



A short series of studies that considers why Jesus is the key to a life that is rich in faith & hope.

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Discover.....Friendship, Faith & Hope!

A short series of studies that considers why Jesus is the key to a life that is rich in faith & hope.

- Study 1. The Scandal of Grace**
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Ecclesiastes 9.1-10
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Romans 5.1-11
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Discover.... Friendship, Faith & Hope**Study 1 The Scandal of Grace**
Luke 18.18-30

1. It would be helpful to now read the two accounts prior to this one ie. Luke 18.9-17.
Luke appears to want to make a contrast between these two and the rich young ruler. What differences do you note in the way the tax collector, little children & the rich young ruler approach God?

2. Why does the ruler call Jesus good? Why does Jesus rebuke him for this approach?

3. Does the ruler think he is good? Or good enough? What evidence would you cite?

4. What is the 'one thing' the ruler lacked? V22
Do you think he was sad because of the request to sell every thing or the command to 'then come follow me.'?

5. What does it 'cost' you to follow Jesus? ie. Materially? Physically? Spiritually? Should following Jesus 'cost' us something? How often—always, occasionally etc?

6. v24 is famous. Do you think it is hard for the rich to enter the kingdom of heaven? We live in a very wealthy society. Is it our riches that is the main barrier to the gospel today? If not what is?
7. How is this story a rebuttal of the prosperity doctrine which says, riches are a sign of God's blessing and should be expected for the followers of Jesus?
8. What do you make of v26-27? What is impossible with man – but only possible with God?
9. Why is the concept of grace so difficult for most people to understand when it is quite simple?
10. **Read Ephesians 2.1-10**
What strikes you about these well known verses?
11. Write a short summary of these verses—of this gospel?
12. If you had to explain to someone why you are a Christian, could you? What would you say?

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Study 2. What is life... How is it to be Lived? **Ecclesiastes 9.1-10**

1. Do you think people struggle to find meaning in life?

Where do people try to find meaning in life? Are they successful?

2. **Read Ecclesiastes 1.1-10**

Ecclesiastes is written by 'the Teacher' - considered to be King Solomon who was famous for his wisdom.

Why does the Teacher consider life to be meaningless? He gives a number of reasons—list as many as you can!

3. Do you agree with his assessment of life? In what ways is he right and in others perhaps wrong?

4. **Read Ecclesiastes 9.1-10**

What does the Teacher see as the great 'leveller' in life?

5. Does he see any value in being righteous?

6. The Teacher has a rather bleak view of people v3. Do you think he is right or overstating the situation?

Consider Romans 3.9-20

7. Is it better to be alive or dead according to the Teacher—why?
8. How does the Teacher suggest we should live out our days? v7f
9. What part does God play in this meaningless life? v7-10?
10. Is the Teacher suggesting we should just live a self indulgent life and forget the rest? If not what is he suggesting?

11. Read Matthew 6.25-34

Where does Jesus suggest a meaningful life is to be found?

12. How are we to live if we are to enjoy the life that Jesus speaks of?

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Study 3. Why Does God Allow Suffering?

1. The question of suffering in the world is often prompted by personal experience. What has happened in your life that would influence the way you think (and feel) about this issue?

Have there been times of personal suffering in your life which has caused you to doubt the goodness of God or even his existence? Share.

2. Put most simply, the assumptions behind the question are:
 - (a) God is all powerful
 - (b) God is all loving
 - (c) There is suffering in the world

Some will argue that at least one statement must be false. What reasoning do you think they use?

3. Consider the following quote. Discuss.

“If God creates a material universe, and gives creatures freedom of action, suffering follows as a matter of course. Having exercised his omnipotence in creating the universe and endowing his creatures with freedom, he cannot block the outcome of that free universe-suffering.” Alister McGrath

4. The first occurrence of suffering in the Bible is in Genesis 3. Does knowing the origins of human suffering help in any way or is it irrelevant when faced with your own suffering?

5. **Read Romans 5.1-11**

How is it possible for Paul to 'rejoice' in his sufferings?
Have you been able to do this in your own life?

6. **Read Romans 8.18-21; 28-39**

What perspective does Paul have in regard to suffering that should be helpful for us? v18 See also 2 Cor.4.16-18

7. How do we know that our suffering is not punitive or meaningless? See 8.28f

8. What comfort is there in knowing that Jesus suffered on our behalf so that we could be forgiven? What assurance does Paul say this gives to us?

9. If nothing can separate us from the love of God—how should that influence how we live and also handle the ups and downs that inevitably come in life?

10. **Read Hebrews 12.4-13**

It is possible that some of our suffering is a form of God's discipline. What is its purpose? Discuss.

11. **Read Revelation 21.1-5**

What can you do to make sure you remember God's perspective on suffering next time you experience hardship?

12. Consider:

'God is not a philosophical ideal, rather He is loving and relational. The source of suffering is the rebellion of each person against the perfect will of God. In His wisdom, God includes suffering in His plan of salvation when Jesus dies and defeats death. The present reality of suffering reminds all people that we fall short of God's perfection. For believers, it is part of the preparation and expectation for eternal relationship with God.' Alister McGrath

Discuss.

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Study 4. Why Don't All Religions lead to Heaven? **Acts 17.16-34**

1. The idea that in the end all religions will lead to God is a very popular concept. Why do you think this is the case?

2. If someone said to you, 'Doesn't the sincere Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, Christian and Jew worship the same God just under a different name? What would you say?

3. Why is it difficult for people to accept there is only one way to God?

4. Consider the claims of scripture.
Read Acts 4.12, 1 Timothy 2.5
Summarise these verses in your own words.

5. **Read John 14.1-6, John 8.24**
What does Jesus claim?

Why do people take offense at the exclusivity of Jesus' claims?

6. Discuss with your group any of the distinctives of other religions of which you may be aware. Are they in conflict with any of the claims of Jesus?

7. Take a few moments to explore some of the unique claims of Jesus:
 - a) Luke 22.67-70
 - b) Mark 2.1-12
 - c) Mark 8.31
 - d) Acts 10.39-43

Consider Paul's view on the uniqueness of Christ in relation to the resurrection See 1 Cor.15.1-6, 12-19

8. All the religions of the world except Christianity are about man's search for God. Christianity is about God's search for man.
All world religions except Christianity tell you what you must DO to be accepted by God. Christianity is all about what God has DONE in Christ for us.

Why does this mean - all other faiths will lack assurance of salvation?

9. In our multicultural society it is politically incorrect to suggest there is only one way to God? Does this mean we should never tell others about Jesus? How can we tell people about Jesus without sounding arrogant or self righteous?

10. Read Acts 17.16-34

What can we learn from Paul who sought to proclaim Christ in a world of other 'gods'?

11. How would you respond to the popular assertion, 'It doesn't matter what you believe as long as you are sincere?' Is it possible to be sincerely wrong? Does sincerity save anyone?

12. Do you believe Jesus is the only way to salvation? Why/Why not? Could you explain your position to a non-believer?

13. What can you or your group do to ensure your verbal witness for Christ is more faithful and proactive?

Read Colossians 4.2-6

Pray that God would help us to have a fresh conviction about Christ being the only way to salvation and that our witness might be gracious yet BOLD!

Discover.... Friendship, Faith & Hope**Study 5. Does the Bible really matter?****Psalm 19.1-14**

1. How do you think most people view the Bible? Important/ irrelevant etc? Explain.
2. The Bible is the best selling book in the world every year. That being the case how do you explain people's ignorance of its contents?

3. Read Psalm 19.1-14

This Psalm speaks of God's revelation by two methods. Can you identify the two ways that God speaks to us? What are they?

4. What does creation reveal about God? See Romans 1.18-20
5. The Psalmist in each verse v7-11, makes a statement about the word/law of God and then a benefit that it brings to the reader.

Identify each of these. Which stands out for you?

6. Consider:

‘Hold fast to the Bible. To the influence of this Book we are indebted for all the progress made in true civilization and to this we must look as our guide in the future.’ Ulysses S. Grant

Do you agree or disagree with Ulysses S. Grant? Can you think of ways that the teaching of the Bible has led to progress in true civilization?

7. Further food for thought:

‘For two hundred years we have sawed and sawed and sawed at the branch we are sitting on. And in the end, much more suddenly than anyone had foreseen, our efforts were rewarded, and down we came. But unfortunately there had been a little mistake: The thing at the bottom was not a bed of roses after all; it was a cesspool full of barbed wire...It appears that amputation of the soul isn’t just a simple surgical job, like having your appendix out. The would has a tendency to go septic.’ George Orwell 1940

Most would agree that Western civilization has been built on a Christian ethic and faith.

What evidence is there (as far as you can see) to support Orwell’s view that we have sawed off the branch we have been sitting on?

8. Read Hebrews 1.1-4

How can we be sure that Jesus supersedes all previous revelations of God? Why is his revelations superior?

9. Read 2 Timothy 3.14-4.5

Paul lists a number of benefits the scriptures bring to us in 2 Timothy. Do we forget or underestimate the power of God's word? Why?

10. Why do people turn away from the authority of scripture according to Paul? v3-4.

Where do you see evidence of this in our society?

11. If Western Civilization has been built on Biblical foundations what can be done to preserve our foundations and not let them crumble beneath us?

12. What can we do individually and as a church to promote Biblical truth in our community? See v2.

Is there someone you can be reading the Word one to one with? Pray that God might open up such an opportunity for you.

