

CHURCH SURVIVAL KIT

Holy Bible



**TABERNACLE BAPTIST CHURCH, PENARTH
SMALL GROUP STUDY NOTES**

CONTENTS

THE CHURCH SURVIVAL KIT

	Page
Introduction To The Church Survival Kit	2
Discussion Starter Questions	7
1. The In-dwelling Christ: Part 1: Prayer	8
2. The Indwelling Christ: Part 2 - The Bible	10
3. The Art Of Fasting	12
4. Meeting Together	14
5. Cheerful Giving	16
6. Serving Each Other	18
7. Forgiving One Another	20
8. Witnessing To Others	22



THE CHURCH SURVIVAL KIT

Do you remember when you first came to know Jesus? If you are anything like me it was a time of great passion and excitement. Faith burned like a hot flame and everything seemed possible. And yet over time that passion can cool if we are not careful.

Sadly one of the causes of this cooling off can sometimes be the disappointment of church life. Maybe the worship is not what we would personally prefer or choose. Maybe a brother or sister in Christ has said an unkind word once too often. Perhaps the routine of week-to-week church life seems pallid compared to the excitement of the Book of Acts. Maybe we are just bored by the preaching! I remember a speaker at a conference once saying that he had become disillusioned with church life, *"The problem", he said, "is that the church I preach about is not the church I preach to."* However, there are a number of things we need to remember when comparing our experience of church to that in the scriptures.

First of all the records in the New Testament are of the high points, the low points and the exciting bits. The "day-to-day" bits are often left out! We might think of the Apostle Paul tearing around the ancient world visiting a new city every week and planting a new church every month but the reality was not like that. Paul tells that he and his companions *"worked day and night labouring and toiling that we would not be of any burden to you"* (2 Thes 3:8). In Corinth he took a job as a tent maker and spent a year and a half working throughout the week to support himself, only going to the synagogue to preach the gospel on the Sabbath. It was not until Silas and Timothy came to join him that Paul was able to give up work and devote himself fulltime to the ministry (Acts 18:5). His "flying visit" to Ephesus lasted three years where he *"never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears"* (Acts 20:31). He spent three months in one synagogue in Corinth debating with people who were obstinate (Acts 19:8-9) before taking the argument to the local university campus where he continued the "daily discussions" for two years (Acts 19:10). When we read between the lines we see that Paul's ministry was a lot more mundane than it at first appears to have been.

Secondly, we need to be aware that we are all called to be ministers, witnesses and missionaries wherever we may find ourselves. This is a 24 hour a day, 7 day a week calling. However, if we allow our Christianity to become something that is only practised on a Sunday morning and maybe at a Small Group or mid-week prayer meeting, then it will certainly become unfulfilling. There is nothing that is as exciting as sharing the gospel with someone or having the privilege of leading them to Christ. There is no book in the world as enthralling as the Bible. There is no relationship as intimate as the one we can know with Jesus. Part of our Sunday worship is the drawing together of the Body of Christ to **equip it** so that for the other 6 days of the week we may **experience** the fullness of the Christian life. Our walk with Christ is not just about what we receive but also about what we give. If our Christian life seems passionless and boring perhaps we need to examine how we are living it!

Thirdly, we can find that our Christian life has become dry and unfulfilling if we have neglected to water and care for it. The Bible tells us that we need to *“keep on being filled with the Spirit”* (Eph 5:18 Literal Translation). If we neglect the basics of the Christian life we can find ourselves in a difficult place. Fellowship, prayer, Bible study, charity, love are all the things which add spice to the Christian life and are essential for spiritual survival and growth.

This **survival kit** is an opportunity to examine our Christian life and reconsider what used to be called the “spiritual disciplines”. In our modern world of political correctness the word “discipline” is not very popular but it has a long and venerable tradition in the church. It simply refers to those things that we do regularly which help us to grow to maturity. Discipline is not always pleasurable or easy to come by. Like a marathon runner preparing for a race it can be quite hard work. In the true sense there is a battle between the spirit and the flesh. The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak. Disciplined living for the Christian means an intentional surrender to the superiority of the Spirit leading to the lordship of Christ over every area of life. Undisciplined living is a mark of our age and culture. D G Kehl says, *“The church has not escaped the blight of undisciplined living: perverted values, wasted time, flabby bodies and distorted emotions provide ample evidence undisciplined living is blighting the church.”* (The Forgotten Fruit of the Spirit in Christianity Today, 27th October 1983)

Discipline however, is a fruit of the Spirit. Christian disciplines need not be looked upon as unpleasant or a legalistic obligation. When practised meaningfully they become sources of strength and joy. In celebration of discipline Richard Foster says, *“Neither should we think of the spiritual*

disciplines as some kind of dull drudgery aimed at exterminating laughter from the face of the earth. Joy is the key note of the disciplines.”

These studies are designed to help us to discover (or rediscover) the resources made available to us in the Spirit for Christian life especially when times are hard. They will look at the Christian disciplines which help us to live faithfully and effectively as witnesses and ministers in the Body of Christ at Tabernacle, in Penarth...and throughout the world.

Roger Grafton
Pastor, Tabernacle Baptist Church, Autumn 2008

STUDY FORMAT

This Bible study series is a little different to previous series in its layout and format. In the past Tabernacle’s studies have generally followed a pattern that begins with an introduction then moves on to particular passage or passages of scripture and is followed by very specific questions which usually have a “right” answer. This is called deductive reasoning and works from a general theory or theology to reach a specific conclusion. This form of question and answer is very useful when coming to a subject for the first time, particularly for example with new Christians. Its weakness is that deductive questioning is designed to help you to reach a particular viewpoint, usually the one held by the writer of the Bible study notes (i.e. me!). It can leave very little room for discussion or dissent and has the potential to exclude people who hold differing opinions.

This series will try to follow a pattern known as inductive reasoning. We will start with some specific passages from the Bible and then move to some general questions. Having read, thought about, and discussed the passage or passages, we will then try to draw some conclusions together as a group about how these scriptures apply to our everyday life in the 21st century. Instead of trying to get you to give a particular answer these studies are designed to provoke discussion and the sharing of knowledge, experience and belief. My prayer is that as the Holy Spirit moves amongst us and leads our conversation that we might discover afresh the Biblical truths for ourselves.

For those who are more used to being “spoon-fed” this might be a challenge but I urge you to persist with the studies and trust that as you talk together and pray together the Spirit will “*lead you into all truth*” (Jn 16:13). This

method of Bible study might also be harder work for you – but the rewards will be far greater at the end of the day.

Here are some ‘Top Tips’ for using these Bible studies:

- These studies are designed as a starter for your discussion. The list of scriptures and the introductory remarks are not meant to be exhaustive, but just a starting place for your thinking.
- Everyone in your group has a contribution to make. If **you** do not join in the discussion then the group will suffer, so be bold and jump in with your thoughts and answers! Don’ t let others do all the work.
- Sometimes questions need deep, well thought out, theological answers - and there may be people in your group that can give them. Sometimes, the answer is more simple and straightforward. Sometimes the simple answer is too simple for some people to see it! Again, be bold. In a group where there is an atmosphere of love, no question is ever too stupid and no answer is too simple.
- Discussion and debate is good and to be encouraged. But more importantly you should be willing to let the Word of God change your life and your actions. Let your group hold you accountable for living out the challenges of the Scriptures in your everyday life. If we end the study as exactly the same people we were when it started then we have, in a way, wasted our time together.
- Don’t forget to try and follow the ‘Four W’s’ of Welcome, Worship, Word and Witnessing in your group. If you have been following the studies for the last couple of years you will be quite adept at this by now!

DISCUSSION STARTERS

Pray now and invite the Holy Spirit to come and “*lead you into all truth*” as you discuss these verses from the Bible. Leave a short while of silence for reflection and listening before you start your discussion.

- What key words or phrases stand out for you in these passages?
- Do these scriptures throw light on each other? When we read them together are they different to when we read each passage by itself?
- What other scriptures can you think of which might shed light on the subject we are thinking about today?
- In each passage who was the writer writing to and what did the passage mean to the original hearers?
- What do these words say to us today and what can we learn from these verses that we can apply to our life in the 21st century?
- Have you read a book or an article or have you heard a sermon on this subject which has been particularly helpful to you?
- In practice what have you found helpful in developing your relationship with Jesus in this area?
- What do you find difficult in this area? Have other people in your group struggled with this in the past but found a way to address this problem?
- Think of ONE thing you can do this week in response to these passages. Resolve NOW to do it this week and report back to your group next week how it went.

Finish with prayer and minister to one another if appropriate.

1. THE IN-DWELLING CHRIST:

PART 1: PRAYER

Church growth experts tell us that people come to church for many reasons but they will stay for only one. They might come because they are made to by a partner or parent. They might come because they are lonely. Maybe they come seeking spiritual truth. Perhaps it is just a habit. Whatever the reason they first come they are many and varied, but they will only stay for one reason which is that they find friendship and love.

You can have the best worship in the world but if there isn't love in the congregation then people won't stay. It doesn't matter how good the preaching is, if people feel unwelcome sooner or later they will drift away. However, whilst this is true we need to note that if you put your trust in people you will always be disappointed sooner or later. All of us are human and at some point all of us will let folk down. If the reason we stay is entirely for the people around us then sooner or later things will go badly wrong. So how do we make the experience of church fulfilling and satisfying? It is in Jesus that our hope exists, and the love that Jesus offers us needs to be the anchor we hold to.

Would you expect to healthy if the only time you ate a meal was on a Sunday morning? Of course not! You would not survive long. Do you think you would be any healthier spiritually if you wait until Sunday morning to digest a spiritual meal? A daily quiet time provides regular contact with your source of spiritual life, Jesus Christ himself. Each day you simply must find time to be alone with Christ. Just as communication is the foundation of any human relationship, so prayer is the the undergirding of our relationship with Jesus. If we want to grow and mature as Christians, then it must start with a healthy prayer life. Knowing the indwelling Christ through our prayer life is the foundation for healthy Christian living.

Read the following passages. For each passage use the questions on page 7 as a discussion starter. Remember, we are not necessarily

trying to find ‘the right answer’ but rather share our experience, knowledge and thoughts as we study the scriptures to grow together as a group and as individuals

2 Chronicles 7:11-16

Proverbs 8:32-36

Matthew 6:5-15

Matthew 18:18-20

Ephesians 6:18-20

1 Timothy 2:1-8

2. THE INDWELLING CHRIST:

PART 2 - THE BIBLE

It ought to be of utmost importance to every Christian to read, study and learn what the Bible has to say, because it is “God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.” (2 Timothy 3:16) Paul tells Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:15 to “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.” In order to rightly divide the word of truth, one must know the word of truth. In order to know the word of truth they must study it.

Often today when we try to share the gospel with someone they will say something like “well, what I believe is...” followed by their personal thoughts on religion. Very often people have a pick and mix approach to faith which draws upon many different religions and spiritualities. It is a consumer based form of faith where people choose the bits they like and put them together in a way that suits them. In a way it is an entirely internal and self-centred form of faith. Christians are unable to do this because we have an external source of authority to guide our thinking and belief. That external source is the Bible. Whenever we have a question the place we go for an answer is the scriptures. When we read the Bible if we see something that we do not like, we are the ones to change, not the word of God!

As a preacher once said, “This book reveals the mind of God, the state of man, the way of salvation, the doom of sinners, and the happiness of believers. Its doctrines are holy, its precepts are binding, its histories are true, and its decisions are immutable. Read it to be wise, believe it to be safe, and practice it to be holy. It contains light to direct you, food to support you, and comfort to cheer you. It is the traveller's map, the pilgrim's staff, the pilot's compass, the soldier's sword, and the Christian's charter. Here, too, heaven is opened, and the gates of hell disclosed. Christ is its grand subject, our good its design, and the glory of God its end. It should fill the memory, rule the heart, and guide the

feet. Read it slowly, frequently, prayerfully. It is a mine of wealth, a paradise of glory, and a river of pleasure. It is given you in life, will be opened at the judgment, and be remembered forever. It involves highest responsibility, will reward the greatest labour, and condemn all who trifle with its sacred contents. Owned, it is riches; studied, it is wisdom; trusted, it is salvation; loved, it is character; and obeyed, it is power.”

Read the following passages. For each passage use the questions on page 7 as a discussion starter.

Nehemiah 8:1-12

Psalms 119:97-112

Luke 24:44-49

John 5:36-40

Hebrews 4:12

2 Timothy 3:16-17

3. THE ART OF FASTING

Fasting is an ancient discipline that followers of Jesus have engaged in to subdue their flesh and gain a deeper spiritual life throughout the history of the Church. Christian fasting isn't some kind of a "work" that's commanded by Christ or required by Scripture. However, that doesn't mean that fasting isn't recommended as a part of our spiritual growth.

The Book of Acts records believers fasting before they made important decisions. Fasting and prayer are often linked together. Too often, the focus of fasting is on the lack of food. However, the purpose of fasting is to take our eyes off the things of this world and instead focus on God. Fasting is a way to demonstrate to God and to ourselves that we are serious about our relationship with Him. Although fasting in Scripture is almost always a fasting from food, there are other ways to fast. Anything you can temporarily give up in order to better focus on God can be considered a fast. Fasting should be limited to a set time, especially when the fasting is from food. Extended periods of time without eating are harmful to the body. Fasting is not intended to punish our flesh, but to focus on God.

Fasting should not be considered a "dieting method" either. We shouldn't fast to lose weight, but rather to gain deeper fellowship with God. . Some may not be able to fast from food (diabetics, for example), but everyone can temporarily give up something in order to focus on God. Even unplugging the television for a period of time can be an effective fast. Paul had advice on a form of fasting for married couples which did not include food (1 Corinthians 7:5)

I'm sure most of us know the feeling of lethargy and sleepiness that follows an overly large meal. Perhaps you are even one of those people who indulges in a snooze on a Sunday afternoon or after Christmas dinner! Fasting is intended to produce the opposite effect. If a surfeit of food can cause lethargy and dullness (both physically and spiritually) then fasting can lead to an alertness and spiritual animation which makes us more aware of God's presence. If it is food we are fasting from, then we can fast for one meal, for a whole day or perhaps for a longer period. However, please be sensible if you intend embarking on a serious fast and seek medical advice.

Read the following passages. For each passage use the questions on page 7 as a discussion starter.

1 Kings 21:25-29

Nehemiah 1:1-11

Matthew 6:16-18

Luke 2:36-37

Luke 5:33

Acts 13:4

Acts 14:23

1 Corinthians 7:1-5

4. MEETING TOGETHER

Surely it's possible to be a Christian without going to church? Is it possible to believe in God without going to church? Yes. Is it possible to believe that Jesus is who he said he was without going to church? Yes. Is it even possible to believe that Jesus died for the forgiveness of your sins and rose again, conquering death, without going to church? Yes.

But is it possible to respond in worship, in the submission of your life to him, in becoming a disciple, without being a part of the fellowship of his followers? Is it possible to receive all the gifts God wants to give you, and to use them for his glory, without other Christians around you? The Biblical answer to that is a resounding 'no!'

The apostle Paul writes about the church as a profound mystery. He describes us as a body in which every part—small or large, seemingly important or apparently insignificant—every part is of great value and to be considered necessary in the body. Paul also speaks of us as a temple, and both Jesus and John speak of the church as the bride of Christ.

God chooses to use us, his people, in an amazing way; he works in this world through the prayers and the actions of his followers. He uses the prayers of individuals, yes, but his power is particularly released when two or three gather and agree in his name. It is certainly the testimony of the church through the ages that unity amongst his people is extremely powerful. On a practical note, being part of a group with others who share your beliefs, values and an understanding of your journey will be a support and aid to your growth in Christ. Can a coal continue to burn for long without other coals? Is it not true that the warmth of a fire is much stronger than the sum of the flames of each coal?

No one claims that going to church is always fantastic, nor that being part of a church is easy. Churches and the people in them make many mistakes, just as we all do in so many areas of our lives. But seeking God's way together and learning to love one another is an essential part of God's plan for His people.

Read the following passages. For each passage use the questions on page 7 as a discussion starter.

Leviticus 23:1-3
Psalm 22:22-28
Matthew 18:19-20
1 Corinthians 14:26-31
Hebrews 10:24-25

5. CHEERFUL GIVING

Here is a statement that is designed to strike fear into the heart of the treasurer! "God doesn't want YOU to give." Before anyone has a heart attack, let me finish the statement: "God doesn't want YOU to give, HE wants to give through you!" All the resources that the Church is ever going to need have already been available to it by God... The problem is that they might still be locked away in your wallet or bank account at the moment!

The Bible teaches us that everything in the world belongs to God, so when he asks us to give (financially, in terms of our gifts or in terms of our time) we are simply passing on something which already belongs to Him. Seeing that the money in our bank accounts and in our wallets already belongs to God takes faith, but it is what the Bible teaches. It can also be incredibly liberating to realise that all our possessions actually belong to God.

Christian giving is allowing the character of God to be expressed in the behaviour of a person in whom God dwells. As the summation of God's character is Love, giving expresses God's Love for others. God is Love (I John 4:8,16). Divine love seeks the highest good of another, with no thought of what I get out of it. God's love is unconditional and unselfish. He wants to express His character through His people.

Paul tells the Corinthians that by giving they can "prove...the sincerity of their love." (2 Corinthians 8:8). Later he encourages them to "openly before the churches demonstrate the proof of your love..." (2 Corinthians 8:24). The manifestation of Christian love in giving is only an expression of God's love functioning in and through us. We love so we give, because the loving, giving God is living and operative in us. Christian love is an expression of God's loving character. Christian giving is an expression of God's giving character which has been given to us by the presence of the Spirit of Christ, the presence of Jesus indwelling the Christian.

We do not earn God's love or approval by our giving, and giving doesn't make us more acceptable to God. Those Churches and evangelists who teach that we can earn God's attention or fulfilling of our prayer because we have given financially are in error and need to be strongly rebuked. However, a giving, loving God had shown us part of his character that we are called to emulate in our giving.

Read the following passages. For each passage use the questions on page 7 as a discussion starter.

Exodus 25:1-9
Exodus 31:1-11
Psalm 24:1-2
Haggai 2:8
Mark 12:41-44
Romans 12:1-10
2 Corinthians 9:1-15

6. SERVING EACH OTHER

When one reads the New Testament and reads about the life of Christ, one of the things that stands out is that Jesus came to this earth to serve. In Matthew 20:28 Jesus says, "the Son of man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many." One of the things included in this service was laying down his life for others.

This verse follows the request James and John's mother who wanted her sons to have greatness in Jesus' kingdom. This was a normal response for a mother who wanted the best for her sons. However, her conception of greatness was an earthly one, which included lording it over others and exercising physical authority. Jesus said this was not the way it was supposed to be among His disciples. Rather, greatness in His kingdom would be determined by service to others, not by exercising physical authority and control over them. Jesus said in Matthew 23:11, "But he who is greatest among you shall be your servant." Those who are greatest in the kingdom of Christ are those who serve others. Jesus demonstrated his greatness by wrapping a towel around his waist, kneeling and washing his disciples feet.

In Church life there are many opportunities to serve one another and the wider world. We may not have many jobs as 'foot washers', but there are many other equally unglamorous jobs available! From making the tea to washing the communion cups, sitting on the security desk to looking after babies in the crèche, there are a myriad of ways to serve. It is sad that it is these 'unglamorous' jobs that we have the most difficulty in finding recruits for. It is sad for two reasons: firstly, the church suffers when important 'behind the scenes' jobs are not done. The second reason is because all of us are missing the opportunity for Kingdom greatness when we decline to serve one another. God wants you to be great, so why not grab the chance?

Read the following passages. For each passage use the questions on

page 7 as a discussion starter.

Matthew 11:28-30

Matthew 20:26-28

John 13:3

Philippians 2:1-8

Colossians 3:23-24

Hebrew 10:19-24

7. FORGIVING ONE ANOTHER

"Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets."

Matthew 7:12

If everyone followed the teaching in Matthew 7:12, it would solve many of the world's problems. It would solve many family problems, church problems, political problems, and personal problems. It gives us the answer as to how we are to treat other people. It sums up the Law and the prophets and much of the gospel itself. But unfortunately, it is teaching that many of us have failed to follow so often in our own lives as Christians. In consequence It is teaching that we fail to receive the benefits of - the great blessings that come to those who do follow it. It is teaching that when rejected results in the direst consequences.

Matthew 7:12 must be understood in light of the context in which it is found. The word "therefore" which begins the verse points us back to Jesus' teaching in verses 7 to 11 where Jesus taught, "Keep asking, and it will be given to you; keep seeking, and you will find; keep knocking, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. Or what man is there among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!" "Therefore" means "in light of what has just been said..." Therefore, in light of the fact that God blesses us with good things when we ask Him, in light of the fact that we are His children, then we must treat others like we want to be treated... and as God has treated us.

One of the first responses of many Christians when they feel hurt or offended is to go straight to Matthew 18 and hurry off to show their brother or sister their fault. Of course, this is a Biblical and proper response to a serious matter. However, if we read Matthew 18 within the context of the rest of the chapter there is a wider understanding to

the instructions Jesus gives. That context is one of serving one another, humility, loving one another and forgiving one another.

Before resorting to Matthew 18, we need to be conscious of Matthew 7:12. Our first response to someone who sins against us should always be one of grace, love and forgiveness. If the greater good of others and the benefit of the one who sinned against us demands confronting them, then we then need to go and show them their fault. However, love and forgiveness are always our first ports of call. Sometimes forgiving someone means NOT confronting them, but letting the matter rest with God.

Read the following passages. For each passage use the questions on page 7 as a discussion starter.

Leviticus 24:19-21

Matthew 5:17-26

Matthew 5:38-48

Matthew 6:14-15

Ephesians 4:32

Ephesians 5:1-2

8. WITNESSING TO OTHERS

The Bible makes it very clear that we are all called to be a witness for Jesus, and share our faith whenever the opportunity arises. As Christians we need to “Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.” Although we know this to be true, sharing our faith remains one of the scariest things for many believers to consider doing. In fact it is so scary, that most of us don’t bother a lot of the time!

Part of the problem is that when we use words like ‘evangelism’ or ‘sharing our faith’ most of us conjure up images of standing on street corners and shouting or knocking on doors. Let me just reassure you that I don’t believe Jesus had that in mind when he called you to be a witness. In fact, I have to say that I believe this method of evangelism to be largely ineffective and even harmful to the cause of the Gospel.

We all know the importance of spreading the word, but sometimes the thought is terrifying; how to bring it up naturally? What if I don’t have the answers to their questions? What if I put my friend off for good? However, If you’re living out your Christianity it won’t be long before people who know you start asking questions; “How come you do that then?”, “Why are you so different?”, “You’re the first person I’ve met who thinks that!”, “Don’t you get bored in church?” Any question about your life and beliefs is a perfect opportunity to share your faith and tell others how God saved you. Your own story of how God has worked in your life is one of the most powerful tools for evangelism you own! You could give your friend a list of all the right reasons to believe in Jesus from the bible, and they will give you 10 arguments back. But if somebody tells you about a life-changing experience they have had that’s hard to ignore, and almost impossible to argue about. Don’t feel the need to exaggerate or worry that your story isn’t very exciting. Every testimony is the record of a miracle, just be honest and share what happened in simple terms. God made you to be his witness, and we need to have faith that God knew what he was doing!

Read the following passages. For each passage use the questions on page 7 as a discussion starter.

Psalm 66:16

Matthew 28:16-20

Luke 24:45-53

Luke 12:11-12

2 Corinthians 2:14-17

1 Peter 3:15-16

