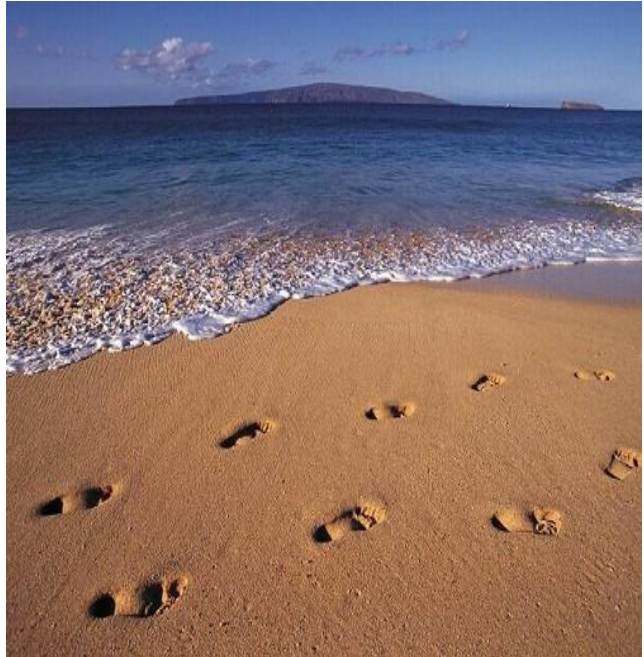




Following In Jesus' Footsteps

Bible Studies



**Jesus said “Come follow me, and
I will make you fishers of men.”
Matthew 4:19**

FOLLOWING IN JESUS FOOTSTEPS

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Introduction to Following in Jesus' Footsteps

Jesus was born in an obscure town some 2,000 years ago. He grew up in another small town called Nazareth, where he lived in obscurity until he was thirty years of age. Then for three years he was a wandering preacher. He never wrote a book. He never held an office. He never had a family or owned a house. He did not go to college. He never travelled more than a couple of hundred miles from the place where He was born. He did none of the things one usually associates with greatness. He had no credentials but himself.

He was only thirty-three when the tide of public opinion turned against Him. His friends ran away. He was turned over to His enemies, and went through the mockery of a trial. He was nailed to a cross between two thieves. While He was dying His executioners gambled for His clothing, the only property He had on earth. When He was dead, He was laid in a borrowed grave through the pity of a friend.

Those 2000 years have come and gone. Today he remains the central figure of all human history. We even calculate our calendar from his date of birth! All the armies that ever marched, all the navies that ever sailed, all the parliaments that ever sat, all the kings that ever reigned, put together, have not affected the life of people on this planet so much as that of Jesus Christ!

Sometimes it is good to go back to basics and remind ourselves of simple truths. Our faith and hope is founded on this Jesus Christ, and in this series we will once again tell the history of his story. These studies do not contain complicated theology, but that does not mean they are simplistic. They do not require vast amounts of previous knowledge, but that does not mean they are shallow. Each week we will look again at the Bible and re-tell the story of Jesus Christ. The questions and discussion points in these studies are simply meant as jump-off points for your discussions. They are not only the opportunity to look once again at the stories of Jesus which we already know, but the opportunity to share the difference

that Jesus' life has made to ours. As we tell Jesus' story afresh I pray that we will also be able to share our own story of faith with the other members of our group.

Our purpose and calling as a church is to "Reflect God's love in our church, community and world." In order to reflect that love, we need to receive it ourselves. My hope is that in going back to basics we might rediscover our first love and maybe fan the flames of passion just a little more. It is also my hope that in sharing our testimonies with one another within a small group of brothers and sisters in Christ we might discover a fresh boldness for sharing it with other people from outside the Church. As we hear once again the story of the good news of Jesus Christ in our small groups, can I ask you to pray that we will also have the courage to share it with those who are yet to meet Jesus and accept him as their Lord?

Please try to use the 4 W's format for your group: open with a **Welcome** activity (there are some suggestions in the back of this booklet), some form of **Worship**, the study of the **Word** outlined in the booklet and finally think about how you might be a **Witness** in sharing the fruits of your study with others.

Roger Grafton
Tabernacle Baptist Church, Penarth.
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1. THE EARLY LIFE OF JESUS

Tell the rest of the group something about your early life that we may not be aware of. After everyone has shared something, ask yourself how well you knew people in your group. Was there anything which surprised you? The truth is that sometimes we don't know people as well as we thought we did! How much do you know about Jesus' life?

◆ The pre-existence of Jesus

Read John 1:1-18 and John 17:5

According to these passages where was Jesus in the beginning?

According to the same passage, who was Jesus?

How do you think these two things are these two linked together?

◆ The birth of Jesus

Read John 1:12-23 and Luke 1:34-35

How was the Jesus conceived?

A few years back a Bishop in the Church of England described the belief in the virgin birth as "incredible" when he said:

“I wouldn’t put it past God to arrange a virgin birth if he *wanted* to, but I very much doubt if he would, because it seems to be contrary to the way in which he deals with persons and brings his wonders out of natural personal relationships. We have no right to insist on the literal truth about the Virgin birth. To insist on literal language is to get stuck in something very close to magic and superstition, and to encourage unbelievers that we religious people deal in fairy tales.”

Do you believe in “the literal truth about the virgin birth”? Why is it important to you, and why is it important to our understanding of Jesus?

God used Mary, a young, poor, female to give birth to the saviour of the world. Micah 5:2 predicts the birth of Jesus and emphasis the humility of Jesus’ birth. How does this encourage you knowing that God uses ordinary and ordinary situations people to accomplish His will?

Share with the rest of the group a time when God used you to accomplish His will.

◆ **The infancy and childhood of Jesus**

Read Matthew 2:1-12

After Jesus' birth, the Bible tells us that the Magi came to Jerusalem seeking Jesus. Why did they come looking for Jesus?

What was significant about the origin of these visitors?

From (Matthew 2:19-23; Luke 2:39), the Bible reveals that Jesus and His family moved to Nazareth. What do you think Jesus' family was like? What is your image of his childhood?

Read Luke 2:41-52

Every year Jesus and his parents travelled to Jerusalem to observe the Feast of the Passover. From this passage, what can we learn about Jesus' spiritual condition?

It was the custom of Jesus' parents to travel to Jerusalem each year to observe the Feast of the Passover. This was one of the three feasts which the Israelites were to observe at the Temple. This particular Passover had great significance to Jesus and his parents. When a Jewish boy was 12 years old (in his 13th year, or the Talmud says, "at the age of puberty"), he was acknowledged a "son of the Law." At that age he was supposed to have learned enough to be sufficiently mature for following the mandates of the Law of God. Throughout his twelfth year he was old enough to study the law in preparation for his 'coming of age' on his 13th birthday. From now on he would be expected to attend the festivals in Jerusalem whose attendance the Law prescribed.

If Jesus is God and has been pre-existent from the very beginning, then how are we to understand that he “grew in wisdom and stature”? Does it cause any particular theological problems to think of the unchanging God growing, changing and learning new things?

2. JESUS' BAPTISM & TEMPTATION

◆ The Baptism Of Jesus.

Read Matthew 3:13-17; Mark 1:9-11; Luke 3:21-23

Read Mark 1:4 again. If John's baptism was for the forgiveness of sin, Why was Jesus baptized?

Why should we be baptized?

Is baptism necessary for salvation? Why/why not?

Does our age at our baptism, the style of baptism or the amount of water matter? Why/why not?

◆ The Temptation of Jesus

Read Matthew 4:1-11, Mark 1:12-13 and Luke 4:1-13

What were the purposes of these temptations?

Why would a Father allow his son (whom he has just said he is pleased with and he loves) allow suffering like this?

How did Jesus defeat Satan and his temptations?

What temptations do you struggle with the most? What weapons and strategies do you use to fight temptation?

Read Romans 6:1-7

If God forgives us ALL our sins, then why do we need to struggle on and fight against temptation? After all, won't God forgive us if we fall and commit sin?

3. THE CHARACTER OF JESUS (PART I)

Whose character (family, friend, or co-worker) do you most admire?
What is it about them that you most admire?

◆ Jesus is Kind-hearted

Read Matthew 20:30-34, Mark 10:13-16, Luke 7:37-48

These stories all contain people that who were kept away from Jesus by his disciples or religious leaders. However, Jesus said that these people should be allowed to come to him. What stands out for you in these three passages?

What sort of people might we try to keep away from church today?
Why do we do this, and what do you feel Jesus might think about it?

As disciples of Christ, we to are to be kind to others (Ephesians 4:32). What does it mean to be kind?.

◆ Jesus is empathetic

Read John 11:1 to 6 and 17-37

How would you respond if you just found out that your friend or a family member had passed away?

How did Jesus respond when he found out that his friend Lazarus was sick, and then when he found out he had died?

What does it mean to be “empathetic”?

Describe a time when your empathy helped someone overcome a difficult time and help that person draw closer to God.

◆ **Jesus Shows Grace**

Read John 8:1-11

The Pharisees and the teachers of the law brought an adulterous woman to Jesus. What words would you use to describe how Jesus treated the woman?

Do you find it easy or difficult to show grace to someone when he or she commits sin?

What about if that sin hurts you personally?

How should we respond when someone sins against us?

As Christians we often are told that Matthew 18:15-17 is the way we should respond when someone hurts us, but how are we to understand this alongside the linked teaching in Matthew 18:21-35? Often we are good at letting people know they have hurt us, but how good are we at releasing them and forgiving them?

In a moment of silent prayer ask God if there is anyone you need to forgive for hurting you, or is there anyone whom you have hurt that you need to be reconciled with? Now go and do it!

4. THE CHARACTER OF JESUS (PART 2)

Besides Jesus, who is your favourite Bible character? Why?

◆ **Jesus is Forgiving**

Read Matthew 26:67 and 27:26-31

Even before he was crucified, Jesus suffered at the hands of his accusers: in what ways did they make him suffer?

Read Luke 23:32-34

Although Jesus experienced intense pain and agony both before and on the cross. How did He respond to the people who were inflicting the pain?

Read Mark 11:25

These words were said by Jesus just days before his arrest and execution. In light of this verse how important is it for Christians to forgive?

Last week we prayed about people who may have hurt us. Right now in your life, are you still harbouring bitterness and anger

against someone? If so, what steps could you take to forgive? If you feel able, ask the group to pray for you.

◆ **Jesus lived a life of obedience**

Read John 5:19-20 and 8:27-29.

For Jesus, what did obedience to the Father mean?

What does God expect from us? Read Micah 6:8. What three things does this say that God requires of us?

Can you think of other things from the Bible which God requires of us?

Are you able to say that you are living an obedient life to God?

◆ **Jesus Lived a Life of Love**

Read John 13:1-17

Describe the type of love that Jesus demonstrated towards His friends.

How much love and devotion do you extend to your friends?

Read Matthew 8:1-4 Note the word 'clean' and then read Leviticus 13:1-3 and 45-46

Jesus touched a man with leprosy and made him clean. How was that act of kindness a particular demonstration of Christ's love?

Who are the 'unclean' in our society today. What can we do to reach and touch them like Jesus did?

Read Matthew 5:43-48 What types of people are Christians suppose to love? How can we do this more?

5. WHAT JESUS SAID ABOUT SIN

Define and describe sin.

◆ Sin begins in the heart

Read Matthew 15:16-20

What is 'the heart' in this context?

Remembering our discussion on Micah 6:8 from last week, how important is the heart to God?

What 'inner sins' do you think most people struggle with?

◆ The Holy Spirit Convicts us of Sin

Read John 16:5-11

What does the word "convict" mean?

Explain a time when you felt that the Holy Spirit convicted you of your sin.

If it is the Holy Spirit within us that convicts us of sin, what value (if any) is there in pointing out sin in unbelievers? When Christians make pronouncements about gay people, single mothers, 'living in sin', alcohol or drugs, how must it appear to non-believers?

◆ **Sin Against Us Must Be Forgiven**

Read Matthew 6:14-15

What will happen if we do not forgive others when they sin against us?

How do we hold this in tension with the belief that at the cross God forgave us all our sins?

◆ **The Cross Makes Forgiveness Possible**

Read Matthew 26:28

Focussing on the word 'covenant', why is Jesus' blood necessary for the forgiveness of our sins?

How do it make you feel knowing that Jesus shed His blood on the cross for the forgiveness of your sins?

Close the session by spending some time as a group worshipping and giving thanks for the cross

◆ **Going Deeper (You may want to do this alone!)**

In 2003 Steve Chalke caused a controversy when talking about the cross. Although he has been widely misquoted, he was criticised by many Christians for questioning the need for the cross in order to bring about forgiveness. Chalke said:

The fact is that the cross isn't a form of cosmic child abuse—a vengeful Father, punishing his Son for an offence he has not even committed. Understandably, both people inside and outside of the Church have found this twisted version of events morally dubious and a huge barrier to faith. Deeper than that, however, is that such a concept stands in total contradiction to the statement: 'God is love'. If the cross is a personal act of violence perpetrated by God towards humankind but borne by his Son, then it makes a mockery of Jesus' own teaching to love your enemies and to refuse to repay evil with evil."

Steve Chalke and Alan Mann, *The Lost Message of Jesus*, [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003], pp. 182-183

How do you understand the cross and the part it plays in our salvation when we take it alongside the other parts of scripture that Chalke highlights? Was the cross really necessary? Could God have done things a different way if he had wanted?

6. WHAT JESUS TAUGHT ABOUT LOVE

Define love.

◆ **Jesus taught us that God loves us**

Read John 3:16-18

Who does God love?

How did God show His love to us?

Read Luke 12:6-7 and 15:1-10

How much does God value us.

What words might be used to describe the effort God puts into 'finding' us?

◆ **Jesus taught us to Love God, our neighbour and ourselves.**

We are to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength.
What does this mean?

How can we practice loving God on a daily basis?

What does it mean to love ourselves?

What are some things you like about yourself?

What does it mean to love your neighbour like yourself?

Is there a 'neighbour' you can show your love to this week? How?

◆ **Jesus taught us to love one another**

Why do you think Jesus gave a new command to love? Why did the old commandments need updating? Did God get them wrong first time around?

What was the new commandment?

What practical steps can you take as an individual, or can we take as a community to become more loving?

SOME WELCOME IDEAS
(With thanks to Clare Humphreys who

found them for us!)

1. Ask each member, 'If you were a car (plant / animal / whatever) what would you be and why?' (Especially suitable for a group with car mad folk in it!)
2. If you could be anywhere else in the world, where would you be and why?
3. Tell us one good thing and one bad thing about last week.
4. What music did you listen to in your teens?
5. Who in history is a hero for you?
6. Whom (apart from Jesus) have you looked up to as a role model?
7. Can you think of a time when someone 'made a stand' about an issue, in a way that impressed you?
8. Is there any occasion that you remember because you were not ready for it?
9. Has anything happened or been said to you recently which has been a real blessing to you?
10. What was the gift at Christmas that gave you most pleasure in giving, and what gave you most pleasure receiving?
11. If you had to suddenly flee to another country, what would one thing would you most want to take with you, and what would you be most glad to leave behind?
12. Describe a situation when you felt affirmed.
13. If there was one gift or talent that you would like to have, what would it be and why?
14. Describe a recent situation when you felt affirmed or loved.
15. If there was one gift or talent that you would like to have, what

would it be and why?

16. Describe (very briefly) a time when you have had to change direction in your life.

