

DNA

BECOME PART OF THE FAMILY



WELCOME TO DNA

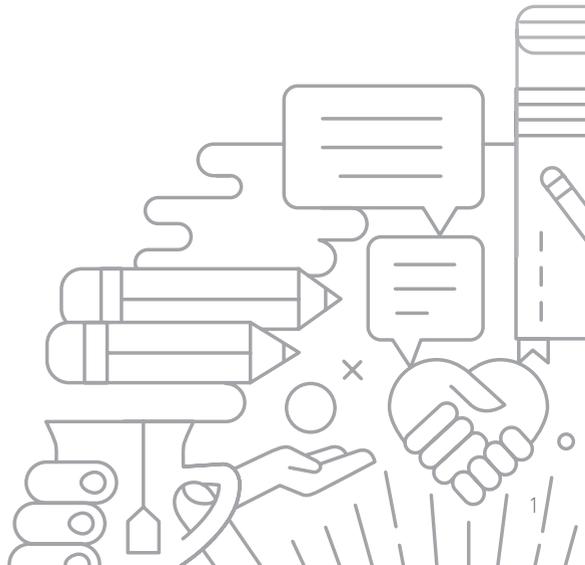
We're delighted that you are considering membership in Common Ground Church.

This booklet, and the two nights of DNA, are the main things you need to know to:

- Transition from spectator mode to participator mode.
- Move beyond being a guest in the lounge, to being a family member with your own room in the house.
- Make Common Ground your home – a place and a people where you can earth your commitment to follow Christ.

If you are not yet a follower of Jesus, we're a church where you're welcome to belong before you believe. Please read 'The Story' on page 28 as you consider re-framing your story within His Story.

Yours in Christ,
The Congregation Leaders of Common Ground



PART 1 PROGRAMME

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Session 2	Our story so far
Session 3	Gospel-centred Our mission and strategy 1. We discover the gospel in the Bible
TEA AND COFFEE BREAK	
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Session 5	3. We deliver the gospel in mission
Session 6	Where are we going?
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Session 3	Understanding our community's leadership
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DNA PART 1



WHY MEMBERSHIP?



FILL IN THE BLANKS

1. Being joined to the _____ church is not enough.
2. It gives us the community, _____ and accountability we need.
3. It moves us towards active _____ and ownership.

We read of the commitment the first church members made to their church in Acts 2...

41 Those who accepted Peter's message about Christ were baptized, and about three thousand were added to the number [of the church] that day. 42 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. 43 Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. 44 All the believers were together and had everything in common. 45 They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. 46 Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, 47 praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

Notice that they 'devoted themselves' (v42) – first to the gospel, and then to the gospel community and the gospel mission.

OUR MISSION



FILL IN THE BLANKS

WHAT IS OUR MISSION?

We are a gospel community filling our city with the _____,
_____ and _____ of Jesus.

HOW DO WE FULFIL OUR MISSION?

We plant and strengthen _____ and equip
_____ who excel in

- evangelism
- discipleship
- community building
- social justice
- societal renewal

1. WE DISCOVER THE GOSPEL IN THE BIBLE

1. The Bible is _____.

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

2. The Bible discloses the _____.

HOW TO DEEPEN YOUR BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

- **Read your Bible every day.** The ESV and NIV Study Bible are recommended.
- **Download these 3 free Devotional Studies:**
 - Revolution
bit.ly/CGRevolutionPDF
 - Acts: Church on fire
bit.ly/CGActsDev
 - Colossians in 30 Days
bit.ly/CGColossiansPDF
- **Listen to MP3s in your car. Download 100s for free at:**
 - bit.ly/CGSeries
 - bit.ly/GILResource
- **Find out not only what you believe, but why you believe it.**
 - Go to Tough Questions banner at www.commonground.co.za
 - Read Tim Keller's 2 books: Making Sense of God, and Reason for God.
- **Take an online course.** Go to www.biblicaltraining.org and download the free Bible courses in MP3 format in the Foundations section.

WHAT WE BELIEVE

Our core beliefs are rooted in scripture, rather than speculation or tradition. Though we seek to be geared to the times, we are determined to anchor ourselves to the rock of timeless truth. What follows are some of those timeless truths, with scripture references included.

THE BIBLE

We believe the Bible (every verse in all 66 books) originated with God, though it was written by chosen authors. It speaks with the authority of God while at the same time reflecting the backgrounds, styles and vocabularies of these human authors. In its original manuscripts, it is infallible and inerrant. It is the full and final authority on all matters of faith and practice. No other writing is similarly inspired by God, nor comes close to having its life-transforming potential. Therefore, it is to be thoughtfully and diligently, happily and prayerfully read and taught, memorised and meditated upon, understood and applied, believed and obeyed.

2 Tim 3:15-17, 2 Pet 1:20-21, Prov 30:5, Deut 4:2, Ps 19:7-9, Isa 55:9-11, Neh 8:1-2, Josh 1:8, Rom 10:17, James 1:21-25

GOD

We believe God is uncreated, eternal, self-sustaining, unchanging, all-knowing, all-powerful, present everywhere and entirely wise, good, loving, gracious, compassionate, righteous and holy. This one God eternally exists as a loving community of three equal persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. He created the universe, the world and everything in it. Through his sovereign authority and unrivalled power, God continues to sustain and govern his creation. He operates within and over every detail of history, past, present and future, as he fulfils his redemptive purposes.

Acts 17:24-25, Mal 3:6, Ps 90:2, Jer 23:23-24, Isa 46:9-10, Dan 4:34-35, 1 John 3:20, Dan 2:20, 1 John 4:8-10, Rev 4:8, Deut 6:4, 2 Cor 13:14, Matt 28:19, Neh 9:6, Eph 1:11, Acts 17:26, Rom 8:28

HUMANKIND

We believe God created humankind, male and female, in his own image and likeness with dignity and worth. He created us to worship, enjoy and love him forever, and to be responsible stewards of his creation. But the first humans sinfully defied God, consequently corrupting the entire human race, alienating us from God (and in many ways from each other), and bringing us under his righteous judgment. Neither good deeds nor religious observance are able to restore this broken relationship with our Maker. Yet, God lovingly took it upon himself to restore us back to himself. Over 4000 years ago, through Abraham, he brought about the ancient nation of Israel, a people to whom he progressively revealed himself through saving deeds, covenants, prophets, signs and scripture. But most significantly, God promises them the coming of a divine Saviour for all people, a promise that was fulfilled over 2000 years ago.

Gen 1:26-27; Ps 95:6, Gen 2:15, Gen 3:1-12, Psalm 51:4, Matt 15:19, Rom 3:22-23, 5:12; Eph 2:1-3, Gen 12:1-2, Heb 1:1-2, Luke 24:25-27

JESUS CHRIST

We believe that Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, became fully human, without ceasing to be fully God. He was conceived by the Holy Spirit, and was born of the virgin Mary. He lived an extraordinary life, marked by profound miracles and teachings. He related to the Father with perfect obedience and intimacy. Primarily, he came to pay the price for the sins of all people by willingly dying on the cross as our substitute, satisfying divine justice on our behalf. Through this sacrifice, he mercifully provided the free, eternal gift of salvation, which includes forgiveness, new life and adoption into God's family. He rose from the dead and later ascended into heaven where he now sits at the right hand of the Father as the only reconciling mediator between a holy God and sinful people. This gift of salvation is available to all who turn to and trust in Christ alone as their Lord and Saviour. Moreover, he promises to personally and visibly return to earth to climax human history.

John 1:1-2, John 1:14, Luke 1:35, John 5:19, 1 Peter 2:24, 1 Peter 1:3-5, Heb 7:25, Heb 9:24, Rom 8:34, 1 John 2:1-2, Eph 2:8-10, Eph 1:5,7, 1 Tim 2:5, Acts 16:31, Acts 1:9-11

THE HOLY SPIRIT

We believe the Holy Spirit indwells each believer upon salvation. Scripture calls every believer and church to glorify Christ, a calling that is only made possible through continual reliance on the Spirit's presence, power and leadership. The Spirit also reveals the Father and the Son to us, pouring out their love into our hearts, and conforming our characters to reflect theirs. This transformational process requires our participation, including whole-hearted trust and obedience, and the disciplined pursuit of God and his will. Additionally, the Spirit assures believers of their eternal security as God's child, guides and strengthens, illuminates the Bible and its truths, distributes spiritual gifts, enables unity between believers, empowers gospel proclamation, and draws unbelievers to trust in Christ.

1 Cor 6:19, John 16:13-14, Eph 5:18, Acts 2:1-4, Rom 5:8, 2 Cor 3:18, Gal 5:22-23, Rom 8:16, Eph 1:13, 2 Tim 2:7, 1 Cor 12:8-11, John 16:7, Eph 4:3-4, Acts 1:8, Acts 2:39

THE CHURCH

We believe all Christians are united with Christ as members of his body, the one true church. This one universal church finds expression in varied local churches. In each local church, believers are to be a spiritual family that regularly gathers for worship, prayer, the teaching of the Word, baptism and communion. Each church is to be led, equipped and cared for by elders and leaders, and each believer is to do all they can to strengthen the church through loving one another, protecting the unity of the church, and generously serving and giving in whatever ways they can. The priority of every church is to impact the world, and penetrate culture, with the good news of Jesus Christ. All this is done under the direction of Christ, who is both the head of the church, and the one who is building it.

1 Cor 1:2, Heb 10:25, Gal 6:10, Acts 2:41-47, 1 Tim 5:17, Heb 13:17, Eph 4:11-12, Eph 4:2-3, 1 John 3:16-18, 2 Cor 9:7,13, Rom 12:4-8, Matt 4:19, Matt 28:18-20, Eph 1:22-23, Matt 16:18

THE JUDGEMENT

We believe God is grieved and angered by sin, unbelief and rebellion. He promises to judge everything and everyone that contradicts his character and defies his will. Everyone lives once, and then faces God on Judgement day, an event that will follow the return of Christ. Depending on whether we spurn or embrace Christ and his grace in this life, we will either suffer eternal condemnation without him, or be received into eternal communion with him. Additionally, depending on their faithfulness to Christ, believers will receive heavenly rewards.

Rom 2:5, 3:19, Acts 17:30-31, Heb 9:27, 2 Thes 1:8-9, Rev 14:9-11, Luke 23:39-43, Phil 1:21-23, 1 Cor 3:12-15, Col 3:23-24

THE KINGDOM

We believe that Christ, through his first coming, introduced his Kingdom in part on the earth. Through his second coming, his kingdom will be fully realised: a redeemed humanity will enjoy immortal resurrection bodies as they celebrate God's manifest presence and grace forever in the new heavens and new earth, a world purged of all suffering, injustice, sin and death. The church is to both live in joyful anticipation of this certain future, and to provide the world with 'foretastes' of it. We do this through proclaiming the gospel, living counter-culturally, building authentic community, serving the poor and marginalized, confronting injustice, and protecting creation, all the time praying, 'Let your kingdom come.'

Mark 1:14-15, 1 Cor 15:51-54, Rev 21:1-3, 22:1-5, Isa 65:17-25, Matt 6:19-21, Heb 6:5, Luke 24:46-49, Matt 5:13-16, John 13:34-35, Luke 10:27-37, Job 29:12-17, Matt 6:9-10

2. WE DEPICT THE GOSPEL IN BAPTISM



FILL IN THE BLANKS

Baptism beautifully depicts the gospel in two ways:

1. It shows the _____ the gospel promises.
2. It shows the _____ the gospel calls for.

HELPFUL RESOURCES IF YOU HAVEN'T BEEN BAPTISED

Please listen to / download this talk:

<https://bit.ly/20jSmxW>

Related to this talk, here is a Bible study on baptism:

First, read about the baptisms of...

- the Samaritan converts - *Acts 8: 5, 12*
- the Ethiopian eunuch - *Acts 8:36-38*
- Paul - *Acts 22:16*
- Cornelius and his associates - *Acts 10:47-48*
- the Philippian jailor and his household - *Acts 16:30-33*

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THESE 5 ACCOUNTS?

- Baptism is the commanded sign of newfound faith.
- Baptism is connected to community.
- Baptism need not wait.

Next, read *Acts 2:37-38*.

FROM THESE VERSES, WHAT ELSE DO WE LEARN ABOUT BAPTISM?

- Baptism is 'in the name of Jesus Christ'.
- Baptism is for every believer.
- Baptism is connected to repentance - which includes the very early stages of trust.
- Baptism is connected to the experience of God's forgiveness. Beware, this does not teach that baptism saves, as some wrongly take it.
- Baptism is connected to the experience of the Spirit.

FAQ ABOUT BAPTISM

QUESTION 1

I WAS BAPTIZED AS AN INFANT DO I NEED TO BE RE-BAPTIZED?

This is an excerpt from this message - <https://bit.ly/20jSmxW>

Good question. You should only be baptized in the name of Jesus once, because you can only be saved once. It's the same with marriage – just one ceremony for one marriage.

But here's the thing – and take a breath because I say this out of honour for God's Word: I am not so sure that your infant baptism was in fact a baptism that the Scripture recognizes.

I am sure that your infant baptism was very special to your parents, but let's be honest, it wasn't that special for you – because you can't even remember it!

I know many churches teach infant baptism. They go back a long way. We know that as early as the 3rd century it was practiced. We're not trying to pick a fight with those churches. It's just that we as pastors are accountable to God to teach God's Word to God's people – and we don't see infant baptism in the Scriptures. We argue that the tradition doesn't go back far enough – it doesn't go back to first century Christianity.

I already said that there are some key aspects to a good initiation into

Christ-following: faith in Jesus, repentance and baptism, the experience of the Spirit. And I said, sometimes the order is varied in Acts – some people in Acts experienced Spirit-baptism before water-baptism.

But that's the only flex we see. Always, always, always in the book of Acts a person first hears and believes the Gospel, and then and only then do they get baptized. Those churches which teach infant baptism, get the order wrong. They say baptize the little baby now, and one day hopefully they will come to faith in Jesus, and at that point this baptism will take on a new meaning. It's an interesting teaching, but it's not biblical.

THESE CHURCHES OFTEN GIVE 2 ARGUMENTS:

1) There is the circumcision argument. They say that in the Old Testament, people would circumcise their babies – as the sign of the family’s faith. Now baptism is the new version of circumcision. Again, a fascinating argument. But not a biblical one. Study Colossians 2 carefully and you will see that in fact Old Testament circumcision pointed to how one day God would circumcise the hearts of believers by the Holy Spirit, not to water-baptism.

2) There is the ‘households’ argument. A few times in Acts, we’re told whole households were baptized. Remember the Philippian jailor’s baptism – we’re told his household was baptized along with him. But remember what it said before: ‘They spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house.’ To say that there was a 2 year old in the mix is an argument from silence. A 2 year old would not be able to hear the gospel and put faith in Jesus. (That’s why in Common Ground we seldom baptize anyone younger than 6 or 7, unless they clearly evidence a comprehension of the major aspects of the Gospel and have personal faith in Jesus and they beg to be baptized in obedience to God’s Word [and not because we said they should]).

How do babies get baptized in these infant baptism churches anyway?

They get a sprinkling of water. Baptism comes from the Greek word ‘baptismo’ which means to plunge, immerse, engulf – like an Ouma Rusk in coffee. Sprinkling hardly does justice to that word. Remember that we’re told the Ethiopian ‘went down into the water and Philip baptized him.’ Dunked.

What do we do with our babies in this church then?

We dedicate them to Jesus, in the hope that one day they will dedicate themselves to Jesus too, and be baptized as a next step. Jesus himself was dedicated by Joseph and Mary.

Back to the question:

Do I need to be re-baptized? If you were sprinkled as an infant, no need to insult what happened there. It was meaningful to many no doubt – perhaps the prayers prayed for you there even played a part in you later coming to faith. But sprinkling someone who does not yet understand the Gospel isn’t a biblical baptism. I’m not suggesting you get baptized again. I am suggesting you get baptized for the very first time – in the biblical sense.

QUESTION 2

WHAT IF I HAVE FOLLOWED JESUS FOR YEARS WITHOUT BAPTISM – IS IT TOO LATE NOW?

Imagine that you got married, but that for whatever reason you didn't exchange rings. Just the vows but no rings. Years into your marriage, you find out that the other person really wishes that you did give them a ring. What do you do? Do you say, 'It's too late honey! We should have done that earlier. No ring for you.' Of course not. You swallow your pride and you buy them a ring. If you love this person it's never too late to do what you should have done long ago.

Someone in Common Ground had followed Jesus for years and had not been baptized. One of his excuses was he saw the value of new believers being baptized, but believed it was pointless years in to following Jesus. Eventually he ran out of excuses. And he took the plunge. I will never forget his words afterwards: 'It's like all these years there has been this smudge on my windscreen of faith. I got used to it. The baptism-issue. But it's gone now. I can see clearly now. But the best is that, by obeying his word, I feel the Spirit more. Why on earth did I delay something that wonderful?'

Are you a new believer?

Maybe even today you are trusting in Jesus for the first time. Maybe you have been on the faith-road for a while. Either way, let me end with Ananias' words: *'What are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name.'* (Acts 22:19)

QUESTION 3

WHAT DOES COMMON GROUND BELIEVE ABOUT BAPTISM?

WHAT COMMON GROUND BELIEVES ABOUT BAPTISM

Getting baptised in water is the first step of obedience for a person who has committed their 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*, and *Acts 10:48*. We do not get baptised because we feel like it, but rather because we take Christ's leadership seriously.

WHAT BAPTISM SYMBOLISES...

The baptismal 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 how we visibly reflect what has happened on the inside.

The baptismal waters are like a bath.

In *Acts 22:16* it says "*Get up, be baptised and wash your sins away, calling on his name.*" Baptism displays the spiritual cleansing from the guilt of sin that we have received as a result of Jesus' death.

The baptismal 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' that rejected and ignored Christ's leadership over your life. Baptism is a break from your sinful past.

The baptismal waters are like a maternity ward.

Baptism also reflects how we were 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*).

THERE ARE THREE COMMON REASONS CHRISTIANS OFTEN GIVE FOR NOT BEING BAPTISED

1. I will do it when I feel God telling me to do it.

We agree totally! But has not God already told us to do it in the Scriptures? When we wait for some personal message from God to do it, we dangerously elevate our own thoughts and emotions over what God has spoken so clearly in his Word. Isn't that a kind of disobedience?

2. I see my confirmation, catechism, or some other moment as my public profession of faith, and thus don't need to 'duplicate' this with baptism.

It is true that many believers stood up in front of a congregation and made a public profession of faith, often with much intent and sincerity. While this moment is often very meaningful and God-honouring, it is not what Scripture calls us to in terms of baptism. Confirmation/catechism are a membership moment in front of a congregation, indicating that somebody is ready and informed around the matters of membership. Baptism is something different - a profession of having entrusted your life to Jesus, and becoming a believer.

3. I agree with what you're saying about believer's baptism, but my parents would be really upset if I got baptised again.

Although we understand the complexity of this reality and we are not in any way trying to cause relational strain, nor undermine or disrespect others' beliefs, the reality is that Christ's call to be first in your life will result in many sacrifices and tough moments of followership. In Matthew 10: 37 Jesus says "Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me." We would encourage you to sensitively but courageously consider the call to follow Christ in obedience.

GETTING BAPTISED

Once you have repented of your sins and put your trust in Jesus to give you the gift of salvation, we suggest you speak to your Life Group leader or an elder about getting baptised. It can happen anywhere, at any time, and any Christian can baptise you. It is also a great opportunity to invite friends and family. In Common Ground, people sometimes choose to be baptised in or after a Sunday meeting, whilst others choose to invite friends and family and Life Group members to another moment that they organise.

Usually, before getting baptised, a person should be prepared to give some basic background to their story of coming to faith, simply as a helpful profession of their faith commitment to Christ before those present. This proclamation usually includes: the circumstances leading to faith, briefly describing the moment or journey of placing faith in Jesus, and the difference he's already made to the person being baptised. Most importantly, however, this profession includes a clear declaration of faith that Christ is the Lord and King of the person's life.

QUESTION 4

WHAT MAKES BAPTISM LEGITIMATE?

For a number of reasons, some people may wonder if their baptism was legitimate. Some wonder because their baptism was such a long time ago. Others wonder because they had a long lapse of faith after their baptism. Others tend to confuse an important 'coming of age' ceremony with baptism and wonder if it was or was not their baptism. So what makes for a so-called legitimate baptism?

There are essentially only 2 ingredients for a baptism to have the basics of what scriptures describes:

1. Faith in Christ.

Baptism isn't about personal moral performance, but trust in Christ as saviour and king - before much or any transformation happens. One should not get baptised by coercion or social momentum, without faith in Jesus' work on the cross. This does not mean that a person has perfect understanding of all the complexities of the gospel, but rather genuine belief that Jesus is who he says he is in his word, and did what the word says he did on the cross.

2. Submersion under water in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

As mentioned, sprinkling doesn't seem to do justice to the original word 'baptizo'. A real submersion by another believer who baptises in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit is the second ingredient for baptism.

Baptism is legitimate when; a person is submerged* under water because of their obedience and faith in Christ, who he says he is in his word, and that he did what the word says he did on the cross.

One need not get baptised a second time if the above two ingredients were present. Rather, our baptism should be a reminder of God's covenant commitment to his children, even when they doubt.

Once baptised, a person may have had a lapse of faith at some time. This too should not serve as a reason for a second baptism. Their baptism should rather serve as a wonderful reminder of the fact that it's Christ's faithfulness, and not our faith, that saves us. When Christ saves us by faith, we may wonder, doubt or even run, but Christ remains faithful. We need not get baptised again if we were once saved, just like we ought not to ask our parents to call us their kids; even if we doubt them at times - our identity remains.

[*As a church we believe in, love, and are committed to doing full immersion baptisms, but the amount of water/ mode of baptism is not what makes the baptism real. If someone gets baptised as an adult, after becoming a believer, and had water poured over them, this is still a form of baptism. It is not the mode of baptism that is important, but rather a genuine faith which makes it spiritually significant.]

QUESTION 5

IS BAPTISM A PREREQUISITE FOR MEMBERSHIP?

The short answer is: no. However, although baptism is not a prerequisite for membership, at Common Ground we do see it as vital to following Jesus and obeying his word and the commands therein. As leaders, we will always teach and encourage all followers of Jesus to get baptised in obedience to Christ - even if they have been following Christ for some time.

Although baptism is not a prerequisite for membership, there are a few things worth noting:

1. The journey.

The leaders in Common Ground will always encourage and teach all Christ-followers to get baptised as adult believers for as long as they are members of the church. Despite the meaningful moments of christening and or confirmation that one may have had, we will continue to encourage this step.

2. The Word.

Baptism is motivated by obedience to Christ and his Word. Therefore, the leadership finds conviction for adult believer's baptism, not primarily in past experiences or even positive sentimental feelings, but from what Christ has told us to do, and what he has modelled to us. Therefore, discussions with leaders on the topic will never discard the significance and meaning of previous commitment experiences, but will always revert back to finding conviction in what Scripture teaches.

3. The leaders.

Although baptism is not a prerequisite for membership, it does have implications for some forms of leadership involvement within Common Ground. Because the word of God is central to leadership unity and vision in our church, and baptism is central in Scripture, there will be limitations to leadership involvement for those unwilling to get baptised. That will need to be worked out with your congregational leadership team. (This will be dealt with relationally rather than with a form of generic church policy.)

3. WE DELIVER THE GOSPEL IN MISSION



FILL IN THE BLANKS

Mission involves introducing people to Jesus. This is the mandate given to the church by Jesus. It involves 2 things:

1. We practice missional _____.

There is no greater thrill than being instrumental in another person's journey to faith. What does 'missional me' look like? It is very simple:

- _____: since the Gospel to spread along the lines of relationships, we are far more likely to reach people who trust and respect us – which has to do with friendship.
- _____: Ask people what they believe. Listen, don't just talk. Share your story of how Jesus became real for you, and the difference he makes. There are more ideas on the next page.
- _____: Invite people to events and especially to Sunday meetings. Tell them that this church is surprisingly non-religious and refreshing. Invite them to topics that might interest them.

2. We practice missional _____.

One of our secret 'herbs and spices' of Common Ground is that every Sunday we seek to be 'Double Impact'. By this we mean that we try – difficult as it may be – to both build up believers and reach out to new people in the same meeting, every meeting!

HOW TO SHARE YOUR FAITH

Tim Keller, who leads a congregation of 5000 in Manhattan, says that there are four major ways to dialogue with people far from God.

He lists potential aspects in each. Though his list might sound technical, it's quite natural and organic in the way it happens – all in the context of a friendship. It also starts with the simpler less challenging ones and over time moves to the more challenging ones.

FIRST: ONE-ON-ONE INFORMALLY

- If they are a new friend let them know of your Christian faith by simply mentioning church attendance or Christian beliefs in casual conversation.
- Ask them about their beliefs and experiences with faith and church and simply listen appreciatively and sympathetically. Try to understand where they are on their journey. Don't share your ideas till you have heard theirs.
- When they are struggling, listen sympathetically to their life's challenges and mention that you will pray regularly for them; if appropriate even asking if you can pray for them there and then.
- Vulnerably share a difficult personal issue you have and mention in passing that your faith helps you by giving you strength and granting you forgiveness, but that you would value their prayers or help.
- Share your God-story: a brief testimony of your Christian experience, how you came to place your faith in him, and the difference he has made in your life. Did Christ give you a peace or joy you never had before? Then say so. Did Christ help you through a terrible loss or difficulty? Then say so. Did Christ save your marriage? Then say so. Did Christ give you a sense of purpose and mission? Then say so.

SECOND: ONE-ON-ONE INTENTIONALLY

- Familiarize yourself with an explanation of the Gospel such as the one over the page – and share it in your own words, trusting the Spirit to help you emphasize the parts that will be most impacting to the person.
- Offer them a book (like Tim Keller’s ‘The Reason for God’), or a link to an audio talk (our website has many) or a video (like one of Louis Giglio’s DVDs on the universe or suffering) and invite them to discuss their reactions with you after they have read or listened or watched it.
- Ask them if they have objections to the gospel. Listen respectfully and affirm that it’s a good question. If you don’t have a good answer, admit so, and look to our website (Tough Questions banner on the home page) or speak to one of the pastors for answers.
- Invite them to regularly read a part of the Bible together with you, preferably one of the Gospels, and then discuss the character of Jesus.

THIRD: PROVIDE AN EXPERIENCE OF CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

- Invite friends to situations or activities where they meet some of your believer-friends who you think they will hit it off with.
- Invite friends to venues where they hear the gospel communicated and discussed such as a Sunday meeting (we’re a church where you’re welcome to belong long before you believe), or an Alpha course (with over 30 million people having done it, it has great credibility).

FOURTH: INVITE THEM TO TRUST IN JESUS

- If they are interested in becoming a Christ-Follower, guide them in a simple prayer, such as the one at the end of ‘The Story’ which starts on the next page.
- When a person does respond to Christ do all you can to support them through the post-decision uncertainty that tends to come to all – give them an Ignite book and a Bible. Pray for them. Invite them to your life group. Introduce them to other Christians. Pick them up on your way to church.

THE STORY

EPILOGUE: YOUR STORY

There are almost 8 billion of us. That's 8 billion unique stories.

Yet, as different as we all are, some of the same themes weave through all our lives: love, betrayal, separation, promise, sacrifice, forgiveness and reunion for example.

WHY IS THIS?

Have you ever wondered if there is a much bigger Story playing out – one that makes sense of your story, of every story?

THERE IS!

It's God's Story - a story of love and betrayal, sacrifice and reunion. Discover how your story fits into his...

CHAPTER 1: LOVE

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. (Genesis 1:1) He is real. He's alive and well, ablaze with energy. He's large and in charge. He made it all, knows it all, owns it all and cares about it all.

The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. As high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love. (Psalm 103:8)

Guess what part of creation he loves most. That's right - he loves us most. But why?

It's because God created us in *his image*. (*Genesis 1:27*) As humans, we're unique works of art reflecting the image of our Creator: we think, we choose, we create, and we were designed to love and be loved—by God and each other. Just as the earth needs the sun, so we need God. God made us to find our meaning and happiness in Him. He made us for himself. But we look for love in all the wrong places, don't we?

CHAPTER 2: BETRAYAL

Instead of looking to God to complete and rescue us, we have betrayed him by looking to things such as money, approval, comfort, romance, thrills and success instead. *We have exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator. (Romans 1:25)*

Betraying God, we break his heart. One Scripture says *The Lord saw how great man's wickedness had become. The Lord was grieved and his heart was filled with pain. (Genesis 6:5-6)*

Not only that, our broken relationship with God has led us to the breakdown of all relationships: people with other people (selfishness, racism, violence), people with nature (waste, pollution) and people with themselves (shame, fear and emptiness).

In each of us is a God-shaped vacuum that God alone can fill. That's why we feel so empty sometimes, craving something more. We were made for more than this world can offer.

CHAPTER 3: SEPARATION

Most of us are not HIV-positive. But we all have a condition with far worse consequences – we're SIN-positive! Many times we have sinned against God in thought, word and deed. Just as when someone commits a crime a penalty must be paid, so there is a penalty for violating God's standards. The wages of sin is death. (Romans 6:23) The penalty is spiritual death – being separated from God.

Judgement Day is real, and coming. Your life of sin means *you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgement will be revealed. (Romans 2:5)* Your entire life - every thought, word and deed - will be exposed and judged by God. All will be brought to the light. We get away with nothing.

Because God is perfectly holy, *we will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord. (2 Thessalonians 1:8,9)*

Separated from God and all that is good. Forever. That's hell.

CHAPTER 4: PROMISE

Is there any hope for our broken lives and world?

Only one. It's the grace of God.

We betrayed God, but he did not abandon us. Long before Jesus came, God promised again and again that he would one day win us back by sending a Rescuer. Here is one such promise: *The Lord himself will give you a sign: the virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel (which means 'God with us'). (Isaiah 7:14)*

God has made good on his promise! 2000 years ago, God sent Jesus to this planet to save and restore us. The unique Son of God became one of us. The God-Man lived perfectly, spoke truth, modelled love and healed broken bodies and lives. He said he came to bring *freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed. (Luke 4:18)* He offered life in all its fullness and a whole new path for us to walk in.

CHAPTER 5: SACRIFICE

On the cross, Christ sacrificed everything. For you.

He loves you so much he would rather die than live without you - which is what he did! He proved his undying love for us all by dying on our behalf. Christ died for our sins once and for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. (1 Peter 3:18) God took your sin and the sin of the whole world, and put it on his blood-soaked Son, punishing it there.

Then a great exchange happened.

Because he was shut out from the Father's presence, you are welcome in.

Because he was broken, you can be made whole.

Because he was nailed down, you can go free.

Because he was cursed, you can be blessed.

Because he died, you can live.

CHAPTER 6: FORGIVENESS

Do you know what Jesus cried out moments before dying?

| *"It is finished!" (John 19:30)*

What had he completed? Answer: our forgiveness and acceptance by God. We could not save ourselves, so he saved us.

It is by grace you have been saved, not by works – so that no one can boast. (Ephesians 2:8) Religions wrongly teach that we can earn our salvation through our good deeds. But none of us is good enough. It's not good people who get to God - it's forgiven people. The religions of the world say, 'do, do, do'. But Jesus says done!

The only place we sinners can reunite with God is on our knees, at the foot of the cross. There we find that *as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our sins from us. (Psalm 103:12)*

CHAPTER 7: LIFE

Three days later, the Son rose from the dead. Death had been defeated. Shafts of unstoppable hope dawned upon our planet.

Ever since then, God is ready to give anyone *new birth into living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. (1 Peter 1:3)*. He wants to free those who *all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death (Hebrews 2:15)*.

When we turn to the Risen One, we come alive to the Living God. His Spirit comes to live inside of us. The winds of heaven start to blow through the deepest chambers of our heart.

Most wonderfully, we're given a forever-relationship with our Creator. *Though you have not seen him, you love him ... and are filled with inexpressible joy. (1 Peter 1:8)* The door into his throne-room has swung open. We can be up close and personal with the invisible God. Anytime we want. Wow!

CHAPTER 8: REUNION

In Christ our past is forgiven. Our present has purpose. But best of all, our future is heaven. *Look! God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away. (Revelations 21:3-4)*

God's story will reach its high point when Jesus returns to remove all that is evil and heal all that is broken. He will bring about a whole new world. There we will

enjoy God, each other and our immortal bodies forever. All that this world was meant to be, but could not be because of our sin, that world will be. *What no eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no human mind has conceived – God has prepared for those who love him. [1 Corinthians 2:9]* So much to look forward to, but no need to wait...

CHAPTER 9: COMING HOME

To all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God. (John 1:12) God's arms are open wide. He invites you to come home to him. Right here. Right now. Can you feel his love drawing you like a magnet?

Why not come home? This could be the moment your story collides with his! Will you turn to him, and trust in him? *Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. (Romans 10:13)*

If you want to put your faith in Christ as your Lord and Saviour, don't wait another minute. Get alone. On your knees. And pray the following simple words. He listens...

'Jesus, I believe you are the Son of God who came to rescue me. I want to know you personally. You died on the cross for my sins to bring me back to God. Be my Saviour now. Forgive me. Make me your child, part of your family now and forever. I believe you are risen from the dead, alive as Lord. Live in me by your Spirit. Take control of my life. As I learn to trust and follow you from now on, reshape me to be the person you created me to be.'

FIRST STEPS

If you prayed that prayer, welcome home. The adventure begins. Like all relationships, your walk with God will need to grow and mature. Scripture gives some ways to start growing it. Start doing them right away...

- Daily **celebrate God's unfailing, undeserved love.** It's the best thing you have ever had! *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)*

- **Find spiritual community** in a church you can call home, and with some Christian friends. *Don't stop meeting together as some are in the habit of doing, but encourage each other. (Hebrews 10:25)*
- **Start talking to God**, who is now your friend and Father, about anything and everything. *Pray on all occasions with all kinds of prayers. (Ephesians 6:18)*
- **Tell respected Christian friends and relatives about your decision.** In fact, don't be shy to tell everyone you've decided to follow Jesus. *We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. (2 Corinthians 5:20)*
- **Read the Bible daily.** *Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path. (Psalm 119:105)*
- Your relationship with God is **based on his Word**, not your feelings. Feelings rise and fall, but God's promises are unshakable. *Live by faith, not by sight. (2 Corinthians 5:7)*
- Though there may be some immediate changes in your life, you need to **form new habits** of goodness with the help of the Holy Spirit. This takes time. When you fail, receive Christ's forgiveness and get back on your feet. *God will forgive you and cleanse you from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9)*
- **Don't expect that life will become easier** nor that everyone will support your faith. *Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. (1 Peter 4:12, 13)*
- **Accept your identity in Christ.** *If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, and the new has come! (2 Corinthians 5:17)* Write down the date below, so you don't forget when you turned your life over to Christ...

WHERE ARE WE GOING?

In February 2017 when we celebrated Common Ground's 20 year birthday, we shared our 5 year vision for the future.

We're passionately committed, more than ever, to serving our city in 5 ways in the next 5 years.

TOGETHER WE WILL MULTIPLY...

CHRIST-FOLLOWERS

Let's reach, baptize, integrate and disciple 100s, even 1000s of new people.

CONGREGATIONS

Let's trust God for 10 more access points, across the breadth of the city, for people to experience the life, fame and message of Jesus.

COMPASSION AND JUSTICE

Let's ask God to coach our hearts and lives to minister, in partnership with Common Good, to the broken pockets of our city – especially the smallest of kids, those wilting in under-functioning schools, and those crushed by unemployment.

CULTURAL RENEWAL

Let each of us become more envisioned and equipped to take Jesus' ways and wisdom to work and into society, turning our professions and life roles into callings, so that each of us becomes a strand in the rethreading of our city's culture.

CHURCH STRENGTHENING

Since we're a small part of Christ's body in Cape Town, let us for the sake of the city and gospel, find ways to engage, learn from and serve pastors and churches outside of Common Ground, especially those in under-resourced areas.

REDEMPTION MINISTRY

Redemption Groups are small groups that dig deep into difficult and seldomly discussed areas of life, caring for people who are facing difficult and painful periods in their lives. We usually run these groups in the 2nd and 4th terms, depending on demand.

Whether you are struggling with relationships, living with loss, working through a divorce, dealing with abuse, trying to understand who you are in Christ, trying to overcome an addiction of any kind or love someone through it, living with a chronic illness or looking for break through into new areas in your walk with God, we would like to journey alongside you.

During the year we run various courses that are facilitated by people who have travelled some of these difficult journeys themselves and who are now ready to support, encourage and journey with you.

Please see below for the different Redemption Groups that we offer:

- Beyond Abuse
- Living with Loss
- Breaking Ground
- Recovery from Divorce and Separation
- Dealing with Depression and Anxiety
- Living with Chronic Illness
- Steps to Recovery – Addiction Support Group
- Tuesday Family Support Group

To find out more about these Redemption Ministries please go to commonground.co.za/redemption-groups

Praise be to the God and father of our lord Jesus Christ, the father of all compassion and the God of all comfort; who comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we have received from God. (2 Cor 1 3-4)



DNA PART 2

COMMUNITY: DOING LIFE TOGETHER



FILL IN THE BLANKS

4 WAYS TO BUILD COMMUNITY:

1. Meet people by _____ longer on Sundays.

Two questions to ask someone you meet:

- 1) How long have you been coming to Common Ground?
- 2) What brought you?

2. Use your _____ as God's secret weapon.

3. Stretch your relational _____.

4. Reconcile _____ relationships.

HOW TO RECONCILE BROKEN RELATIONSHIPS

'Reconciliation = skilfully restoring broken or strained relationships'

Relationships can break and become strained. Sometimes it happens when another person wrongs you. Sometimes it happens when you wrong another. Sometimes no intentional wrong was done – perhaps there was a misunderstanding, or perhaps a lack of communication and effort has caused the connection to decline. What are we to do when this happens? Listen to two things Jesus said...

Matthew 5:9 (Jesus said,) "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God."

Jesus calls us to be peacemakers. It means that we actively pursue authentic, not superficial, harmony with people. The reason I say 'authentic not superficial' harmony is because we often settle for a kind of pseudo-peace where underlying tensions and conflicts go unaddressed. Sometimes being a peacemaker will entail being a peacebreaker. We may have to expose some painful issues to bring about real peace. We need to seek reconciliation between us and others, and between conflicting parties.

Elsewhere the Bible says it like this: *'If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.'* (Rom 12:18). This echoes the words of Jesus. Peace and harmony is something that we need to take responsibility for. We need to live at peace with everyone – as far as it depends on us.

Wonderfully Jesus promises that as we give ourselves to being peacemakers, people will discern that we really are agents of the God of peace. We will be perceived as God's children as we reflect his peacemaking character and intention in a conflict-filled world.

Matthew 5: 23 (Jesus said,) "Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, 24 leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to that person; then come and offer your gift."

See how Jesus tells us to deal with someone close to you whom you have hurt or offended. Jesus refers to ancient Jewish life where bringing an offering to the temple was of extreme importance. But he tells them that even more important than ritual faithfulness is looking after one's relationships. There is nothing more important and urgent than doing all you can to reconcile with people who feel hurt or offended by you.

HERE'S SEVEN BRIEF KEYS TO SKILFULLY RECONCILING BROKEN OR STRAINED RELATIONSHIPS.

1. Talk to God before talking to the person. Discuss the problem with God first. When you do this he can change your heart. And perhaps he can change the other person as you pray for them. As David did in the Psalms, ventilate vertically. Take your hurt and anger to him. Tell him what you feel. Cry if need be. Also, be sure to pray, 'God – help me not to look to this person to satisfy my deepest needs. That's your job.' When we look to people to make us happy, we end up setting ourselves up for far greater agony and disappointment when they let us down. Also, ask God to help you forgive the person.

2. Talk to the person not to others. What do most of us do when we're hurt? We talk to others about it. That only makes it worse, doesn't it? Jesus, in Matthew 18:15, tells us to talk to the person before talking to others: 'If a fellow believer hurts you go and tell him – work it out between the two of you. If he listens, you've saved the friendship. But if he doesn't, take one or two others along so the presence of witnesses will keep things honest.' By the way, when a person speaks to you about how another person hurt them, ask them if they've talked to the person yet. If not, it may be best to say, 'Please stop – talk to them first. That's what Jesus tells you to do in *Matthew 18:15*.' Proverbs says *'Fire goes out for lack of fuel, so tensions dissipate when gossip stops.'*

3. Always take the initiative to see the person. Even if the other person is more in the wrong, Jesus tells you to take the initiative – and make time to talk with the person about the problem or conflict. The longer you wait, the more complicated the situation often becomes. In the warmest way possible say, 'Any chance I can come round. There's some stuff that I'd love for us to talk about.' Face to face is best. My experience is that trying to talk over the phone or by email only worsens the situation. Choose a good place, and make sure that you're both at your best when you talk. A rushed 30-minute lunch break won't do.

4. Listen more than you talk. Use your ears more than your mouth. You may be hurt, but as you listen to the other person's feelings, you will realize they've been hurt too. Listen non-defensively. Don't react. Just listen. Sympathize with their feelings.

5. Confess your part in the conflict. The Bible reminds us that if we claim we're without sin, we deceive ourselves. Instead of focusing on the wrong the other person did, focus on the wrong you did. Humbly apologize. Don't make excuses. As you do, it makes it easier for the other person to apologize. Ask for forgiveness.

6. Attack the problem, not the person. At some point you may need to speak about what the other person did that offended or hurt you. Think carefully how you do this, because if you come across in an attacking way, you'll do even more harm. The Bible says, 'Don't let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouth, but only that which is helpful for building the other person up.' As a general rule never say, 'You always...'. This will get their backs up. Rather say, 'When you did this (and be specific about what they did), this is how it affected me. This is how it made me feel.'

7. Aim at reconciliation not total resolution. Reconciliation focuses on the relationship. Resolution focuses on the issue. Even after speaking, you might not agree on the issue, but make sure you're reconciled to the person. It's unrealistic to think that all issues can be resolved. Perhaps say these words, 'I can live with us not seeing eye to eye on the issue. Perhaps after some time we will. But I want you to know that my relationship matters to me a lot. Let's stay arm-in-arm even when we don't see everything eye-to-eye.'

So that's the third building block: reconciliation. But there is one critical part of reconciliation I have left out, because it deserves its own focus – it's the fourth building block...

UNDERSTANDING OUR COMMUNITY'S LEADERSHIP

Remember your leaders who have spoken the Word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith. (Hebrews 13:7)

Have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority, because they keep watch over you as those who must give an account. (Hebrews 13:17)

In the New Testament, there are 2 kinds of leaders in a local church:

1. _____

2. _____

The role elders and deacons can play in your life:

1. _____ and exit the church through them.

2. Trust them to _____ the church.

3. _____ their care and input.

4. If need be, be open to being _____

DISCIPLESHIP: MATURING IN CHRIST

Just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness. [Colossians 2:6-7]



FILL IN THE BLANKS

Four habits to grow as a disciple...

1. Come every _____ you're in town.
2. Daily read and reflect on the _____.
3. Maybe _____ a Group of 3 or 4.
(See page 47 for more)
4. Metabolize God's Word into _____.

WHAT IS A 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 Saviour 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)

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 savoured, 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 behaviour 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

GROUPS OF 3

WHAT IS A GROUP OF 3?

- It is 3 people (although continued reference is made to groups of 3, sometimes this can extend to 4 people) who meet to encourage, challenge and hold each other accountable to the critical priorities of every Christ-follower: 1) feasting on Jesus, 2) fighting their sin, and 3) fulfilling their mission.
- The group commits to meet at least every other week for at least an hour to answer some key questions.
- Usually these groups gather spiritual peers, but they can also be a great way for seasoned believers to disciple 1 or 2 less experienced ones, while still benefiting themselves.
- Groups are same-gender. Men sometimes call their groups Fight Clubs.

WHY START A GROUP OF 3?

- **Scripture reveals the power of two or three teaming together tightly:** *'Where two or three gather in my name, there I am with them' (Matt 18:20). 'Two is better than one. If one falls down, the other can pick them up. A chord of three is not easily broken.'* (Eccl 4:9-11) *'One man chases a thousand, but two can put ten thousand to flight' (Deut 32:30).*
- **Sustained change requires accountability.** Ever tried to form a habit like losing weight or running on your own? No matter how committed you are, the odds are against you. But if you join a Weight Watchers or find a running partner, it's much easier. Same with Christ-following: alone we likely fall or stagnate, but together we likely stand and progress in our walk with Christ. This is because encouraging, authentic and accountable relationships are pivotal to thriving as a Christ-follower: *'Encourage one another daily, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness' (Heb 3:12).*

HOW GROUPS OF 3 COMPLEMENT LIFE GROUPS

Both Life Groups and Groups of 3 help us to feast on Jesus, fight sin and fulfil our mission. Life Groups, however, are best for 1) integrating new people into our faith community, 2) building wider relationships with a family of believers, 3) taking seriously and applying what God is saying to us as a church through the Sunday preaching, and 4) putting ourselves under the care and oversight of pastors who team with Life Group leaders. Groups of 3 are best for deeper accountability and more focused discipleship. In summary, they complement not compete with each other – especially when Groups of 3 form within Life Groups.

WHY WE FEAST ON JESUS, FIGHT OUR SIN AND FULFIL OUR MISSION

- **Feasting on Jesus is our greatest privilege.** Jesus declared, *'I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry'* (John 6:35). It is the secret to fighting our sin: we don't only conquer sin by working hard to change our actions, but by trusting Christ to change our affections. In the process, we lose our taste for sin and grow our taste for Jesus. It is also the secret to fulfilling our mission: We can only contagiously commend to others what we ourselves cherish and enjoy. Only as we remain in him can we be fruitful.
- **Fighting our sin is a kill-or-be-killed affair:** *'If you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live'* (Rom 8:13).
- **Fulfilling our mission is our God-prepared destiny:** *'We are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works which he prepared in advance for us to do'* (Eph 2:10). *'See to it that you complete the ministry you have received in the Lord'* (Col 4:17).

HOW WE FEAST ON JESUS

- By daily reading and reflecting on Scripture. (John 15:7)
- By thirsting and asking for the infilling of his Spirit. (John 7:37-39)
- By keeping company with him throughout our day. (Matt 11:28-30)
- By listening to what God is saying to and showing us. (Matt 4:4)

HOW WE FIGHT OUR SIN

- By identifying and addressing those areas of our life where we struggle to trust Christ. (Rom 14:23)
- By identifying and addressing the cracks that exist in our character and relationships. (Col 3:5-8)
- By identifying and addressing the God-substitutes we turn to for heart-deep satisfaction and security. (Jer 2:13)
- By confessing our sins to one another. (Jam 5:16)
- But mainly from drawing on the resources we have in Christ. (2 Pet 1:3-4)

HOW WE FULFIL OUR MISSION

- By loving and serving the people closest to us. (John 13:34)
- By strengthening our church (1 Pet 4:10), especially discipling newer believers. (Matt 28:19)
- By responding to injustice and poverty. (Isa 58:6-12)
- By integrating our faith into our work-life. (Gen 2:15)
- By building relationships with and reaching out to far-from-God people. (1 Thes 2:8)

SUGGESTED FORMAT FOR A GROUP OF 3 MEETING

Opening (5 min)

1. Briefly open in prayer.
2. Briefly share a high and low since we last met.

PART 1: FEAST ON JESUS (20 MIN)

1. What book(s) in the Bible have you been reading and reflecting on? What are the most significant 2 or 3 insights you have had, from which passages?
(Bibles open)
2. Since we met, when did you feel closest to Christ, most filled with his Spirit?
3. Have you had any success in keeping company with Christ throughout the day?
4. What has God been showing or saying to you?

PART 2: FIGHT YOUR SIN OR FULFIL YOUR MISSION (25 MIN)

Alternate between the two options each time you meet.

Meeting 1: Fight your sin.

1. In what area(s) of your life are you struggling to trust Christ?
2. Where are the cracks showing in your character and relationships?
3. Is Christ currently satisfying and securing the depths of you – or is there some God-substitute (a person, activity or thing) you're hoping will?
4. Where have you sinned or been seriously tempted lately? How often? What were the circumstantial and emotional triggers?
5. How do you plan on drawing on your resources in Christ to overcome these struggles, cracks, God-substitutes and sins?

Meeting 2: Fulfil your mission.

In what ways, if any, have you struggled to or has God helped you to:

1. Make the people closest to you feel loved and served?
2. Strengthen our church, and disciple newer believers?
3. Respond to injustice and poverty?
4. Integrate your faith into your work-life?
5. Build relationships with and reach out to far-from-God people?

Closing (10 min)

1. Anything you want us to hold you accountable for next time we meet?
(Someone to record these and to repeat in the following meeting)
2. Anything you want us to pray for?
3. 'Let's pray.'

TOP 12 TIPS FOR GROUPS OF 3

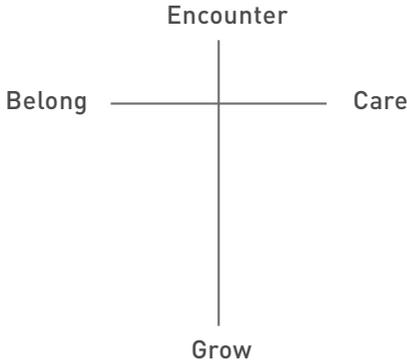
1. Choose one person to schedule meetings, and keep them on track.
Rotate this role.
2. Try meet over breakfasts, lunches or coffee. Put the dates in your calendars far in advance. It must be top priority.
3. Honour the time limitation of the meeting. On average, each question gets 5 minutes for all 3 to share. Think through your answers before meeting.

4. Enjoy friendship time beyond these meetings. Be there for each other in tough times.
5. Remember accountability is something given, not taken. It is not the job of the group to demand you walk you in the light. It's yours to give.
6. Be patient with yourself. If you're new to whole-hearted Christ-following, you may be overwhelmed by how out of shape you are spiritually. Hang in there. Over time, being in this group will get you in shape.
7. Honour confidentiality
8. If need be, steer each other to additional help beyond the group.
9. Sit under weekly anointed biblical preaching which fans into flame the 3 priorities around which the group gathers: feasting on Jesus, fighting sin, fulfilling mission.
10. Try out daily accountability (via Whatsapp). For example, everyone could share a single verse or insight that stood out to them in their Bible reading.
11. Try out journaling – start recording those things you believe God is saying to or showing you. Bring these journals to the meetings.
12. Help start new groups by spreading word, or by letting a 4th person join your group for no longer than a few times, then
 - 1) encourage them to start their own or
 - 2) multiply into 2 groups.

Re-read these 12 tips as a group from time to time.

LIFE GROUPS

LIFE AT THE INTERSECTION OF THE CROSS



FILL IN THE BLANKS

WHAT ARE SMALL GROUPS FOR?

Life groups are for _____.

They devoted themselves to ... fellowship. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts. (Acts 2:42, 46)

Life groups are for _____.

All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. (Acts 2:44-45)

Life groups are for _____.

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching. (Acts 2:42)

Life groups are for _____ Jesus.

They devoted themselves to ... prayer. They (were) praising God. (Acts 2:42,47)

THE HOST STRATEGY

EVERY YEAR, COMMON GROUND RUNS A 6-WEEK CAMPAIGN THAT:

- Provides a 6-week set of video-teaching on a subject to be shown in life groups. (We preach on the same subject on Sundays, although covering different material.)
- Launches lots of new groups.
- Revitalizes existing groups.
- Attracts lots of new people to groups and Sundays.

As for launching new groups, we encourage people to start (HOST) their own temporary groups. This is how we put this idea out there:

“CONSIDER WHETHER YOU’RE ABLE TO HOST (HEART, OPEN, SERVE, TURN ON) A TEMPORARY LIFE GROUP DURING THIS 6 WEEKS:

1. Do you have a **heart for people**? Do you have some far-from-God friends or family members who, if you invited them to a meal and a short DVD, would possibly come?
2. Would you be able to **open your home**?
3. Would you be able to **serve a snack** or a meal?
4. Can you **turn on a screen** and play the video for the night – followed by asking a set of questions we will provide for you on the training night beforehand?

COMMON GOOD

LIVING
SOCIAL
JUSTICE

Common Good was founded by Common Ground Church in 2005 to respond to poverty and injustice in Cape Town, and to mobilize, inspire and equip ordinary Capetonians and our church community to live out social justice in their everyday lives.

Common Good's vision is for a city where individuals and communities impacted by the inequality and injustice of our past, are flourishing physically, spiritually, economically and socially.

We seek to respond in three key areas: early life, education and employment. We believe that tackling the challenges associated with these areas has the greatest potential for positive impact among the most vulnerable and marginalised.

For more information on what we do on these initiatives, please see our website: www.commongood.org.za



THE LIVING WAGE

WHAT IS A LIVING WAGE?

A living wage is a wage that is high enough to meet a person's basic needs, so that they don't have to struggle to maintain a decent standard of living. In South Africa, the minimum wage is not even half this amount and, sadly, many workers are illegally exploited for less.

HOW DO WE RESPOND?

Turning the tide on poverty in our nation may seem like an impossible task, but we all have the potential to effect meaningful change in our personal spheres of influence. Starting in our own homes, with our own employees, we can begin to address the social injustices of our past.

Starting in our own homes, with our own employees, we can begin to address the social injustices of our past.

Unfortunately, it is human nature to use other people's behaviour as our benchmark. We quickly settle for 'the going rate' without considering whether it is sufficient to live on, and we forget that most of the working poor are the sole source of income for their families. The result is that we unwittingly contribute to an ongoing cycle of hardship instead of offering a way out.

We need to see that paying a living wage isn't an act of charity, it's justice. It requires a complete change of mind-set that says, "I am no more important or deserving than any other human being. I can gladly give out of what I have because I believe that God provides not only for me, but for my workers too". As followers of Jesus, this attitude is a significant part of our journey to righteous living, and a decision that brings joy and freedom to both the giver and the receiver.

WHY SHOULD WE PAY A LIVING WAGE?

The gospel reaches into every sphere of our lives, including our roles as employers. Our response to the living wage should therefore be informed by our faith. Prayerfully consider the following motivations, which are just four of the many reasons in favour of the living wage:

- **God is generous.** He delights in moving us from “how little can I pay?” to “how can I bless someone?”
- **Fair remuneration brings dignity.** All people are created equal and are worthy of a decent wage.
- **Exploitation is an injustice.** My preferred lifestyle should never come at the expense of another.
- **I can be a catalyst for change** and be part of helping a family break out of the cycle of poverty.

Pray that God would guide you as you seek to respond to this important issue. The following practical resources will also help you on your way.

WATCH & READ

- VIDEO: A Living Wage: Breaking the cycle of poverty, one family at a time

“My friend’s conviction to pay his employees a living wage had a huge impact on me. I realised that as a family we weren’t doing all we could for our domestic worker. We had to make some sacrifices, but it was a no-brainer.”

<https://bit.ly/2nn0UJa>

- The living wage as a biblical imperative

Isaiah 1:17 “Learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow’s cause.”

Also see James 5:1-6, 1 Thess 4:6, Jer 22:3, Prov 22:16

- One family’s journey to justice

How we came to pay a living wage by Nigel Branken

“I honestly believe, that paying a living wage to workers is not only just, but is probably the single most important thing we can do to address poverty and inequality in our country.”

bit.ly/2jDtOmm

- National stats and context

GroundUp: South Africa’s 5-million working poor by Gilad Isaacs

“... should we be satisfied with a status quo in which 41% of workers, working at least 35 hours a week, cannot lift themselves and their dependents out of poverty?”

bit.ly/2KGwllJ

- Answers to common points of criticism

11 Excuses people give for not paying a living wage

"If you truly value your domestic worker, but can't afford to pay her a decent salary, employ her for fewer days per week and give her the opportunity to earn more elsewhere."

bit.ly/2FPg7cx

DO THE NUMBERS

- Living wage calculator

Use this handy calculator to estimate what a living wage is for your employee(s). Everyone's circumstances are slightly different, so sit down with them and discuss their monthly financial needs.

<http://living-wage.co.za/>

MAKE THE CHANGE

- Ask tough questions

Ask yourself: Am I contributing to South Africa's poverty crisis by paying too little? Am I prepared to adjust my personal budget or lifestyle to ensure that my employee(s) are paid a living wage? Do I really believe that all people are created equal and deserve a fair wage?

- Take action

Have a frank conversation with your family and get everyone on board. If you can't afford the increase, what luxuries or privileges could you go without in order to free up the necessary finances? Then do it!

- Share your story

Tell others what you've learned. Share your convictions with them. Be a catalyst for change.

GENEROSITY: UNDERWRITE THE CAUSE OF CHRIST

The Gospel empowers tremendous generosity. We see this in something the Apostle Paul wrote to the Philippian church in Philippians 4.

Some background: Paul and his team were at work preaching the gospel and planting churches. These activities needed more than just the Holy Spirit's power. They also involved a lot of overheads. The workers needed to live. Venues needed to be hired. Travels involved costs. New churches required some full-time leadership which involved costs. And in every church, money was spent on the most financially desperate. If you didn't know this, sorry to be the one to break it to you ... God's work has always involved real financial costs! Of course, without the Holy Spirit we can't do a thing, but without the generosity of God's people, the spread of the Gospel is hampered...

Anyway, the church in Philippi had been very generous in underwriting the Gospel's advance through Paul and his team. He writes.... It was good of you to share in my troubles. Moreover, as you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel (and) even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid more than once when I was in need.

Notice that phrase 'in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel' – Paul is connecting their giving to their love for the Gospel. In fact earlier in the letter he commended their 'partnership in the Gospel' (1:5). They were not sending money to Paul out of their love for Paul, but out of their love for what Paul and his team were doing – advancing the Gospel and planting churches. Paul is grateful, of course, but next he goes on to teach us 4 amazing reasons for giving to God's work...

Not that I desire your (financial) gifts; what I desire is that more be credited to your account. (Phil 4:17)

1. Giving is an investment in eternity. God delights in our giving not because of what he gets from us, but because of what we get for our giving. See, Giving gets God's approval and reward. Using a financial metaphor, Paul speaks of our heavenly bank account. The more we give to the cause of Christ on earth, the

wealthier we get in heaven! Jesus once spoke of this as storing up treasure in heaven. Giving may feel sacrificial, but is it really? Giving is an investment in eternity! It is the single best use of our hard-earned cash! We are rewarded in eternity. And we will meet people in heaven who came to faith because of ministry efforts we underwrote! I guess that every Christian will get to heaven, and realize, I should have given more to the cause of Christ! A second thing, he wants them and us to know that ...

| *Your gifts are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God. (Phil 4:18)*

2. Giving is a form of worship. Worship is the offering of our lives to God in response to his grace toward us. Jesus poured out everything he had to make us his treasured possession. Now we treasure him by offering up everything we have and are –our prayers and praises, our heart and mind, our time and talents, and as we see here our money and possessions. There is a reason that we take up the offering at a similar time to the singing – it’s all worship. It’s all saying, ‘God you are worthy of everything I have and everything I am.’

Now look at this promise...

| *And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus. (Phil 4:19)*

Now we see how Paul is marrying God’s provision with our generosity. What comes first: the chicken or the egg? What comes first: God’s provision or our generosity? The answer is ... yes. They both come first and second.

3. God’s providing seed for giving. God provides so that we can give. Paul understood that these Christians had been provided for by God and were thus able to give. He didn’t think that most of them were flush - in 2 Cor 8 he mentions that they gave out of their poverty. But still they had something, and thus could give. Paul’s point is that whether you have a little or a lot of money, some of it should be given away. In fact Paul taught people that whenever God provides for you through your salary or any money that comes to you should be thought of as a combo of bread and seed. Bread, the part that meets your needs. Seed, the part that is to be given to Christ. Listen to how he puts this in 2 Cor 9: 10-11...

He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. You will be enriched in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion. (2 Cor 9:10-11)

So God provides through my salary or whatever provides the seed of my giving. But wait, it goes both ways (like the chicken and egg) ...

4. Giving attracts God's provision. In verse 19, God shows us that as we underwrite the cause of Christ, we become eligible for God's provision. That's what the word 'And' is all about. 'And God will meet all your needs.' As we have given to God, so God gives to us. Paul says this explicitly elsewhere in 2 Cor 9...

Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. (2 Cor 9:6)

Every bit of income is part bread and part seed. As you sow that seed, God promises that you will reap God's provision. It's a promise. The craziest thing to do would be to eat your seed! Rather sow it and you will reap.

Okay, a step back, I know this should never be the main reason we give. Sure when you give, God provides. Sure, you can never outgive God. But the main reasons you give should be higher than that – as we saw, giving is an investment in eternity, giving is a form of worship! It is not the main reason we give, but it is nonetheless one reason to give. Else why would Scripture repeat this promise so often! God made a promise: sow and you will reap.

So many people have the same testimony: 'My finances have been so tight all these years. When I heard about God's plan that I would give a first portion of my income to the cause of Christ, I resisted. Until one day I just knew I had to do it. So I started to give 5% and then soon enough I was giving 10%. What I found is that my 90% seems to go further than my 100% used to! It's like my life has become marked with many financial mini-miracles.'

WE'RE PART OF THE ADVANCE MOVEMENT

Serving God is done best when we are part of something bigger than ourselves. That's why we are not many independent congregations, but a highly interdependent family of churches - called Common Ground.

But it doesn't stop there. Common Ground is just one church in one city. God has led us over the years to link arms with a movement far bigger and far more impacting than just ourselves - Advance.

Advance is a growing movement of like-minded churches who partner very intentionally in planting and strengthening yet more churches. In 2016 it consisted of 85 churches across Africa, Europe, Australia and America - of which a full 25 are new church plants!

For more information visit www.advancemovement.com.