



IGNITE

A 31 DAY JOURNEY INTO THE BIBLE FOR NEW AND NOT-YET BELIEVERS.

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WHY JESUS?

① JESUS ALONE CAN FIND US.

Religion is humanity's search for God; Christianity is God's search for humanity. Every other religion puts forward a pathway by which you should try to earn salvation. But the Bible insists that our sinfulness has created an uncrossable gulf between God and ourselves. Neither good deeds nor religious devotion can span that gap. *'But God demonstrates his love for us in this: while we were still sinners, he died for us'* (Romans 5:8). Through his death, Jesus spanned the gulf! 'It is by grace you have been saved, not by works – so that no one can boast' (Ephesians 2:8).

② JESUS ALONE CAN FORGIVE US.

Whether we realise it or not, we all stand guilty before a Holy God. Many times we have sinned against God in thought, word and deed. Just as when someone commits a crime there is a penalty to be paid, so there is a penalty for violating God's standards. 'The wages of sin is death' (Romans 6:23). The result of things we do wrong is spiritual death – being cut off from God. We all deserve to suffer that penalty. But God took our sins and put them on Jesus on the cross, and punished them there. Now we can stand before God forgiven; guiltless.

③ JESUS ALONE CAN FILL US.

In every heart there is a God-shaped vacuum that God alone can fill. We may try all kinds of things to fill this hole – success, love, thrills, money, adventure, achievement – but the satisfaction is always short-lived. That's because material things can't fill a spiritual void. Jesus said, 'I am the bread of life' (John 6:35). He is the only one who can satisfy our deepest hunger. He promises to fill us 'with joy in his presence, with eternal pleasures at his right hand' (Psalm 16:11).

④ JESUS ALONE CAN FREE US.

The things we do wrong have an enslaving hold on us. Jesus said, 'Everyone who sins is a slave to sin' (John 8:34). Jesus died to free us from this slavery. He gave us his Spirit so we can be free to start living the sort of lives that deep down we have always wanted to live – lives marked by 'love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control' (Galatians 5:22-23). This change may not be instant though. It's progressive. 'If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed' (John 8:36).

⑤ JESUS ALONE WON'T FORSAKE US.

Though we avoid the subject of our death, we must face up to what happens when we die. Outside of Christ's grace, we are separated from God forever. Jesus came so that 'by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death – that is, the devil – and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death' (Hebrews 2:14). To know Christ here on earth guarantees we'll be with him forever. 'Neither death nor life ... neither the present nor the future ... nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord' (Romans 8:38-39).

HAVE YOU RECEIVED CHRIST YET?

If you will receive Jesus as your Lord and Saviour, he will find, forgive, fill, free and never forsake you. This gift is called 'salvation'. Here is a prayer that can help you do just that:

God, you created me and you have the right to lead my life.
But I have sinned against you, a Holy God,
and I have been separated from you.

Jesus, I believe you are the unique Son of God who died for my sins,
rose again and who is still alive. You are Saviour and Lord.

Be my Saviour: forgive my sins, and give me the gift of eternal life.
Make me a brand-new child of God.

Be my Lord: take my life.
I choose to turn my back on everything which I know displeases you.
As I follow you, help me to live a life that brings you joy.

Thank you that you hear my prayer of faith.
You promise that if anyone calls on you, they will be saved.
Thank you! Amen.

I prayed this prayer on

The first person I told about my decision to commit my life to Christ, was
.....

Signed

IGNITE. verb.
**To set fire to;
to cause to
burn; to heat
to the point of
combustion
or chemical
change.** (Concise Oxford Dictionary)

Have you ever encountered a burning bush? Probably not.

But Moses, a leader in ancient Israel, did. He found an ordinary bush ablaze with a strange light. When he stepped closer, he realised it was burning with God's tangible presence. What an odd way for God to reveal himself – until we see what happened next ...

God spoke to him through the bush – and Moses' ordinary life was set ablaze with the extraordinary reality of a living, speaking God. First the bush and then Moses, consumed by the wondrous presence of God.

Our prayer is that during this journey, this book (and the bright-shining truths in the Bible that it points to) will, like the bush did to Moses, spark an eternal, life-changing flame of love for God and his Son in your heart. You may have questions or concerns. So did Moses. Nevertheless a life-changing encounter with the living God awaits. Step closer...

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

① There are 31 sections or 'days' in total.

Try to do one every day.

② Days **1 to 10** will reveal what Christians believe.

③ Days **11 to 31** will – in light of days 1 to 10 – guide you in living the Christian life.

④ You will need an easy-to-understand Bible, such as the New International Version, and 5 to 15 minutes each day.

Enjoy.

DAY 01

WHO IS GOD? MOON OR SUN?

LISTEN IN

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

FIND & READ Isaiah 6:1-8

THINK ABOUT IT

What is God like? We see he is: 1) The eternal King (v1). Though earthly kings come and go, God remains on his throne. 2) High and exalted (v2). He is incredibly great. Holy (v3). This means that he is absolutely pure and totally unique. 3) LORD (v3). The Hebrew word for this is 'Yahweh' which means 'I am who I am'. 4) Almighty (v3). The Hebrew word is 'Shaddai' which means the one who is powerful enough to act on behalf of those who desperately call out to him. 5) Creator (v3). He created the whole universe. 6) Glorious (v3). God's glory is the magnificent radiance of his perfect character. His glory fills the universe.

How should we respond in his presence? When we truly encounter him, we worship him like these angels do (v3), tremble in awe (v4), own up to our sinfulness (v5), receive his forgiving and purifying touch (v7) and find ways to tell others about how amazing he is (v8).

LIVE IT

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

STILL HUNGRY?

Read Isaiah 40:12-40 and Psalm 103.

DAY 02

WHO IS JESUS? TALKING TO A FISH

LISTEN IN

Imagine you wanted to talk with a fish in a pond – you couldn't. The only way to do it would be to become a fish. It's the same with God and us. God, in his massiveness, is easily misunderstood. So he took the ultimate step in making himself known in the clearest way: he became a man. Jesus is God's way of saying, 'Look at my Son and then you'll see me.'

FIND AND READ John 8:1-11

THINK ABOUT IT

What do we learn about God from Jesus in this story? God cares about truth. We see this because Jesus was so eager to teach truth to the people (v2). God knows our hearts. Jesus saw through religious acts to the sin deep in their hearts. (v7). God is wise. Jesus dealt oh-so-cleverly with the trap set for him (v9). God is loving. We see this in how Jesus dealt so gently with a broken woman (v10). God is forgiving. Jesus didn't condemn the woman – even though she was clearly in the wrong (v11). God is morally pure. Jesus told her to sin no more. We see God in the life of Jesus! 'In the past God spoke through the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, through whom he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being.' (Hebrews 1:1-3)

LIVE IT

What do you think God is like? How does this story of Jesus change or challenge your view of God?

STILL HUNGRY?

Read Philippians 2:5-11 and Matthew 16:13-18

DAY 03

SIN. THE TEST.

LISTEN IN

Tomorrow we see how Christ rescues us, but today let's think about what he rescues us from. Have you ever seen how naughty little children can be? Have you ever asked, 'Who taught this kid to disobey its parents? To lie? To steal?' The Bible tells us that it is our sinful, rebellious hearts that lead us astray. The word sin means 'to miss the goal'. God created us to live our lives toward the goal of reflecting his love and holiness in the world. But left to our own devices, we always seem to miss the goal.

FIND & READ Romans 3:10-20 and also v23

THINK ABOUT IT

God explores deeper than our achievements, looks and personalities. He sees minds that don't understand him (v10). He sees hearts that have turned away (v12). He hears words that are dishonest and hurtful (v13,14). He sees self-inflicted pain (v16). He observes that there is no peace or fear of God in us (v17,18).

How does God feel about our sin? He judges us according to his perfect law, which stands for his own holiness (v19). This law silences our excuses and leaves us standing guilty before him (v20). All of us have sinned, falling short of God's perfect standard (v23).

Is God cruel to judge our sin? Injustice happens when judges let the guilty off or treat people discriminately. God makes sure that justice happens. He lets no-one get away from their deserved punishment. He judges according to unchanging laws that are based on his unchanging holiness. To do anything else would be being unjust.

LIVE IT

In what ways have you seen sin hurt people? How do you feel about being guilty of sin before a holy God?

STILL HUNGRY?

To understand Judgement Day, see Romans 2:5 and Revelations 20:11-15. Read Psalm 2 for a prophecy about Jesus written hundreds of years before he was born that highlights his response to our rebellion.

A SCIENTIST AND A BELIEVER

Tony Bunn

I was born with an enquiring mind, and it is not surprising that for the past 40 years I have been involved in scientific research. My early church experiences in a church school left me unable to get any sense of that personal relationship that many people speak of. **Since God is immeasurable, science cannot prove or disprove his existence,** and so for much of my life I sat on the agnostic fence of uncertainty.

My daughter invited my wife and I to Common Ground. I was amazed by the quality of the teachings. I was struck by the spiritual passion in the people. Shortly thereafter, a person of humble faith asked me a simple question: **'So what's your God story? Have you been saved?'** 'Not sure I have a God story,' I said, 'and well, yes ... I think I'm saved but how does one really know?' She replied, **'If you're saved you know – your life starts to change in profound ways.'**

This was my wakeup call. I started to read books like The Bible, Tim Keller's *The Reason for God*, and Francis Collins' *The language of God* – books that show the rational substructure of Christian faith. All the while there was this growing realisation that **there is indeed another reality – the reality of Jesus Christ,** who invites me to revel in both his masterful creation as a scientist and in friendship with himself as a follower.

DAY 04

THE CROSS. TEARING DOWN THE WALL!

LISTEN IN

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

FIND & READ Mark 15:16-39

THINK ABOUT IT

Jesus died a horrible, unfair death for all to see. But something unseen and far worse happened. He, the sinless one, experienced the punishment our sin deserved so that we could be forgiven. That's why he felt abandoned by his Father (v34). When he 'breathed his last', the temple curtain tore in two - on its own (v38).

What does this mean? Long before Jesus came, the Jews built a temple. God lived in it, in the Most Holy Place. No one could enter through the curtain except the high priest once a year. This reminded the people that their sin was serious and separated them from God. But as Jesus died, the curtain was supernaturally torn. This means that the barrier between sinners (that's us) and God was destroyed by the sacrifice of Jesus! The door is now open for us to live closely to God, despite our past sins, which are now forgiven. What good news! Jesus offers freedom from guilt and a close relationship with God too. Of course, this only applies to us if we receive his blood-bought forgiveness and walk through the open door, by putting our faith in Jesus and the cross.

LIVE IT

Have you put your faith in Jesus' death for your sin? Have you experienced the forgiveness of sins?

STILL HUNGRY?

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

DAY 05

FAITH IN CHRIST ALONE. JUST JUMP!

LISTEN IN

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

FIND & READ John 14:1-9

THINK ABOUT IT

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

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

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

LIVE IT

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

STILL HUNGRY?

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

DAY 06

SALVATION. COME HOME!

LISTEN IN

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

FIND & READ Luke 15:11-22

THINK ABOUT IT

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

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

LIVE IT

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

STILL HUNGRY?

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

A NEW FAMILY

Sainesan Naiker

I grew up the youngest of 5 in a family of practicing Hindus. My alcoholic, violent father filled our lives with anxiety, until my parents divorced when I was 12.

I practiced Hinduism because I was told to by my parents. Then my eldest sister came to faith in Christ. I admit I was curious. My second eldest sister, however, was very upset – until she visited Common Ground Church with a friend. There she said she felt God’s presence tangibly, and sensed him saying, “I am your Father”.

So when I came to Cape Town to study, I decided to explore the God my 2 sisters had come to know. To be honest, I wasn’t immediately sold. After attending church for 6 months I still struggled to comprehend the simplicity of what I was hearing. How could I, who was so broken and fallen according to the Bible, receive something I did not deserve? Surely God’s acceptance must be earned by good deeds and religious devotion?

Eventually I took God at his offer of grace. I let down my guard, and invited him to do what he wanted. Very quickly he stepped into my life, and settled my heart. I’ve never looked back.

Remarkably, while this was happening to me, a similar thing was taking place in my mother’s heart back in Durban! She also came to know God as her Father. Inspired by the power of God to change lives, I started to pray for my 3rd eldest sister specifically. Within two weeks, she phoned and asked me what Bible she should buy, because she had a growing realization that the God of the Bible is the real one. Two months later I watched in astonishment as she was baptized!

So, God has changed my biological family. But one of the joys is that I have also found a spiritual family here at Common Ground. The support and guidance that I have received, and have started to now give to others, has deeply enriched my life. Knowing that God is a God of love and power, who answers prayer, fills me with enthusiasm for the future.

DAY 07

RESURRECTION. THE EMPTY GRAVE!

LISTEN IN

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

FIND & READ Matt 28:1-10

THINK ABOUT IT

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

LIVE IT

What does the resurrection mean to you?

STILL HUNGRY?

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

DAY 08

FOLLOWING JESUS. JUST DO IT!

LISTEN IN

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

FIND & READ Matthew 4:17-23

THINK ABOUT IT

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

LIVE IT

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

STILL HUNGRY?

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

DAY 09

PAYING THE PRICE. THE COST.

LISTEN IN

In April 1999 a teenager pointed a gun at 17 year old Cassie. 'Do you believe in God?' he asked. 'Yes, I believe in Jesus,' were the last words she ever said. At her funeral 75 of her friends became Christians. They could see her faith was real enough to die for and they wanted something that meaningful for themselves. If you had a gun to your head and were asked the same question, what would you say?

FIND & READ Luke 9:18-26

THINK ABOUT IT

When we see, like Peter and Cassie did, who Jesus really is (v20), we will be willing to pay a price to follow him. Like Jesus, our role model and leader, we may even be killed for our faith (v22). Following him means denying ourselves and carrying our cross (v23). This means things won't always be cosy and easy. Pain, discomfort and unpopularity may result from being obedient to him. We can't keep anything in this life forever (v24). It's pointless trying to gain what this world offers, but losing our souls in the process (v25). At Judgement Day our devotion to Jesus will be greatly rewarded. Knowing him makes it impossible to be ashamed of him (v26). Jim Elliot knew these truths well. He was murdered while trying to share his faith with man-eating South American Indians. His grieving wife found his diary, in which he had written this line: 'He is no fool to lose what he cannot keep to gain what he can never lose.' She was so inspired by his example that she led a mission to the same men who had killed her husband - and led them to Christ!

LIVE IT

Do you have a revelation of Jesus? What is the cost of following him for you? Are you willing to pay that price?

STILL HUNGRY?

Matthew 13:44 shows how giving up everything for Jesus can be a joy.

SOMETHING UNEXPECTED HAPPENED

Marilyn Keegan

I was wandering in the desert, spiritually thirsty. I felt wretched much of the time. I tried all means – Buddhism, mysticism, Hinduism, Judaism, New Age stuff – to quench that thirst.

Then I read some advertising about an upcoming series Common Ground was doing. I was concerned by the title of one of the talks – ‘Jesus and the Loose Lady’. I sent a tetchy email to the pastors of the church, challenging their use of the word ‘lady’. After a flurry of emails between them and myself, I went to hear this talk about ‘The Loose Lady’. I was ready to criticise and be my normal difficult self. **But something unexpected happened.** The preacher told the story of how Mary, overcome by Jesus’ grace, knelt at the feet of Jesus and spread perfume on them. Then and there **something deep inside me - from a place I did not know - welled up, and I wept.**

Broken, yet relieved by unexpected grace, I yielded my life to Christ. Finally, my spiritual thirst was satisfied. What a simple delight to entrust my life to him. Since then, I’ve had to confront many demons and make many changes in my life. I am learning to love others – I think more about others and what they need. **I am deeply happy for the first time in many years and I feel safe, secure and protected under God’s wings.**

DAY 10

ETERNAL BENEFITS. DON'T SETTLE FOR STALE BREAD.

LISTEN IN

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

FIND & READ Romans 8:14-17 and 8:35-39

THINK ABOUT IT

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

LIVE IT

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

STILL HUNGRY?

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

DAY 11

THE END. SNEAK PREVIEW?

LISTEN IN

Ever watched a sad movie that you knew would end well? Knowing that things will get better helps you get through the painful parts. The Bible allows us to glimpse the end in order to help us get through our present trials. On 11 September 2001, the Twin Towers in America collapsed, killing thousands. On 9 December 2004, a giant Tsunami killed 200 000 people. On 12 January 2010, an earthquake in Haiti added yet more deaths to the number of those killed by natural disasters. What catastrophes. It made millions ask, 'When's the world going to end?' Let's see what Jesus taught about the end ...

FIND & READ Matthew 24:3-14 and 24:24-31

THINK ABOUT IT

Jesus teaches us about the end of the world. He gives 10 signs (v5-14) including false Christs and false prophets, worsening wars, natural disasters, many Christians being hated and some Christians even losing their love for God because of the increasing evil in society. It's all happening! The end is coming closer. One unexpected day, Jesus will return in full glory and power to end the world as we know it. Those who have rejected him will mourn (v30), but his own people will be gathered to him (v31). We don't know when it will happen, but one thing we're sure of is this: we are closer to the end today than we were yesterday. Wow! We need to learn how to live with the end in mind. We should heed the Bible when it says, 'Fix your eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen for what is seen is temporary and what is unseen is eternal.' (2 Corinthians 4:18)

LIVE IT

Practically, how can you fix your eyes not on what is seen and is temporary, but on what is unseen and eternal?

STILL HUNGRY?

See 2 Peter 3:3-15 for more about the end and how to prepare for it. Revelations 21:1-7 tells us what heaven is like. Read 2 Corinthians 4:16-18 to learn about living with eternity in mind.

GETTING BAPTISED

Getting baptised in water is the first step of obedience for a person who has committed his/her life to Christ. Here is why: Jesus and the early church leaders commanded that all believers must be baptised in water as a form of initiation into the adventure of following Christ. See Matthew 28:19, Acts 2:37-38, Acts 10:48. We do not get baptised because we feel like it, but because we take Christ's leadership seriously.

WHAT BAPTISM MEANS:

- The baptism waters are like a press release. Although choosing to follow Christ is a deeply personal decision, it is not a private matter. Jesus instructed us to go public with our choice (Mark 8:38). Baptism is an outward sign to all, of what has already happened on the inside.
- The baptism waters are like a bath. In Acts 22:16, Paul was "baptised, washing away his sins". It depicts spiritual cleansing from the guilt of sin.
- The baptism waters are like a graveyard. Romans 6:4 says that "we were buried with Christ in baptism". Baptism reflects an inward decision to die to "the old you" who rejected and ignored Christ's leadership over your life. Baptism is a break from your sinful past.
- The baptism waters are like a maternity ward. Baptism also reflects how we are united with Christ in his resurrection. We have a new life. "If anyone is in Christ, they are a new creation. The old has gone, the new has come." (2 Corinthians 5:17)

WHAT ABOUT INFANT BAPTISM/CHRISTENING?

Infant baptism, though often being special to the parents, is a religious tradition that is simply not mentioned in the Bible. Biblical baptism always happens to a person who understands what is going on, since they have just freshly repented of their sins and put their trust in Jesus.

GETTING BAPTISED

Once you received Jesus as Lord and Saviour (see the beginning of the book), then speak to your small group leader or one of our pastors about getting baptised. It can happen anywhere, any time. And any Christian can baptise you. It is also a great opportunity to invite friends and family.

DAY 12

THE BIBLE. HONEY AND LIGHT.

LISTEN IN

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

FIND & READ Psalms 119:9-21&103-105

THINK ABOUT IT

Why get into the Bible? It keeps us pure (v9) and sin-free (v11). It brings us joy (v14) and wonder (v18). It nourishes our souls, like honey feeds our bodies (v103). It guides us in decision-making, like a path leads us when we're lost (v105). It gives us understanding (v104).

How do we get into the Bible? Obey it (v9). Memorise parts of it (v11). Speak it aloud to yourself and others (v13). Treasure it (v14). Think about it often until it becomes part of you (v15). Don't neglect it (v16). Ask God to open your eyes as you read and hear it (v18). Long for it (v20). Be humble, not arrogant, as you receive it (v21). Find pleasure in it (v103). It's not enough to get into God's Word and be informed. God's Word needs to get into us until we're transformed! Every time you read or hear it, ask God to speak to you through it.

LIVE IT

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

STILL HUNGRY?

See Joshua 1:6-9 and 2 Timothy 3:14-17 for more. For brilliant commentary on the Bible go to www.slices.org.uk/SlicesforEveryone.html

FILLING THE VOID

Oliver Berard

For years, I indulged myself with all things exciting: girls, smoking, drinking, parties, weed and drugs. It seemed harmless. I had some really good times with friends, doing as I pleased. Over the years, I drank more, smoked more, and did more potent drugs. I attended a Catholic church now and then, and used to enjoy the peace there. **Though I felt bad about my lifestyle, I didn't have the strength or confidence to change it.** And I didn't really know what changing it would entail. So I just kept going.

Over time, an emptiness surfaced. Though I tried to fill my inner hole with travel, trances, friends and drugs, I became more depressed. More and more I withdrew from friends who were leading a lifestyle that I could no longer endure. I began to take anti-depressants and attend therapy. In therapy I came to the conclusion that there was a major void in my life. I was empty, insecure, and felt heavy.

Realising I could sit there forever and never solve the real problem of filling my void, I ended therapy months later. Although I'd been exposed to other religions, **I just knew that the only person who could fill the void in my life was Jesus Christ.** Feeling the Catholic church was not for me, I came to Common Ground Church, which was a bit more accessible to me. I found the people easy to relate to. I joined a small group. On Sundays I initially bailed out the back of meetings before anyone could speak to me. But over time I've built solid relationships.

Jesus has brought me back from the brink. I experience Jesus changing me, sometimes slowly, sometimes fast. And I experience the security of his faithfulness, not to mention deep, stabilising peace and a sense of purpose.

DAY 13

CHURCH. WE'RE FAMILY.

LISTEN IN

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

FIND & READ Acts 2:41-47

THINK ABOUT IT

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

LIVE IT

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

STILL HUNGRY?

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

DAY 14

THE HOLY SPIRIT. WATER, ICE, GAS.

LISTEN IN

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

FIND & READ John 16:7-15

THINK ABOUT IT

Who is the Holy Spirit? He's called "Counsellor" (v7) which means comforter, strengthener, advisor and helper. He's also called "the Spirit of Truth" (v13).

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

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

LIVE IT

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

STILL HUNGRY?

Ezekiel 37:1-10 gives a powerful picture of the life giving effect that the Spirit has on believers. See John 14:16,17 too.

DAY 15

PRAYER. WELL WORN PATHS.

LISTEN IN

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

FIND & READ Matthew 6: 6-13

THINK ABOUT IT

How should we pray? Cut out distractions and focus on God who is with you. He is eager to respond to your prayer (v6). Be real. Don't try to impress him with fancy religious talk (v7). Express gratitude, sorrow, curiosity, love, anything.

Why should we pray? There's so much stuff to pray about: focus on who God is and tell him how much you love him (v9). Think about what he wants for you and the world around you; then invite him to have his way (v10). Ask him for what you need, even small things (v11). Say sorry for any sins you've committed (v12). Give him your pain and forgive those who've wronged you (v12,14). Ask him for protection from temptation and the devil (v13).

When should we pray? "Pray continually" (1 Thessalonians 5:17). You can keep talking to God non-stop. Push through the times when it seems like he's not listening. He is. Also, realise that not everything you ask for, you really need or are ready to receive. Be patient. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you pray. Stay connected.

LIVE IT

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

STILL HUNGRY?

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

LETTING GOD OUT THE BOX

Nicola Goldblatt

I grew up Catholic – not a good Catholic, but enough to feel that God and I were fine, as long as he stayed in his box, of course. Never for a second did I allow my little bit of religion to restrain my lifestyle. **I was a party-animal**, surrounded by mates and boys, inebriated, having the time of my life. I was that girl dancing on the bar counter.

In London, a house-mate invited me to a non-Catholic church. I went and wept the whole time – I felt so moved. Although I tried to explain this away, something drew me in and over the next while I attended three consecutive courses that introduced people to Christianity. But somehow this delusion kept me from progressing spiritually: **I thought I was a Christian because I'd been brought up one**. When people spoke of having a relationship with God, I just thought they were being excessive. It was during my fourth course that I first understood you can't be born a Christian, you can only become one when you trust and surrender yourself to Christ.

I met Jesus, and my heart exploded with joy. Letting God out of the box I let him start having his way in my life. I experienced his presence powerfully. This is what I'd been missing all those years. And the Christian community amazed me - especially a group of girls who surrounded me, supporting my newfound faith.

Being a Christian didn't make life easier: I was staying in London illegally, and was living with my boyfriend. God gave me the courage to let the boy go (he couldn't accept the change that was happening in me) and I came back to SA. But the joy of discovering Christ swallowed those lesser pains.

My discovery of Christ was a gradual process, I was a slow learner, but when I finally 'got it', it blew me away like fireworks! I'm so glad God is patient with the slow kids. **I am glad he never stopped pursuing me.**

DAY 16

THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT. THE MASTER SCULPTOR.

LISTEN IN

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

FIND & READ Galatians 5:16-25

THINK ABOUT IT

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

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

LIVE IT

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

STILL HUNGRY?

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

DAY 17

OBEDIENCE. GET UP AGAIN.

LISTEN IN

If a child steals something from their parent, they don't stop being their parent's child, but they do damage the relationship temporarily. The way to make peace is for that child to own up to, and turn from, their wrongdoing. In the same way, when we become a child of God and then sin, we don't stop being his child, but we break fellowship with him until we admit the sin and sincerely ask for his help to change.

FIND & READ 1 John 1:5-2:6

THINK ABOUT IT

God is light (1:5). Since he hates sin, he wants us to live openly and obediently before him. This makes fellowship with him and other Christians possible (1:6-7). If we sin, we must confess it and not hide it (1:9). God promises to forgive us and purify us with the blood of Jesus (1:9-2:2). As we grow in our relationship with him, we'll become more obedient (2:3) and more like Jesus (2:6). No matter how many times we fall, if we confess, he'll lovingly forgive us. Like a child learning to walk, we must move beyond falling all the time, to learning how to walk in obedience. God is gracious, but he's also committed to making us more like his Son. One more thing – it's important to know the difference between the Holy Spirit's conviction of sin and the devil's condemnation. When you sin, the Holy Spirit will lovingly highlight your sin and gently draw you back to God. But the devil will try to make you feel unworthy of God, causing you to run from him in shame. Reject these lies and feelings of shame. Rather run to God's grace.

LIVE IT

What are the sins you struggle with? Do you hide or confess them? In what ways have you noticed even small changes in your life that show that you are becoming more like Jesus?

STILL HUNGRY?

Read Psalm 51 and Romans 8:1.

DAY 18

WORSHIP. MAKING MUSIC.

LISTEN IN

God enjoys being enjoyed. “The Father seeks after worshippers” (John 4:24). We worship God because we can confidently access God through Jesus and the Spirit (Ephesians 2:18). Worship is our total devotion to God because of who he is, all he’s done and all he still will do. Worship is not just singing once a week with other Christians. It’s loving and being in awe of God throughout the week. Worship is the heartbeat of a Christian. It’s also the pathway to real peace, joy and power.

FIND & READ Psalm 98

THINK ABOUT IT

Why worship God? Because he is a holy (v1), righteous (v2), loving and faithful (v3) king and judge (v9). He has done marvellous things (v1) – like saving people, revealing himself, creating the sea, rivers, mountains and everything!

How should we worship? Worship God with your mind by filling it with thoughts of God from the Bible. Worship him with your heart by shouting for joy and bursting into song (v4). Worship God with your body by clapping, dancing and, if possible, making music (v6-8). Lastly, worship God with your will by giving everything to him as your king, starting with yourself. “Praise the Lord, O my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name!” (Psalm 103:1). Worship is the one thing we will do forever. God wants us to learn to worship him even when we don’t feel like it, because he never changes. If we put this into action, we will soon discover that worshipping God brings greater satisfaction than anything this world offers.

LIVE IT

Are you a worshipper? How can you worship God more on your own? And with others?

STILL HUNGRY?

See Psalm 63 and Revelations 4:2-11 for more.

NO MORE SEEKING

Natasha Swift

I grew up in a non-religious family. But in my early teens, a deep yearning to know who I am and why I am here came over me. I started to anxiously seek for a higher power and an authentic spirituality, but because of my preconceived notions about Christianity, I never considered it an option.

I travelled the world and turned over every stone in my search; Buddhism, the yogic practices of Hinduism, New Age Metaphysics, Shamanism, African Cosmology, and Sacred Geometry.

In my thirties I married Chris, but a year into our marriage, I felt that marriage was hindering me on my spiritual search. We separated until I realized marriage is precisely where spiritual growth is forged. Chris graciously welcomed me back, but then the arrival of our first child gave way to further anger and resentment in our marriage.

At this time, we just happened to meet our new neighbours who were pastors in Common Ground. We decided to visit their newly started church.

What a surprise. Everything felt familiar, comfortable, like home. It was as though God was speaking to me through the message. What really impacted me was the idea of Grace: because of Jesus' perfect life and sacrificial death, there's nothing I can do to make God love me more or less. His love was a given – a gift of Grace. God was inviting me to come as I am.

After many months of exploration I surrendered to Jesus on the Alpha course. Later I was baptized.

And wow, things have changed...

I started to feel the presence and love of God palpably.

Also feelings of shame were washed away. My marriage began to heal too. There's so much joy now. For decades I had anxiously searched for God. Yet all along he had been searching for me, drawing me to himself. To find him I didn't need to do Yoga in Thailand or visit a Shaman in an African village. I just needed to go to the Cross, where God's grace was demonstrated. The futile searching has given way to the thrill and peace of being found!

DAY 19

THE DEVIL. THE CAGED LION.

LISTEN IN

A man once was stranded in a game park at night. He heard a lion roar, and spent the night in a tree terrified, only to find out the next day that the lion had been caged all along. He had nothing to fear. This is a picture of spiritual warfare. In some ways, life gets tougher when you follow Jesus. The reason is that we have a new enemy, Satan. When we become Christians, we become soldiers in a war. But, we don't fight him in our own strength. And if we trust Jesus, we have nothing to fear.

FIND & READ 1 Peter 5:6-11

THINK ABOUT IT

The devil is like a roaring lion looking to devour you (v8). But if you're in Christ, then he's in a cage. Jesus has all authority over him and has given you his authority too (Luke 10:17-19). Satan may not harm you, unless you enter his cage.

How do we resist the devil and stay out of his cage? Be humble, trusting, self-controlled and spiritually alert (v6-8). When we give in to pride, unbelief, temptation and spiritual laziness, we lose our spiritual protection. Stand firm in your faith (v9). The main battlefield is our minds. Satan will try to get us to believe his lies, so we must stand in faith on the truth of the Bible. Stay in community (v9). Satan preys on the isolated ones. Together, we can watch one another's backs. Also, we must repent of all occultic practices like witchcraft, sorcery, talking to the dead, visiting psychics, tarot card reading, "glassy-glassy" and more (see Acts 19:19). Lastly, be sure that God will overcome Satan's efforts to harm you (v10). So be aware of the devil, but be in awe of God (v11).

LIVE IT

Have you experienced spiritual attack? How can you better fight this war in the future?

STILL HUNGRY?

See Psalm 91, Matthew 4:1-11 and Ephesians 6:10-18.

DAY 20

TRUST. VERTIGO.

LISTEN IN

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

FIND & READ Mark 4:35-41

THINK ABOUT IT

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

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

LIVE IT

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

STILL HUNGRY?

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

BIG THINGS HAPPEN IN SMALL GROUPS

In Common Ground, we're passionate about small groups, for three reasons:

- ① Jesus calls us to build relationships with other Christians so that we can encourage, strengthen, care for, support, challenge and sharpen one another. Together we stand, isolated we fall.
- ② Our Sunday meetings are not enough to develop enduring relationships. But committing to meet with a few people on a regular basis is a great way to do this.
- ③ Small groups are helpful for deepening our insight into the gospel, applying it to our life, growing in spiritual gifts and partnering with others as we seek to better serve the city and the church.

A BIT ABOUT SMALL GROUPS:

Each group meets weekly in a home. They range in size from five to twenty. Usually they include a meal or refreshments, a conversation about the Sunday message, some bible discussion and a time of prayer. There is no pressure to pray aloud if you're not ready. Every group aims to grow in number until it is ready to multiply into two groups, with a new leader leading the new group.

HOW TO JOIN ONE:

Either join a group with someone you already know, or sign up for one at the Involvement Desk after a meeting. You might want to visit two or three groups before you commit to one where you feel you can relate to some people in the group.

DAY 21

TOUGH TIMES. DON'T DIE, BUTTERFLY.

LISTEN IN

A butterfly struggles for hours to break free from its cocoon. But if you were to try help it, it would die. The fight to get out is the very thing that develops in it the strength to fly. This is the reason God often doesn't answer our prayer to take away the struggles we're facing. He loves us too much to spare us from suffering.

FIND & READ 2 Corinthians 1:3-11

THINK ABOUT IT

Why does God allow us to suffer at times? These verses provide some answers:

1) So that he can comfort us (v3). It is when we hurt most that he holds us the tightest, even when we can't feel his presence. 2) So that we can comfort others (v4). Our wounds enable us to later help other people with the comfort God gave us.

3) So that we can experience Christ, the wounded healer (v5). God knows what pain feels like. Jesus lived the human life and suffered a painful death. That's why he is so gentle with us in our suffering. 4) So that other suffering people are inspired by our example of perseverance (v6). 5) So that we rely on God more, and on ourselves less (v9). 6) So that God receives glory by delivering us from the suffering (v10).

7) So that spiritual community is strengthened as we pray for one another (v11). God finds no joy in our pain. We must persevere in trusting God as the father of comfort (v3) and our deliverer (v10). He doesn't always take the suffering away, but he promises to always bring us through it.

LIVE IT

What tough times have you experienced? What did you learn in them? How can you deal with tough times better in the future?

STILL HUNGRY?

Read Psalm 23, Romans 5:3-5 and Hebrews 12:1-11.

DAY 22

MONEY. STARLIGHT OR BRIGHT LIGHTS?

LISTEN IN

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

FIND & READ 1 Timothy 6:5-11

THINK ABOUT IT

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

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

LIVE IT

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

STILL HUNGRY?

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

GOD HAD MY NUMBER

Carol Bradley

I grew up in Israel. Able to read Hebrew, I thought that was as close as you could get to God, but I didn't know a personal relationship with God was possible. My life has been tough: a disintegrated family, a divorce, being a single mom to three children, and a highly pressurised job. All I knew how to do was survive. My job was everything to me. It provided for me and my family, and gave me the affirmation I craved.

One day I heard a voice say to me, **"I am your rock, not your work"**. I believed it was God speaking to me. I found myself asking God if he really was a personal God, who knew me and loved me as an individual. Was it possible to have a personal relationship with him? I thought I'd ask God directly.

Opening a bible late one night, the answer came as I read these words: "Let the morning bring me word of your unfailing love. For I have put my faith in you. Show me the way I should go for to you I lift up my soul". I was deeply moved. Minutes later I received an sms: "Give your trust to God and don't give up because he always comes through. Trust in him." Shocked, I messaged back asking who it was and how they got my number. Their answer came: "The Lord gave me a number and told me what to write". Amazingly, this person was from another part of South Africa, didn't know me, or anyone I knew. Tears sprung to my eyes. **I discovered God had my number, and loved me. So I started to trust Jesus.**

Life's never been the same since. I stopped trusting in the rock on which I'd depended for so many years – work. I spent more time with my children, and God has provided for me in every way since then. I've been through the stress of changing jobs, the children's father leaving the country, and having to sell my house due to financial difficulties. **But God has provided for me all the way.** I've been blessed with amazing love from believing friends, grown closer to my children, lost the impatience of a pressurised job maniac, and recently found true love in a man God hand-picked for me.

DAY 23

WORK. WATCHING ME PLAY.

LISTEN IN

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

FIND & READ Colossians 3:17 & 3:22-4:1

THINK ABOUT IT

In those days, up to half of the known world were slaves. So most of the Christians were really poor. They lived on hand-outs from the wealthy masters. They felt unmotivated to work. Without a vision for their work, they felt used by their 'masters'. Even today, our work and duties can sometimes feel like slavery. But as Christians we can learn to please God in our work.

How should we do work in a God-pleasing way? Do everything with God's help and for God's glory (v23). God wants to help you develop your knowledge and skills. Do it for God, not people (v23). Don't focus mainly on pleasing people (like bosses, lecturers or teachers). Please God first. This will push you to work hard when no one, except God, is looking (v22). Put your whole heart into whatever you do (v23). The way to success is hard work. However, overworking doesn't please God either (see Psalm 127:1-2). Work towards a vision (v24). Ask God to help you have a vision for your life and work wisely towards it. A great vision will inspire great sacrifices, which will result in great rewards. Don't abuse power over others (4:1). God wants equal opportunity for all. That's why Christians led the way in ending slavery a long time ago.

LIVE IT

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

STILL HUNGRY?

See Proverbs 5:6-11.

DAY 24

MAKE A DIFFERENCE. SALT AND LIGHT.

LISTEN IN

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

FIND & READ Matthew 5:11-16

THINK ABOUT IT

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

How can we be light? Light should be made obvious to all, not hidden. Following Jesus is a very personal thing, but it's not a private thing. Let your light shine before people (v16). How will people respond? Some will hate you (v11-12). But they really hate the God of light within you which exposes their darkness. So don't take it personally. Look forward to the rewards from God for persevering in suffering (v12). Some, however, will see your good deeds and be drawn to the God that motivates you (v16).

LIVE IT

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

STILL HUNGRY?

See 1 Peter 3:13-18 and Hebrews 11:32-40.

DAY 25

TELLING YOUR STORY. REALITY TV.

LISTEN IN

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

FIND & READ Acts 22:1-16

THINK ABOUT IT

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

LIVE IT

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

STILL HUNGRY?

See Mark 5:19-20.

COUNTING THE SECONDS

Michael Day

“I want to take a break from you and try life without you.”

These were my words to God in Grade 8. I'd been privileged to grow up in a committed Christian family and had gone to church for 13 years. But two things made me move away from God.

First I desperately craved the acceptance of my friends and was willing to do anything to get it. Second, although my faith had instilled some good morals in me (that I was soon to throw away), God had not yet become very real to me.

What followed was a two-year crazed adventure away from God – the worst two years of my life. **Instead of trusting God's path for me, I tried to create my own.** As each week passed, I fell further and further away from God. Involved in the wrong crowd, I did things that I knew would upset my parents, things I truthfully didn't want to do. I knew what I was doing was wrong but couldn't bring myself to stop.

Then one day I came to my senses and realised that life without God sucks – it doesn't make sense and it doesn't satisfy. So I turned to God. And he came to me, forgave me and took control. What a relief it was to give my life to him, to start trusting and following Jesus, not holding anything back. My experience of Christ, and the hope he gives, soon became so great that it was not that difficult to let my friends know that God was now in charge of me.

When I came back to Christ it dawned on me that, though I had walked away from him, **he had not walked away from me.** I imagine he was constantly calling out my name, patiently watching me do all these stupid things, and yet having so much more for me. I guess that God was counting the seconds until I would be home. And how good it is to be home! Home is the place where I am gripped by a sense of gratitude, and purpose, and comfort, and life lived to the full. **I wouldn't want to be anywhere else.**

DAY 26

SERVING. THE GREAT REVERSAL.

LISTEN IN

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

FIND & READ John 13:1-17

THINK ABOUT IT

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

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

LIVE IT

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

STILL HUNGRY?

See Mark 10:42-25 and Philippians 2:1-4 and 1 Peter 4:10-11.

DAY 27

SOCIAL ACTION. ORPHANS AND WIDOWS.

LISTEN IN

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

FIND & READ Luke 10:25-37

THINK ABOUT IT

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

LIVE IT

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

STILL HUNGRY?

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

DAY 28

THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. SHINE!

LISTEN IN

If someone plays an unplugged electric guitar in a big hall you can hardly hear it. But if you plug it into a big amp and turn up the volume, it can entertain thousands. God wants to take our little lives and to plug them into the power of his spirit. That way, our impact in this world will be so much bigger than if we tried to do it in our own strength.

FIND & READ Acts 1:4-9 and 2:1-4.

THINK ABOUT IT

God promises us a gift (1:5), the Holy Spirit. When we are saved we are born of the Spirit (John 3:5). But he also wants to baptise (1:5) and fill us (2:4) with the Spirit, where we experience his presence and power in a very real way (2:2-4). Why? So we'll have power to be his witnesses (1:8). He wants us to influence people with his power, not with our own cleverness and determination.

Who will we influence? God wants us to share his passion for people. God wants to use us to begin impacting people where we are, and then send us to people in other places. We must be willing to go (1:8).

How does he fill us? Jesus, in John 7:37-39, tells us we need to come to him, thirsting for him, and asking him with simple trust, to be filled with his spirit. Once we've been filled, we must keep on yielding control to the spirit, staying plugged in day after day (Ephesians 5:18).

LIVE IT

Have you been filled with the Spirit? Have you sensed him using you in supernatural ways? Do you feel God's call to be part of his global mission? Are there any church mission trips you can join?

STILL HUNGRY

See John 7:37-39, Acts 2:17-18 and 2 Corinthians 12:7-10 for more.

THE TWO GREATEST GIFTS

Olivier Teddy

I'm from the DRC. My father is from Congo and my mother is from Liberia. My feelings of loneliness, and having a father who wasn't there for me, made me leave home. I found my way to South Africa.

One thing I did get from my family was a really bad taste in my mouth for things such as God, Christianity and the church. **In my view, Christians were a group of idiots and hypocrites.** Despite my distaste for Christians, in SA I made friends with some Christians. They invited me to church. I suppose I was curious about the God I was rejecting. What was it that all these Christians seemed to be so thrilled about? So I took up their offer.

God really got my attention. The day I went to church, the preacher taught about healing. And right there, in the meeting, God healed me of something that I'd suffered from for 10 years. No one prayed for me – God just touched me. This miracle opened me up to God. I kept going back to church, and even joined a small group. **Since then I received two of the greatest gifts ever given to me: love and forgiveness.**

Despite the fact I never knew God, he reached out to me and revealed his love to me, accepting me as I was. I now count on him, and call on him. **He is always there for me. He is the father I always yearned for.**

And he forgave me, which gave me the strength to forgive my earthly father for the way he let me down. The surprising thing is that because I've forgiven my earthly father, he and I are now getting closer. My prayer is that my father will discover God too.

I have also discovered a new family of people in this church, people who share the same joy of being loved by the same father in heaven. **I am so grateful that, though I scorned Christ, he still reached out to me.**

DAY 29

SEXUALITY. LIKE A RIVER.

LISTEN IN

When you stick two pieces of tape together the bond is very strong. If you tear them apart and try to use the same tape again, it will be far less sticky. Sex is the bonding agent that God designed to bind a man and a woman together for life. That's why separating from a sexual partner is so painful. The more you have sex before marriage, the less power that sex will have to "bind" you to your life-partner one day. So resist the pressures to have sex that come from the sex-crazed media and your own hormones.

FIND & READ 1 Thessalonians 4:1-9

THINK ABOUT IT

How can we have a God-pleasing sexuality? We must actively avoid all sexual immorality (v3). This includes sex and foreplay before marriage, adultery, homosexual sex, and looking at pornography. We must learn how to control our bodies (v4). Our sex-drive is very strong. We must learn how to control it rather than be controlled by it. We should not take advantage of anyone sexually (v6). That includes sexually harassing people, rape and sexual abuse. We should link sex with real love (v9). Sex that's selfish or hurtful isn't based on real love.

Why please God with our sexuality? Jesus commanded it (v2). God wants us to be holy and honourable (v4). We need to be different to people who don't know God (v5). We'll be punished by God if we disobey him in this area (v6). Let's please God and benefit ourselves and others by avoiding all sexual sin! Sex is like a river. When it stays in the banks of God's instructions, it brings great blessing. When it overflows and floods the banks of God's instructions, it brings destruction to our lives and to society.

LIVE IT

Have you given in to sexual sin? How can you go about controlling your sexual urges and dealing with pressure from media, your emotions and your body in a way that pleases God?

STILL HUNGRY

See 1 Corinthians 6:12-20, Proverbs 5 and 2 Timothy 2:22.

DAY 30

MAKING PEACE. THE PATHMAKER.

LISTEN IN

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

FIND & READ Colossians 3:8-15

THINK ABOUT IT

Why overcome division and hostility between people? When we follow Jesus we are no longer mainly identified by our class, culture, race or gender, but by our new identity in God (v10) as God's loved and chosen people. That means that a Christian in Nigeria has more in common with a Christian in the USA or China than they do with their non-Christian Nigerian friend! We are united by our common relationship with God. That's why our race, culture, class, gender, level of education and level of wealth are not enough to divide us. Christ is all and is in all (v11).

How do we seek peace? Be set free from anger and hate (v8). Become compassionate, kind, humble, gentle, patient, forgiving and loving (v12-13). Most importantly, allow God's love to bind us together in unity and peace (v14-15). Change must start with the church (v12). If God's people don't know how to make peace, then there's no hope. Become a peacemaker (Matthew 5:9). The Holy Spirit will guide and strengthen you.

LIVE IT

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

STILL HUNGRY

See Ephesians 2:14-22 for more.

DAY 31

COMMITMENT. UNBREAKABLE GRIP.



LISTEN IN

Bind your arms together, by holding onto your wrists. This is a picture of the Christian life. The one hand represents Christ's committed grip on you once you have been saved. The other hand represents your grip on Christ in response to his unbreakable grip on you. This visual captures the essence of the Christian life.



FIND & READ Philippians 3:1-14



THINK ABOUT

We should rejoice in Christ's grip on us. Amazingly, "Christ Jesus took hold of me" (v12). This speaks of Christ's grip on us. It is a strong, gracious grip of salvation. It is God's perfect, unflinching commitment to never let go of those he has saved (see John 10:28). His grip on us should motivate and energise our tightening grip on him (v12). We can tighten our grip on him in several ways: Admit the futility of trying to impress God with our religious performance (v1-6). Be less excited about all of our life's accomplishments (v7). Be ecstatic about the undeserved prize of having a personal relationship with Jesus (v8). Remind yourself that your being warmly accepted by God (called 'righteousness' in the bible) is not based on anything you did, but on the grace that comes from Christ (v9). Seek a deeper and closer walk with Christ (v10). See your relationship with Christ like a race in which you enduringly and single-mindedly forget what is behind, and press on toward what is ahead (v13)! Keep heaven in your sight, and obey the call of God in your heart (v14).



LIVE IT

Reflect on your Ignite journey: Have you been saved yet? What has changed in your life? What have you learnt that you don't want to forget? What questions remain unanswered? What changes do you still need to make?



STILL HUNGRY

The bible consists of 66 books. Try read them all, one at a time, doing one from the New Testament, followed by one from the Old Testament, and so on. Purchase a study bible to help you understand some of the more difficult parts. Enjoy the adventure ...

GIVING CHURCH ANOTHER TRY

Liesel Muller

My earliest memories of church involved long sermons and old people, neither of which I could relate to. **So I looked elsewhere for the truth.** I took classes in philosophy and religious studies and read books on mind-power. I visited religious temples and frequented esoteric fairs. **But there was always something missing.** One night, I had a very real spiritual experience that left me on my knees praying. God showed me that by experimenting with all these beliefs I was flirting with danger.

Aged 25, after fulfilling some of my biggest dreams, I still felt unfulfilled. Some close friends spoke enthusiastically of their faith and **I decided to give church another try.** As I walked in, tears started rolling and I cried throughout the service. I felt like a baby being cradled by this great heavenly father. Since I was a teenager I had been desperately seeking the truth but all I had to do was stop running. I listened carefully to the words of the service and I heard a message of truth, the kind of message you can actually take something out of.

Whilst I am made uniquely for a purpose, there is immense relief in knowing that I am no longer the ultimate creator of my life. It allows you to be available for things you could never have otherwise imagined. I have encountered a genuine caring and a love that Christians have for each other, and for making a real difference in the communities around them. **I have come home, and I never want to leave.**

TAKING COMMUNION

“Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf” (1 Corinthians 10:16-17).

Unlike baptism, which is a one-time event, Communion (a.k.a. The Lord’s Supper) is a practice that is observed over and over in a church – whether in informal small group settings or in big-group Sunday meetings. We break bread and drink wine or grape juice together. The bread and wine are symbolic of a far greater reality. The mood of this time varies – at times reflective, and at other times celebrative.

WHY WE HAVE COMMUNION?

- Jesus told us to (see Matthew 26:26-28).
- It celebrates all that Christ has won for us and done for us on the cross (see 1 Corinthians 11:24).
- It allows us to regularly humble ourselves before God, and receive fresh supplies of his grace and forgiveness (see 1 Corinthians 11:28).
- It affirms that in Christ, we, despite our differences, have been made one (see 1 Corinthians 10:16-17).
- It anticipates a life of eternal fellowship with Christ (1 Corinthians 11:26).

FAITH IS NOT INTELLECTUAL SUICIDE

If Christianity is not true we are wasting our time. If it is true then it is of vital importance to everyone. There are many intellectual or personal questions that can make it difficult to trust fully in Jesus. The great news is that there are also very solid answers to these questions. We can test the claims of Christ because it is an historical faith – based on the life, death and resurrection of Jesus – affirmations based on historical evidence. God does not want us to commit intellectual suicide when we choose to follow him. Faith in Christ is very reasonable when the evidence is carefully and openly explored. This leads us to doubt our doubts.

HERE ARE SOME RECOMMENDED RESOURCES FOR THOSE WHO HAVE QUESTIONS:

Website

- Go to www.commonground.co.za and click on 'Why Jesus' then 'Tough Questions'. This provides compelling answers to the FAQs of the Christian faith.

Books

- The Reason for God, by Tim Keller. In this New York Times bestseller, Keller, pastor of one of New York's largest congregations very respectfully, intelligently and compellingly responds to Christianity's critics, and presents his reason for believing in the God of the bible.

- The Jesus I Never Knew, by Philip Yancey. In this masterpiece, Yancey helps us take a fresh look at who Jesus really was and is.

- 3:16 – The Number of Hope, by Max Lucado. In this bestseller, Lucado clearly and vividly presents what the Christian faith is all about by opening up the summarising verse of the whole bible, John 3:16.

DNA

When we first visit a church, we're at best a guest. But if this is the church for us, then it's God's plan that we would progress to becoming part of the family. The DNA course will help you make that transition from observing guest to participating family member.

WHAT IS IT ABOUT?

DNA outlines what membership and participation in the local church looks like. At DNA, we share the Common Ground story; our vision and mission as a gospel community filling Cape Town with the message, life and fame of Jesus.

WHO IS IT FOR?

It is for those who want to:

- find out more about our church
- learn how to become involved in the church
- decide whether this is the church for them
- meet more people in the church
- meet the leadership team of the church

WHEN DOES IT HAPPEN?

We run DNA many times a year. It consists of two informative sessions on consecutive Monday nights.

Sign up at our Involvement Desk for the next one.

BIG WORDS

Some words or phrases commonly used in Common Ground that you may not understand ...

Anointed: Someone is anointed when they are spiritually empowered by God for a special task.

Cell group: Another name for a small group, home group, or life group.

Deacons: The tried and tested leaders appointed by the pastors to lead certain aspects of the church like ministries and small groups.

Discipleship: 1) A person committed to spiritual growth and obedience to Christ is growing in discipleship. 2) The word describes the efforts that Christians make to help less experienced Christians grow in their walk with Christ.

Eldership team: The team of people, mainly couples, who lead and care for Common Ground Church; they are also called the pastors or elders. Each congregation is led by its own eldership team.

Evangelism: The efforts that Christians make to introduce other people to Jesus. Also known as 'sharing your faith' or 'outreach'.

Gentiles: Non-Jews.

Glory: 1) To glorify God means to revel in and worship his awesomeness. 2) To experience his glory means to be overwhelmed by his awesome qualities and presence.

Hallelujah: An outburst of praise in response to the greatness and grace of God; the word stems from 'hallel' (to happily praise) and 'jah' (short for Yahweh, which is God's Name).

Holy: 1) With regard to God, it refers to his radiant beauty, uniqueness, perfection and purity. 2) With regard to God's people, it

refers to a commitment to purity.

Idol: Anything we look to as a God-alternative in the hope it will secure, save or satisfy us. This could be a wooden statue, or something less tangible but just as real: sex, money, love, fame, success, power, control, comfort or children, for example.

Justification: The word to describe how we are accepted by God not on the basis of our works, but on the basis of Christ's works – his perfect life and his sacrificial death.

Kingdom of God: Since God is king, wherever his reign is embraced by people, or manifested by the Spirit's power, there is his kingdom. In this sense God's kingdom can advance.

Lead pastor: Each team of pastors or elders is led by a lead pastor who captains the team.

Lord's Supper: Also called Communion. This is when Christians break bread and drink wine (or juice) together as a symbol of celebrating God's gifts of salvation through the cross, and oneness in the church. It can be done whenever Christians gather.

Ministry: 1) Christ-honouring, Spirit-empowered service to others. 2) Each church has a variety of ministries, each providing opportunity to serve different needs, either in the church or in the community.

Mission: Every Christian and every church is sent by God to make a difference in the world. In this sense they are on mission with God.

Michael Eaton: The name of one of the

world's best bible teachers who has massively influenced our church's understanding of the bible over the years. Read his commentaries at www.slices.org.uk/SlicesforEveryone.html

Multi-congregation: Though Common Ground is one church, it is also many congregations. Though each congregation may feel like its own church, it is part of something larger.

New Testament: The 27 books of the bible that were written after Jesus came.

Old Testament: The 39 books of the bible that were written before Jesus came.

Original language: The Old Testament was originally written in Hebrew, the New Testament mainly in Greek, but partly in Aramaic. There are many translations into various languages. Our most used ones are NIV (New International Version) and ESV (English Standard Version).

Outpouring: An experience of the Spirit's presence and power. Also known as infilling or baptism of the Spirit.

Paul: Often in preaching we say, 'As Paul said.' This refers to the apostle Paul who wrote one third of the New Testament.

Prophecy: To prophesy is a God-given ability to share a direct message from God with another person or a group of people. Also known as 'bringing a prophetic word'.

Quiet times: The daily alone times with God where Christians seek to grow closer to Christ through bible reading and prayer.

Repent: To admit and own our sinfulness, and turn from it toward a life that chooses to please, depend on, and seek after God and his will for us.

Sanctification: God's commitment to develop Christ-like character in his children, with their co-operation.

Salvation: The way that God, through Jesus, has rescued us from the penalty and power of sin, into a transforming relationship with himself.

Sovereign: We often speak of God's sover-

eighty; the fact that he is in total control, even though evil abounds. This helps us trust him when things seem out of control.

Spirit-filled: A person is filled with the Spirit when they open themselves to the empowering and transforming influence of the Holy Spirit.

Spiritual warfare: The experience of undergoing temptation, discouragement and confusion as a result of Satan's crafty resistance to our love for Christ. We overcome these attacks by persevering faith in Christ and his word.

Testimony: Our testimony is our unique story of the difference Jesus has made in our life.

Tim Keller: The name of a leading church expert and author who leads a large church in New York City. Over the years he has influenced our church to more effectively be powered by the gospel as we impact our city. Listen to his sermons at <http://sermons2.redeemer.com/>

Tithing: The practice of regularly giving a portion of one's income to the church, so as to underwrite its vision and ventures. Though it must be remembered that Christ calls us to give all we have to him, not just 10%.

Trinity: The theological word that describes the three-ness of God, in that, although he is one God, he is father, son and holy spirit all at the same time.

Vision: 1) A preferred picture of the future that inspires passion. 2) An image that God directly places in our minds as way of communicating with or through us, as in 'God gave me a vision' (a.k.a 'a picture').

Wrath: God's antagonism towards evil in which he refuses to negotiate, and promises to judge if we fail to repent.

QUIET TIME

QUIET: a place and time where you can be still

TIME: a regular and consistent time each day

A “quiet time” is a dedicated time each day set aside to connect with God — to adore and praise him, to study scripture and hear what he has to say, and to allow his Word to renew our hearts and minds so that the Spirit of God can transform us.

Our goal as Christians is not just to know about God, but actually to know him as one person knows another. He is our father, our friend, our comforter, our guide, and our Lord. Knowing him in this way, talking with him in this way, calls for responses of joy, of worship, of repentance and sorrow, of hope and expectation. Knowing and loving God — that’s what quiet times are about.

TIPS

Be Intentional: The ultimate goal is to find a consistent time each day when you’re fully alert and free of distractions. Plan ahead. For example, if you want to spend time with God in the morning, go to bed early; if you’re tempted to check email, turn off your devices; if you find yourself preoccupied with the day ahead, keep a notepad next to you to record to-dos.

Be Creative: The quiet stillness of the early morning is ideal, but you may want to experiment with times and places that work well with your temperament and schedule. For example, extroverts might find it easier to concentrate while sitting alone in a crowded café.

Be Open: While we recommend a combination of worship, scripture reading, meditation, and prayer, be open to how the Spirit leads you.

Wetherell Johnson in his book *Created for Commitment* inspires us: “Knowing my temperament, I knew that my initial enthusiasm for reading the Bible could quickly wane. I might stay up late a few nights, get up early a few days, but I would not be able to keep it up. Yet I believed that somehow this was important to my life and my faith. What discipline could I adopt to make myself get up early every morning continually until it became a new habit of life? ...I dragged myself out of bed in the morning (with strong tea to wake me up) until God changed my sleeping habits. (Later my metabolism was changed so that the early morning became my prime time.)

I studied with three key questions in mind:

1. What does the Bible passage say?
2. What does it mean to the people of the day when it was written?
3. What does it mean to me?

Following this, I would kneel to Christ Jesus as Savior and Lord, yearning to know Him through my study of “all the counsel of God” (Acts 20:27). I might have said, “Here I stand, so help me God. I can do no other,” as Luther said in totally different circumstances. However, I could not have conceived at the time that life with the Lord would be so joyous. I knew it would be right; I knew it would be safe; I knew he would be faithful. His grace was sufficient for all sense of inferiority and any other lack, but I never realized how joyous it would be.”

Tim Keller in his book *Daily Quiet Time: A Way to Begin* guides us: “Like most people, my devotional time consisted of a) Bible reading and then b) prayer. My prayer life changed, however, when I learned of and added a ‘middle discipline’ — meditation — between plain Bible reading and full-out prayer. Meditation is prayer — full reflection on what God has just told you in His word. It is neither study nor prayer, exactly, but a combination. Psalm 1, which is not a prayer, but a meditation, indicates that meditation is the doorway into deeper prayer. Learn to do meditative prayer, and you will enrich your prayer life in untold ways.”

FOUR STEPS

1. **Quiet Yourself — Focusing:** to prepare to meet with your Lord
2. **Bible Reading — Listening:** to understand the truth
3. **Meditation — Reflecting:** to sense the reality of the truth in your heart
4. **Response — Speaking:** to see God at work in your life, the lives of others, and the world

QUIET YOURSELF: Silence... Simple Prayer... Quiet Music... Deep Breathing... Take a few minutes to focus on God and to shut out distractions. Experiment. Vary this.

BIBLE READING: Read the scripture passage 2-3 times, inviting the Holy Spirit to reveal God’s truth to you. Read for understanding.

Two general questions that can tease out great insight on most bible passages are:

1. What does this text tell me about God? (e.g. his names, attributes, desires, promises, commands, salvation)
2. What does it tell me about humanity? (e.g. nature of humanity, examples to avoid or follow)

In this devotional however, guiding questions are provided to help you discover God’s Word for yourself and respond in prayer.

MEDITATION: Become aware of God’s loving presence and read the passage again. Notice how he might be speaking to you through his Word. Dwell on a word or a phrase that jumps out at you. Record answers to the following:
What truth has caught the attention of my heart or mind?(e.g. a command to be obeyed, a comfort to be savored, a characteristic of God to be grasped) Think about this truth.

What is it really saying? Put it into your own words.

Why is God showing me this today? As thoughts become clear or convicting, write them down.

If this truth is alive in my life, how would I be different? (e.g. How does God want to

transform my heart, thinking, habits, relationships?)

RESPONSE:

Talk to God about this truth. The essence of prayer is simply to respond to what God has shown you. Be yourself; ask questions; try not to rush. A response can also be silence or tears.

Some find the **ACTSI model** of prayer helpful...

Adore God for who he is (e.g. his attributes revealed in this passage)

Confess the sinful emotions, attitudes, and behavior that result when we forget who he is.

Thank God for what he has done (e.g. his grace to forgive and heal us)

Supplicate (ask) for comfort and help in applying this truth today

Intercede for Others. The Bible is not just my story — it is first and foremost God’s story, then our story, and finally my story:

What does this truth and the passage reveal about God’s heart for the people and world around you? (e.g. family, neighbours, workplace, my faith community, city)

Who or what has God put on your heart today?

Pray this truth for them.

