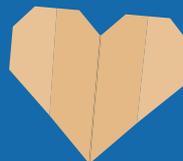


NEXT STEPS



Prayer | Evangelism | Growth | Serving

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A YEAR OF NEXT STEPS

Adam Lowe & David Browne

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INTRODUCTION

It's our fervent prayer, that 2018 will be a year of 'Next Steps' as a church. We're hoping and praying that we'll all — as individuals and as a church — press further into our mission to make and mature disciples by seeking to take a next step in prayer, evangelism, growth, and serving.

Starting in January, we will be exploring each of these topics through the Bible, along with highlighting a range of ways that each person can take a 'next step'. We're aiming for these to be as practical as possible and accessible to every person in our church. We recognise that every follower of Jesus is in a different place in their walk with God, so we want to help one another to keep growing and stepping forward in our relationship with God.

Some of these 'next steps' will be one-offs (i.e., something to be done once), some will be seasonal (e.g., just for Easter), and others will be for the entire year (e.g., reading a chapter of the Bible each day). For more 'next step' ideas in each of these four areas, please visit stbarts.com.au/nextsteps or check out the 'next steps wall' at church. The four key areas are:

- **Prayer:** Prayer is simply speaking and listening to God. It is the most important activity of every follower of Jesus! A 'next step' in prayer could include growing in our devotional lives, praying with others daily, praying more intentionally for our church and world, and/or attending some prayer training.
- **Evangelism:** Evangelism is simply sharing the Good News of Jesus through what we say and do. It's a key way in which we take part in God's mission and unfolding Kingdom! This could involve praying daily for someone to know the Gospel, attending some training, or inviting a friend.
- **Growth:** Growth simply refers to becoming more mature as followers of Jesus. This next step recognises that our development as disciples is a life-long journey. This next step could involve reading the Bible daily, signing up for the Ridley Certificate, or attending a training day.

- **Serving:** Serving simply refers to knowing, developing, and using our God-given gifts and resources for God's purposes in the world. This could involve praying intentionally before you serve, learning more about your gifts, encouraging others to use their gifts, or using your gifts more effectively.

How to Use this Study Guide

This study guide is intended to be used each day (except Sundays) during our 'Next Step' series. Every week there will be a sermon and small group questions to match the topic. You don't need to be a member of a small group, but if you are, I'm sure you will get even more out of the readings, reflections, and questions. The study guide includes:

- **Reflection:** Each day there is a Bible reading referenced (usually from the New Testament) along with a brief reflection. You can use this on its own or along with a Study Bible to dig a bit deeper.
- **Questions:** Each day there are two or three questions to think about in response to the reading. These questions particularly focus on applying what we have read that day.
- **Prayer:** Each day a short prayer is provided to help guide you to prayerfully offer up everything to God that you've been studying that day.

If you have any other questions that you would love to ask the author of the daily reflection, then we would love to hear from you. You can identify the author for the day by the initials at the end of each daily reflection as either AL (Adam Lowe adam@stbarts.com.au) or DB (David Browne david@stbarts.com.au).

Finally, this study guide and series is intended to be used with a 'Next Steps Plan'. The idea is that every person would identify and commit to at least one 'next step' for each of our four areas. These plans are available on our website (there are also printed copies available at St Bart's).

Our hope and prayer is that this study will be of immense blessing to you, helping you to grow in your relationship with God, your understanding of his Kingdom and your role in it, along with a greater appreciation of the significance of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection.

Adam Lowe
St Bart's Toowoomba



WEEK 1: PRAYER

Prayer is simply speaking and listening to our God. It is the most important activity of every follower of Jesus!

We're hoping that every person can take at least one step forward in prayer. This could involve growing in our devotional lives, praying with others, praying more intentionally for our church and world, and/or attending some prayer training. For more ideas, visit stbarts.com.au or check out the 'next steps wall' at church.

DAY 1: SUNDAY, JANUARY 7

READ Matthew 6:9-13

This Sunday our first sermon for the series will focus on prayer. Be sure to check out the 'next step' ideas at the back of the church, or visit the 'next steps' page on our website (stbarts.com.au/nextsteps).

You can also listen to the sermon, access small group questions, and explore other related resources for each week (under 'Sermons' at stbarts.com.au).

DAY 2: MONDAY, JANUARY 8

READ Matthew 6:5-8 and 2 Chronicles 7:13-16

Reflection: Praying without Hypocrisy

As we begin our series on 'Next Steps', focusing this week on prayer, this section of Matthew is particularly challenging! This is an amazing challenge to not neglect our prayer life and be sincere in our motives as we come before our God and converse with him. Note that in verse 5, Jesus assumes that they will be praying! Jesus doesn't say, "IF you pray", but "WHEN you pray". However, assuming that the disciples will pray, he is most concerned with HOW they pray.

In these verses, Jesus emphasises that at the heart of prayer should be sincerity. In fact, Jesus goes further than that, saying that the disciples should not be like people who love to look 'super-religious' in front of everyone else, praying on the street corners where everyone can see them (note that on a corner you can be seen not just by people on one street, but at least two streets!). Jesus is saying that their motives of prayer did not reflect the true purpose of communicating with God (the word 'hypocrites' in this context means that they were just 'play acting' and 'going through the motions'). Instead, these people simply wanted to look good. How sad that they received their reward (i.e., looking good in front of others) only to miss out on the true reward for prayer which is to grow in relationship with God and be part of his mission.

However, if Jesus thought that he needed to teach his disciples this (in case they slipped into this behaviour), then how much more relevant to us! When we come to God in prayer, we do not need to impress him or use complex language. We can simply speak to him, delighting in our God, praying for the world, confessing our sin, and presenting our requests. AL

Questions

1. What do you most love about prayer?
2. Do you ever have "questionable" motives when you pray?
3. How can you grow in your sincerity of prayer?

Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank you for your phenomenal love and the privilege of prayer! Help us to never neglect this great joy nor to undermine it with insincere motives. Please continue to teach us how to pray. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

DAY 3: TUESDAY, JANUARY 9

READ Ephesians 3:14-21

Reflection: Praying for God's Strength

I love reading Paul's prayers as he writes to various individuals and churches, with this one being simply breathtaking! How I long for my prayer life to be filled more with such beautiful descriptions of God's goodness and love. Whenever I read this, I'm always struck by Paul kneeling before God. As Paul prays, he clearly recognises just how precious it is to come before God and the intimacy afforded to us with God through Jesus. Paul's prayer is characterised both by humility and sincerity (quite the contrast to the hypocrites yesterday!). Paul longs — more than anything — for his brothers and sisters in Ephesus to be growing in their strength from God, their connectedness with God's love, and their understanding of who God is. Note that all of these things are only possible by God's power and glorious riches. This is a recognition that without God nothing is possible — it is only from God that true love and power flow. How wonderful it would be to pray this every day for our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Verses 20 and 21 remind us of just how powerful and glorious our God is. When Paul says that God is able to do “immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us”, he's not saying that God is like a genie in the bottle ready to grant all our wishes. Paul is saying that we often pray too small, or too inwardly, underestimating the power of God and how he is at work in the world — including through us. We often rely too much on our own strength and own power, when instead we should be kneeling before the one who is all-powerful! Not that prayer is for our indulgence, but for God's glory through the church and the Lord Jesus Christ, across all generations. AL

Questions

1. When are you most likely to rely on your own strength instead of God's?
2. How are you encouraged to draw on God's power more instead of your own?
3. Can you identify other prayers of Paul throughout his letters?

Prayer

Heavenly Father, may our brothers and sisters in Christ be strengthened through your glorious riches and the gift of your Holy Spirit. May we be established in your love and equipped to do even more than we ever dare dreamed possible, for your kingdom and your glory. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

DAY 4: WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 10

READ Psalm 150

Reflection: Adoration

Whenever I am finding it most difficult to pray adoringly to God, Psalm 150 helps me to lift my gaze from my own circumstances to God's glory and goodness! Praise him, praise him, praise him! Thirteen times the psalmist passionately leads the people to direct their prayer and hearts to their great God! In fact, it is not just the people of God whom the psalmist desires to praise God, but everything that has breath! And for what reasons are they to praise God? For who he is (enthroned in the mighty heavens — he's truly God!), for all he's done (his acts of power — especially those leading to salvation), and his unsurpassed greatness (there's none greater!). We can direct praise to all sorts of things in our life, but there is no substitute for God and none more worthy of praise than him.

And of course, such praise is not meant to be a solemn process, but one in which our praise spills over with enthusiasm. Note that there is a trumpet, harp, lyre, timbrel, dancing, strings, pipe, and symbols. Wow! This doesn't mean that you have to rush out and pick up a whole set of instruments, but it does mean that when we praise God, we ought not to remain unmoved or indifferent to truly how great our God is. My three-year-old son has a favourite worship song, and whenever we put it on, his praise to God is uncontainable! When we praise God, we shouldn't hold back — for God is worthy of it all. Nor should we remain unmoved, for the goodness and saving work of our Lord has greatly affected us and the world forever. This, of course, does not mean that God is indifferent to our troubles. It may not always seem possible to outwardly adore God in some of our darker chapters, but I'm utterly convinced that the more we pray adoringly — even when it seems that we can't — the more our relationship with our God and our circumstances are transformed. Praise the Lord! AL

Questions

1. What helps you most to adore God when you pray?
2. What are the things that you can praise God for?

Prayer

Our Great King in Heaven, how we praise you for who you are, for what you've done, for what you're doing, and what you are yet to do. Please help us to adore you more and express that through our lives. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

DAY 5: THURSDAY, JANUARY 11

READ Psalm 51

Reflection: Our Need for Confession

The heart monitor beeps erratically, the patient lies lifeless on the stretcher, doctors and nurses scramble to set up the defibrillator. The electric shock courses through the body of the patient but no signs of life return. The heart monitor's beeps come further apart and everyone in the room looks desperate. Eventually, the patient flatlines...

Psalm 51 might seem like the desperate scrambling of a person trying to avoid getting 'zapped by God', but confession is part of the healthy heartbeat of a Christian life. The post-script of this Psalm gives its context: 'A Psalm of David. When the Prophet Nathan came to him after David committed adultery with Bathsheba'. David wrote this Psalm shortly after Nathan exposed him for sleeping with Bathsheba and trying to cover up his sin by having her husband killed in battle. He cries out to God in confession, begging for forgiveness and restoration. It's a raw and desperate plea for a loving God to show mercy in light of our darkness and depravity. While the way in which David sinned is far from normal, his act of repentance is the only healthy part of this part of his life. In fact, confession and repentance should be part of every Christian's life. The moment our prayer lives 'flatline' and we think we have nothing to confess or give thanks to God for, we are in trouble. While constant confession might give you the impression that you aren't making progress, the opposite is true. To keep growing and living as a Christian we need to recognise sin and respond to it in confession. To avoid 'flatlining' as a Christian, make sure you confess your sin regularly and receive the forgiveness that God is ready to give. DB

Questions

1. Is there anything you need to confess to God today?
2. Is there anything you need to confess to the people around you today?
3. How can you make a habit of confessing and being forgiven by God?

Prayer

Merciful God, maker and judge, please create in me a clean heart and wash me of my sin. I have sinned against you in my thoughts, words, and actions and what I've failed to do. Restore me Lord into right relationship with you and renew a right spirit within me. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

DAY 6: FRIDAY, JANUARY 12

READ 1 John 5:13-14

Reflection: Our Basis for Confidence

What are the certainties in your life? Sometimes the things we take for granted leave us with a loathing and a feeling of resignation; death and taxes for instance. Other certainties, like that the sun will come up tomorrow, can empower and inspire us. The unconditional love of a mother, the reliable support of an old friend, or the ability of a genuine smile to cheer you up are all things that can give us confidence. Our past positive experiences forge the basis for a confidence which gives us the ability to step out in life.

God's reliable and everlasting love forms the basis for our confidence as Christians. The Lord is described as gracious and compassionate over and over again in the Bible (e.g., 2 Chronicles 30:9; Psalm 103:8; Psalm 111:4; Psalm 145:8 Joel 2:13; Jonah 4:2). Jesus' life and witness displays confidence in God's sovereignty and goodness even when things seem bleak and the evidence points to the opposite conclusion! Jesus' vindication in his resurrection gives us every reason to believe that God is steadfast and true, and that as the Psalmist says: his love endures forever. God's love is the basis for Christian confidence.

God's love is the greatest certainty in life. So as you step out in faith, know you can rely on God's undying love. You may stumble and fall, and life may seem tricky and unstable at times, but even in the darkest places God is in control and will hear you when you call out to him. This is the most solid basis for confidence in the world and gives us courage to keep walking in God's light and step out in faith! DB

Questions

1. Write a list of five important things God has done for you...
2. What do all the things God has done for you mean for you today?
3. How could you share these things with other people?

Prayer

Great God in heaven, thank you that your love endures forever and that you are our basis for confidence. Help us, Holy Spirit to look to you for confidence and keep us from putting our trust elsewhere. Empower us, Lord, to step out in faith and trust you with our whole lives this day and always. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

DAY 7: SATURDAY, JANUARY 13

READ James 4:1-3

Reflection: Our Motives for Prayer

Prayer is the most powerful thing a Christian can do, but our motives can rob our prayers of their power. Have you ever been asked for money by someone who you knew was just going to waste the money or use it to harm themselves? What about being asked for details about yourself from someone who you knew would use this information against you? Our motives often dictate how our requests are received. So why shouldn't this be the case with God?

The book of James is a letter addressed to a Christian community. These people are dealing with all sorts of trial and temptations from outside the community, but there is also division and discord within. To add to their problems, their prayers don't seem to be working and they are losing confidence in the power of prayer. James' response is to point out that their prayer life is rubbish, "You do not have, because you do not ask God!", not only is it scarce but when they do pray they do so for the wrong reasons. James' advice for this community, and for us, is to purify our motives and prioritise our allegiance to God over our allegiance to the world. God gives good things to those who love him, but if we neither love him nor ask for things that will truly bless us and others, then what answer could we possibly expect other than: No.

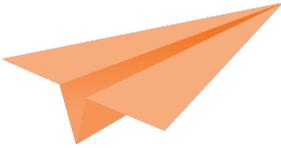
As we look to take next steps in our prayer lives let's take some time to reflect on our motives for prayer. Do you just want things from God to serve your own agenda? Or do you love God and pray prayers that align with his Kingdom purposes? As we purify our motives, we will see our prayer life flourish! DB

Questions

1. Have you ever asked God for something with questionable motives?
2. How could you refine your motives in the things you ask God for?

Prayer

Loving heavenly Father, I confess that so often my prayer comes from the wrong place. Thank you that you are a loving and forgiving God whose nature is always to have mercy. Help me to catch your vision for your world and pray into that vision for the benefit of all creation and your glory! In Jesus' Name, Amen.



WEEK 2: EVANGELISM

Evangelism is simply sharing the Good News of Jesus through what we say and do. It's a key way in which we take part in God's mission and unfolding Kingdom!

We're hoping that every person can take at least one step forward in evangelism. This could involve praying daily for someone to know the Gospel, attending some training, or inviting a friend. For more ideas, visit stbarts.com.au or check out the 'next steps wall' at church.

DAY 8: SUNDAY, JANUARY 14

READ Romans 10:5-18

This Sunday our second sermon for the series will focus on evangelism. Be sure to check out the 'next step' ideas at the back of the church, or visit the 'next steps' page on our website (stbarts.com.au/nextsteps).

You can also listen to the sermon, access small group questions, and explore other related resources for each week (under 'Sermons' at stbarts.com.au).

DAY 9: MONDAY, JANUARY 15

READ Romans 1:11-17

Reflection: Not Ashamed of the Gospel

For some, the idea of a crucified messiah was an utter joke. For others, the idea was shameful. But to Paul, the death and resurrection of Jesus was Good News for which he would never be ashamed! That's why we read in these verses that Paul longed to both build up the community in Rome and preach the Good News. Sometimes we can lose sight of just how good, the good news really is. Sometimes, we can feel reluctant to share the Gospel because we're embarrassed or busy. Other times we can simply be apathetic because we don't recognise the urgency of our message. But Paul has none of that, being EAGER to share that Good News to all who will hear. Note however that Paul isn't just excited to share the Gospel, but he notes that he is 'obligated' (verse 14). Why is he obligated? Because he has received the riches of God's grace and been sent by the Lord Jesus. If you trust in Jesus as your Lord and Saviour, then you too share in the same commission and task. How that looks will be different for each and every one of us, but the Good News, and our role in sharing it with the world (and those right next door) remains the same.

To not share this news would be unthinkable to Paul, for he knows that the Gospel has the power to bring salvation to everyone who believes! Imagine having the cure to every illness in the world yet you just decided to keep it for yourself? Well, if you trust in Jesus, you have not just a cure for illness, but Good News that saves for ever. That's why Paul is not ashamed. That's why, for Paul, it doesn't matter if it results in persecution, suffering, or humiliation. For Paul, it's worth it, because there's no greater task. AL

Questions

1. Have you ever felt ashamed or embarrassed about being identified as a Christian or feeling prompted to share the Good News?
2. What might give us confidence to share the Good News in word and action?
3. What truly makes the Good News so good and powerful to save?

Prayer

Gracious God, thank you for your saving Gospel through Jesus! Please embolden us to share this Good News that we, like Paul, would not be ashamed for we see with clarity its power to save. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

DAY 10: TUESDAY, JANUARY 16

READ Isaiah 12

Reflection: Make the Lord Known to the Nations

This part of Isaiah is a glorious — and honest — song of praise. Isaiah recognises that he - along with the nation — will be delivered by the Lord, even though they have fallen short. Isaiah sees with immense clarity, that such salvation cannot be achieved by their own doing, but must come from the Lord who is their ultimate strength and defence. And so Isaiah, looking forward, foresees the time — that day (v.4) — in which they will be rescued by God. And what will the Lord require of them in response to this saving? Very simple! To proclaim — to tell others — of the Lord: of who he is (his name because he can be known), of what he has done (he’s rescued them and is the source of salvation), and that he is exalted (i.e., he’s enthroned, rightly ruling as Lord). Our natural inclination, when we meet someone special or receive an extraordinary gift, is to share that news. Well, it is no different with God, except the glory of who God is and the wonder of what he has done is far more marvellous than anything else.

But to whom are we to proclaim? Well, Isaiah tells us: let this be known to all the world! This does not necessarily mean that we are all individually meant to travel to the corners of the earth, but it reminds us that this news is so amazing that we dare not hold it back from anyone! God desires that none should perish and that all should know his saving love through the Lord Jesus. See unlike Isaiah, we not only know that God will save, but we know how he has through Jesus’ death and resurrection! “That day” has arrived! Therefore let us proclaim his name with our entire lives. AL

Questions

1. What do you think it looks like to ‘proclaim’ Jesus?
2. How might your life ‘sing’ to the Lord for the glorious things that he has done?
3. Who today do you think you can share or show the good news of Jesus to?

Prayer

Loving Father, we thank you that we know salvation through Jesus. Thank you that we can know you personally and have great certainty of our future. Please help us to sing of your salvation today and every day. In Jesus’ Name, Amen.

DAY 11: WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 17

READ Matthew 5:13-16

Reflection: Being Salt and Light

As followers of Jesus, we have a critical role in being both salt and light to the world. In the ancient world, salt was used in the flavouring and preservation of food: it had an incredibly important life-giving purpose. Sometimes it can feel like we're not having much of an impact, or that our contribution is small, but as we obey Jesus, our lives are like light piercing the darkness. And it doesn't matter how small the light is, it only takes the tiniest of lights to break the dark! Jesus is telling his followers, that we have a critical role in the world, bringing life and light to a world in darkness.

Sometimes as Christians, we can feel like we need to hide all of our 'good deeds' — that is, the good things that we do in obedience to Jesus' teaching. Certainly, we are not to do any of these things in order to look good! However, we are encouraged to do these things in order to point to the goodness of God. Jesus is saying, in the most phenomenal and challenging way, that the way we live our lives truly matters. Our lives have a profound purpose. We do not need to be ashamed of it, nor do we need to do everything in secret. Not that we would seek just to make a good impression, but in order that our following of Jesus can be like a mirror that points to the light of Christ in order that they too would come to trust in him and glorify his name. Wherever you are today (and tomorrow, and the next), you are the salt and light of that place. You have been sent by God to bring life and point to the life-giver. So friends, let's live lives consistent with the Gospel, and not be ashamed of showing it wherever we are today. AL

Questions

1. Where will you be today and the coming days?
2. How do you think you can be salt and light in those places?
3. Who in particular do you desire to come to know Christ's saving love?

Prayer

Saving God, we thank you that you have given us a purpose to be salt and light in the world. Please help us to show your love with everyone with whom we encounter today. Please forgive us for the times in which we have not been salt and light, and help us to live this way for you. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

DAY 12: THURSDAY, JANUARY 18

READ Matthew 28:16-20 and Genesis 26:1-6

Reflection: Making Disciples

Jesus left his disciples without money, without fame, without buildings, without a book, or even a picture of himself to remember him; but he did leave them with something. Jesus left his disciples with a mission, a promise that he would be with them always and that he would send his Holy Spirit to them in due time. From these humble beginnings, a rag-tag band of eleven disciples (Judas had died) set out on a mission to carry on the work that Jesus began. The Great Commission is the inheritance of all those baptised in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. This mission has been passed down to us from the lips of Jesus and has been followed by Jesus' disciples ever since. If we are not passionate about making disciples and teaching them to follow Jesus, then we aren't really following Jesus' commands. While not all of us get to get into the water and baptise new believers, and not all of us get to run a course on Christianity, we all have a role in making disciples.

How do you communicate your faith, in word and in deed, to those around you? How are you supporting missionaries, evangelists, and children's church leaders? What is your role in God's mission to the world? At the end of the day, the church isn't about money, fame, buildings, books, or images. The church is a body of people reconciled to God whose mission it is to continue God's work in the world. Evangelism isn't just for 'elite' evangelists or missionaries — we all have a role in the mission of God and we all need to work together to fulfil the church's mission of making and maturing disciples. DB

Questions

1. What is your role in the church's mission of making disciples (if you're not sure, speak to a Christian you can trust)?
2. Why do we need to work together to fulfil the great commission?
3. Who can help you in following the Great Commission?

Prayer

Dear God, thank you for letting me follow you and for bringing me into your fold. Help me to actively participate in your mission and channel all the gifts you have given me, my time, talents, and treasures, in the making and maturing disciples of Jesus Christ by the power of your Holy Spirit. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

DAY 13: FRIDAY, JANUARY 19

READ Acts 1:1-8

Reflection: To the Ends of the Earth

Luke was a follower of Jesus who wrote as clearly and historically as he could about the life and witness of Jesus in the gospel attributed to him. His second work, Acts, is about the life and witness of the Holy Spirit. While the story follows the paths of Peter, Paul, and other followers of Jesus, it is ultimately about the Holy Spirit taking the Gospel from Jerusalem, to Judea, Samaria, and to the end of the earth! It's a riveting read, but amongst all the amazing characters it is the Holy Spirit that shines forth and carries the plot.

How did you become a follower of Jesus? While it might be tempting to attach your faith to your parents, the person who spoke to you, or the amazing person who did the 'altar call' at the event you attended, they didn't make you a Christian. The Holy Spirit brought the Gospel to you and without him, you would have never been convicted and turned your life to Jesus. The Holy Spirit inspired the people who encouraged you in your faith, and the Holy Spirit has preserved and carried the Christian faith from Jesus' ministry to the present. As you take your next steps in evangelism this week, do not neglect the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit takes the Gospel of Jesus into the world. Our role as followers of Jesus is to follow his prompting and recognise that we can do nothing without him. So whether you take the Gospel to the next room or to the ends of the world, be filled with the Holy Spirit and live for God's glory. DB

Questions

1. What does Luke say about the Holy Spirit in Acts 1?
2. Where have you seen people follow something other than Jesus, what might have you been missing?
3. How can you be asking the Holy Spirit to convict and inspire those you aim to share the Gospel with this week?

Prayer

Loving heavenly Father, thank you for sending your Holy Spirit to live inside me and empower me for your mission. Please help me never to forget the Spirit's power and leading in my life. Holy Spirit, please come and fill my heart with your love and equip me for my mission that I might help make and mature disciples of Jesus Christ. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

DAY 14: SATURDAY, JANUARY 20

READ 1 Peter 3:8-16

Reflection: Ready to Answer

A theologian was once at an airport preparing to fly to a conference. As he went through customs the officer behind the desk gruffly asked him: "Purpose of trip?". The theologian explained that he was going to a conference. "What type of conference?" came the reply. He explained that the conference was about theology and focussed on what we know about God. Then came the question that every Christian longs to hear: 'Tell me about God, I'd like to know more'. In the line with plenty of people behind him the theologian panicked. "It's big!", blurted out the theologian. The customs officer smiled and nodded and calmly said: "Yes it is big. I'll have to find out more".

While the theologian's answer in this story didn't cover the basics of the Gospel, Jesus, or where to find out more, it just might have been the right one. 1 Peter tells us to 'always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you for the reason for the hope that is within you'. Sometimes this reason might come in the form of a simple Gospel explanation or a book, but any answer you give should convey the awe and wonder you have for God. You never know when you will be asked to give a reason for why you are so joyful or why you were so honest! An ambassador doesn't need to know every detail about their country, but they must know why they are a proud citizen of the country and why they love their people. In the same way we should be clear about why we follow God and love him and be ready to give anyone who asks the reason for the hope that is in us. DB

Questions

1. Write down three reasons why you love God...
2. How would you explain the Gospel to someone if you only had 3 minutes?
3. Think of a person you'd like to share the Gospel with and pray that God would give you the opportunity.

Prayer

Loving heavenly Father, thank you for making me your son/daughter and for loving me so much that you sent Jesus into the world to die for my sins. Help me Lord to be prepared to give a reason for the hope I have in you and please grant me opportunities to share this hope with my neighbours. Amen.



WEEK 3: GROWTH

Growth simply refers to becoming more mature as followers of Jesus. This next step recognises that our development as disciples is a life-long journey.

We're hoping that every person can take at least one step forward in growth. This could involve reading the Bible daily, signing up for the Ridley Certificate, or attending a training day. For more ideas, visit stbarts.com.au or check out the 'next steps wall' at church.

DAY 15: SUNDAY, JANUARY 21

READ John 15:1-17

This Sunday our third sermon for the series will focus on growth. Be sure to check out the 'next step' ideas at the back of the church, or visit the 'next steps' page on our website (stbarts.com.au/nextsteps).

You can also listen to the sermon, access small group questions, and explore other related resources for each week (under 'Sermons' at stbarts.com.au).

DAY 16: MONDAY, JANUARY 22

READ Matthew 28:16-20

Reflection: Obedience to Jesus' Teaching

The 'Great Commission' completely shapes and informs our mission as a church to make and mature disciples of Jesus Christ for God's glory. That means, that as a church, we're passionate to see (and help) people to become followers of Jesus and continue to grow as disciples throughout our lives. We love (and long!) to be disciple-making and disciple-maturing disciples. We don't just do this because it seems like an innovative idea — we do it because we share in the commission that Jesus gave to his disciples after he was raised from the dead.

As you read the passage, it is important to first note that it is on the basis of Jesus' all-encompassing authority that we are sent into the world. We do not go by our own strength, or by our own authority, or even on our own terms. Jesus alone has been given all authority in heaven and on earth and therefore it is only him who can send us into the world. Take a moment to reflect on both the privilege and responsibility of what it means to have been sent by God as his ambassador into the world. More often than not, this does not necessarily mean that we have to move away (although it could!), but it does mean that each of us has a part to play in God's comprehensive and relentless mission to the world. Wherever you spend your time each week, are the key places in which you can make God known. Similarly, as Jesus commanded the disciples to teach people to obey his commands, we all have a responsibility to help one another live faithful lives based on all that Jesus has instructed. We don't do that in order to be saved, but because we are saved! That can all seem rather scary, but remember that as Jesus sends us, he also promised to be with us. AL

Questions

1. Where do you spend most of your time each week? How might you share the Good News through what you say and/or how you live?
2. Who can you be praying for to know Jesus?
3. What does it mean to know that Jesus promised to be with you?

Prayer

Loving God, thank you for Jesus and that it is through him that we are sent into the world to share in your mission. Thank you that you are with us! Please help as we seek to make and mature disciples of your son. Amen.

DAY 17: TUESDAY, JANUARY 23

READ Psalm 19

Reflection: The Goodness of the Word

This magnificent psalm highlights the way in which the beauty of creation points to the glory of God. In verses 1-6, the Psalmist likens the splendour of the created world to a mighty declaration of the goodness of God. If you've ever stood and looked skyward on a clear night — especially when outside of the city — it's hard not to be taken aback by the jaw-dropping grandeur of thousands of stars punctuating the dark backdrop of space. As we gaze upon such beauty, however magnificent, there is always a sense of creation pointing away from itself to the creator behind it all. Yet despite creation declaring the glory of God, our Lord desires for us to not only know him in general but to know him specifically. Hence, from verse 7 onwards, the Psalmist marvels that we can know God because he has given us his Word (i.e., the Law). And the Word is good! His precepts are right, his commands are radiant, his statutes are trustworthy, his decrees are firm — they are more precious than gold and sweeter than honey! The Bible contains God's good words to us.

Yet despite the goodness of God's Word and how it nourishes us, it is so easy to neglect our reading of the Bible. Sometimes it is because we mistakenly seek nourishment from other sources, other times it is because we mask our hunger with sustenance that ultimately fails to satisfy. In order to be mature Christians, we must have a regular diet of Scripture that can point us to who God is, remind us of all that he has done, instruct us for mission in the world, correct us from straying from his ways, and keep his promises at the forefront of our minds. God's words are not only to be like honey on our lips, but — as per verse 14 — they are to be spoken from our mouths and ruminating in our hearts. AL

Questions

1. In what way does God's Word feed you?
2. What is your pattern or habit of reading the Bible? How could you grow this?

Prayer

My Lord, my Rock, and my Redeemer, thank you for the gift of your Word. Thank you that you desire us to not only know you in general, but to know you personally. Please help me to read the Bible more, that your words might be constantly on my mouth and in my heart. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

DAY 18: WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 24

READ 1 Peter 1:22-2:3

Reflection: Growing Up

Part of being disciples is the continual shaping of our lives into the likeness of our Lord. Sometimes this means slow and gradual development of our character and traits. Other times, it means God doing some pruning in our lives to remove those aspects of our behaviour or character that do not reflect God (see 1 Peter 2:1 for a 'spiritual spring cleaning' list). Unsurprisingly, one of the key ways in which we grow in Christ's likeness is to obey the truth by sincerely loving others. We do this not of our own strength, but by relying on the strength of the Spirit who dwells in us (i.e., the imperishable seed). This new life comes from the work of the Holy Spirit, but it is the Word of God - particularly the Gospel - that the Spirit causes to take root in our hearts and lead us to repentance.

It is this Word that will last forever and it is this Word that God seeks to grow and flourish in our lives. In a way, Peter is saying to his readers that we must constantly be seeking to 'grow up' in Christ through the roots of his Word going deeper and deeper into our lives. The Spirit works to do this, but we must work with the Spirit in partnership to this growth. God desires for us not to stay as we are, but be 'grown up' Christians. That is, we are to take the news of the Gospel and apply it to more aspects of our lives, letting it shape our character, speech, decisions, priorities, and relationships. We are to constantly be seeking to go deeper in our understanding of who God is and our relationship with him. AL

Questions

1. What would help you grow your appetite for the Lord?
2. Has your diet of Scripture increased or decreased since you first became a Christian? What might help you to crave God's Word more?

Prayer

Loving Lord, how we thank you for your Word and Spirit that have taken root in our lives. Please increasingly have your way with us, that we might continue to grow up in our salvation and grow in our craving for what is good. Please save us from filling up on poor spiritual diets or seeking to replace you with powerless spiritual substitutes. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

DAY 19: THURSDAY, JANUARY 25

READ Colossians 3:12-17

Reflection: Clothing Ourselves

I used to love getting up in the morning to find my perfectly pressed uniform already out on my chair ready for a day of school. It's easy to clothe yourself when you have your clothes picked for you, but it gets much harder when you grow up and the appropriate thing to wear isn't always so clear. Fortunately even if you, like me, are long out of school, you can be sure that God has provided you with clothes to wear.

Often when we begin our Christian walk, being 'clothed with Christ' is easy. For some of us our parents have raised us in church and helped us to grow spiritually. For those of us who became Christians later in life many of us had people to surround us and encourage us to clothe ourselves with kindness, gentleness, and humility. Later in life, a bit like our clothes, we need to make a conscious decision about 'what to wear'. Our fashion choices might be important but what we wear physically isn't nearly as important as what we wear spiritually!

Colossians encourages us as 'people of God', to make a daily commitment to clothe ourselves with the attributes of God: compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, love, and unity. If we are going to follow God these must be the virtues we prioritise. So this week in your prayers remember to ask God to clothe you and the Holy Spirit to inspire you to keep clothing yourself with Christ so that those around you are blessed and God is glorified. DB

Questions

1. What attitudes and virtues do you want to put on each day?
2. How can you ensure you 'clothe yourself with Christ' each day?
3. Which attitudes and virtues do you struggle with the most?

Prayer

Living Lord, please clothe me with compassion, kindness, gentleness, patience, humility, love, and unity. Help me look more and more like Jesus and fill me with your Spirit that I might love and care for those around me and live for your glory this day and every day. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

DAY 20: FRIDAY, JANUARY 26

READ James 1:1-8

Reflection: Growth Through Trials

When the Vikings wanted a mast for their ships, they would go into the forest and find the sturdiest young tree they could find. They would then chop down all the trees surrounding that one tree and make a clearing in the woods. The chosen tree would then be buffeted by the winds and snow, it would endure icy blasts in winter and intense heat in the summer. Years later, the sailors would return to find a rugged old tree that was tough enough to take the raging seas the Vikings would eventually tame.

Sometimes God does the same thing with us. James says to consider it pure joy “whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance”. He sees the trials his people are going through and sees purpose in it. James knows that some things we can only learn through experience, and the most important lessons can only be learned the hard way. Think of the people you respect and who have taught you the most about life, chances are their lives weren’t cake walks. As we endure trial and suffering it makes us stronger and equips us for the mission ahead.

There is a difference between the tree and the Vikings, and us and God, however and it’s an important one. While the Vikings chopped down the trees and left the tree to its own growing process, God does not abandon us. God will never leave or forsake us and promises to be with us through every trial and is championing us and inspiring us to live for him. God wants us to grow as people and as disciples, so count it pure joy when you endure in his name! DB

Questions

1. What have your trials taught you so far in life?
2. What can this tell you about future trials?
3. How can you prepare for future trials?

Prayer

Loving Lord, thank you so much for being with me through every trial. Thank you for considering me worthy of your Gospel and of the Christian life. Help me to endure every trial and temptation and to grow as a person and as a disciple of Jesus. Amen.

DAY 21: SATURDAY, JANUARY 27

READ Hebrews 5:11-6:3

Reflection: Warning Against Falling Away

A friend I met at university had calluses under her chin. She had calluses because she played violin — a lot! She loved playing violin so much she practised every day and made a career out of it. She played at church and she played in small concerts, she played at missionary support nights, and to packed out concert halls. And while she played advanced pieces, and was so good at playing the difficult notes, she never forgot the basics because she practised them every day. This should be how we practice our faith: diligently, passionately, but never forgetting the basics.

The letter to the Hebrews is a letter to people who have forgotten the basics because they thought they were beyond it. The basic tenants of the Christian faith are like an anchor, supporting us and reminding us of how much God loves us. History is littered with theologians and leaders who ‘went beyond the basics’ and fell away from their faith altogether. Hebrews laments the fact that the people should be ready to teach but instead, they have abandoned their foundations and are falling away. In order to grow we need to get the basics right and use these as the foundation for everything else.

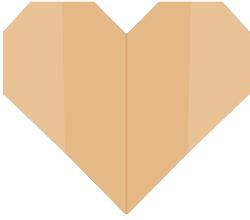
So next time you recite the Apostles’ Creed, say the Lord’s prayer, or sit down to read a Bible verse you have read a thousand times, don’t forget the basics. If you’re going to be a tough hardy Christian with calluses of faith under your chin, you’ll need to practice the basics and build on that foundation. Don’t forget your foundations and fall away; build on the basics and grow every day! DB

Questions

1. What are the basic tenants of your faith?
2. Why do you think these are important?
3. How can you keep yourself from falling away?

Prayer

Dear Lord, please help me to continue to grow in my love for you but help me to continue to have faith like a child and stand in wonder and awe at your love. Thank you Jesus, that you died for me and that I can trust you always. Amen.



WEEK 4: SERVING

Serving simply refers to knowing, developing, and using our God-given gifts and resources for God's purposes in the world.

We're hoping that every person can take at least one step forward in serving. This could involve praying before you serve, learning more about your gifts, and more effectively using your gifts. For more ideas, visit stbarts.com.au or check out the 'next steps wall' at church.

DAY 22: SUNDAY, JANUARY 28

READ 2 Corinthians 9:6-16

This Sunday our fourth sermon for the series will focus on serving. Be sure to check out the 'next step' ideas at the back of the church, or visit the 'next steps' page on our website (stbarts.com.au/nextsteps).

You can also listen to the sermon, access small group questions, and explore other related resources for each week (under 'Sermons' at stbarts.com.au).

DAY 23: MONDAY, JANUARY 29

READ John 13:1-17

Reflection: Jesus, the Ultimate Servant

It's hard to imagine how this night would have been for the disciples. Jesus is about to lead the Passover meal and demonstrate that he will fulfil this meal by becoming the ultimate sacrificial lamb. It certainly was a night to remember. As was the custom, guests at a meal would have had their feet washed. This act of washing would have been usually performed by a servant in the house. None of the disciples would expect that it would be the Lord, their Master, who would wash their feet. They're all very confused by Jesus' action, but Jesus says that whilst they do not understand now, they will later. For Jesus' act of service was about to point to his ultimate act of service on the cross, that would not only wash them physically clean, but clean them from the stain of sin.

In verses 6-8, Simon Peter cannot at first bring himself to let Jesus wash his feet. Peter is acting part in humility (not wanting Jesus to wash his feet), but also in pride (dictating that he should be washed in totality). But shockingly, Jesus responds, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me". The only way that we can receive the gift of grace and forgiveness, is by accepting Jesus' act of washing us clean on the cross. For those who have this, there is one more thing: that Jesus' example of servanthood would also be the model of our lives. That as servants of the Lord, that we would serve those around us in order to point back to the great Servant King. AL

Questions

1. Have you ever felt too important or good to serve those around you?
2. How does serving those around us help point to the ultimate act of service by Jesus on the cross?
3. Who can you serve in your life — and how so — in order to point to Jesus more?

Prayer

Dear Servant King, thank you for your ultimate act of service on the cross. Please help us to continually accept your great act of service and imitate you in our lives for your glory. As your servants, please help us to constantly be inspired by your service and prevent us from ever thinking that we're above serving those that you have placed in our lives. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

DAY 24: TUESDAY, JANUARY 30

READ Ephesians 2:1-10

Reflection: We are Made for Service

The moment that you follow Jesus is the moment that you come alive! How is this possible? Because Jesus' death and resurrection releases us from the chains of sin and death. Paul says that formerly we were *dead* in our transgressions and sin. This does not *just* mean all of the ways that we fall short of God, but also the broader problem of the brokenness in our world and our lives caused by sin. But when we trust in Jesus, we accept that he has paid the penalty for ALL SIN, we are raised up through Jesus' victory of resurrection, and we become coheirs with Christ of the Kingdom of God. None of this is due to our own doing! It was when we were dead (v.1 and v.5) that God rescued us, and when we followed the ways of the world (v.2 and v.4) that he died for us. It is through his abundant love that we are saved and given life.

And with new life, comes a *new way* of living: namely, serving God. As people who have come alive, who have received victory over sin through Christ, we are to live with God as our King, with a view of the transformation that he desires in us. Thankfully, Paul reminds us that just as we are saved by grace (i.e., it is a gift) and that we are God's handiwork, God now desires us to use our God-given gifts and abilities for his cause in the world. He gave us those gifts, so it should not surprise us that he has a purpose for them. Sometimes we can feel like we don't have much to offer, but you are God's handiwork with things that have been prepared for you to do (in advance). We are so loved and valued by God, that he not only has saved us, but he wants us to be involved with his Kingdom work. If you're not sure what that looks like for you, please have a chat with a Christian who you trust (ask them what they think your gifts are), or have a chat to one of the ministry team. AL

Questions

1. What does it mean to you that you have been made alive in Christ?
2. What do you think are the gifts that God has given to you, as his handiwork?

Prayer

Heavenly Father, we thank you that when we were dead in our sin you saved us through Christ. Thank you for the gifts that you have given us! Please help us to know, develop, and use them for your glory. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

DAY 25: WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 31

READ Luke 6:27-36

Reflection: Love and Service

At the heart of all Christian service, is love. That is, in response to God's sacrificial love for us, we express our love for the Lord by serving him and loving others. This section in Luke, focusing on loving our enemies, is incredibly challenging. The disciples were going to know and experience the extremes of hatred towards them. But in imitation of their Master, they were to love even those who rejected and persecuted them. In imitation of our Lord, who even pleaded for the forgiveness of those who crucified him, we are to love in a God-shaped generous and sacrificial way. If we're not challenged by this, then I suspect that we haven't yet begun to grasp the weightiness of what Jesus asks of us. The examples that Jesus provides are all quite extraordinary. The generosity and forgiveness demonstrated through each of the various acts can, by worldly standards, seem 'unfair'. But that is the point! For just as we have *undeservedly* received mercy — without merit, we haven't earned it — we are to demonstrate undeserved grace and mercy through our lives. As even our enemies become the recipients of mercy and kindness through us, our prayer is that they will come to recognise this as a glimpse of God's perfect mercy and kindness to them through Christ. As I reflect on this, I'm filled with excitement (and trepidation), that every time someone mistreats me, it is an opportunity for me to show them God's grace in action! Let's praise God for his mercy, that he is judge, and that we have the privilege of showing his mercy to the world through love. Do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. Be merciful, *just as your Father is merciful*. AL

Questions

1. When do you find it most difficult to show mercy and love to others?
2. Who is someone to whom you can demonstrate God's mercy more?
3. How can you grow in your capacity to love indiscriminately?

Prayer

Loving God, we thank you for your abundant mercy. Please help us to love more, showing your mercy, even to those who are our enemies. We pray for those who hate us, that they may know your saving love and the work of Christ in their lives. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

DAY 26: THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 1

READ 1 Peter 4:7-11

Reflection: Service as Living for God

My wife and I have friends who don't serve people as a chore — it's part of their lifestyle. Having known this couple for only a couple of weeks, they offered their beachside apartment to us for a weekend so that we could have some time together. They regularly bring us gifts and come around to our place to make yummy food. The other day they drove three hours just to help us with music at a church service (which took 45 minutes). What impresses me most about these two is how natural serving others is to them. They do it because they love God and because they have made following Jesus and serving others a part of who they are.

1 Peter describes acts of service not as an optional extra in a person's life, nor as a chore to earn salvation or a better seat in heaven. Notice how many times God is mentioned in 1 Peter 4:7-11. For Peter, acts of service are the natural outworking and overflow of our love for God. Christians don't serve others because they have to, they serve others because it is who they are in Jesus Christ. Peter encourages us to pray regularly, love deeply, offer hospitality, and faithfully steward all the gifts they have been given by God. Verse 11 of this passage is God-soaked and shows us that everything we say, and everything we do should, reflect the God we serve. Everything should be done in a manner worthy of Christ and reflect the goodness and love of the God who gives us everything we have. As you look for ways to serve God this week pray that the Holy Spirit would give you a servant heart and that service would become a natural part of your lifestyle. DB

Questions

1. What are the ways 1 Peter 4:7-11 talks about serving?
2. What are the ways you currently serve others in your week?
3. What steps could you take in aligning your life with that described in 1 Peter?

Prayer

Dear Lord, please give me a servant heart. Help me to see the needs that you see in our world. Help me to become more like Jesus who came not to be served but to serve. Please help me use the gifts and talents you have given me more effectively each day. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

DAY 27: FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 2

READ 1 Corinthians 12:12-30

Reflection: Our Gifts and the Body

Did you know that ants have two stomachs? They have a personal stomach which holds food the ant needs to survive, but also a corporate or communal stomach which stores the food they share with the other ants. If an ant had only one stomach they might be able to store more food, but they would be unable to care for the other ants whose job it is to perform other important functions.

In 1 Corinthians 12 the Apostle Paul uses the analogy of a body for the church. While your body only has one stomach, all your body parts serve a purpose and work together to make you, you. Right now your eyes are sending signals to your brain to help you read these words, your lungs are supplying oxygen to your heart which is pumping out blood to help your other organs process food, repair your body, fight off infection, and perform a whole host of other functions. Some are glamorous and immediately practical, some are subtle and probably go unnoticed but all are significant and all work together to serve the purpose of keeping you alive.

If the church is to function as effectively as an ant colony or as a human body, it needs to recognise that every member has an important role to play and that we all must serve each other to stay alive. The church at its worst is a divided mess of people serving their own selfish agendas, but at its best, the church is a well-oiled machine serving everyone's needs and helping each individual member function to the best of their ability. Let your next step serve the good of the body, yourself, and glorify God, who serves you every day. DB

Questions

1. What other bodies or organisms work together to serve one another?
2. What do you currently do for the benefit of others?
3. What could be your next step in serving others today?

Prayer

Gracious God, thank you for reconciling me into the body of Christ. Please help me to look at my life in light of the greater body of Christ. Thank you that Jesus washed his disciples' feet to show me how I am to serve others and ultimately serve you. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

DAY 28: SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 3

READ Ephesians 4:1-16

Reflection: Growing in the Use of Our Gifts

The song 'City on a Hill' by Casting Crowns describes a community torn apart because it refuses to share its gifts:

Did you hear of the city on the hill, Said one old man to the other, It once shined bright, and it would be shining still, But they all started turning on each other. You see the poets thought the dancers were shallow, And the soldiers thought the poets were weak, And the elders saw the young ones as foolish, And the rich man never heard the poor man speak. But one by one, they ran away, With their made up minds to leave it all behind, And the light began to fade in the City on Hill.

Ephesians speaks of the importance of Christ, unity, humility and using our gifts in a complementary fashion to build up the whole body of Christ. A final stanza of the song speaks of how God has given us different gifts to build up the body:

*It is the rhythm of the dancers; That gives the poets life;
It is the spirit of the poets; That gives the soldiers strength to fight;
It is fire of the young ones; It is the wisdom of the old;
It is the story of the poor man; That's needing to be told.*

As disciples of Jesus, we need to keep taking next steps in how we use our gifts but also in how we use those gifts to complement those of others. A life-long journey of following God begins with one single step. As the city on the hill, we need to make it our mission to grow in our use of gifts today and every day. For the benefit of all creation and the glory of the Lord. DB

Questions

1. What does 'speaking the truth in love' look like in your life?
2. How can you promote unity in our Church through the use of your gifts?

Prayer

God of Grace and Love, please help us to be a light to the nations and work together to share your light with the world around us; like a city on a hill. Help me to build up the whole body of Christ and serve our church more humbly and sacrificially each day. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

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TRAINING CENTRE

