our explanation of the gospel to them.

DISCUSSION (20 MINS)

1. Why is it important to take questions seriously?
2. What are the limitations of apologetics?
3. Do you feel equipped to answer questions that arise in your evangelism?

4. How can study of apologetics be worshipful?

- 'Apologetics is a resource; it is up to the apologist to make the connections with the lives of real people in the modern world.
- Without this connection, theories remain theories, abstract ideas hanging in mid-air, and not grounded in the realities of life.'

ALISTAIR MCGRATH

APPLICATION (5 MINS)

Take some time to think through some of these common questions about the Christian faith and explore how you might help someone journey from their initial question to the cross of Christ.

- Who made God?
- Has science disproved Christianity?
- What about the big bang theory and evolution?
- If God is good, why does he allow suffering in the world?
- Is the Bible full of mistakes and contradictions?
- If God is real, why doesn't he just reveal himself to the world?
- There is no such thing as absolute truth, so shouldn't we all just believe what we want?
- I'm a good person. Why would God send me to hell just because I don't believe he exists?
- Why Christianity instead of another religion?
- Do you *really* believe in miracles?

PRAYER

Pray together for the wisdom of heaven as we attempt answer the questions and concerns of the world in humility and love, while representing God with integrity and boldness. Pray for open minds and receptive hearts in those we talk to, and give thanks that even though there are sound and reasoned answers to be shared, God's saving work does not ultimately hinge on our ability to successfully answer challenging questions.

ACCOUNTABILITY (15 MINS)

Fill in accountability forms, share in pairs or smaller groups and pray for each other.

SESSION THREE

PRACTICAL EVANGELISM – CRISIS

This session explores how we can respond to an ongoing crisis by meeting practical needs while always being ready to demonstrate and proclaim the hope of gospel, even in the face of the most difficult, chaotic and confusing life events.

SESSION IN A SENTENCE

Evangelism shouldn't be put on hold when a crisis hits: rather we must continue to be ambassadors of peace in the world, keeping the hope of the gospel central to our words and actions as we meet the needs of others in crisis.

SESSION BACKGROUND

In the middle of the third century, the Roman empire was ravaged with the plague of Cyprian. As thousands died daily, people began to act cruelly, even without compassion for members of their own family. Fear is a potent force that can cause people to act in terrible ways as our survival drive takes hold.

During this troubling time, one group of people were beginning to stand out as being different to the rest of the panic-stricken population – the Christians. This relatively new sect of religious believers met the horror of the plague with a different spirit to those around them – acting in love and hope rather than fear and despair. Christians cared for the sick and even took responsibility for burying the dead, all while assuring those affected by this confusing and terrifying disease of the eternal hope found through faith in Jesus Christ. While the plague

of Cyprian almost destroyed the mighty Roman empire, the response of faithful Christians meant that this otherwise horrific pandemic significantly helped the spread of Christianity across Europe.

When the Black Death hit the same continent in the fourteenth century, its effects were even more deadly. Catherine of Siena followed in the footsteps of those early Christians by offering practical compassion and the hope of the gospel as the world around her fell apart. Catherine's own sufferings were laid aside for the benefit of others, achieved by the empowerment and new perspective of complete submission to the will of God.

- 'Your eyes will not see anything which
- seems impossible, or the sufferings which
- may follow, but only the light of faith, and
- in that light everything is possible; and
- remember God never lays greater burdens
- on us than we can bear.'

CATHERINE OF SIENA

When Martin Luther was faced with the deadly bubonic plague in the small town of Wittenberg, his response was not to run away as many clergy did, but to come into closer proximity with those in need. For Luther, it was not simply a case of, 'What would Jesus do?' but, 'What would we do if it was Jesus in need?'

- 'Everyone would want to be bold and
- fearless; nobody would flee but everyone
- would come running. And yet they don't
- hear what Christ himself says, "As you did
- to one of the least, you did it to me." When

he speaks of the greatest commandment he says, "The other commandment is like unto it, you shall love your neighbour as yourself ." There you hear that the command to love your neighbour is equal to the greatest commandment to love God, and that what you do or fail to do for your neighbour means doing the same to God. If you wish to serve Christ and to wait on him, very well, you have your sick neighbour close at hand. Go to him and serve him, and you will surely find Christ in him.'

MARTIN LUTHER

Pastor and theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer left his homeland of Germany in June 1939 on the urging of friends to escape the dangers of the Nazi party, only to return a month later, realising quickly that he had made a mistake in walking away from his nation in its time of need.

'I must live through this difficult period of our national history with the Christian people of Germany. I will have no right to participate in the reconstruction of Christian life in Germany after the war if I do not share the trials of this time with my people.'

DIETRICH BONHOEFFER

Bonhoeffer knew that his Christian witness and integrity would be compromised after the crisis if he did not stand firm during the crisis. It was a decision that would eventually cost him his life - and yet the legacy of that life lives on today. Bonhoeffer holds up to historical scrutiny as a man who lived in complete trust of the hope that he preached, continually counting the cost of following Jesus.

Christians throughout history have followed the lead of their saviour, who in the face of the greatest crisis in all of history - the rebellion of humanity against God - ran headfirst into the chaos of sin and death to bring the hope of peace to all who trust in his truth (John 16:33). And Jesus runs with us into the crises of today as we go in his power to offer the world the everlasting peace of his gospel (Matthew 28:18-20).

SESSION GUIDE

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CATCH UP (10-20 MINS)

Take time to catch up with one another, sharing stories, feedback on opportunities and anything else that would encourage the group. For smaller groups, ask each person to share one win and one struggle since your last meeting. For larger groups, ask four or five people to share a specific testimony since your last meeting.

PRAYER

Pray to commit the time to the Lord and over any situations, positive or challenging, arising from the catch up time.

TEACHING (40-50 MINS)

Work through the following teaching material in your own way, either by reading it word for word, or by reworking it into your own presentation.

'On that day a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him. But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off both men and women and put them in prison. Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went.'

ACTS 8:1-4

Crisis can come at any time. Whether it's a natural disaster, disease, financial collapse, personal tragedy... the list of potential challenges goes on. When crisis hits, people can begin to panic, fear takes hold and hope can fade quickly. If we believe that the gospel is the source of true hope and peace, then in times of crisis, how should we respond in a way that uses the circumstances for gospel opportunity?

The idea of leveraging a crisis might seem distasteful or inappropriate. But we're not talking about making profit or personal gain. As

the church, we are seeking to make a kingdom gain: the glory of God is our objective.

When God is glorified in our lives and actions, the world moves closer to the full reality of the peace that we were created for and will one day know perfectly in the eternal kingdom (Revelation 21:1-7). Rather than being opportunistic for our own gain, we seek opportunity for the gain of God's kingdom, the very kingdom in which the poor and those in mourning will be blessed and comforted. Word and action evangelism is the most appropriate response to any crisis as it is the announcement and demonstration that there is hope.

When the great persecution Luke describes in Acts 8 broke out in Jerusalem, the early church found itself scattered and in crisis. Rather than wallowing in self-pity or retreating into hiding, Luke tells us that they proclaimed the gospel wherever they went. For all the stories in Acts about the evangelistic activity of the apostles and other leaders like Stephen and Philip, it is this easy-to-miss detail that perhaps best reveals the response of the church as a whole to times of crisis. Whether in season or out of season, the church must prioritise the proclamation of the gospel as a demonstration of our trust in its truth so that the world can know its hope for themselves (2 Timothy 4:1-2).

There have been numerous times throughout history where the Christian response to crisis has directly affected how the world perceives faith in Jesus Christ. Through plague, famine, persecution, war and economic crisis, history paints a clear picture: where Christians have been seen to act selflessly and in line with the eternal hope of heaven and present power of the Spirit, faith in Jesus has spread rapidly and the church has grown.

To provide genuine gospel hope in times of crisis, we need to be intentional both in our character and in our activity. Here are five practical ways we can reflect the five core characteristics of the evangelist during times of crisis.

1. COMMIT PRAYERFULLY (PRAYERFUL EVANGELISTS)

To be a prayerful evangelist is to know that God is trustworthy (Psalm 100:5), hears our prayers (1 Peter 3:12), is not indifferent to our suffering

(2 Corinthians 1:3-4), and empowers us to do good works for his glory (Ephesians 2:10). Our evangelism is always to be done in his power through prayerful lives.

We must **speak to God**. We should acknowledge his identity, worship him for who he is, thank him in all things and grow in confidence that he is good at all times. By confessing our failure and fear, we receive his forgiveness and his grace to move beyond our frailty. By asking him to bring peace to the chaos of crisis we minister to those in need and he uses us for his glory.

We must **listen to God**, taking time to rely on his wisdom, leading and inspiration as we approach challenging and complex circumstances and bring his gospel to bear upon them.

We must **move with God** as his ambassadors, with prayer as the foundation of our activity as we go, and as an offering of activity to those we engage with.

Discuss: What crises are you currently aware of? How can we best pray FOR the situation, and WITH those affected? (We will pray for these situations in the prayer time later in the session.)

2. PROVIDE HELP (COMMITTED EVANGELISTS)

Even those who don't believe in God can receive an offer of prayer as an act of love and kindness, but it is likely to ring hollow if separated from an offer to meet their practical needs. During and after times of crisis, people need practical help. While our evangelism relies on a verbal communication of the gospel, our broader witness relies on living transformed lives and expressing the love and compassion of Christ to those around us. It means being practical, meeting needs as if we were meeting the needs of Jesus himself (Matthew 25:40). Do people need groceries or supplies from the pharmacy? Do they need their house cleaning, their garden tidied or their meals prepared? Would they appreciate some company and conversation, or perhaps they need a lift somewhere?

What's the best way to find out what people need? Asking them! The very act of listening

to people before we steam in with our assumptions or a gospel presentation can often be transformational for how future dialogue about Jesus goes. As we commit to listening and commit to meeting the needs in front of us, opportunities to explain the Jesus story will often follow.

3. PROCLAIM HOPE (BIBLE-TEACHING EVANGELISTS)

As we help those in need with practical help, we should look for opportunities to explain the gospel story. Alongside our actions, the powerful truth of the gospel offers healing and hope on the deepest level of human need - which is not physical but spiritual (Matthew 10:28; Matthew 16:26).

It is crucial that we remain thoughtful, humble and compassionate when we share the truth of the gospel in the light of crisis. This doesn't involve watering down the truth, but it does mean being prepared to engage in a meaningful way with real-world concerns and questions so that the good news is still good news. People's hearts are open during times of crisis, so we must be ready to offer clarity in the face of confusion, helping people realise that, even while crisis surrounds, there is a firm foundation upon which we can build our lives that will help us weather any storm (Matthew 7:24-27).

Discuss: What challenges must we be prepared for as we speak of Jesus in a time of crisis?

4. PRIORITISE COMMUNITY (ACCOUNTABLE EVANGELISTS)

Through Advance we get used to checking in with each other, asking pointed questions and journeying through life with intentionality together. In times of crisis, we are reminded how important it is that we don't become isolated in our own communities that ignore the needs of others around us. Let's hold each other to account for prioritising the needs of others as a core part of our Christian lives, and by extension, our evangelism - never forgetting that the root of our evangelism is found in the dual command of loving God and loving our neighbour.

Accountability doesn't only relate to our experiences of temptation or our devotional lives. It should also give space for reflection and our response to the challenges of justice, care for those in need, our approach to the environment, and other issues that directly affect the way we love our neighbour.

5. ENCOURAGE PRACTICALLY (INSPIRATIONAL EVANGELISTS)

Our job as evangelists is to continually stir the church to be witnesses of the good news. During a time of crisis we should take the initiative to continually reaffirm the gospel to the church so that our brothers and sisters in Christ are reminded of the hope it offers the world. Some in the church may think it inappropriate and opportunistic to proclaim the gospel in times of crisis. Our job is to realign this thinking where necessary and to encourage the church to prayerfully offer the peace of the gospel to a chaotic world at *all* times.

Discuss: How can we stir the church to prioritise evangelism in times of crisis?

Satan loves to grip us with fear and make us ineffective, blunting us in our purpose as carriers of hope. In his famous letter to Johann Hess about whether Christians should flee crisis (for him, the plague) or stay and help, Martin Luther offered this prayer of rebuke against Satan's schemes and a powerful assurance of God's supremacy:

'Get away, you devil, with your terrors! Just because you hate it, I'll spite you by going the more quickly to help my sick neighbour. I'll pay no attention to you... If Christ shed his blood for me and died for me, why should I not expose myself to some small dangers for his sake and disregard this feeble plague? If you can terrorise, Christ can strengthen me. If you can kill, Christ can give life. If you have poison in your fangs, Christ has far greater medicine. Should not my dear Christ, with his precepts, his kindness, and all his encouragement, be more important in my spirit than you, roguish devil, with your false terrors in my weak flesh? God forbid! Get away, devil.

- Here is Christ and here am I, his servant in this work. Let Christ prevail! Amen.'

MARTIN LUTHER

Fear and chaos don't win. Let's go and tell the world the name of the one who already has.

DISCUSSION (USE EXTRA TIME IF YOU CAN)

1. Where does our responsibility start and end in meeting people's need in a crisis?
2. How do you combat your own fear in times of crisis?
3. Can you think of an example of how your evangelism became *more* effective during a crisis?

- 'You must live with people to know their problems, and live with God in order to solve them.'

P.T. FORSYTH

PRAYER

'Lord, help us in times of crisis. Help us to be aware of the need, to be compassionate in our response, and above all to trust you in the face of uncertainty. Forgive us when we fail to trust you and help us to overcome fear that would hold us back from living as you would have us live. Empower us to be a people of hope and peace for a world in chaos. Would we be faithful to proclaiming your gospel in all situations, and intentional about how we practically meet people's needs in times of trouble. Thank you that you are good in all situations. May your goodness be revealed in our evangelism and witness. Amen'

Take some time to pray into the specific areas of crisis that we looked at earlier in the session.

APPLICATION AND ACCOUNTABILITY (15 MINS)

Sometimes crisis plays out on a grand scale, like a natural disaster or a pandemic. At other times, crisis plays out in individual lives and family circumstances, and is no less difficult for those who experience them. Take the time to think about what is happening globally, locally, and individually in the world around you and to think about how you can apply the five crisis evangelism actions from the session to these situations. Once you have identified some areas of crisis, and how you can offer the hope of the gospel in and through them, hold each other to account for what you will do to respond in the coming weeks.

Fill in accountability forms, share in pairs or smaller groups and pray for each other.



SESSION FOUR

NEGLECTED TOOLS OF EVANGELISM — PRAYER

This session expands upon the prayer session from Year One, exploring how we can use prayer in our preparation for and participation in evangelism.

SESSION IN A SENTENCE

Prayer is vital for evangelism, both as we prepare for evangelism and as a tool for evangelism as we participate in the great commission.

SESSION BACKGROUND

Not having the right tool for the job at hand can be frustrating. When it comes to evangelism, there is no shortage of 'tools' that have been produced to help the church become effective in its witness. As helpful as these tools can be, we probably wouldn't go so far as to suggest that any particular individual resource is *essential* to the task of evangelism.

But there are some 'tools' for evangelism that transcend any resources we produce. Their effectiveness doesn't hinge on context or culture. These tools *are* essential to evangelism because they directly affect the faithfulness of our witness and the fruit that comes from it.

In reality, these 'tools' are actually spiritual practices – and like all spiritual practices they are profoundly powerful *and* practical. Spiritual practices can be easily neglected when it comes to evangelism, perhaps because we forget their practical value.

Across three Advance Group sessions we're going to look at three spiritual practices – *prayer, listening, and thanksgiving*.

In Year One, we explored the relationship between prayer and evangelism in three primary ways.

First, as part of the process through which we can grow in maturity as children of God and as disciples of Jesus Christ who help others to grow likewise (Ephesians 4:14-16).

Second, as the way by which God's power can bring opportunities to witness *and* work through us and shift our evangelism from merely marketing the Christian faith to stirring hearts from death to life (Colossians 4:2-6).

Third, as the way by which we can be equipped with spiritual armour to defend against the attacks of the enemy as we go onto the front lines of spiritual battle and to open the eyes of any who may have been deceived by his schemes that they may instead see and know the light of Jesus (Ephesians 6:10-20).

Keeping those three things in mind, let's expand upon them in this session to think practically about how we might pray in preparation for evangelism, and how we might pray as we participate in it.

SESSION GUIDE

CATCH UP (10–20 MINS)

Take time to catch up with one another, sharing stories, feedback on opportunities and anything else that would encourage the group.

PRAYER

Pray to commit the time to the Lord and over any situations, positive or challenging, arising from the catch up time.

TEACHING (20–30 MINS)

Work through the following teaching material in your own way, either by reading it word for word, or by reworking it into your own presentation.

- ‘And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with
- all kinds of prayers and requests. With this
- in mind, be alert and always keep on praying
- for all the Lord’s people. Pray also for me,
- that whenever I speak, words may be given
- me so that I will fearlessly make known
- the mystery of the gospel, for which I am
- an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may
- declare it fearlessly, as I should.’

EPHESIANS 6:18–20

It might seem odd for prayer to be first on our list of neglected evangelism tools. The truth is, even though our prayer lives might be thriving in general, our enthusiasm to *get up and go with* the gospel can leave us neglecting the need to *spiritually sow* the gospel.

- ‘Prayer is crucial in evangelism: Only God
- can change the heart of someone who is in
- rebellion against Him. No matter how logical
- our arguments or how fervent our appeals,
- our words will accomplish nothing unless
- God’s Spirit prepares the way.’

BILLY GRAHAM

Prayer plays a part both in the way we prepare for evangelism and in how we participate in evangelism.

PREPARATION

Power

As we pray we put the power where the power belongs – in the hands of God, the only one with the power to save (Romans 1:16). We ask God to move beyond our limitations, to soften hearts, to reveal himself in our witness, to move miraculously, to save. Prayer enables us to go as an empowered people.

Confession

We are to be a holy people who carry a holy message, but we are not perfect. To paraphrase William Secker, we should not fall into the trap of blushing over confession more than the sins we commit. As we make mistakes and fall short of God’s standard, we can confess to our Lord and know his forgiveness and restoration. Prayer enables imperfect messengers to go as carriers of the holiest message.

Transformation

If Jesus makes no difference to our lives, then the gospel we proclaim has no integrity. Yes, we’ll make mistakes, but we don’t want to be making the same mistakes over and over. We don’t need to be perfect to share the good news, but we do need to be experiencing something of its transforming effects in our lives for it to be revealed as truth. D.L. Moody said, ‘The Bible was not given to us for information but transformation.’ Our evangelism is not about sharing information, but about inviting others into the same transformation we’re experiencing. Prayer enables us to go as a transformed people.

Provision

There are many prayers of supplication we can pray when it comes to evangelism, but perhaps the best of all is for opportunity: ‘God, would you provide opportunities for me to share my faith today.’ As we step into these opportunities, we can pray for the provision of boldness, compassion, clarity, wisdom, and more. Prayer enables us to go into every opportunity as an equipped people.

Discuss: Does your prayer life feature these characteristics?

In failing to prayerfully prepare for evangelism we are preparing to fail in evangelism. That doesn't mean that prayer guarantees that our evangelism will lead to immediate decisions to follow Jesus, but it does mean that we will continually be drawn into a more faithful witness of his truth.

PARTICIPATION

There are many ways in which we can use prayer as a practical element of our evangelism, but these two are a good place to start.

Prayer Walking

What could happen if we did a prayer walk around our neighbourhoods at least once a month? By inviting God to move among the people who live in the streets surrounding our own homes, and making ourselves available to be an answer to that prayer, opportunities will often arise *while* we're out prayer walking. People will say hello, conversation follows, an explanation of what we're doing and why can be expressed, and an opportunity to share our faith naturally presents itself from there.

Prayer Talking

In our conversations with people, one of the best tools we have is to offer to pray for them. We can offer to pray there and then, or if they are not comfortable, then at a later time when we are alone in prayer. Prayer itself becomes an opportunity to show the heart of the gospel (loving kindness) and the gospel power of God (as he moves in response to the prayer).

Discuss: Do you have experiences of prayer walks or of using prayer as a tool in your witness? What happened? Sharing stories where things didn't go so well can be as helpful as sharing 'success' stories.

Many of us might not think we're neglecting prayer in our evangelism, but upon reflection we may be surprised to discover that we don't press into the power of prayer in all the ways we might. Paul's prison-based prayer request to the Ephesians was not for freedom from his circumstances but boldness to proclaim the gospel in the opportunity before him (Ephesians 6:18-20). Likewise, let us pray that whenever we

speak we might receive the words and power we need to fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel.

DISCUSSION (20 MINS)

1. Does your personal prayer life have a healthy focus on evangelism?
2. Are you comfortable offering prayer to others? If not, what are the barriers?
3. Reflect together on these verses from Psalm 17. How do they instruct our prayer, especially as a tool for evangelism? Use the words in bold to focus your discussion.

● 'I call on you, my God, for you will answer me; turn your ear to me and hear my prayer. Show me the wonders of your great love, you who save by your right hand those who take refuge in you from their foes.'

● PSALM 17:6-7

APPLICATION (5 MINS)

Put into practice the Preparation and Participation prayer characteristics from this session. Consider how to establish a rhythm of prayer walking around your neighbourhood – and if you don't already, keep a prayer journal. Note down people you meet and prayer requests you receive, and update it with answers to prayer as an encouragement along the way.

PRAYER (10 MINS)

Pray that God would prepare you as an empowered, forgiven and transformed disciple who steps into the opportunities he provides. Thank him that he is at work in and through you day by day. Pray for those you know who do not yet know Jesus as Lord. Pray for each other, that you would all keep prayer central to your walk with Jesus and to your evangelism.

ACCOUNTABILITY (15 MINS)

Fill in accountability forms, share in pairs or smaller groups and pray for each other.



SESSION FIVE

NEGLECTED TOOLS OF EVANGELISM

– LISTENING

This session explores the art of listening. We will explore practical ways in which we can become better listeners as we attempt to help people connect to the truth of the gospel.

SESSION IN A SENTENCE

Listening well to people demonstrates our love for them, helps us to avoid treating them as mere evangelistic targets, and gives us opportunities to identify gospel connection points in their lives.

SESSION BACKGROUND

Richard ‘Dick’ Bass was known for going on ambitious expeditions and talking about them at length with anyone in earshot. On one flight, he chatted incessantly to the gentleman next to him about his exploits climbing Everest and his plan to do so again. As the flight was landing, Bass realised that he hadn’t made time for his unknown travel companion to introduce himself. ‘That’s okay,’ the man said, ‘I’m Neil Armstrong. Nice to meet you.’

Dick Bass missed out on a great conversation with the first man to walk on the moon. When we fail to listen to others, we are likely to miss out on more than an interesting anecdote or two. We risk missing the person themselves.

If we were to ask people about the skills or character traits needed to be a good evangelist, what would come out on top? Perhaps good communication skills, confidence, winsomeness

and passion would all feature, but what about listening? Would it even make the list?

Jesus asked many more questions than he answered. Of the more than 180 questions Jesus was asked, he only directly answered a few, often preferring instead to offer a question in response. Jesus asks more than 300 questions in the pages of the New Testament – questions to provoke thought or self-reflection, to reveal hypocrisy, to keep a dialogue flowing, to probe, to enlighten, to restore, or to heal.

Jesus was always prepared to listen to the answer to his questions. The gospels are full of examples of him listening to those around him (see John 3–5 for a great example). Jesus listened to questions, needs, fears and concerns, objections and accusations. Jesus was available to listen, and his profound and powerful use of questions in response was not just a conversational technique but a revelation that those he spoke with had been heard. It’s a great place for our evangelism to start from.

In Jesus’ willingness and ability to listen and question, we see a hope for our evangelism that does not miss the person in front of us as we seek to faithfully connect them to the truth of the gospel.

SESSION GUIDE

CATCH UP (10–20 MINS)

Take time to catch up with one another, sharing stories, feedback on opportunities and anything else that would encourage the group.

PRAYER

Pray to commit the time to the Lord and over any situations, positive or challenging, arising from the catch up time.

TEACHING (30–40 MINS)

Work through the following teaching material in your own way, either by reading it word for word, or by reworking it into your own presentation.

- ‘To answer before listening – that is folly and shame.’

PROVERBS 18:13

Have you ever been in a conversation with someone where you couldn’t get a word in edgeways? It can be deeply frustrating to feel spoken *at* – to be the recipient of a monologue rather than the partner in a dialogue. For most of us, not being heard is worse than being misunderstood – it’s like we haven’t been seen or valued.

Unfortunately, evangelism can too often become one-way communication. There will always be a place for public evangelism from a platform, but when it comes to personal evangelism (daily opportunities for most Christians) then one-way communication falls short. It treats the other person as an evangelistic target rather than a real person to whom God is offering a restored relationship. It is hard to help people see God’s love for them when his followers don’t show them any love in the first place.

The value of listening is not found merely in the information we receive about a person, but in the value a person receives as we give them our loving attention.

One-way communication is the tool of the marketer. Evangelism is not about selling a product, it is an introduction to the living person of Jesus Christ. God wants to be in a relationship with people – not statistics, demographic targets or missional objectives, but people – who are unique and valuable and who have his attention.

- ‘62 percent of non-Christians and lapsed Christians say that someone who listens without judgment would be the best person to talk with about faith: significantly higher than any other quality reported.’

BARNA GROUP

People want to be genuinely heard without prejudice. That’s not to say that people are unwilling to disagree, but before we can disagree in a healthy way, we first need to understand. By listening we show people that we care about them and that we don’t only want to point out all the ways in which they are wrong.

Truly listening to people is really useful, too. We can learn about what is going on in their lives, we can meet their actual needs rather than what we think they need, and we can make connection points to the gospel that address their actual questions rather than those we think they must be asking.

Discuss: Work through the following seven points together, reflecting on your own strengths and weaknesses in listening to people as part of evangelistic conversations.

1. ASK QUESTIONS

A huge part of listening well involves asking good questions. It reveals that we are listening thoughtfully, keeps the conversation moving into interesting areas, and gives us a chance to better understand the thoughts (and needs) of our conversation partner. Jesus modelled this to us, perhaps most clearly in the healing of Bartimaeus: ‘What do you want me to do for you?’ (Mark 10:46–52).

2. BEWARE 'WINNING'

What's the fastest way to kill a conversation? Trying to 'win' it. We don't need to have all the answers. Research conducted by Barna suggests 'know-it-all' conversation partners are not well regarded by non-Christians. We don't need to walk away from every conversation as the victor. A conversational win is where both parties were able to share their thoughts clearly with the other.

3. CREATE SPACE

We don't need to force conclusions. It's better to create space for people to think about what they are saying and hearing in response, and give ourselves space to reflect rather than always rushing to respond. As the Friar reminds Romeo in *Romeo and Juliet*: 'Wisely and slow; they stumble that run fast.'

4. DISCOVER TOGETHER

When we listen to others, we often realise that God is teaching us something new *through* them. We mustn't limit our evangelism to an attempt to draw someone to exactly where we are already, but realise that evangelism is a journey we are on together towards Jesus.

5. EXPLORE CONFLICT

Other worldviews can contain truth. There are questions about Christianity that are helpful and objections that are insightful. We shouldn't dismiss everything that is counter to our own views, especially without first listening carefully and taking time to understand why it's important to the person we're talking to. We should be inquisitive and affirm what is good.

6. FIND COMMON GROUND

There are likely to be plenty of areas of agreement in any conversation. Finding these areas of common ground can help to build affinity, giving us a foundation of agreement from which disagreements can more graciously be explored, and leading to unexpected gospel connection points.

7. GROW

Listening to people – with real feelings, thoughts and experiences – is an opportunity to grow in compassion. Our motivation for evangelism

can easily become skewed: how often do we share the gospel *only* to obey a command, *only* because our church is running a mission week, or *only* because we have a good head knowledge of the gospel and we know it needs to be shared? How often is our motivation simply love? Listening helps us to grow in compassion, empathy and love, and become the kind of messengers who represent the gospel not just in what we say, but who we are.

As we attempt to listen well to those around us, we must also listen carefully to the Holy Spirit – both in our prayerful preparation for evangelism and actively while we are in conversation with others. It has been said that evangelism is simply 'joining in the conversation the Holy Spirit (the greatest evangelist) is already having with a person,' so let's turn our hearts to him as we turn our ears to the ones in front of us.

DISCUSSION (20 MINS)

1. What makes a good listener? Would you consider yourself one?
2. What is the 'folly and shame' of not listening to those we witness to?
3. Is there a way of incorporating listening into public evangelism as well as personal evangelism? How might you do this?
4. How might you encourage those you speak with to open themselves to listening to God?

APPLICATION (10 MINS)

Practice listening by engaging a not-yet-Christian in conversation. You could start with a simple question such as, 'If you could ask God one question, what would it be?' and see where the conversation leads. Be present as they talk with you, asking good questions in response to the things they say that don't *lead* or *coerce* the conversation but *enrich* it. Resist offering too much of your own insight (unless requested), and create space for your conversation partner to be heard. Affirm that you heard them and appreciate their input by restating some of the things they said and how you will enjoy reflecting on these after the conversation.

Reflect afterwards with these questions for yourself:

1. How would I feel if I had been listened to in the way I listened in this conversation?
2. Do I understand their feelings, thoughts, ideas, concerns, or objections more clearly?
3. Did I learn anything new or helpful?
4. How might I get more insight about, or respond to, some of the things we discussed?

PRAYER

Spend some time waiting upon and listening to God together. Ask him to speak to you and make yourself available to hear his voice. Share encouragement with each other as and when members of the group feel they have heard from God.

Pray that God would help you to listen well to those around you. Ask him to help you grow in compassion and love for those you reach out to.

ACCOUNTABILITY (15 MINS)

Fill in accountability forms, share in pairs or smaller groups and pray for each other.



SESSION SIX

NEGLECTED TOOLS OF EVANGELISM – THANKSGIVING

This session considers the role that thanksgiving plays in our faith and evangelism. We will consider the emotional and psychological benefits of a thankful life posture, and the importance of remembering who God is, what he has done, and why we have cause to be eternally thankful to him.

SESSION IN A SENTENCE

Thanksgiving plays a vital role in our walk with Jesus and the witness we offer into the world, helping us to be emotionally healthy messengers who continually remember the goodness of God even in the face of great challenges.

SESSION BACKGROUND

- 'Remember, remember the fifth of
- November..'

Bonfire Night celebrations happen annually in the UK to commemorate Guy Fawkes and the so-called Gunpowder Plot. Across the nation people light bonfires, set off fireworks and enjoy warm food and beverages in an atmosphere of family fun and festivity. But what precisely is being remembered?

In 1605 a group of conspirators hatched a plot to assassinate King James I by blowing up the House of Lords with 36 barrels of gunpowder. The plot was planned for 5 November, during the State Opening of Parliament, but thanks to a tip-off, the authorities found out about

it – and during a search of the House of Lords they found Guy Fawkes, one of the conspirators, watching over the barrels of gunpowder.

The plot was foiled, and Fawkes and many of his partners in crime were found guilty of treason and sentenced to being hung, drawn and quartered.

At some point, someone decided that the remembrance of these events would make a fun night out for families across the UK who could enjoy a hot dog while watching a 'Guy' (an effigy a bit like a scarecrow made of old clothes) thrown onto a bonfire! What strange customs we can have – and what strange things we often choose to remember.

Truth be told, most Brits probably couldn't tell you the specific details of what is supposed to be remembered on 5 November each year, and it has little effect on their lives. But when God tells the Jews to remember being delivered out of slavery in Egypt with the Passover meal, he didn't intend it to become merely an excuse for an annual festival. It was to be a way of remembering very clearly and powerfully what God had done (Exodus 12:1-14). The observances and details of Passover week have great significance – they are not arbitrary but vividly tell the story of God's faithfulness in rescuing the Jews from slavery. To celebrate Passover is to *remember*, and in remembering, to give thanks.

Remembrance is a theme that appears throughout the Bible – the word 'remember' is used more than 200 times. A number of these occurrences are God himself telling his people

to remember who he is, what his commands are, and what he has done. This remembrance is essential because it is the way by which God's people can keep him at the centre of who they are.

We can remain thankful even in times of distress, remembering that he is good.

We can remain hopeful even in times of seeming defeat, remembering that he has saved.

We can remain faithful even when idols tempt, remembering that he alone is God.

Whenever the people of God forget these things, we are prone to fall into chaos and calamity. In being brought to remembrance we rediscover truth and hope.

'Remember, remember' – God tells his people over and over, through festivals, songs, prayer, community, the word, story, tradition, service – 'remember,' because in remembering, we will be transformed.

SESSION GUIDE

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CATCH UP (10–20 MINS)

Take time to catch up with one another, sharing stories, feedback on opportunities and anything else that would encourage the group.

PRAYER

Pray to commit the time to the Lord and over any situations, positive or challenging, arising from the catch up time.

TEACHING (20–30 MINS)

Work through the following teaching material in your own way, either by reading it word for word, or by reworking it into your own presentation.

- 'Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.'

1 THESSALONIANS 5:16–18

The modern US observance of Thanksgiving is a wonderful idea. Setting aside an entire day to thankfully reflect on all we have, and to share in the company of others, is something we would all benefit from. We would also benefit from applying the same approach to our evangelism. We are better at celebrating 'successes' – salvation stories – than we are at being thankful simply for the God-given opportunities in front of us.

Paul reminds us in 1 Thessalonians that we should give thanks in all circumstances, because that is the will of God in Christ Jesus for us. Paul knew that the posture of a thankful heart impacts a person spiritually, emotionally, and physically. It should come as no surprise that psychologists recognise the value of thankfulness or gratitude in helping people to sleep better, raise their self-esteem, grow in empathy, and increase in mental strength, to name just a few.

Thankfulness is a valuable tool for evangelism simply by virtue of the way that it helps us go into the world as healthier people. But beyond the mental and emotional benefits, thankfulness helps us in our evangelism because it serves as a reminder of God's work in and through us.

Thankfulness helps us to see beyond our ordinary daily lives to the extraordinary ways in which God is at work. When we face discouragement, we can be thankful for what the Lord has done previously and trust him to work again. We can stir others to join in the commissioning call of Christ by giving thanks corporately for the opportunities we have to share our faith each day. This can help people who may be anxious about sharing their faith to see that not every act of evangelism needs to have a neat salvation ending to be an example of successful obedience to God. Thanksgiving is like a multi-tool for evangelism.

Discuss: There are two parts to Christian gratitude: remembering and thanksgiving. How do you create space in your walk with Jesus to remember who God is and what he has done, and give him thanks accordingly?

Here are a few ways we can make thankfulness part of our regular response to God as we seek to be faithful in our witness.

PERSONALLY

Keep a note of every opportunity God provided to share his hope with others (whether you took it or not). This will remind us of how God is at work in this way and remind us to pray for those we encountered. It may also help us to recognise new opportunities more readily in future.

FAMILIALLY

Be deliberate when around friends and family about expressing gratitude to God for how he has been at work in your life. We might be used to doing this kind of thing in a formal way once a year (like at Thanksgiving), but why not once a week? We can build each other up in regular fellowship of thanks.

COMMUNALLY

Create space in your gatherings and services to celebrate stories of opportunity, not just salvation fruit. We should always celebrate salvation, but it is often the stories of God at work in the 'ordinary' opportunities of 'ordinary' people's lives that can resonate most strongly. If we are thankful for and celebrate the planting of the seed as much as it coming to fruit, we will certainly see more seed planted.

BIBLICALLY

Give thanks creatively using the Bible, which is full of creative expressions of thanksgiving. Read through a Psalm of thanksgiving and use it to express your own gratitude to God, or use it as inspiration to creatively express that same gratitude in another way. Taking the time to creatively express our thankfulness through poetry, painting, songwriting or other creative pursuits is a great way to reflect upon, declare, and reveal to others our thankful hearts.

JOYFULLY

According to Karl Barth, 'Joy is the simplest form of gratitude.' When Roberto Benigni received the Oscar for Best Foreign Film at the 1999 Academy Awards he jumped up onto the seats in front of him and began celebrating

wildly. After clambering over the rows and hugging everyone he met, he eventually got to the stage and tried to express his thanks through broken English and a thick Italian accent. He needn't have bothered. Benigni's limited English vocabulary couldn't have expressed his thankfulness any more effectively than his heartfelt expression of joy. Living joyfully as an expression of our thanks to God directly impacts the power of our evangelism and raises the curiosity of those around us.

NORMALLY

As we go into the world we can use thanksgiving as part of our witness by explaining to people why we are so thankful to God. As we express our thanks in these conversations we can reveal more of God's character, his work historically (the gospel) and presently (testimony), and our eternal hope in him. Treating gratitude to God as a normal and everyday part of our lives speaks volumes about the reality of our relationship with him and the hope it holds for those yet to trust him as Lord.

We are more acutely aware of mental health issues today than at any other time in history. It is no surprise that we have a multi-million dollar 'wellness' industry powering global campaigns and social media stars. But what does it truly mean for us to be 'well'?

When one of the healed lepers returned to bow before Jesus in thanksgiving, Jesus responded: 'Rise and go; your faith has made you well.' The leper had already been blessed with healing to bring physical wellness, but in the posture of thanksgiving and submission to Jesus he discovered a richer understanding of what it means to be well (Luke 17:11-19).

Discuss: What does 'wellness' mean to you in light of your walk with Jesus? How might we express this idea of wellness to the world in a way that doesn't trivialise real challenges people face, but reframes them through the hope of the gospel?

For the wellness of our relationship with Jesus, the wellness of our hearts and minds, and the wellness of our witness in the world, let us fall at his feet daily in thanksgiving. May the church of Jesus Christ grow ever more confident in his

goodness and with joyful hearts hear his voice afresh: 'Rise and go.'

regularly if they are not already consistently present. It doesn't have to be something extravagant, often it is a little change regularly observed that can have the biggest impact.

DISCUSSION (20 MINS)

1. What methods do you use to remember who God is and what he has done?
2. How could you encourage others to use thanksgiving in their walk with Jesus and their evangelism?
3. How do you perceive success in evangelism?
4. Are there ways in which thanksgiving could be part of the way we speak to others about Jesus?

PRAYER AND ACCOUNTABILITY (20 MINS)

In smaller groups, pray in three ways together.

1. Share one thing from this past week that you want to thank God for.
2. Spend some time praying about your own wellness. Which areas of your life do you need Jesus to bring hope or healing to? Share together and pray for each other.
3. Pray for those you reach out to, that they will come to give thanks to Jesus and know his ongoing wellness for themselves.

Fill in accountability forms, share in pairs or smaller groups and pray for each other.

APPLICATION (5 MINS)

Make remembrance and thanksgiving a discipline in your own life, through journaling, making notes alongside your daily Bible reading, recording voice memos on your phone, sharing a time of thanksgiving before eating with your family or friends at least once a week... Get creative!

Talk to your pastor or church leadership to see how the two elements of Christian gratitude can be brought into your church gatherings

RETREAT



The climax of each year of Advance is a time of retreat. How you decide to do this is up to you, but here you will find suggestions for how to spend the time together in keeping with the general principles of Advance group meetings and to bring the third year to a focused end.

HOW TO RUN AN ADVANCE GROUP RETREAT

The general idea is to get away from your normal location and set aside a longer period of time than you would normally for your Advance group sessions. If you can only spare a morning, afternoon or evening, then do what you can in this time, but retreating for a whole day is especially beneficial.

Here are some ideas of what to do during your retreat.

KEY SCRIPTURE

The following passage from 2 Corinthians will work well as a key scripture for your time together if you are looking for a specific focus during the retreat:

- 'Therefore, since through God's mercy we
- have this ministry, we do not lose heart.
- Rather, we have renounced secret and

- shameful ways; we do not use deception,
- nor do we distort the Word of God. On the
- contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly
- we commend ourselves to everyone's
- conscience in the sight of God. And even
- if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those
- who are perishing. The god of this age has
- blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that
- they cannot see the light of the gospel
- that displays the glory of Christ, who is the
- image of God. For what we preach is not
- ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and
- ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake.
- For God, who said, "Let light shine out of
- darkness," made his light shine in our hearts
- to give us the light of the knowledge of
- God's glory displayed in the face of Christ.

'But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.'

2 CORINTHIANS 4:1-9

This passage shows at least the following twelve things for us to reflect on:

1. Evangelism is a gift of God's mercy ('*through God's mercy we have this ministry*')
2. Our method should be pure and holy ('*we have renounced secret and shameful ways*')

3. Clarity is our goal (*'setting forth the truth plainly'*)
4. Satan has deceived those we speak with (*'The god of this age has blinded'*)
5. The focus should not be us but Jesus (*'For what we preach is not ourselves'*)
6. We serve the lost through evangelism as worship to Christ (*'ourselves as your servants'*)
7. God is at work in our lives (*'made his light shine in our hearts'*)
8. God's power is made perfect in our weakness (*'we have this treasure in jars of clay'*)
9. Hardships of life need not crush us, we have strength in the joy of the Lord (*'We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed'*)
10. Confusion of circumstance need not leave us without hope, we can trust in the goodness of God (*'perplexed, but not in despair'*)
11. Persecution need not leave us isolated, we have Christ and his church (*'persecuted, but not abandoned'*)
12. Facing great personal cost need not be fatal, we have an eternal hope (*'struck down, but not destroyed'*)

What other points of encouragement to our evangelism can you draw from these nine verses?

How you study the passage together or alone (see below), how you bring these points out, and how you discuss them together is entirely up to you depending on how you are running your retreat time. But keep this passage and these points in mind as you look at the suggested activities below.

WORD

A key aim of the Advance group is to help each other grow as evangelists who are committed to the Word of God. This retreat time is a great opportunity to go deeper into his word.

EXTENDED BIBLE READING (SOLO READING)

Extended time spent with the Word of God is never time wasted. Having explored the first half (nine verses) of 2 Corinthians 4, why not now go and spend time alone reflecting in the same way on the final nine verses of the chapter?

Alternatively, taking the time to read alone through all of Mark's Gospel or one of the New Testament letters in one sitting is a great way to get a full perspective on the contents of that book. If it is a shorter book, why not re-read it multiple times, praying and reflecting between each reading, making notes, and then going again? You could all choose to read the same thing, or have a few different options that people then share about their time of reading and reflection.

BIBLE STUDY (GROUP READING)

There are a number of ways that you could facilitate Bible study together on the retreat. Perhaps you will want to revisit some of the key passages you have explored over the Advance group sessions. Alternatively, you may feel led to a particular passage or theme that will set the tone for the retreat. As ever, be sure to keep it in line with developing each other as evangelists.

You could also work through the Advance/City Gospel Movements 'Exploring Evangelism Myths' Bible study on YouVersion.



BONUS SESSIONS AND OTHER ADVANCE RESOURCES

One of the bonus sessions available on the Advance website (advancegroups.org/blog) could be used to run a regular Advance group session as part of your retreat. You may also have your own ideas for how you could run an Advance group session in the same format we have been using.

Equally you may want to look at a One Thing blog on the Advance website which features a

number of different evangelists sharing the one thing they wish they had known when they had started to preach the gospel. These short pieces make for excellent discussion starters.

PRAYER

Set aside significant time for prayer during the retreat. Plan for prayer times with a specific focus, as well as time for both praying through scripture and spontaneous prayer. Whatever else you do in prayer during the retreat, the following three focuses are recommended.

PRAYING FOR EACH OTHER

Be sure to pray for one another as a primary element of your time together. Ask people to share one area they are feeling thankful to God for and one area in which they need provision or breakthrough. Encourage people to be specific and honest in their requests, and don't rush through each person but dedicate real time to one another. Be sure to keep a note of words and encouragements that come from this time.

PRAYING FOR THE LOCAL AND THE GLOBAL

Take time to pray for your local context and also the global spread of the gospel. If there are specific situations you have a heart for in either a local or global context then pray for them. Lift up individuals, churches, ministries, missionaries, situations from the news and so on.

PRAYING FOR THE ADVANCE JOURNEY

Give thanks for the journey that you have been on in this group, reflecting on personal growth and stories of fruitfulness and salvation. Ask the Lord to continue the work in you that he has begun, and that you would be transformed into his image with ever increasing glory (you could pray through 2 Corinthians 3:17-18).

WORSHIP

Time spent in God's Word, prayer and fellowship are all part of worship. But spend time in additional specific acts of collective devotional worship - whether it's through singing or other creative expressions.

SUNG WORSHIP

If you have someone who is musically talented, invite them to lead a time of sung worship. Alternatively, there are many great collective worship apps and videos available online, many of which are free. A quick YouTube search for your favourite worship songs will likely bring up a version of the song with lyrics that can be played for the group to sing along to. There is power in the people of God joining together in song to declare his glory.

STORIES AND PRAISE

Spend time sharing stories of how God has been at work in your life this year - stories of growth, breakthrough, evangelistic opportunity and fruit. After each story spend time praising God through prayer, song or any method that works for your group as you seek to give thanks to God for who he is and what he has done/is doing.

COMMISSIONING

Another way in which you could share in a corporate act of worship would be to commission each other before God in the evangelistic task that he has called you to and empowered you for. At the end of this third year of your Advance group it will be encouraging and affirming to recognise this milestone, so give thanks to God for it and pray over each other as you look to go again with the gospel for the salvation of the world and to the glory of God.

ANNUAL REFLECTION

Using the form found on page 188 create space to reflect on the questions provided, fill in the form and pray over the answers given. You may also want to look back on last year's form to help you reflect on your growth. This can be done individually or as a group.

FELLOWSHIP

As we gather together, we grow in friendship with and trust of one another. The fellowship of your Advance group has hopefully been a blessing to each person, and on retreat you can continue in your commitment to hold each other

to account and your enjoyment of each other's company.

ACCOUNTABILITY

Accountability has been a core part of every session so far, and in this final session of the year, once again commit to the same process to ensure you are living holy and humble lives.

FASTING/FEASTING

You may want to commit to a period of fasting as part of the retreat, or base your time together around meals through which you can gather together and make space for discussion. There is no right or wrong way to do this – all that matters is that it helps you achieve the goals of your retreat time.

ACTIVITIES

You may want to plan an activity together – for example, if you are retreating into nature somewhere, go on a walk together and fold some of the devotional activities above into this time. If based in a more urban environment, you could visit an art gallery together and do the same thing, using some of the art as a stimulus for reflection and devotion.

Equally, you might want to do something simply for fun together – a team activity, sport, entertainment option... Whether it's fellowship to encourage devotion, or fellowship to enjoy each other's company and grow in relationship with each other, invest in quality time with each other.

NEXT STEPS

The third year of Advance is done. Before you bring the year (and the retreat) to a close, be sure to look at the next steps for this group.

THIS GROUP

Create space for people to share about how the Advance group experience has been for them. Share feedback about how you've all grown and developed, and think about what the biggest learning has been from the year. How has the group enjoyed a more tailored, less prescriptive guide structure? Encourage each other in these things.

Having been together for three years, will you continue? You could run another year using resources suggested from this guide, or something else entirely. You may want to go back to the beginning and explore Year One again – perhaps the sessions will take on a new dynamic. Whatever you choose, share about what people are excited about in the upcoming year, whether that will be together in Advance or not. If you haven't already, pray and give thanks for the third year of Advance, and commit what is ahead to the Lord.

Take the opportunity to set dates for starting Year Four together.

NEW GROUPS

Make space to talk about the development of new groups that have been launched throughout this year. Multiplication is an important part of the Advance group journey. If you need any support in launching new groups, get in touch with us via the Advance website and your local Advance Ambassador will be in touch to support you in any way possible.

Ask how everyone is getting on with any groups they have started and pray over them.

However you run your retreat time, keep the core values of Advance in focus, reflect on the journey you have been on as a group, and pray for what lies ahead. Give thanks to God for the growth and fruitfulness you have experienced together and commit the future to him.



APPENDIX

OTHER SESSION IDEAS

Use these session ideas in your own way. Each idea includes a suggested key Bible passage along with questions for discussion.

SPIRITUAL PARENTS

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Reflect on the 'spiritual parents' who have helped shape our faith and journeyed with us through our discipleship journey. Reflect on Paul's relationship with Timothy as a spiritual father, but also the roles that Timothy's mother and grandmother played in his journey. Use this session as an opportunity to reflect on these special people, encouraging each other through sharing stories and lessons learned, and explore who your spiritual children might be.

KEY PASSAGE

2 Timothy 1:1-13

LIFE VERSES

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Each of us will likely be able to point to some key Bible verses that have shaped our faith, encouraged or challenged us at specific times, or have been the way through which God has spoken to us most profoundly. In this session, take time to reflect on these passages, sharing them with each other along with the story about their significance to you.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Who has been instrumental in your faith journey and why?
2. What is the biggest thing you have learned from them?
3. What makes a good spiritual parent?
4. Is there anyone who would consider you a spiritual parent?

KEY PASSAGE

Psalm 119:9-16

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Can you share three Bible verses or passages that have had a big impact on your faith or ministry?

2. Why do these hold significance for you?
3. Have you ever been surprised at how the Bible has spoken to you?
4. What Bible reading rhythms do you have in your daily life?

KEY TERMS

In this session, explore some key terms relating to evangelism and discuss them together. You could discuss the importance of having clarity about certain terms and expressions and help each other to come up with straightforward definitions. You could explore and define together:

- Evangelism (see the Advance Deeper section on page 168)
- Evangelist
- Gospel
- Witness
- Mission
- Proclamation
- Discipleship
- Christian
- Worship

KEY PASSAGE

Proverbs 2:1-6

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why is it important to have a good grasp of what these words mean?
2. Can you express these concepts simply to help others understand their meaning?
3. While the passage from Proverbs is about the wisdom of the ultimate truth about God, what can it also teach us about understanding specific aspects of our faith and practice?
4. How do we move from defining terms to applying them?

TESTIMONY

Testimony is a great tool for evangelism. Sharing testimony by itself is not evangelism – we always need to communicate the gospel too – but as part of our overall evangelism practice, sharing the story of how we came to faith and what God has been doing in our lives historically and recently is a precious thing. In this session, talk about the place of testimony in evangelism, and share your stories with one another. Take the time to refine them together, to question each other and draw out details that perhaps get missed in your usual telling. Learn to make your testimony a fluid and living thing that includes up to date information of God at work in your life.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What value do you place on the testimony of how you first came to trust Jesus as Lord?
2. Are you good at sharing recent activity of God in your life?
3. What role can testimony play in healthy evangelism?
4. What does the story of Jesus and the demoniac from Mark 5 tell us about the power of testimony?

KEY PASSAGE

Mark 5:1-20

HOLY SPIRIT

Without the Holy Spirit, evangelism is a waste of time. Only he can take our efforts and use them to bring about new life. In this session, spend time reflecting on the Holy Spirit as the greatest evangelist, and ask him to fill your lives again. Create space in this session to allow the Holy Spirit to minister to you.

KEY PASSAGE

John 16:7-11

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How would you describe your relationship with the Holy Spirit?
2. In what way can the Holy Spirit be described as the 'greatest evangelist'?
3. Jesus says in John 16 that it is better for him to go and the Spirit (the Advocate) to come. Do you understand why?
4. Will you ask the Holy Spirit to come right now?

THE LIVES OF OTHERS

You could spend a session reflecting on the life of an evangelist or missionary and the inspiration and lessons to be taken from their journey (suggestions below but feel free to choose anyone you find interesting). If you plan in advance you could find a biography of the evangelist that everyone could read over the course of the month before you meet together to then discuss in the session time. There are also documentaries and short programs available about some of these evangelists that you can find on YouTube which could be watched before or during the session.

- Eric Liddell
- Selina Hastings
- John Wimber
- Billy Graham
- Rienhard Bonnke
- Luis Palau
- Brother Yun

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What stood out to you the most from the life of this evangelist?
2. Are there any warnings from their life you need to take on board?
3. Do you feel intimidated or inspired when you look at lives such as these?
4. What learning would you hope for someone to take from your evangelism journey if they read your biography?

KEY EVANGELISTS AND MISSIONARIES

- D. L. Moody
- John Wesley
- William and Catherine Booth
- Gladys Aylward
- Aimee Semple McPherson

HOSPITALITY

We could think of hospitality as another neglected tool of evangelism. Throughout the Bible we see hospitality play a key role in how God's love is shared. This is not just a historical or cultural quirk that we can ignore

today - extending hospitality is a key part of our Christian lives and brings with it plenty of opportunities for evangelism. In this session, explore hospitality together - sharing stories of how you have used it evangelistically, exploring

creative ideas with each other and even being accountable to one another for being more deliberate about hospitality in the coming weeks.

KEY PASSAGE

Luke 14:12-14

SERVICE

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Similarly to the session idea for hospitality, explore together creative ideas for what it looks like to actually serve those around you in such a way that it opens up gospel opportunity. As William Booth said, 'You cannot warm the hearts of people with God's love if they have an empty stomach and cold feet', and so how might we fill stomachs and warm feet in our communities whilst never neglecting the need to then bring explanation of the love of God and our access to it through Jesus.

KEY PASSAGE

James 2:14-17

TEAMWORK

.....

Lone evangelism is rarely a good idea, yet it's often the case that we find ourselves alone as we share the gospel with others. Use this session to explore the biblical ideal of and need for teamwork in evangelism.

KEY PASSAGES

- Luke 10:1-3
- Ecclesiastes 4:9-12
- Proverbs 27:17
- 1 Peter 4:10
- Hebrews 10:24-25

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What does the word 'hospitality' mean to you?
2. How do you use hospitality in your evangelism?
3. What are some of the challenges that can come with extending hospitality?
4. Explore Luke 14 carefully. What is Jesus really saying about true hospitality and the Kingdom?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What practical need do you see in your community?
2. Have you seen acts of service directly open up opportunity to explain the gospel?
3. What are the dangers of thinking the act of service itself is our evangelism?
4. Why is service so central to the Christian life, even when it doesn't lead to evangelistic opportunity?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Looking at these verses, what are the values of teamwork?
2. What are the challenges of teamwork?
3. Do you have people you rely on and support in the way the Bible verses express? Who are they and what does this look like for you?
4. How does teamwork in evangelism better reveal the church in evangelism?

A BIBLICAL MODEL

The Bible instructs as to the truth of the gospel, informs us as to the kind of messengers we are to be, and inspires us with various examples of early church evangelism. And yet, the Bible never actually gives us a neat step-by-step guide in how to evangelise from which we can build the perfect strategy for all people at all times. But this is no mistake. Cultures change and methods come and go, whilst the gospel remains the same. So, our evangelism will need to be dynamic and adaptable. Helpfully though, Acts 2 does offer three simple evangelistic principles that will guide us in any culture and season, to ensure our witness is biblically faithful and God-honouring. In this session you can dig into Acts 2 to explore the biblical evangelism model of:

- Prayer:** Seeking the Lord (Acts 2:1-13)
- Proclamation:** Speaking the Word (Acts 2:14-41)
- Presence:** Showing the Love (Acts 42-47)

KEY PASSAGE

Acts 2

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why do you think prayer, proclamation and presence can be called a biblical ideal for evangelism?
2. Why is it significant that the giving of the gift of tongues led to evangelism?
3. What are the essential elements of Peter's proclamation for us to consider for our own proclamation today?
4. How do we balance being in our Father's presence, being present with our church family, and being present in the world as witnesses?

THE GREATEST EVANGELISM CHAPTER

It has been said that 2 Corinthians 6 is the greatest single chapter in the Bible on evangelism. Paul reminds us of the staggering reality that God has chosen to make us co-labourers with him in the world, and that often struggle and hardship will follow. However, rather than be defeated by this reality, we can recognise that this actually authenticates our witness - the truth will always be met with opposition, but opposition need not ultimately overwhelm us, for the truth is our hope. Use this session to explore this evangelistically rich chapter and the opportunity and challenge it presents.

KEY PASSAGE

2 Corinthians 6

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why do you think this passage has been referred to by some as the greatest biblical chapter on evangelism?
2. What kind of stumbling blocks might we put in people's paths and how can we avoid these?
3. Paul says we are authenticated in our evangelism through the struggles we face. How does this encourage you in your witness?
4. How do we reconcile the call to lovingly share the gospel with the challenge to not be "yoked together with unbelievers?"

FAITH, CLARITY, INVITATION

At the beginning of the Advance journey, you were asked the following three questions to help you decide if you wanted to be part of an Advance group:

Faith: Do you have faith that the gospel has lost none of its power, and is the only way by which a person can know true life and salvation?

Clarity: Do you want to share the gospel with clarity whenever you have an opportunity?

Invitation: Do you long to extend an invitation to the hope of the gospel, and see people move into eternal relationship with Jesus?

In this session you can explore these three questions together in more detail and with fresh insight at this stage of your Advance journey.

KEY PASSAGES

2 Corinthians 4:5-18

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why do you think these three questions, specifically, are helpful in deciding whether or not Advance is right for someone (and did they help you)?
2. In what ways have you seen the power of the gospel at work since starting Advance and how has this impacted your faith?
3. Can you see ways in which you have grown in clarity around the gospel and if so, how has this impacted your gospel conversations and proclamation?
4. Has Advance had an impact on how you offer gospel invitation to those around you?

THE ROLE OF THE EVANGELIST

Take a look at The Role of the Evangelist diagram on page 179. Use the image to explore together in this session what the role of the evangelist is, considering each word that is included on the diagram and how the whole image informs your understanding of the role.

KEY PASSAGE

Ephesians 4:11-13

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is the role of the evangelist?
2. If all believers are to share the gospel, why does God call some to be a so-called evangelist?
3. How would you help someone discern whether they were called and gifted as an evangelist in the sense discussed in question two?
4. Why is the message of the evangelist as essential for the church as it is for the world, and why is fig.2 a better representation of this than fig.1?

GOING OUT

Some groups have a practical element to every session and use the first part of their session time as a catalyst for then going out together in some way. You could use one or more of your sessions together to go out together. You could prayer walk, engage in street evangelism, pre-plan a mission opportunity or event to happen in this time, or any other number of practical 'goings'. Make sure you allow time to pray together and look at your accountability forms even if you spend the whole session time out and about.

QUESTIONS BEFORE

1. Why are we going out today?
2. What do we need to be aware of as we go?
3. What can we pray about before we go now?

QUESTIONS AFTER

1. What encounters did we have today?
2. Is there any follow up needed?
3. How can we pray for what has happened today, and for those we have spoken with?

ADVANCE DEEPER

WHAT IS EVANGELISM?

There's a special level of frustration in life reserved for playing a game of charades with your family, where, despite you acting circles around Daniel Day-Lewis himself, they still end up guessing everything *except* what you are trying to communicate.

The communication of the gospel to those around you can at times feel as frustrating as trying to get your family to shout out 'Jurassic Park!' while you prowl around the lounge like a velociraptor. But Christian evangelism is not meant to be a lucky dip exercise in who can correctly discern our 'Jesus actions' in the world as being good news for them. Evangelism is more than the communication of subjective 'good' news; more than the offering of good advice; more than the marketing of the Christian faith.

One way to help us overcome some of the frustrations we may experience in evangelism is to remind ourselves what evangelism actually is. To help us do that, let's explore the *concept*, *uniqueness* and *practice* of evangelism.

THE CONCEPT OF EVANGELISM

The word 'evangelism' basically means to announce good news. Historically the idea was often rooted in the 'good news' of a royal announcement:

A new prince has been born.

A victory has been accomplished on the battlefield.

A new day of national celebration will be observed in honour of our great king.

These days we don't need to wait for a royal announcement to get our good news on, we evangelise every day by being proclaimers

of 'good news' on our social media platforms about anything and everything.

I've just eaten an amazing cheeseburger at the new place in the mall!

My sports team won against our rivals!

This lipstick shade looks great on me!

I just got the new iPhone!

But these declarations (good as they *may* be) are less than the good news of Jesus Christ. When it comes to the gospel it turns out that we aren't done with royal announcements just yet. The gospel is a royal announcement from the perfect kingdom of heaven that is to be proclaimed to *all* of creation.

A prince of peace has been born and his name is Jesus.

A victory has been accomplished on the cross over sin and death.

A new and eternal day of celebration is possible through the resurrected Lord.

THE UNIQUENESS OF EVANGELISM

Christian evangelism is unique to all other forms of good news proclamation in *at least* these three ways:

1. ITS UNIVERSALITY

The overwhelming majority of what we announce as being 'good' is actually subjective. To take two of the earlier examples: the cheeseburger is not good news for a vegetarian (or the cow), and the rival team who lost won't share your enthusiasm for the sports result.

But the gospel is good news for *all people in all places at all times* (Psalm 96). It is the truth that restores humanity to relationship with the God we ran away from. In response to the gospel all can turn back to God, know his forgiveness and be set free to worship him.

2. ITS CONSEQUENCE

Not only is the gospel good news for everyone, it is also the *most important* news for everyone. There might be something other than the gospel that you could claim as universal 'good news', for example, reducing the plastic in our oceans could be good news for all people, ensuring our planet is a healthier space to live and thrive in. And yet, many people won't notice this good news at work in their lives day by day (except for the effect of having to use a paper straw clearly not fit for purpose in a McDonalds milkshake).

But the gospel is the most important news for any human to receive and know at any moment of their lives because it is the *exclusive* way by which a person can move from death to life (1 Corinthians 15:1-3; 20-22). There is no other way to the Father than through trust in the Son as Lord (John 14:6; Romans 10:9).

3. ITS POWER

Marketing can be powerful (and coercive). Your diet might be going gangbusters until that Doritos advert appears on TV to push your willpower beyond breaking point. The truth is that marketing is specifically designed to appeal to our emotions, wants and needs as it offers us something attractive to satisfy those things.

But Christian evangelism is not an attempt to coerce people into choosing our product. Evangelism is a presentation of the about Jesus with our lips and our lives in the power of the Spirit. Rather than exploit people's emotions, wants and needs, we seek to exalt the one who can fulfil them. The gospel has the power - both in its essential truth and in how God works through it - to revive our dead hearts and transform us into the people we were created to be (Ephesians 4:22-24).

THE PRACTICE OF EVANGELISM

If conceptually Christian evangelism is a royal announcement of good news, and uniquely it is the proclamation of the powerful, life-saving and changing news about Jesus Christ, what might it look like in practice?

Our evangelism can be outworked in numerous ways. Relationally over time with friends and family; offering prayer to a stranger; preaching to multitudes from a platform; through the giving of a Bible; conversation that flows alongside meeting practical need; the practice of hospitality... the list goes on and on. But in any expression, evangelism always requires the Holy Spirit to be at work, not least because salvation power belongs to God alone (Romans 1:16). One simple definition of evangelism I've heard is to understand evangelism as *joining in the conversation the Holy Spirit is already having with a person*. Alongside this, evangelism is to be motivated by love - our response to the love of God who first loved us, and who offers that same love to the world through us (1 John 4:10-12). Beyond these two vital realities, evangelism in practice will centre to some degree on the following three things.

1. WORDS

While works and wonders are *desirable* in evangelism, words are *essential* (Romans 10:14). Many Christians never progress beyond 'charades evangelism' with the world, hoping that by their actions alone people will be able to put it all together for themselves and come up with Jesus as the answer. But without words we will struggle to give people the information they need to know that Jesus is Lord, that repentance is required, and that God is knowable not just as an abstract feeling but in his character as revealed in the Bible. The gospel must be known by us and then communicated clearly with words to those around us so that they may know for themselves and respond accordingly.

2. WORKS

We might think of works as being something we do in the world to 'show' Jesus before preaching the message. But the primary way that works are of use to us in evangelism are in the works of God himself. Historically (the gospel), presently (testimony of his work in our lives), and yet

to come (the assured hope of the coming kingdom).

That being said, works in the world are also an important part of our witness as they reveal God at work *in and through us* today. In this way we become representatives for God's character and heart in our own behaviour and interactions with the world - *being and doing the gospel* - meeting practical need and showing God's love in action, all of which confirms the integrity of the message we share (2 Corinthians 5:20).

3. WONDERS

Regardless of where you sit on the charismatic spectrum, we must not ignore that God is still working the greatest miracle of all today - salvation. The healing and resurrection of dead human hearts is both the content *and* the outcome of our message and is a miracle we should proclaim with wonder. Alongside this, we should wisely be open to God moving in miraculous ways - healing, words of knowledge, deliverance etc - through us as he sees fit for the purposes of revealing himself to those we reach out to (Acts 14:3).

As we put the pieces of the evangelism puzzle together - while keeping in mind the desired outcome of seeing disciples made and matured in the church - we can offer an answer to the question 'What is evangelism?' as follows:

- Evangelism is the Holy Spirit empowered
- proclamation (words essential; works and
- wonders desirable) of the good news about
- Jesus Christ in the hope that people might
- trust in him as Lord, turn from their rebellion
- against God the Father and know true life
- in restored relationship with him today
- (brought to maturity by his Spirit and in
- his church) and forevermore in his eternal
- kingdom.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How would you explain evangelism to someone unfamiliar with the concept?
2. What other elements of the good news are unique to Christian evangelism?
3. Words are essential, but how do works and wonders play a role in our evangelism?
4. How might clarity about what evangelism actually is help with some challenges and frustrations we face as we attempt to announce the good news to the world?

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APPENDIX

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SHARING YOUR FAITH AND SHARING THE GOSPEL

We use the terms 'sharing your faith' and 'sharing the gospel' interchangeably and yet, they are distinctly different - yet complimentary - activities.

Let's take a look at what makes these two types of 'sharing' different and why the distinction is more than just a game of semantics.

Sharing Your Faith is a personal reflection about your own understanding and experience of faith in Jesus. When you share your faith you might explain why trust in Jesus makes sense to you, what Jesus has done in your life and the difference it makes day by day (what we commonly call testimony), the hope you have in light of the existence of God and the resurrection of Jesus and, the relating of your understanding and experience of faith to the experiences of those you talk to, or in response to the questions they raise. Sharing your faith, at its best, is an invitation for someone to hear, see and investigate what faith in Jesus Christ looks like in your life (and potentially what that could mean for them).

Sharing The Gospel, on the other hand, means explaining the story of the good news about Jesus Christ, the tenets of the truth about who God is, what he has done in the world and what that means for the world. It is the story of creator and creation, of relationship and rebellion; of the life, ministry, death, resurrection, ascension and return of Jesus. It is an invitation to repentance - to turn from our rebellion back into relationship with God by trusting exclusively in Jesus as Lord and living accordingly in the power of his Holy Spirit.

Do you see the difference between these two things? It is possible to share your faith without sharing the gospel. Whilst people may bemoan the lack of gospel, it is important to note that sharing faith can often be a positive step in a person's journey towards faith in Jesus. It is also important to note that faith-sharing can be so vague that it actually misleads people as to the source and truth of our hope.

Sharing your faith in and of itself is not technically evangelism (to announce the good news) as it doesn't proclaim the good news itself, only the effects of the good news in a person's life, which is still an important and powerful thing to express. As an early step towards hearing and understanding the good news more clearly, this 'pre-evangelism' can be profoundly important in a person's journey (and studies have shown us that people are overwhelmingly more likely to come to personal faith in Christ when they know a Christian personally, and this is surely not because their Christian friend only ever talks to them about the plain tenets of the gospel!).

Conversely, you can share the gospel without sharing your faith. The tenets of the good news are, and will always be, true, irrespective of your personal experiences of faith. The power of the gospel is not found in the credibility of a person's faith journey, but in its essential and unchanging truth - the truth that will set people free (John 8:32). However, the gospel is often most persuasive when its effects are made known in the life of the one proclaiming it as a message of transformation (2 Corinthians 5:17).

What is ideal... is for people to have connection points from the unchanging truth of the gospel to their life today, helping to bring clarity from the word via the witness to the world. For this reason we would be wise and loving to share our faith.

But what is essential... is that people know the way of salvation: peace with God, true life today and forevermore through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. For this reason we must share the gospel.

If you see someone sharing their faith, whatever platform and influence they may have large or small, be encouraged. Faith-sharing is a great stepping stone, so don't panic if it doesn't seem to have enough gospel content. Give thanks for what could be an important moment in a person's life of being exposed to faith so that when the gospel is eventually proclaimed it may be more authentically understood in the life of the hearer.

Pray that the opportunity for the gospel to be shared will be taken at the right time with boldness and clarity. Wherever you can, encourage those who have shared their faith as to the role it plays, whilst also affirming the need to keep our eyes open for the gospel opportunities that come our way and asking God to give us the boldness we need to take them.

We should be honest with ourselves. If we are settling for faith-sharing to tick a 'witness' box in our Christian life but never actually express the gospel to anyone, we are not actually being witnesses of the gospel in the truest sense, and we are likely neglecting to offer what people need the most - not our faith, but their own in Jesus Christ through the power of the gospel of which we are not ashamed (Romans 1:16).

Finally, it is worth saying that the Holy Spirit is far more dynamic than the process outlined here. We trust him to lead us in all of the sharing that we do and to give us wisdom to respond in the right way in any given opportunity. It is the truth of the gospel that sets people free by the Spirit's power and so we resolve to share the good news clearly from lives that give testimony to the power and hope of the gospel by its effect in our ongoing story.

Whole life witness - the sharing of faith and gospel in word and deed.

QUESTIONS

1. What opportunities do you have to share your faith each day?
2. Why is it important to understand the difference between sharing your faith and sharing the gospel?
3. Why do some people find it easier to share their faith than the gospel, and vice-versa?

APPENDIX

GOSPEL DOCTRINE

- You are not an accident. You are created by and in the image of the perfect and loving God (Father, Spirit, Son) who is the source and sustainer of life (Genesis 1).
- We have all rejected God (sinned) by going our own way, instead of living in obedience to our creator. This is why the world is broken and full of suffering. This injustice aggrieves God, who does not trivialise sin by ignoring or excusing it, but who justly punishes those who offend (Romans 3:23).
- We are powerless to put things right once we have rebelled against God, having committed an act of treason against the king of the universe. Rejection of God is rejection of life itself. We are left with eternal death, the natural product of our rejection of life *and* of God's punishment (divine justice) for breaking his standard for right living (Romans 6:23).
- But God desires for none to know death, for he is love itself and wants to be in eternal relationship with us, his dearly loved children. God graciously set in motion a rescue mission to save us (1 Timothy 2:4-6).
- God sent his Son, Jesus Christ, into the world as a human being, to live the perfect human life that never rejected the Father. Jesus was killed upon a cross, acting as our substitute and choosing to take upon himself the death we deserved for our rejection of God (John 3:16; Romans 3:23-25).
- Three days later, Jesus rose from the dead, showing that the curse of death is broken. New life is possible *only* through trust in Jesus Christ and the seeking of forgiveness for sin (Proverbs 28:13; Ephesians 2:1-10; 1 John 1:7-9).
- Jesus' death and resurrection achieved reconciliation, redemption, propitiation (appeasement), and the defeat of evil. Our sin was credited to Jesus, and his righteousness is credited to us. The only requirement on our part for this transaction to take effect is that we trust in Jesus as Lord (faith), and believe that God raised him from the dead. We are saved by faith alone. (Matthew 20:28; Romans 10:9; 2 Corinthians 5:18-21; John 12:31; Colossians 2:15).
- We can now access a restored relationship with our heavenly Father. We have peace and are adopted into his family. We die to our old life and are born again into a new life. (Luke 9:23; Colossians 1:20, 2:13-14; Romans 5:1-2; Galatians 4:4-7).
- Jesus ascended to heaven, where he reigns at the right hand of the Father, but he has sent believers the gift of the Holy Spirit to empower us to live obediently in the fullness of life, and to help us share his good news with the world. We become new creations – disciples – transformed by the work of the Spirit in our lives, which leads to fruitfulness. We work as God's ambassadors in the world, representing the kingdom of peace, serving as witnesses to the truth of the Jesus story in word and deed (Micah 6:8; Acts 1:8; 2 Corinthians 5:11-21; Galatians 5:22-23).
- One day, Jesus will return to judge the living and the dead. God's perfect kingdom will be restored and eternal life with our loving Father awaits those who trust in Jesus as Lord. Eternal death (hell) awaits those who do not. The good news is that no one needs to perish eternally, all can know eternal life and joy in relationship with God, through faith in Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 15; Revelation 21:1-8; 22:1-5).

APPENDIX

GOSPEL NARRATIVE

Before all things, God existed in perfect relationship with himself, Father, Spirit, Son. God created the world and it was very good, and he shared a unique relationship with humankind. We were created for perfect life with him, the King of the universe, and life itself! But God did not force humanity to love him, he let us choose for ourselves. With this free will humanity chose to go their own way, rejecting God.

Rejecting the King of the universe is treason without equal, rebellion against life itself. Death, suffering and pain entered the world. Humanity doomed itself to separation from their perfect heavenly Father with no way back. God couldn't excuse the rebellion, for there would be no justice in that action. A just and righteous God must demand a penalty be paid for the crimes committed. The punishment for rebellion against life is death.

But God so loved the world that he initiated a plan to save humanity from death - to make it possible for us to know the fullness of his life and love forever. God sent his son Jesus into the world to live the perfect human life, a life that never rebelled and became guilty of any crime against God.

Jesus willingly died upon a cross to take the punishment of death that humanity deserved for its rebellion and in doing so he became our substitute. Three days later he came back to life, because he is God and death cannot hold him. In this moment it became possible for humanity to not only receive forgiveness for rebellion against God, but to share in the new and eternal life that Jesus has made possible. The curse of death was broken.

All we need to do is believe that Jesus is who he says he is - the crucified and resurrected Saviour of the world, the King of the universe - and choose to make him Lord of our lives. There is salvation and life for all who trust in him, and the empowering of his Holy Spirit enables us to live the kind of lives we were created for: lives that reveal the image of God so that all may know true life. By placing our trust in Jesus, we die to our old life and are born again into new life. One day Jesus will return and his perfect kingdom will be restored. All who trust in him will live forever within his kingdom, and so we are called and compelled to share God's love with the world so that all may know this eternal hope today and forevermore.

APPENDIX

YOUTH GOSPEL TALK EXAMPLE

ONE: YOU ARE NOT AN ACCIDENT!

So many people go around thinking that they are a cosmic accident, that they are here because the universe just came into being from nothing, and then we somehow arrived a few billion years later. But that doesn't make any sense, nor does it offer any hope for what life can mean!

The Bible says that God has always existed and created the world from a desire to share his love with his creation – humanity. So you are not an accident – you are God's creation, you are loved and you have purpose. God has decided the universe is better with you in it, and that is why you are here!

TWO: YOU HAVE MISSED THE POINT!

The problem is, when people don't know that God created them and that he loves them, they miss the whole point of life! Knowing God is living life as it was meant to be lived – in friendship with our creator, in relationship with a loving, kind, merciful, gracious, patient and wise God. The Bible talks about God as a perfect Father, who wants good things for his children – that's you and me! But the Bible also talks about us as being rebellious children, we've run away from our Fathers love.

Not knowing God is like running onto the pitch of the Football (Soccer) World Cup final but not bothering to set up any goals... no one would be able to score a goal, no one would be able to win the trophy – it would be pointless, just people running around until the end of the game.

THREE: YOU CAN KNOW FULL LIFE!

The Bible tells us that when we reject the life God has for us, bad stuff will happen in this world because we think we know how to live this life better than the perfect God who created

us. Our less than perfect way of running things will result in a less than perfect world. The Bible calls this sin – which means missing the mark of what we were created for. Another way of thinking about sin is selfishness. We choose our way instead of God's way. We say, *'Hey God, I'm better than you; I know more than you; I don't need you; I can be a better God than you.'* We only have to turn on the news to see the messed-up world we live in, and this is the result of people missing the point, living for themselves, or anything other than their loving Father God who is the source of life. All the suffering, injustice and chaos we see in the world exists because we think we know better than God – we've rejected him.

This rejection puts a barrier between us – an imperfect and rebellious people – and the perfect God of all creation. When we reject God there are consequences to our actions. If you go against your teachers and break the rules at school you might get a detention, the negative consequence of making the wrong choice. But when we go against our creator God the consequences are not a simple punishment to correct our behaviour, these consequences are the natural reality that follow our actions. In rejecting God we reject life and if you reject life what are you left with? Death.

But God doesn't want you to die, he created you for life in all its fullness in relationship with him. The Bible tells us that God has done something to fix the problem we created, he sent his Son Jesus into this world – God in human form – to live the perfect human life that shows us how we were supposed to live, and to take the consequences of our rejection upon himself.

Jesus was killed on a cross to take the death that we chose when we rejected God, to take our eternal detention. Here's the amazing news though, three days later he came back to life!

People might say, "Are you crazy? How can a man come back to life from death?" But remember, Jesus is God and God is life – death

can't hold him! The Bible says that if you say sorry to God for running away from his love and trust in Jesus as Lord – that means the perfect One we were created to live for instead of the imperfection and chaos of living for ourselves – we can move from the death we had chosen and into true life in relationship with Jesus, today and eternally in Heaven: God's perfect kingdom.

[The prodigal son story could be told here to illustrate everything said up to this point, about running from a loving father, ending up in a mess, and in turning back to home realising we have a better welcome than we hoped for. We are welcomed back as sons and daughters with all the blessings and privileges attached.]

FOUR: WHO IS IN THE HOTSEAT OF YOUR LIFE?

Do you have a favourite chair in your house? The place you get annoyed if someone else sits in and gets the best view of the TV? Our lives have a hotseat – a throne from which we rule and reign over our existence. We don't want to allow anyone else to sit on this throne, to have reign over our life. We say to God, 'Hey God, you can't sit in the hotseat of my life, I want to be in control!'

But God loves us so much that he wants us to know the true life that he created us for, to help us, to guide us, to sit where he belongs, the throne of our heart. Putting God in his rightful place means we can be truly fulfilled in his love, that we can truly live.

So many of us are confused about what life is about. Some of you might struggle with depression, self-harm, eating disorders, understanding our identity. Some are not happy with what they see in the mirror. Some are worried about the future. You don't think you will achieve anything meaningful. Some of you are deeply unhappy and stressed. Some of you are feeling pretty good about everything in life, and yet there is still something missing that you can't quite put your finger on...

[A short testimony could be used here to connect the ideas you are presenting to real experience.]

God has an answer to all these realities, he says 'You feel that way because you are not truly alive, you are experiencing the shadow of life, mere existence. All who have breath in their lungs exist but that only ends in death, you were created for life and that is found in putting your trust in my son Jesus and living for him.'

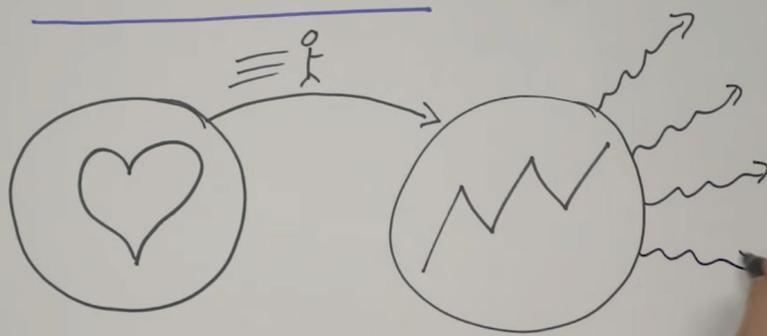
Don't miss the point of life. Turn to God, say sorry for rejecting him and he will forgive you. Put your trust in him as Lord and he will show you who you really are. He will give you full life, real life, and you will never experience death. When you draw your last breath in this life you will be more alive than you've ever been as you are with him eternally. To be sure, this life will still have challenges, not every problem in your world will instantly be fixed when you follow Jesus – and you might even discover some new challenges that come *because* you are following him – but God will help you. He will give you his Holy Spirit to help you live the life he has for you in this complicated world. He will bring you into his church, which while not perfect, is his family on earth, designed to help you know him more, keep going even when life is difficult, and reveal his love and care the world. You will never be the same again.

You are not an accident, you are loved beyond compare by a perfect God. But God will not force you to trust him. True love is always a choice. You have to choose it for yourself. You can turn back to God today and know real life in relationship with him.

What will you choose?

QUESTIONS:

1. What is good about this presentation?
2. Is there anything lacking?
3. Why might this be considered a 'youth talk'?
4. How would you adapt this talk for another specific audience (eg. a student meeting, a mother and toddler group, a business leaders' lunch, a retirement community)?



APPENDIX

GOSPEL METHODS

There are many inhibitions Christians have about sharing the gospel, but perhaps three stand out especially:

1. Disabled by the fear of man
2. Disempowered by a lack of skill-set or calling
3. Disqualified by sin or failure

Do you recognise yourself in any of these?

The response to these issues in the church has often been to present a method of gospel explanation that will make it easier to gently and intentionally start conversations (*fear of man*), help achieve the evangelism task (*skill-set*), and let everyone play (*calling or disqualification*). The idea makes sense: if we can supply an effective enough method, it will lead to more people becoming messengers of the message.

METHOD → MESSENGER → MESSAGE

Yet, whilst this approach can lead to some positive outcomes, evangelism equipping and encouragement that hinges on rote methodology should never be thought of as the ideal. The power of evangelism is not in a method, but in the truth of the message of the gospel.

We can put too much stock in method being able to fix the inhibitions of the messenger and the ignorance of the world when these things are actually best addressed by the wonder and power of the gospel itself, by its plain truth and its reality at work in the messenger's life.

Method is useful, to be sure, but it has to find its proper place.

REORDERED:

MESSAGE → MESSENGER → METHOD

Leonard Ravenhill rightly points out that "any method of evangelism will work if God is in it." This begs the key question:

How do you make sure God is in your method?
You make sure God is in the messenger.

And how do you ensure God is in the messenger? You start with the message – the gospel itself.

MESSAGE

We don't start with the gospel in evangelism equipping solely so that we understand it well enough to tell the world about it (as important as that is). We start with it, reassert it, and press into it over and over again, because without its truth the light in our lives, individually and communally, will fade.

When we take the time to talk through the gospel, explore its truth, wrestle over its intricacies, marvel at its wonder, delight in its hope, respond to its invitation to repent, and live in its reality, we are changed. Our minds become sharper as to how to express with simplicity the

depths of the gospel. Our lives are refined into the image of the one at the centre of the gospel. Our hearts are moved for those who don't yet know the gospel.

Simply put, the best evangelism equipping and encouragement is found in knowing the gospel deeply. By its truth and power we become more than people with a message delivered by a method, we become the living embodiment of the message (2 Cor 5:17-21).

MESSENGER

The 2019 Oscar nominated movie *1917* tells the story of two soldiers who are sent on a perilous mission to deliver a life-or-death message to the front lines of a World War I battle. These messenger soldiers risk their lives to get the message to those who need to hear it, so that they may be saved from certain death.

We might view our role as messengers of the gospel in a similar way, jumping out of the safety of our church trenches and heading into the battlefield with our message (and indeed for some around the world there are very real dangers in evangelism). But where this messenger analogy falls short is in the impact of the message on the messengers themselves. In *1917* the soldiers first carry the message out of duty, and then later out of urgency, knowing that it could save lives. But the message itself has no impact on them as people; only the mission they undertake.

Far more than just carriers of a life and death message, we are the living embodiment of what the message is. It is transformational. Indeed, as we are transformed by our knowledge and experience of the gospel and submission to its truth, we have the hope to overcome any challenge that evangelism presents, not by method, but by the power of the message itself.

Disabled by fear? Let the gospel of peace enable you to live in freedom (2 Tim 1:7).

Disempowered by weakness? Let the authority of the gospel empower you beyond your limitations (2 Cor 12:9).

Disqualified by sin? Let the gospel of salvation restore you to relationship with God and qualify you to serve his kingdom purpose (Mat 5:14-16).

Let the gospel bring you to life and let that life be lived as a messenger of gospel hope in word and deed.

METHOD

Having committed to talking through, wrestling over, and knowing deeply the gospel for ourselves, we can begin to discern more appropriately what resources are available and use them effectively in any given context. To be clear, method here means a simple way of explaining or exploring the gospel, rather than techniques within evangelism such as asking questions, listening well, offering prayer etc.

The best approach for talking someone through the tenets of the good news will always be a deep knowledge of the gospel—with head and heart—so that in any conversation you might know how to make connections from the wonderful truth of the gospel to the life of the person you are talking to. To reveal the word of God that is living and active as being true for their life, so that our friends, neighbours, colleagues, or strangers would receive the gospel as people, rather than as the targets of any given method; that they would see the gospel as a message of life because they are talking to someone truly alive by its power.

With all this in mind, the following gospel methods can then be brilliant tools for evangelism in different contexts as they build upon the gospel foundation we already have in our lives.

The 4 Points The4Points.com
The Three Circles Various YouTube examples
Jesus At The Door jesusatthedoor.com
Sin to Son sintoston.com
Life in 6 Words app (Apple / Google Play stores)
3, 2, 1: The Story of God, The World and You three-two-one.org
Wordless Book letthelittlechildrencome.com
Alpha alpha.org
Christianity explored christianityexplored.org

CHART: THE ROLE OF THE EVANGELIST

Fig.1 The evangelist is called to proclaim the gospel message to the **world** and to the **church**.

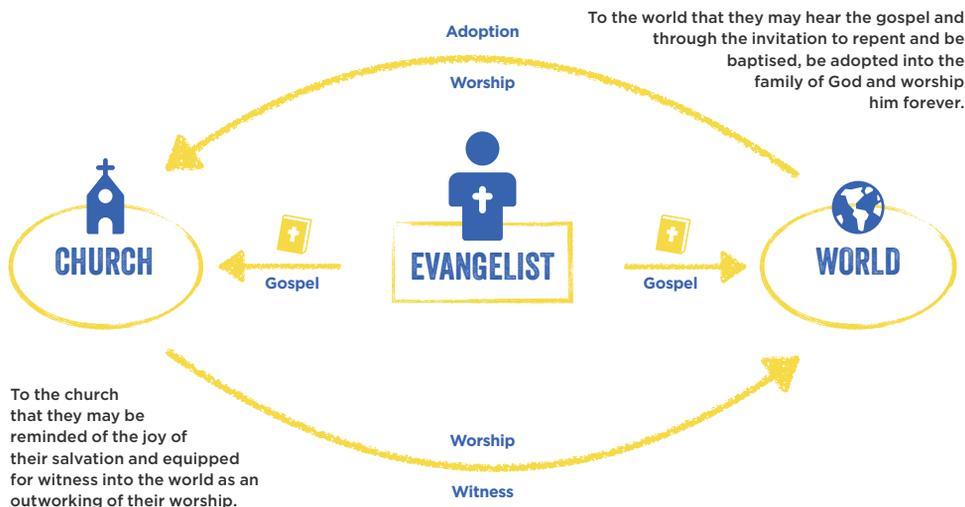
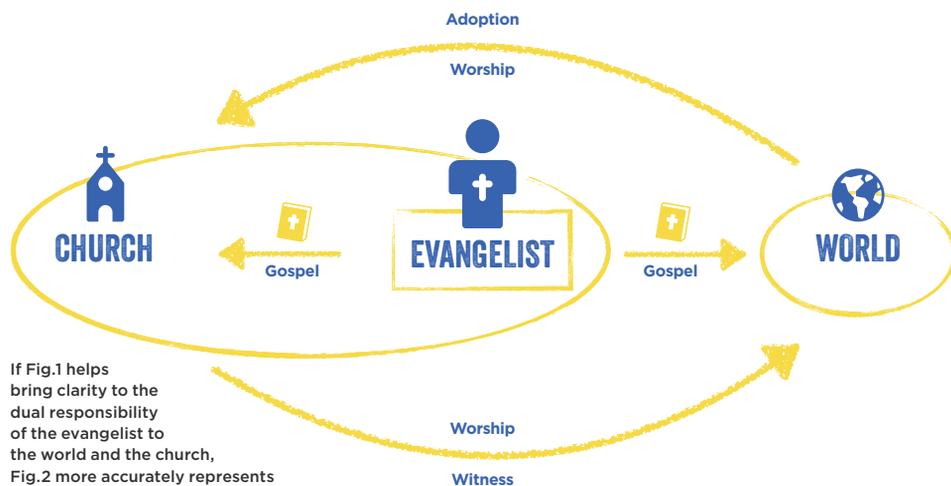


Fig.2 The evangelist must remember that they are part of the local church.



How does this image relate to the New Testament verses that use the word *evangelist*?
 Acts 21:8 (see Acts 8:26-40 for context on Phillip), Ephesians 4:11-13, 2 Timothy 4:1-5



APPENDIX

TEN SIMPLE STEPS FOR STARTING AN ADVANCE GROUP

1. FAMILIARISE YOURSELF WITH THE GUIDE

The first step in the process of starting an Advance Group is to familiarise yourself with the Advance Group material that will guide you through every session and the overall Advance journey. Read all the introductory material and the first couple of sessions so that you are comfortable with the content and how things work.

2. PRAY

Prayer is key to every group time and a bedrock of our evangelism into the world. As you prepare to invite people into the Advance journey pray for those you reach out to, that the right people will join you on this adventure. Pray before, during, and after every session, that the Lord will guide and lead each of you to the centre of His will and empower you for faithful life and service.

3. DECIDE HOW YOU WILL MEET

After you have familiarised yourself with the material, decide how you would like your group to meet. There are hundreds of groups starting every month, the majority of which meet in person once a month for around two hours. But there are many groups that meet online through Zoom or another online platform, or meet with a different frequency or session length. Decide the model that works best for your group and give it a go.

4. INVITE PEOPLE

Reach out to those you would like to invite with a simple invitation and low-level commitment to try the first session together. Advance Groups have been conceived with between six to twelve people being involved but if it works for you to go bigger or smaller in group size feel free to work with what you have.

We don't require that group leaders or members register themselves with us to be involved. However, we do strongly encourage anyone who is willing to do so to sign up via the Advance website so that we can understand more about the spread of Advance Groups across the world and encourage you on your journey by connecting you with bespoke evangelism resources, invitations to Advance gatherings and events, amazing stories from across the movement, and the assurance that we are praying for you.

5. SET A START DATE

Invite people to a specific date for the first session but be prepared to be flexible if needed. All that matters initially is to find a date to get the process started and try out session one together. If people then want to continue the Advance journey, you will then be able to set the plan for this, and the future dates, as part of the climax of session one.

6. RUN THE FIRST SESSION

HOW LONG?

Sessions are designed to happen once a month for around 2 hours. This frequency gives a group time to put into practice what they have learned between sessions and not overwhelm the diary with a meeting commitment that becomes a burden rather than a blessing. Ultimately, though, it is for each group to decide what works best for them in their context.

HOW TO PRESENT?

Advance groups are designed to be outworked in an informal and highly interactive way, following the content and flow of each session in a conversational group style, with gentle leading from the leader/facilitator to keep things on track. However, some groups prefer to make the session more formal by teaching from the front in a more presentational style.

HOW ABOUT ACCOUNTABILITY?

One of the five principles of Advance Groups is accountability and this element should be present in every session. We also encourage every leader/facilitator not just to promote a safe place for accountability within the group, but for every group member to have accountability in their Christian life, as a personal principle beyond the group, through their local church community, family life, key friendships etc. Intentionality is key with accountability.

HOW WILL WE COMMUNICATE?

Communication between group sessions is vital; a way to encourage one another to persevere in witness, to share updates, prayer requests, opportunities for evangelism, and so on. There are many ways to do this, but WhatsApp and Facebook groups are the most popular. Every group has the freedom to choose whichever method/platform works best for them.

HOW DO WE CONTINUE?

The first group session is the perfect opportunity to ask every group member to find and block out a date and time for next sessions (this is included as part of the session). There is no limit to how many dates you can book in advance, but most groups block between 6 months and one year ahead, which is a great way to ensure people commit to the journey early.

7. GET PRACTICAL

Our goal is not to simply give you information and inspiration, but an invitation to actually go into the world with the hope of the gospel. Encourage each other to get practical with what you explore in the sessions and feedback to each other about how it's going.

8. SHARE YOUR STORIES

Speaking of feeding back how it is going, we love to hear about what God is doing in your life and your group. Please share your stories with us, through the stories section on our website, so we can bless others in the movement (and beyond!) with how God is at work.

9. PRAY SOME MORE

There is no such thing as too much prayer. And because prayer is the fuel that moves evangelism, let's keep praying.

10. MEET AGAIN

And now, after your first session is done, your next dates are in the diary, you are putting into practice what you've learned, are sharing encouragements with each other, and are continuing to pray, you are ready for the next step... Session Two!

WE ARE HERE TO HELP. IF YOU NEED ANYTHING AS YOU START YOUR GROUP, OR AS THE JOURNEY CONTINUES, YOU CAN CONTACT US VIA THE ADVANCE WEBSITE:

ADVANCEGROUPS.ORG

APPENDIX

ADVANCE FAQ

IS ADVANCE ONLY FOR EVANGELISTS?

No, definitely not. Advance is for everyone! We believe that all Christians are called to share the good news of Jesus with those they meet. We all need to have the opportunity to be sharpened and shaped to be better carriers of this message, not just those specifically gifted as an evangelist.

DO YOU NEED TO BE A CHURCH LEADER TO LEAD A GROUP?

No, in fact the Advance Group Guide is designed so that anyone can easily start and lead a group or session.

DO I NEED TO PAY ANYTHING TO JOIN OR LEAD AN ADVANCE GROUP?

There's nothing to pay - Advance is totally free to all members.

DOES MY ADVANCE GROUP NEED TO BE MADE OF PEOPLE WHO ALL KNOW EACH OTHER?

No. There are many great things about Advance Groups, and one of them is that you can get to know new people in your local area with the same passion for sharing the gospel. However, if you've got friends you'd like to join a group with, you're welcome to do that too.

WHAT CAN I DO IF THERE ISN'T AN ADVANCE GROUP GUIDE IN MY PREFERRED LANGUAGE?

We're constantly translating guides into new languages, so if you can't find the language you're looking for please do get in touch with the Advance team to chat about this.

DOES MY ADVANCE GROUP NEED BE MADE UP OF PEOPLE OF THE SAME GENDER?

Where possible, we would encourage Advance groups to be made up of members of the same

gender, but this is not a requirement. We would however strongly encourage mixed groups to split into smaller groups of men and women when working through the accountability sections of each session.

HOW CAN I START AN ADVANCE GROUP?

Please fill out the Start a Group form at advancegroups.org and we will be in touch.

IF I'M ALREADY IN AN ADVANCE GROUP, HOW CAN I LET YOU KNOW?

Please fill out the form at advancegroups.org/already-in-a-group.

A photograph of a smiling Black man in a crowd, wearing a black t-shirt with a logo. He is looking towards the camera. Other people are visible in the background, some wearing masks.

APPENDIX

EASTER TO PENTECOST

A CALL TO THE GLOBAL CHURCH

TOGETHER REACHING EVERYONE

You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you: and you will be my witnesses...

Major denominations and movements across the globe are coming together to call every believer in every church to pray and to share the good news of Jesus Christ between Easter and Pentecost.

At Easter, churches around the world celebrate what Jesus has done for us through his death and resurrection. The call is for the body of Christ to then move into an intentional season of prayer and witness across the seven weeks of Easter time, culminating in night of unified global prayer and a day of evangelistic action on Pentecost Saturday.

What could happen if the global church unites to fulfil the great commission of Jesus?

Scan the QR code below for a special Advance group session you can do with you group in the month of Easter to prepare yourselves to make the most of this opportunity, and join in with the church around the world in prayer and proclamation - that all would have an opportunity to see hear and respond to the good news of Jesus.

SCAN HERE TO
DOWNLOAD YOUR
EASTER TO PENTECOST
SESSION!



YEAR ONE REFLECTION

HOW DID YOU HOPE TO GROW THROUGH THIS FIRST YEAR OF ADVANCE?

HOW HAVE YOU GROWN?

WHAT IS YOUR BIGGEST LEARNING FROM THIS YEAR?

WHAT IS THE MOST SURPRISING THING TO COME OUT OF THIS YEAR IN ADVANCE?

WHAT HAS BEEN THE GREATEST ENCOURAGEMENT IN YOUR EVANGELISM?

At the end of this first year of Advance, use this form to reflect on what you've learned, how you've grown, and what your hopes are for the next year of the Advance journey. If there are any stories you reflect on here that you think would encourage others, share them with us at advancegroups.org/stories

WHAT HAS BEEN THE GREATEST CHALLENGE?

WHAT SCRIPTURE HAS MOST IMPACTED YOU THIS YEAR AND WHY?

HOW HAS GOD BEEN AT WORK IN YOUR PRAYERS THIS YEAR?

HOW DO YOU HOPE TO GROW IN YEAR TWO OF ADVANCE (AND WILL YOU SET UP YOUR OWN GROUP THIS YEAR)?

WHAT EVANGELISTIC OPPORTUNITIES ARE YOU LONGING FOR IN THE COMING YEAR?

YEAR TWO REFLECTION

HOW DID YOU HOPE TO GROW THROUGH THIS SECOND YEAR OF ADVANCE?

HOW HAS THIS YEAR BEEN DIFFERENT TO YEAR ONE?

HOW HAVE YOU GROWN?

WHAT IS YOUR BIGGEST LEARNING FROM THIS YEAR?

WHAT IS THE MOST SURPRISING THING TO COME OUT OF THIS YEAR IN ADVANCE?

At the end of this second year of Advance, use this form to reflect on what you've learned, how you've grown, and what your hopes are for the next year of the Advance journey. If there are any stories you reflect on here that you think would encourage others, share them with us at advancegroups.org/stories

WHAT HAS BEEN THE GREATEST ENCOURAGEMENT IN YOUR EVANGELISM (DID YOU GET THE OPPORTUNITIES YOU HOPED FOR FROM LAST YEARS REFLECTION)?

WHAT HAS BEEN THE GREATEST CHALLENGE?

WHAT SCRIPTURE HAS MOST IMPACTED YOU THIS YEAR AND WHY?

HOW HAS GOD BEEN AT WORK IN YOUR PRAYERS THIS YEAR?

WHAT ARE YOUR HOPES FOR YEAR THREE OF ADVANCE (AND WILL YOU SET UP YOUR OWN GROUP THIS YEAR IF YOU HAVEN'T ALREADY)?

YEAR THREE REFLECTION

HOW DID YOU HOPE TO GROW THROUGH THIS YEAR OF ADVANCE?

HOW HAVE YOU GROWN?

WHAT IS YOUR BIGGEST LEARNING FROM THIS YEAR?

WHAT IS THE MOST SURPRISING THING TO COME OUT OF THIS YEAR IN ADVANCE?

WHAT HAS BEEN THE GREATEST ENCOURAGEMENT IN YOUR EVANGELISM?

At the end of this third year of Advance, use this form to reflect on what you've learned, how you've grown, and what your hopes are beyond this year. If there are any stories you reflect on here that you think would encourage others, share them with us at advancegroups.org/stories

WHAT HAS BEEN THE GREATEST CHALLENGE?

WHAT SCRIPTURE HAS MOST IMPACTED YOU THIS YEAR AND WHY?

HOW HAS GOD BEEN AT WORK IN YOUR PRAYERS THIS YEAR?

HOW DO YOU HOPE TO GROW IN THE COMING YEAR?

WHAT EVANGELISTIC OPPORTUNITIES ARE YOU LONGING FOR IN THE YEAR AHEAD?

ACCOUNTABILITY FORM

 Download a printable version from advancegroups.org/group-guide

● 'Search me O God and know my heart' (Psalm 139:23)

Accept one another (Romans 15:7)

Confess your faults to one another (James 5:16)

Encourage one another and build each other up (1 Thessalonians 5:11)

● 'Live out your God-created identity. Live generously and graciously towards others the way God lives towards you.' (Matthew 5:48, MSG)

KEY

✓ Good
— Okay
✗ Bad

How clear is my vision for my life?	Are my relationships with those I serve healthy? (Peers, leaders, the opposite sex)
How clear is my vision for the work I'm involved in?	How healthy is my response to being hungry, angry, lonely, or tired?
Am I enjoying what I do?	Am I engaging in inappropriate lustful thoughts?
Do I feel God's pleasure in what I'm doing?	Am I getting enough rest?
How passionate am I?	Am I managing my time well?
Am I pursuing intimacy with Jesus?	Am I spending my spare time in a healthy way?
Am I making enough space for prayer?	Am I keeping a healthy balance between church, work and home life?
Am I spending time in personal Bible study?	Am I forming and maintaining relationships with non-Christians?
Did the Bible come alive for me today?	Am I exposing myself to sexually alluring material?
Am I seeking evidence of God's power in my life and ministry?	Am I defeated in any part of my life: jealous, impure, critical, irritable, touchy or distrustful?
Is Jesus real to me?	Am I managing my money well?
Am I teachable and accountable?	Am I giving generously?
Am I available and approachable?	Am I choosing not to envy other people?
Am I listening well?	Am I choosing to not grumble or complain?
Am I making myself vulnerable to others?	Am I walking with integrity?
Am I leading with a servant heart?	Am I decisive and confident?
Am I trustworthy?	Am I willing to take risks?
Am I keeping my promises?	Am I making goals and reaching them?
Am I holding on to healthy perspective?	Am I willing to make sacrifices?
Am I handling pressure well? (from people, work, circumstances)	Am I keeping my cutting edge?
How is my health?	Am I moving in the power of the Spirit?
Am I eating healthily?	Am I withholding forgiveness from anyone?
Am I sleeping well?	Am I pursuing freedom from destructive patterns and strongholds?
Am I allowing my mind to dwell on inappropriate thoughts?	
Am I remembering the sick, hurting and needy?	
Are my family happy?	
How are my friendships?	

● 'Trust God from the bottom of your heart. Don't try to figure out everything on your own. Listen for God's voice in everything you do, everywhere you go. He's the one who will keep you on track. Don't assume that you know it all. Run to God! Run from evil.' (Proverbs 3:5-7, MSG)



GLOBAL NETWORK
OF EVANGELISTS

SO ALL MAY HEAR

One evangelist can reach only so far. One organisation can do only so much. By working together, we multiply our efforts for the expansion of the gospel. This is the vision of the Luis Palau Association's Global Network of Evangelists.

Dedicating the next decade to accelerate evangelism worldwide, the Palau Association is working to build networks of evangelists in 150 countries.

These networks are being developed through strong, trusted relationships with evangelists and Christian organizations around the globe, with a vision to connect and encourage evangelists as never before to win more people to Christ.

This Global Network of Evangelists is using all available means to annually reach millions with the good news of Jesus Christ.

Through mentoring and equipping, collaborative outreach events, and training and conferences, members are provided with the help they need to impact their world for Christ. Our plan is to extend this offering to thousands more evangelists from around the world, forming the first-ever global network, spread across 150+ countries.

evangelist.global



the message

SCHOOL OF EVANGELISM

BECAUSE
WE ARE
NOT ASHAMED
OF THE GOSPEL



SPEND 10
MONTHS
BEING
EQUIPPED
TO LIVE &
SPEAK OUT
THE GOOD
NEWS OF
JESUS



AN EVANGELISM TRAINING
COURSE FOR THOSE 18+
BASED AT THE MESSAGE TRUST
IN MANCHESTER

FIND OUT
MORE &
APPLY
TODAY



MESSAGE.ORG.UK/MSE
@SCHOOLFEVANGELISM



**THE GOSPEL.
THERE IS NO PLAN B.**



ADVANCEGROUPS.ORG

LUIS PALAU 
ASSOCIATION

the message