

CHAPTER ONE

*Start a new
adventure with God*



NOTES FOR THE JOURNEY

Chapter One.

The journey begins here.

You were made for a life of adventure.

In a culture that can be lonely, rushed and hectic, we want you to experience a way of life that is rooted in healthy, life-giving rhythms. A life of community, celebration, freedom and generosity. Over the next ten weeks, we will introduce this way of life.

Each week, you'll spend time in personal reflection, before meeting with your small group to chat about what you've read and learned. You'll be invited to take part in larger experiences where you pray, share and serve together.

And through it all, we believe that the God who hand-made you will speak to you about who He is, and the purpose He has for your life. Are you ready?

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

Acts 2:42-47, The Bible, NIV version.

Chapter One | Sessions

WEEK ONE

What is Chapter One?

WEEK TWO

The Rhythm of Scripture

WEEK THREE

The Rhythm of Prayer

WEEK FOUR

The Rhythm of Power

WEEK FIVE

The Rhythm of Worship

WEEK SIX

The Rhythm of Freedom

WEEK SEVEN

The Rhythm of Generosity

WEEK EIGHT

The Rhythm of Reaching Out (part one)

WEEK NINE

The Rhythm of Reaching Out (part two)

WEEK TEN

Do it all in community

Reading the Bible

Each week, in advance of your small group session, you'll have five passages from the Bible to look at, and three options on how to approach them. Whichever approach you choose, you will have the opportunity in your small group session to talk about what you've read, and any ways in which God has spoken to you.

To get the most out of Chapter One, we'd really encourage you to take the time to follow these Bible passages. Having said that, if you miss the odd one, that's totally ok – do still go to small your group. The readings are there to help you explore more about God, not to give you 'homework' that must be completed.

Approach One | **Devotionals**

If you're short on time, commit to simply reading, or listening to, the five devotionals we've written for each rhythm. This is the least demanding approach (though it is also the approach that is least likely to establish a regular rhythm of Bible reading.)

The devotionals are deliberately short – each one takes about three minutes to read – and there's a suggested way to respond at the end. If you don't have the time to sit down and read, or you find reading difficult, you can listen to the audio versions while you're in the car, in the kitchen, or brushing your teeth.

If you take this approach, resist the urge to cram on the last day. The devotionals are best read one each day, with a couple of days off, so you have time to reflect on what is written.

Approach Two | Personal Reflection

If you are able to devote a little more time each day, you'll benefit from reading the passage and inviting God to speak to you through it, before you read the devotionals we've written.

Primarily, the Bible is a book about God. That might sound obvious, but so easily we can read it as though it's about us. Each book, each chapter, reveals something about His character. The more you dig, the more you'll understand of his Holiness, his authority, his kindness and his compassion. It's only when we understand more of who God is, that we understand ourselves.

To take this second approach, set aside a regular block of time each day for five days of your week. It doesn't have to be long. Sit down with your Bible, a pen and a notebook. Pray, ask God to speak, then read the passage through a couple of times. As you do, ask God, '**What do you want to say to me? What do you want me to notice?**' Write down your response.

Approach Three | Personal Study

This final approach will take time and patience, and will require more of you than the other two approaches – but what worthwhile thing doesn't?

We know that not everyone will be able to take this approach. But if you can, it will stretch you further, grow you more, and give you a greater understanding of the glory of God.

So how do you study the Bible? Author, Jen Wilkin, suggests the following three-stage process: *comprehension, interpretation, application*.

COMPREHENSION | WHAT DOES IT SAY?

With your Bible open, a notebook nearby and a dictionary handy, take some time to read the passage a few times. Note down what is written. Don't try to understand it yet, just focus on what it says. What do you notice? What words, phrases or ideas are repeated? Are there any words you don't understand?

INTERPRETATION | WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

Having looked at what the passage says, you're now ready to explore what it *means*. If it's a fairly short passage, you might want to rewrite it in your own words. This is a great way of intentionally slowing down and focusing your mind.

If you have a study Bible or commentary, this is the point where you might want to see what it says about the passage. In trying to understand the meaning, it might help you to know who wrote the book of the Bible that the passage is in, who did they write it to, and in what style did they write it?

Each book of the Bible tells its own story of the character of God from a particular cultural and historical perspective. Considering who wrote it, when and why, helps us avoid misunderstanding, and can prevent us applying meaning that was never intended.

APPLICATION | HOW SHOULD IT CHANGE ME?

After establishing what a passage says and what it means, we're finally in a position to ask how the text should impact us. Seeing the Bible as the word of God, and submitting to its authority, means being willing to let it change us.

Ask the following three questions of the passage:

What does this passage teach me about God's character?
In light of this, how does it change my view of myself?
What should I do in response?

If you'd like to read more on how to study the Bible, you might like to buy the following book:

'How to Read the Bible for all its worth', by Fee & Stuart

Shared experiences

In addition to your small group discussions, you'll be invited to take part in group experiences. These are designed to take you, and the people you are journeying with, to a new level of relationship with God and with each other.

The first experience is simply sharing your **story**. We all have a story to tell, regardless of where we are in our faith. Throughout Chapter One, we'll provide everyone with the space to share part of their journey. As well as sharing with the group, we'll equip you to share your story with others outside the church.

The second experience is **prayer**. In week three, you'll meet during your usual weekly session, to pray for an extended period of time. This might sound daunting – particularly if you've never prayed with others before – but we'll guide you through it in a really structured way that's easy to engage with. Our experience is that people really hear from God in this session.

The third experience is **freedom**. In week six, we'll go through a 'Mini Freedom experience' together, inviting God to highlight any areas where we're believing things that don't line up with Biblical truth, and asking Him to set us free.

And in the final experience, you'll have the opportunity to **serve** the community, in a meaningful and potentially life-changing way, with those in your group.

How to share your story

Everyone on Chapter One has the opportunity to share their story with those in their group.

If you are a Christian, use the three sections below to help structure your story. Don't feel the need to answer all the questions – they're just there to stimulate thought. After you've written, try to edit each section to a paragraph of 6-10 sentences, looking to make it as conversational as possible.

If you're not a Christian, instead just take time to think about your family background, any experiences you've had of God, and how you came to be part of Chapter One.

Once you've written your story, practise speaking it out. Aim to keep it to three minutes max.

1. BEFORE

Who were you before you committed your life to Jesus?

What was your lifestyle like?

Who did you spend time with, and what did you do?

What were your emotions in your day-to-day life?

How did you deal with setbacks, challenges, crises?

What, if anything, did you feel was lacking in your life?

What were your hopes, dream and ambitions?

What did your relationships look like?

Where did you turn for help or advice?

2. ENCOUNTER

It might be that things happened for you over time rather than suddenly – and that's fine. But try to remember what brought you to Jesus. Don't be tempted to manipulate your story to make it sound more dramatic. Your story will resonate because it's real, not because it's sensational.

What helped you turn to Jesus?

Did you have a particular need which Jesus met?

Was there another Christian whose life made Jesus attractive to you?

Were there any key places or moments?

Was it a sudden conversion or gradual?

What did you realise at that time?

What emotions did you feel?

3. AFTER

What has your life been like since your commitment to follow Jesus?

How has Jesus made a difference to your life?

What have been the benefits? What has been the cost?

What are your ongoing struggles?

How have your thoughts, attitudes and emotions changed?

What has changed in your relationships with others?

How does your faith in Jesus affect your hopes, dreams and ambitions

Chapter One Bible passages

NOTES FOR THE JOURNEY

*Audio versions of these devotionals are available at
www.kca.church/chapterone*

RHYTHM ONE

The Rhythm of Scripture

“THEY DEVOTED THEMSELVES TO THE APOSTLES’ TEACHING..”

Perhaps your Bible is your most treasured possession.

It has become tatty and dog-eared from years of relentless study. The spine is broken and fixed-up with sellotape. There are notes scribbled down the side of every page, and your favourite verses are highlighted and underlined in pencil. You take it everywhere you go, and you feel almost lost without it.

Or perhaps your relationship with the Bible is a bit more complicated. You have a copy or two in your home (although you’re not entirely sure where) or a Bible app on your phone, but really... it’s been a while. There are times when the Bible seems relevant, but other times when it seems like it’s written for another people in another time.

Or maybe you don’t believe the Bible at all. Perhaps you think it’s a book of harmless fairytales – useful for others maybe, but certainly not for you. Or worse, a book that is responsible for doing more harm in the world than good.

We believe the Bible is the word of God. That, although it was written by different authors over a number of years, it is inspired by God himself. And that it tells a story everyone needs to hear.

On the next pages are the passages for you to read this week, followed by a simple devotional for each. We are praying that as you read the passages each week, you’ll grow in your understanding of the Bible, and develop a rhythm of reading it that is disciplined, sustainable, and life-giving.

RHYTHM ONE

The Rhythm of Scripture

BIBLE PASSAGES

Use the notes on 'How to read the Bible' to reflect on or study one of these passages each day in the week leading up to small group session.

DAY ONE

Reading: 2 Timothy 3:16-17

DAY TWO

Reading: Genesis 1:1-25

DAY THREE

Reading: Genesis 1:26-31

DAY FOUR

Reading: Genesis 3:1-19

DAY FIVE

Reading: John 3:16-18

DEVOTIONAL | God-breathed and useful

An audio version of this devotional is available at

www.kca.church/chapterone

Walk into any bookshop, and you'll find whole sections of books that promise to help you to live well.

Books that help you to follow your dreams. Books that help you to sleep. that promise to make you happy, make you healthy and make you rich. But with so many books offering so much wisdom, how do we separate what's important from what's not?

The Bible is the world's most popular book. Each year, more than 100,000,000 Bibles are either sold or given away. It's the best-selling book of the year, every year.

But more than being just another book, in today's passage, the writer, Paul, makes two astonishing claims: that the Bible is both 'God-breathed' and 'useful'.

First, the Bible is *God-breathed*. The claim is that this book, written over a period of around 1,600 years by at least 40 human authors, is inspired – or 'breathed-out' – by one author: God himself.

Through many different kinds of literature (history, poetry, prophecy, letters...), He reveals to us the single, coherent story of a Father who goes to remarkable lengths to rescue the people he loves. A story with one central character: Jesus Christ.

The second claim is that the Bible is *useful*, for every human being.

Useful in teaching us what's true, and in helping us to understand what's wrong. Useful in helping us to live well – in how we relate to others, how we bring up children, how we handle money.

The lived experience of millions of Christians, all over the world, is that things written hundreds of years ago speak right into the reality of their lives today. This is God communicating with the people he has made, about how to live in the world he has created.

But the Bible isn't simply a book of rules – its purpose is to bring us into relationship with Jesus. *More precious than gold, it has the power to change lives.*

Over the next four days, we'll look at the life-changing story of the Gospel that Scripture reveals.

RESPONSE

What are your own experiences, if any, of reading the Bible? Do you believe that God ever spoken to you as you've read the Bible? Do you think the Bible is relevant today? Why? Why not?

Reading: Genesis 1:1-25

DEVOTIONAL | The world the Father made

An audio version of this devotional is available at

www.kca.church/chapterone

Surely no sentence that has ever been written is so powerful – and so full of meaning, and so understated – as the opening line of the Bible. *'In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth'.*

The Bible never argues for God's existence, it assumes it. In the Bible's story of creation, we see the power of God in action. God speaks, and the universe is.

Light appears, and waters shift. And where there was formlessness and emptiness and disorder, He brings shape and structure and colour. God's intelligence, majesty, creativity and joy are poured into the things He creates.

Stars so bright they can be seen from millions of light years away. Seas capable of roaring with majesty and power one minute, and lying tranquil and still the next. And the whole thing teems with life.

Creatures that fly and swim and crawl and stalk – some wild and powerful and terrifying, others fragile and delicate and vulnerable. All of them whispering something about the character of their creator.

Most of it goes unseen, or unnoticed, by human eyes – but all of it is watched over, known and enjoyed by Father, Son and Spirit. *And*

everything about it was good. It's important we start here. Often the church begins with the story of sin and fallen humanity – of our desperate state and our need for rescue. It's all true of course – but it's not where the Bible story begins. It starts with a loving, holy creator who personally designs and crafts a universe to reflect His glory.

So when you look around the world today, stop and look for the detail. Pause for a moment. Notice the small things. And when you find them, don't just marvel at the detail, celebrate the unseen Creator. The heavens and the earth – from the grandest mountain to the tiniest creature – declare His glory.

RESPONSE

Take some time today to slow down and notice the intricate detail in creation. Who or what do you believe is responsible for creation? If you believe in the Creator, take some time to thank Him.

Reading: Genesis 1:26-31

DEVOTIONAL | His masterpiece

An audio version of this devotional is available at

www.kca.church/chapterone

Imagine you're a great, prolific artist. You're used to sitting back and looking at your work, pleased with what you've made. But of all your wonderful works of art, this *one* creation gives you your greatest pleasure. *It's your masterpiece.*

The creation of human beings gets an extended focus in the Genesis account of creation. When God created the world – the stars, the planets, the sea, the animals – He said, “it is good”. But when He created people, He said, “it is very good.”

That's you and me – and every person you'll come into contact with today. The friend who knows you better than anyone. The neighbour you nod to when you leave your house. The person in your workplace or school or uni that you just can't get on with.

The unborn girl being knitted together in her mother's womb to the dying man at the end of his earthly life. All of them handmade lovingly and deliberately by the master craftsman. There is no person who has ever existed who came about by accident. *He made you on purpose.*

He made you *for* purpose, too You were made in the image of God – which means there are things about Him that are true of you. Just as God has will and emotions and intelligence and creativity, so do

you. Just as God exists in community – Father, Son and Spirit – so you were made for community.

And you were made to be his image on the earth – to reflect the goodness and kindness and glory of God to the world.

There are moments in everyone's life where we ask the question, why am I here? What's my purpose? When you know you were made deliberately by a loving God with plans and purposes, it changes everything.

RESPONSE

'God made mankind in his own image, in the image of God, he created them.' When you get time today, why not take a moment to dwell on this line, and to ask God what it means for you.

Reading: Genesis 3:1-19

DEVOTIONAL | What went wrong

An audio version of this devotional is available at

www.kca.church/chapterone

We've talked, over the last couple of days, about the perfect world God created. But you don't have to look too far to know that something has gone horribly wrong.

Turn on the TV, connect on social media, have a chat with a friend, and you soon come across hurt and pain. People may disagree on the reason, but one thing is for sure, *our world is broken*.

The Bible paints a clear picture of what went wrong, and where the problem began. The first human beings were given a choice – to trust God, or to turn from Him and go their own way. We know what they chose, and their decision ripples through all of creation.

Now, instead of the unity and intimacy that God designed us for, people experience shame, hurt and struggles for power. There's not one aspect of human life that hasn't been affected by sin. And the Bible says that even creation itself is groaning.

You and I are given the same choice as Adam and Eve today – submit to our loving Father or go our own way. And time after time, we choose rebellion. Reckless decisions and selfish choices. The harm we cause to ourselves and others is destructive. But bigger still is how sin affects our relationship with our Father.

Simply and bluntly, each sin is an act of war against a Holy God. And

instead of intimacy with Him, we experience fear and hiding. Not only do we miss out on the wonderful things He has for our lives, but our rebellion earns the wages of sin: death and separation from our Father forever.

That's the heart of our brokenness. We're marred masterpieces, in the hands of a holy God. And none of us, in our own strength are able to repair the damage. But graciously, as we'll reflect on tomorrow, this isn't the end of the story...

RESPONSE

What evidence of brokenness do you see in the world around you? What signs do you see in your own life – in the feelings you experience, in the things that stir your heart?

DEVOTIONAL | What Jesus did

An audio version of this devotional is available at www.kca.church/chapterone

As we talked about yesterday, our sin separates us from God. We have a debt against Him that we cannot pay. Our situation is more desperate than we think, but our God is kinder than we know.

Motivated by love, Jesus takes the initiative. Far from standing back and watching us mess up, He chooses to join us in our filth, so we can join Him in his family. The eternal God is born into the confines of a human body. With hands and arms and feet. Fully God and yet fully man.

God comes close, in a human body like ours, so we can identify with Him. And we find out He's nothing like we thought he was. He's unspeakably holy and yet he's unimaginably kind.

He hangs out with sinners and nobodies. He heals the sick, He raises the dead. He lives the perfect life that we don't even get close to, obedient to the Father and never once sinning. And then He *chooses* the cross.

And on the cross, he willingly takes all our sin on himself – everything we've ever done, and said and thought that's wrong. *He* takes the punishment that we justly deserve. *Our debt against God is paid, by God himself.*

And on the third day, Jesus walks away from the grave. What looked like defeat is uncompromising victory. Death and the power of hell are beaten. And the path back to God is open to all – regardless of our guilt and background – *all because of Jesus.*

That's the Gospel. It's the best news we could possibly hear. But we each have a response to make. It involves admitting we've done wrong, believing that Jesus died on our behalf, and making a commitment to follow Him. Have you done that?

RESPONSE

If the things you've reflected on this week have struck you as true, and you'd like to accept Jesus as your saviour for the first time, here's a prayer you might like to pray:

"Lord Jesus, I'm sorry for going my own way instead of your way. I acknowledge there's nothing I can do to save myself. I take you at your word. I believe you are the Son of God who died to forgive my sin. From now on, please take first place in my life. Fill me with your Spirit, and help me to be the person you made me to be. Amen."

Could you say these words and mean them? If so, why not pray this now? If you already know Jesus as your Lord, ask him to excite and stir you again with the wonder of the Gospel.

RHYTHM TWO

The Rhythm of Prayer

“THEY DEVOTED THEMSELVES... TO PRAYER”

Let's be honest, prayer can be a struggle.

We sit down to pray, with all good intentions, but our minds wander to the to-do list. We get the words out, but they just sound wooden or mechanical. Or it just feels like we're talking to thin air.

Far from being 'devoted to prayer', many people go through life with a low level guilt that they don't pray *often* enough and don't pray *well* enough. This week's Bible passages have been chosen, not to pile on the guilt, but to look at what the Bible teaches about the heart of prayer.

We'll look at two Psalms and three teachings from Jesus. Then, in your small group session this week, you'll have an opportunity to experience praying together with the people in your group. That's because the best way to develop a healthy rhythm of prayer isn't through reading about prayer or learning a prayer formula, but to simply begin praying.

Our prayer is that through Chapter One, you will develop a regular rhythm of connecting with God through prayer. Why? Because through the incredible noise of the universe, there is a Father God who hears every single prayer you pray.

He is devoted to you.

RHYTHM TWO

The Rhythm of Prayer

BIBLE PASSAGES

Use the notes on 'How to read the Bible' to reflect on or study one of these passages each day in the week leading up to small group session.

DAY ONE

Reading: Psalm 27:4-5

DAY TWO

Reading: Psalm 19:1-6

DAY THREE

Reading: John 10:1-16

DAY FOUR

Reading: Matthew 6:1-8

DAY FIVE

Reading: Luke 11:5-13

Reading: Psalm 27:4-5

DEVOTIONAL | It's all about relationship

An audio version of this devotional is available at www.kca.church/chapterone

We spent last week looking at the truth of the Gospel: God creates a perfect world, with human beings his work of art. We rebel, in our thoughts, words and actions – but out of love, God makes a pathway back to Him, through Jesus, that is open to all.

Jesus has won for us eternity with God in heaven, but He has also won the possibility of relationship with Him today.

Our means of relating to God is prayer – but we all know that prayer can be hard. Where do we start? What do we say? We can see prayer as a ritual, an item on a tick list, another thing to squeeze into an already busy life – and another thing to feel condemned about when we don't get around to doing it.

And so we miss it. God is everywhere, but we're distracted. It's possible to have dinner with the person we love most – a husband, or wife, a sister, a friend – but because we're distracted, to never enter into their presence. *We can do that with God, too.*

David, the writer of today's psalm, says the *one thing* he desires is to be close to God. This is more than ritual, it is relationship. It is a *hunger* for his presence. This is the sort of longing that drives a persistent prayer life.

Through prayer, we can get close to our heavenly Father and spend time in His house – without having to use a special language, without being restricted to a specific place. Just talking and listening to the one who made us and who knows us best.

Through prayer, we can get close to our heavenly Father and spend time in His house – without having to use a special language, without being restricted to a specific place. Just talking and listening to the one who made us and who knows us best.

What is your *one thing*? What is the thing you want more than anything else? Is it happiness? Success? Money? Is it a friendship or relationship? Or is it God? To know Him, and to be near Him?

This week, we're looking at the rhythm of prayer. Wherever you are on your journey, why not ask God to give you a hunger for more of Him, and reveal to you more of what He's like? Because of Jesus, you can talk to Him anytime, anywhere. Why not now?

RESPONSE

What is your 'one thing'? Honestly, what is the one thing you want more than anything else? If you know it's not God, ask Him to give you more of a hunger for Him.

Reading: Psalm 19:1-6

DEVOTIONAL | The God who speaks

An audio version of this devotional is available at www.kca.church/chapterone

Dip into any book of the Bible and you'll soon encounter something stunning – something we can so easily take for granted. *God speaks to human beings.* Ordinary people in very ordinary places hearing from an extraordinary God.

Moses on a mountain. Elijah in a cave. Samuel in his bed. Our God speaks and wants to be known. *It is not God who hides, it's us.*

Here are some ways in which God might speak to you today wherever you are – on the train, in the car, at work, in the kitchen:

God will speak to you through the **Bible**. This incredible library of 66 books, written by people but 'breathed' by the Holy Spirit – that all tells one coherent story pointing to Jesus. The Bible is alive – it has the power to speak right into your situation today.

God will speak to you **supernaturally**. As you listen for Him, He'll put visions, words and pictures in your mind. He'll put people on your heart, helping you to see people and situations like He does.

God will speak to you through his **creation**. The writer of today's psalm talks about the skies, day after day, proclaiming the work of God's hand – speaking to us about his majesty and his glory.

And God will speak to you through other **believers**. A word of

encouragement from a friend that helps change your perspective.

A word of knowledge that unlocks a situation. It's one of the reasons it's so important to be in community with other Christians.

How often, in your prayers, do you just slow down and listen? How often are you aware of God's presence in the normal, the everyday? How often do you say, Lord, what do you want me to hear in this moment?

The God of the Bible is a God who speaks. Have you heard him recently? What is He saying to you?

RESPONSE

Start today by asking God to speak to you throughout the day. End the day by jotting down anything you heard, through prayers, through other people, through the Bible, through the world around you. What do you notice? How is God speaking to you?

DEVOTIONAL | Recognising his voice

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www.kca.church/chapterone

Are there people in your life who you recognise over the phone even before they introduce themselves? What gives them away? Is it their tone? The name they call you? The sound of their cough?

The better we know someone, the easier it becomes to recognise their voice. It's the same with God.

Sometimes when He speaks, we question it. Was that Him or my own thoughts? Hearing from God is something that is learned. The more time we spend with Him, the more we'll recognise His voice.

In today's passage, Jesus describes himself as a good shepherd. Middle Eastern shepherds were known for talking and singing to their sheep. They'd play a repeated tune on a small flute so their sheep would have a consistent cue to follow.

The sheep would become so familiar with the sound, they'd know it from a mile away. So when an imposter called, they wouldn't batter an eyelid.

So what does it sound like, the voice of God? His voice is **consistent**. It doesn't change. What He says in the Bible – the things He's said to you in the past – they're still true today. His voice is **accepting**. It's the voice that says to you "above all else,

you are mine, and I love you.” His voice is **challenging**. It’s the voice that has your best interests at heart; that says: “If you’ll allow me to, I’ll help you change those things in your life that you know you need to change.” And His voice is **encouraging** – not in a fluffy sort of way, but in the truest sense of the word – a voice that gives you courage to face the things you’re facing.

That’s the voice of the Good Shepherd. Always loving, kinder than we know, always with our best interests at heart.

Do you know it, that voice? Have you heard it lately? Are you deliberately placing value on hearing from Him? Are you slowing down enough to listen?

RESPONSE

Spend a few minutes writing a prayer to God about something that’s on your mind. Then ask the Good Shepherd if there’s anything He wants to say to you. Write down what He says.

Reading: Matthew 6:1-8

DEVOTIONAL | Be authentic

*An audio version of this devotional is available at
www.kca.church/chapterone*

In the passage today, Jesus is teaching his followers how to pray. This is God teaching us how to approach God. And what He says could be summed up in two words: 'Be authentic.'

When you pray, don't use religious formulas or say things out of mindless obligation. Don't use lengthy words for the sake of it or babble on and on. Don't try to impress the people around you with the words you say.

Just come to Him, honestly, with all your raw feelings. Even when those feelings involve anger, disappointment and frustration.

When Jesus says, don't pray on street corners, but instead go into a room and close the door, he's not saying 'never pray in public'. He's simply saying your public prayer should be an overflow of your private prayer. And both are about an authentic relationship with your Father.

Heaps of books have been written on how to pray. But perhaps the best way to learn is to listen to a secure young child talking with their Father.

Look at the intimacy. Look at the joy. Look at the honesty and the openness. Look at the closeness and the informality. It isn't forced

or mechanical or stuffy, it's intimate and alive. That is what meaningful, authentic prayer looks like. When you pray today, say what you really think. Be authentic.

RESPONSE

Go into a room, close the door, and tell God how you really feel. What's going well? What are you finding hard? What are you angry about? What hurts?

DEVOTIONAL | Prayer as a first instinct

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www.kca.church/chapterone

I wonder how many opportunities we pass up each day, by not praying about them? Things we deal with, without asking God to help.

God is at work all around us, all the time. Sometimes we notice him at work in our lives and in the lives of others, just because He is so good. But God is also the one who invites us to ask, rather than just barging in.

What is your first instinct in situations, when things go well, and when things go wrong? How do you deal with the 'normal', the everyday? Is turning to God your first instinct?

When Jesus teaches his friends to pray, He says, "ask and it will be given to you, seek and you will find." He invites us to come to Him continually – to be 'shameless' and 'audacious' in the way we ask. He has good gifts to give us, and He wants us to ask for them. Who *doesn't* want to see the good gifts God has?

In our society, we have lots of great things that make life easier. And when things go wrong – whether it's to our car, our home, our body – we have people we can call on to fix the problem. We also have a mentality of independence – we don't tend to like to ask for help or admit that we're stuck.

And so, if we're not careful, prayer can get pushed down the list. It can become a last resort – something reserved for moments of crisis, when everything else has failed. But even non-believers pray when their lives are in genuine danger.

Instead, what might happen if prayer became our first instinct? How many more stories of answered prayers and God working in day-to-day life would we have? How much more peace would we experience because we turned to God first and looked to him instead of ourselves for the answer?

When we pray, when we bring all these things to God, we tend to realise that the thing we need more than anything else is his presence – which is precisely what He loves to give. *How much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?*

RESPONSE

Is prayer your first instinct? Who or what do you tend to go to, before you go to prayer? In everything you face today, take it to God first, and see what He does.

RHYTHM THREE

The Rhythm of Power

'EVERYONE WAS FILLED WITH AWE
AT THE MANY WONDERS AND SIGNS
PERFORMED BY THE APOSTLES'

You don't need to have been around too long to know that life can be tough, confusing, and sometimes just plain dull.

We spend countless hours tidying things, searching for things we've lost, fixing things that are broken. We stand in queues, we wait on the phone. There are meals to cook, essays to write, tax returns to fill in. And then there are the harder things: Job losses. Relationship breakdowns. Hospital appointments.

Should we shut up and settle: "oh, that's just the way life is", or should we hunger for the extraordinary?

The early followers of Jesus were marked by a faith that God would continually show up in their ordinary, everyday lives. They performed signs and wonders that made people take notice.

Christianity isn't just about believing the right things, or living a Christ-like life, it ought also to have a spiritual dimension, too.

Church leader and author, Francis Chan, writes: "No matter where you live and what your days look like, you have the choice each day to depend on yourself, to live safely and to try and control your life. **Or you can live as you were created to live – as a temple of the Holy Spirit, dependent on him, desperate for God the Spirit to show up and make a difference.**"

RHYTHM THREE

The Rhythm of Power

BIBLE PASSAGES

Use the notes on 'How to read the Bible' to reflect on or study one of these passages each day in the week leading up to small group session.

DAY ONE

Reading: John 14:15-18

DAY TWO

Reading: Acts 2:1-13

DAY THREE

Reading: Galatians 4:4-7

DAY FOUR

Reading: Galatians 5:13-26

DAY FIVE

Reading: Acts 3:1-10

DEVOTIONAL | Who is the Holy Spirit

An audio version of this devotional is available at

www.kca.church/chapterone

We can get a bit confused about the Holy Spirit.

In some ways, it's easier to visualise Jesus, because He's human. Perhaps we *get* the concept of Father (even if our ideas fall way short), because we all have an experience of Father, whether good or bad or distant.

But the Holy Spirit somehow seems less concrete and more difficult to get our heads around. We say we're *filled* with the Spirit, *challenged* by the Spirit, *nudged* by the Spirit. But what does it mean? *Who is the Holy Spirit?*

In today's passage, Jesus describes the Holy Spirit as a He, not an It. A person not a force. It's vital we get this. The Spirit is every bit as personal as Jesus or the Father. And He's every bit as divine.

He is eternal, 'hovering over the waters' in the Genesis account of creation. And now, He is '*given*' to those who follow Jesus.

When Jesus comforts his disciples in today's passage, it's by explaining that when he's no longer physically with them, the Father will send the Spirit to be with them forever.

In fact, later in John's Gospel, he says to them: "It is for your *good* I

am going away. Because, unless I go away, the Holy Spirit will not come to you.”

Does that seem crazy to you? I mean, what could be better than having Jesus with you in person? The answer, it seems, is this: having God himself live *in* you through the person of the Spirit.

So what is this person of the Holy Spirit like? Put simply, He’s like Jesus. Jesus healed, restored, loved and encouraged. The Spirit does too. Jesus is kind, generous, forgiving, humble and gentle, so is the Spirit. He is as powerful, wild and zealous as Jesus too.

So, be comforted, be excited and prepare for adventure. Over this next week, we’re going to look at the person of the Holy Spirit – and the rhythm of power that is available to us through Him.

RESPONSE

When you think of the Holy Spirit, what *ideas* do you have? Where do you think these ideas come from?

Reading: Acts 2:1-13

DEVOTIONAL | You will receive power

An audio version of this devotional is available at

www.kca.church/chapterone

When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues the Spirit enabled them.

Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken. Utterly amazed, they asked: "Aren't all these who are speaking Galileans? Then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language? Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome(both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!" Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, "What does this mean?" Some, however, made fun of them and said, "They have had too much wine."

When the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost, the people involved knew about it. The disciples knew about it, speaking in languages they'd never learned, and all at once experiencing new power, joy and boldness. The Jews who had gathered in Jerusalem knew about it too – some were amazed, while others could only make sense of what they were seeing and hearing by assuming the disciples must be drunk! The history of the

church is about the person of the Holy Spirit filling ordinary followers of Jesus, and changing them for good. This is the history of Kings Church Amersham too. It's now over 40 years ago that the Holy Spirit burst into the church in a new and wonderful way, as some of us still remember well, when we used to meet in the Baptist Chapel down in Old Amersham.

One by one this group of ordinary people began to be filled with the Holy Spirit – some when they were being prayed for, many as the Spirit simply met with them on their own, often as they were going about their normal lives. And the church was transformed - I was a visitor in those days, and the impact it had on me looking in has lasted a lifetime.

The church experienced joy, boldness, freedom and excitement – and a new love for Jesus, as well as for one another. Who we are today is still in large measure the result of what the Holy Spirit started amongst us then. And it was the Holy Spirit who made the difference – the same power that raised Jesus from the dead is available to us through the person of the Holy Spirit. We cannot live the Christian life without him.

Now when the Holy Spirit bursts into our lives individually, it will not look the same for everybody. We are all different, after all. But however we experience him, it will be real. And he can't help but make a difference! Have you had your own Pentecost moment? Have you been filled with the Holy Spirit? And if you have, have you been re-filled recently? Let me encourage you this week, to make space, and to ask God to fill you with his Spirit. Ask, and see what the Father will do – after all, as Jesus said he is the God who gives generously when we ask him.

RESPONSE

What experiences have you had of the Holy Spirit? Take some time to ask the Father to fill you with the Holy Spirit today, whether you've experienced him before, or whether it's for the very first time.

Reading: Galatians 4:4-7

DEVOTIONAL | Who God says you are

An audio version of this devotional is available at

www.kca.church/chapterone

We talked yesterday about 'experiencing' the Holy Spirit. Experience is important – but not just for experience sake. There are things God wants to say to you, ways He longs to change you.

If you've never seen the film 'The Lion King', then you might want to skip the next few paragraphs. (Or better still, go and watch the film, then come back and read the rest...)

In the Lion King, there's a moment where the hero, Simba is wandering aimlessly in the wilderness. His Father, the King Mufasa, has died, and Simba seems oblivious to his destiny as heir. Rafiki the monkey follows Simba, and tries to provoke him into action: "You don't even know who you are!" says Rafiki. "Oh, and I suppose *you* know" replies Simba. "Sure I do", says the monkey. "You're Mufasa's boy!"

It's a defining moment in the film. As Simba starts to believe in his identity – as he realises who he is – he finds the courage to stop running away, and live the life he was born for. *He finds purpose and boldness because he realises he's the son of the king.*

Before anything else, if you are a Christian you are a son or daughter of God, and nothing can ever take this away.

No other words override it, no disaster decreases its value and no success adds to its worth. It's down to nothing you did yourself, it's all down to God's grace. *Jesus* did it. All because he loves you.

Now, because of Jesus, God the Father looks at you and sees the righteousness, goodness and blamelessness of Jesus. He treats you as if you've lived the life that Jesus lived. And if that's how God sees you, then that's who you are.

What is available to you, as a follower of Jesus, is a life of supernatural power and purpose – but the doorway to that life is understanding who you are in Christ.

One of the things the Holy Spirit loves to do is to reveal to followers of Jesus their sonship. If you need greater understanding of who you are, ask Him to reveal it. Then believe it and walk in it.

RESPONSE

Ask the Holy Spirit to show you more of who you are in Christ. What tangible difference does it make to know that you are a son or daughter of the King?

Reading: Galatians 5:13-26

DEVOTIONAL | A changed people

An audio version of this devotional is available at

www.kca.church/chapterone

Imagine you move house, and find that the previous owners have left the place in a bit of a state.

Piles of rubbish are heaped in the corners of the rooms, there are stains on the carpet, the paintwork has been chipped – and these are just the problems you can see.

Stay a while and you stumble across deeper issues – complicated problems that are more than surface deep. Damp. Subsidence. Problems with the foundations. Issues that will take a bit more time to resolve.

In Ephesians 2:22, Paul writes that God's people are to be the *dwelling place* for the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit *moves in*. And when He does, in his kindness, there are changes He's going to need to bring.

Some transformations might be quick and painless, but others might take a bit more time. Turning anger to patience. Addictions to self-control. Deep-seated anxieties into life-changing peace and joy. Making us more kind, forgiving, gentle, faithful...

These things are the *fruits of the Spirit*. Choose to follow Jesus – to walk in the Spirit and walk away from your old ways – and the Holy Spirit will grow these things in you.

Immediately, you might not notice a change – but that’s the deal with fruit. Watch an apple grow, and you don’t see much. It’s only later in the season that you notice how much it has changed.

If we allow Him to, the Holy Spirit will bring wonderful, life-changing transformation to our character – undoing the work of sin in our lives and making us the people He created us to be.

How has God changed you? Are there fruits you would still like to see grow? The Father’s great purpose for you is to make you more like the Son, Jesus, through the power of the Holy Spirit. Will you let Him?

RESPONSE

As you look back on your journey as a Christian, what fruits do you see growing in your life? What fruits would you like to see more of?

Reading: Acts 3:1-10

DEVOTIONAL | Filled up and sent out

An audio version of this devotional is available at

www.kca.church/chapterone

On their own, the disciples weren't a particularly impressive bunch – even the ones closest to Jesus.

Peter panicked when a young servant-girl accused him of being with Jesus. James and John were power-hungry and seemed obsessed by ideas of their own greatness. All of them abandoned Jesus and did a runner when things got tough.

But when the Holy Spirit came, everything changed. Peter boldly preached to a huge crowd and saw 3,000 people baptised and added to the church in one day. James was willing to die for the Gospel. John went on to serve the church long into his life.

The book of Acts is the wonderful story of the Holy Spirit empowering ordinary people to do courageous and risk-filled things. Healing the sick, raising the dead, understanding the power they had, and intentionally blessing the people around them.

They were a people on mission – living for purpose and loving the people God had put in their paths.

How does the Holy Spirit turn a bunch of scared men into courageous world-changers? By making the truth about Jesus so

real to them that they can't get enough of Him, can't stop living for Him and can't stop talking about Him.

God doesn't give us the Holy Spirit just so we can have a bless-up every Sunday as his family. Certainly, He wants us to enjoy Him – to turn our tears to laughter, our mourning to songs of joy. *But God gives us the Holy Spirit for mission.*

He empowers us to reach out and point others towards Jesus. He blesses us, so we can bless others.

We are ordinary people, changed by Jesus, to change the world.
As you go about your ordinary life today, full of the Holy Spirit, who are you intentionally going to bless?

RESPONSE

Ask God to interrupt your day today by breaking your heart for the things that break His. Is there anyone He is asking you to reach out to?

RHYTHM FOUR

The Rhythm of Worship

“THEY BROKE BREAD IN THEIR HOMES AND ATE
TOGETHER WITH GLAD AND SINCERE HEARTS,
PRAISING GOD...”

A teenager raises his hands as the worship band plays. A few rows back, a man kneels, his eyes closed, his hands outstretched. A young woman dances. Children sing.

Different people, different postures, all in the name of worship. But beneath the sound and movement, what else is going on? What really *is* ‘worship’?

For the early followers of Jesus, worship was never confined to music. It wasn’t restricted to a particular day or to a specific sacred space. ‘Worship’ was an everyday thing – the outworking of a ‘glad and sincere heart’.

This week, as we move our focus to the rhythm of worship, we’ll look at different aspects of what worship means, using passages from the Old and New Testaments.

We’ll talk about the things we love, and the power they have to grip our hearts – about why God is worthy, and what it looks like to put Him first.

As we do, our prayer is that ‘worship’ becomes something we intentionally do, wherever we go – in the busy moments of life and the quiet. And, that what happens when we gather together on a Sunday is simply an overflow of a *lifestyle* of worship.

This is what we were made for.

RHYTHM FOUR

The Rhythm of Worship

BIBLE PASSAGES

Use the notes on 'How to read the Bible' to reflect on or study one of these passages each day in the week leading up to small group session.

DAY ONE

Reading: Exodus 32:1-6

DAY TWO

Reading: Isaiah 6:1-8

DAY THREE

Reading: Psalm 13

DAY FOUR

Reading: Luke 10:38-42

DAY FIVE

Reading: Romans 12:1

DEVOTIONAL | We all worship something

An audio version of this devotional is available at

www.kca.church/chapterone

We begin our focus on the rhythm of worship by looking at a well-known passage from the Old Testament.

Moses (the leader of God's people, the Israelites) has been off spending time with God, and the Israelites are worried he's not coming back. So they take matters into their hands, pooling their gold earrings and turning them into a cow-shaped idol.

It's easy to laugh at the Israelites for bowing down to a golden calf, or to mock religions that make idols of man-made things – but idol worship is a daily ritual here, too. Only, the idols are often much more subtle, and perhaps more dangerous, as a result.

In his book, 'Worship Matters', Bob Kauflin writes: "Each of us has a battle raging within us over what we love most – God or something else." The truth is, we all worship something. What we love most will determine what we worship – and when we love and serve anything in place of God, it is idolatry.

The most innocent of things can become idols when we place too much significance on them. A relationship. Our work. Family. The latest gadget, sports, money, a hobby. The most *powerful* idols are often things we can't even see – our reputation, other people's approval, power. We think, "If I just had that, *then* I'd be happy", looking to temporary pleasures to fulfil eternal desires.

Throughout the Bible, God repeatedly condemns idolatry. He hates it when His people go after these other 'gods', because he knows that they're not really 'gods' at all. They promise much, but they deliver little. They are powerless to save us.

When Jesus was asked, what is the greatest commandment, he replied: You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. (Matthew 22:37)

God wants us to love Him more than our relationships (our friends, husbands, wives or kids), more than our 'stuff', more than we love our own lives. That doesn't mean we can't love anything else, of course. But it means that we can't love anything in the *right* way unless we love God more.

RESPONSE

What (or whom) do you worship? To think this through, try answering these questions: What does your mind drift to when you have nothing else to think about? What makes you angry when you don't get it? What do you fear losing the most?

Reading: Isaiah 6:1-8

DEVOTIONAL | He alone is worthy

An audio version of this devotional is available at

www.kca.church/chapterone

In today's passage, Isaiah is worshipping in the temple – the same temple he has likely worshipped in countless times before. Only this time it's different. *This time*, he gets a glimpse of what has been going on behind the scenes all along. Isaiah gets a vision of God. And the vision is majestic.

Picture it. The train of the Lord's robe fills the temple. Angels worship Him – covering their eyes and feet in the presence of this glorious sight. Their repeated cry is 'Holy, holy, holy'. Perhaps the best definition of this word 'holy' is 'other' or 'altogether different'. These angels have been worshipping God across the ages – and they still haven't yet got over his 'otherness'.

When you get a big vision of who God is, it changes everything. Your perspective shifts. Things you've held in high esteem – things, even, that you've built your life around – suddenly seem small, insignificant and unworthy in comparison.

When Isaiah sees God as he really is, he sees *himself* as he really is. He realises that *he's* not the centre of the universe after all – that there's a being who is so glorious, so worthy of worship, in whose presence Isaiah is not even worthy to stand. And he's ruined. He is broken. He is undone by the Holiness of God. One day, we will all

stand, as Isaiah did, before this Holy God. I wonder, what will we think? What will we say? What will we do?

Here's the truly remarkable thing in all of this. When Isaiah gained this true perspective of God and of himself, he found that God was not only utterly glorious and unspeakably Holy, but also unimaginably kind.

The God who is so Holy, so 'other' has compassion for us. He cares for us. He says to Isaiah, "Your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for." He says that to you, too, if you are a follower of Jesus. Your guilt is removed, your sin is paid for in full.

Our God is worthy of our worship – for who He is, and for what he has done. Nothing and no one else comes close to him. So we worship, simply because he is worthy. And if we refuse, Jesus says elsewhere that even the rocks will stop being 'rocks', and will start to worship Him too.

RESPONSE

Have you had a big vision of who God is? Ask the Holy Spirit to speak to you and show you.

Reading: Psalm 13

DEVOTIONAL | Choosing to worship

An audio version of this devotional is available at www.kca.church/chapterone

It's amazing how often the writers of the Psalms seem in the depths of despair one minute and lifting up God's name the next. This isn't because of a sudden miraculous change in their circumstances, but instead it reflects a deliberate choice to worship God in the midst of whatever is going on.

In the Bible, God commands us to worship Him. He doesn't *need* us to worship. It isn't because of any lack or insecurity on His part. It's because He knows it does us so much good.

In Paul's letter to the Thessalonian church, Paul writes 'rejoice always'. We might be tempted to ask "Really, though? In *all* circumstances? What about when life is tough – when we face those things that threaten to rob us of joy? Toothache. Tiredness. Work pressures. Anxiety.

Or how about when the pain of life hits us so hard that it takes our breath away? Suffering, illness, bereavement, death? Do we simply 'turn our frown upside down' and smile through the pain?

In fact, worship isn't about denying the hardship we are facing. If anything, as we see in the Psalms, pouring out our hearts to God builds our relationship with Him. It becomes a part of our worship as we

acknowledge that He is big enough to take it, strong enough to hear the truth of how we're feeling, and great enough to deal with all that life throws at us, to sustain us through it, and to bring us out the other end.

He brings us out the other side of our circumstances, and ultimately, He will bring us through the other side of life – fully into His glorious presence. Now we see Him in part – one day, we will see Him as He really is, and live with Him forever.

And so, in all things, we choose to fix our eyes on Him. We consider that He loves us so much that, through unimaginable suffering, He gave himself for us. We catch a glimpse of his glory; we reflect on His kindness and His patience... and we are moved to worship as the only appropriate response.

And as we worship, we draw closer to Him, and our perspective on life comes more into line with His perfect view of things. Today, whatever the circumstances of life, we can sing the Lord's praise.
For he has been good to us.

RESPONSE

Have you ever had to make a deliberate choice to worship God, in spite of what you were facing? What happened? How did it change things?

DEVOTIONAL | An unhurried life

An audio version of this devotional is available at

www.kca.church/chapterone

Life is busy...countless things to do and so little time to squeeze it all into. Did God not know it would be like this? Was 24 hours a day really enough?

It's easy to sympathise with Martha in this story – particularly on those days when an unhurried life feels like a total impossibility. But it is there in black and white in the Word of God. Jesus' approval of Mary's choice is clear (as is, it should be said, His compassion and kindness to Martha.)

In Psalm 46, God says: "Be still and know that I am God." He says it because it is essential to our wellbeing. We may be busy. We may have responsibilities. But – we *need* to be still. We need to remember who He is, and who we are. *He is God and we are not.*

I have noticed recently my sheer delight when something that was in the diary is unexpectedly cancelled. Even if that thing was good, enjoyable, useful... It's just so lovely to have the space. Why do we find it so hard to deliberately create that space?

Partly, it's because we have an enemy who wants to keep us occupied with the less important things in life. The devil would love us to be caught up in busyness, if our endless activity keeps us away from God. But partly, too,

we don't value rest highly enough.

We must be careful. Hurry can be a great joy-robber. Our busyness can stand in the way of our worship.

If we are always rushing, when are we going to remember what God is like? When will we have a moment to consider his glory, the wonder of his creation, his incomprehensible love for us, or the distance he stooped to pick us up and set us free?

However busy we are, a rebalance is possible. We must 'work from rest' rather than 'resting from work'. So, take a minute today – now even – to pause. To slow down. To breathe. And to focus on Him.

It's only as we take some time to be still, that we gain a proper perspective on life. He is God, we are His children. Nothing else matters as much as this.

RESPONSE

Be ruthless with your calendar. What could you NOT do this week, in order to spend more time with God?

DEVOTIONAL | Whole life worship

An audio version of this devotional is available at www.kca.church/chapterone

It's fair to say that Paul, who wrote today's passage, knew a thing or two about worship. We don't know if he could sing – or if he was any good on the guitar – but he understood what true worship was all about.

For Paul, worship was something that engaged his whole body, his whole being, his whole life, after he'd met with Jesus.

So, what does it mean to offer your body as a living sacrifice? This is how the Message translation of the Bible puts it: *'Here's what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life - your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life – and place it before God as an offering.'*

True worship is about making a choice, day after day, to take our whole lives, and to place them before God as an offering to him. And so, the simplest things, done with the right heart attitude, can become worship.

Our *thoughts* can become part of our worship. The things we choose to focus on, the thoughts we allow to form and stick. The way we choose to see situations, or other people.

Our *words* can be part of our worship. The things we intentionally choose to say or choose not to say. What we write (or what we don't write) on social media.

How we use our *bodies* can be part of our worship. The choices we make about our relationships and our sex life. What we do with our hands, our feet. What we allow our eyes to focus on and our ears to listen to.

How we use our *money*. How we use our *time*. How we use the gifts we've been given. Worship is about ordinary decisions made in ordinary places on ordinary days. Taking our whole lives and choosing to use them to bring glory to God.

Of course, the word 'therefore', right at the start of the passage, is key here. Paul is saying we worship *in view of God's mercy*. In other words, worship is a response. We don't live like this to earn the love of God; we live like this because he first loved us.

Jesus gave his life as a perfect offering in our place. It is finished. He has done it. *Therefore*, as a daily response, what can we do but worship Him?

RESPONSE

How are you using your whole life to worship God? Are there any changes you could make – things you'd like to start doing, things you'd like to stop – in order to worship him more?

The Rhythm of Freedom

“THEY BROKE BREAD IN THEIR HOMES AND ATE TOGETHER WITH
GLAD AND SINCERE HEARTS...”

We place a high value on freedom. When a human being is deprived of it, through being controlled or oppressed, it rankles against something deep within us. It feels wrong to the core, a ‘crime against humanity’.

Freedom is seen as being worth fighting for – and sometimes, worth dying for. It’s hard to forget Mel Gibson as William Wallace in the film *‘Braveheart’* yelling: They may take our lives, but they’ll never take our freedom!”

Today, ‘freedom’ means different things to different people. To some, it might mean a freedom of speech – being able to say or write what you want. To others, it’s about lifestyle – freedom to live how I want, to love whom I want, to *be* who I want.

Jesus, too, placed a high value on freedom. He said things like: “You will know the truth and the truth will set you free” and “When the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.” But what did Jesus mean? What does true freedom look like, and how can we find it? What role does God play, and what role do we play?

This week, we’ll look at God’s heart for freedom, and how the New Testament writers understood it. As we do, we’re praying that *you* find true freedom. And that, like the disciplines of Bible reading, prayer and worship, ‘freedom’ becomes an intentional rhythm in your life. Something you choose to walk in, day after day.

RHYTHM FIVE

The Rhythm of Freedom

“THEY BROKE BREAD IN THEIR HOMES AND ATE TOGETHER WITH
GLAD AND SINCERE HEARTS...”

BIBLE PASSAGES

Use the notes on ‘How to read the Bible’ to reflect on or study one of these passages each day in the week leading up to small group session.

DAY ONE

Reading: John 8:31-36

DAY TWO

Reading: 1 Peter 5:8-11.

DAY THREE

Reading: Ephesians 6:10-19.

DAY FOUR

Reading: 2 Corinthians 10:3-5.

DAY FIVE

Reading: Matthew 4:1-11.

John 8:31-36

DEVOTIONAL | God wants you to be free

An audio version of this devotional is available at

www.kca.church/chapterone

Our God loves to set people free. He has been doing this for years.

Perhaps the best-known story in the Old Testament is the story of the Exodus. God's people, the Israelites, are in captivity in Egypt. But through a series of miracles, God's power is displayed. The Red Sea is parted, God's people go free, and the mighty Egyptian army is drowned in the sea.

This story of God freeing his people isn't just a good old story from the history books. It's *our* story too.

In today's passage, Jesus is clear about our spiritual condition apart from Him. We are *slaves* to sin. Jesus uses this analogy to make the point that a slave obeys his master because he *belongs* to him.

When sin is our master, we are unable to resist it. And so, our greatest need (like those Israelites in Egypt) is for *rescue*. For someone to come and set us free from the grip that sin has on us.

And so, Jesus comes. He lives the perfect life we cannot live. He is tempted but he never once sins. And at the cross, he takes the punishment we deserve for all the things we've done and thought and said that are wrong. God's awesome power is displayed. The powers of darkness are crushed, and we go free. We did nothing to earn it, but we get to receive what Jesus has done for us. Now, if we are

Christians, we *belong* to Jesus. We have a new master – a master who is thoroughly kind and loving, who understands us through-and-through, and who has our best interests at heart. *True freedom comes from serving this wonderful master.*

The truth is, we sometimes act as though we'd rather be enslaved to sin than enjoy our newfound freedom. (After the Israelites were set free, many complained they wanted to go back to captivity!)

But freedom is a daily choice to line up our thinking and our lives with the truth of who God is and what he has done for us. Over the next couple of days, we'll look at how we can do this.

RESPONSE

Today, take some time to dwell on the truth of what Jesus has done, and any impact this has had on your life. What thought patterns or lifestyle choices is he freeing you from?

DEVOTIONAL | Know who the enemy is

An audio version of this devotional is available at

www.kca.church/chapterone

It's fair to say that the concept of Satan is not a popular one.

In our society, while many people are happy to believe in a loving, benevolent God who is there to protect them and their families, the idea of a personal force of evil, Satan, is rejected by most. Some see the idea as offensive, others as outdated, others still as childish or laughable.

But the Bible is clear. It teaches us that Satan is real and he is active. He has set himself up as the enemy of God. If we are part of God's worldwide family of believers, he is our enemy too.

Today's passage shows us just how deadly Satan is. Like a hungry lion, he lies in wait for an opportune time to take down his victims. It's imperative that Christians are alert to the reality of Satan and his capacity to get involved in our lives – in our thoughts, our emotions, our relationships and the circumstances of our lives.

We mustn't *overestimate* Satan. He is in no way equal with God. While our almighty God reigns eternally over all things, Satan's power is very much limited. As a created being, he is finite, and he can do nothing without God's permission. What's more, God has already secured eternal victory over Satan through Jesus' death and resurrection.

But there is still a battle taking place. Until the time comes when Jesus returns to earth and the enemy is finally destroyed, Satan will continue to oppose God's people, trying to turn us away from our faith and towards sin.

God wants your freedom – even more than you do. We'll look tomorrow at how we can stand 'firm in the faith' against our enemy, looking confidently to the promise that God himself will make us 'strong, firm and steadfast'.

RESPONSE

How seriously do you take the reality of Satan?

What comfort do you find in knowing that he can do nothing without God's permission?

Reading: Ephesians 6:10-19

DEVOTIONAL | Prepare for battle

An audio version of this devotional is available at

www.kca.church/chapterone

Beneath the surface of daily life, Satan and his armies are waging an invisible war against those who believe in Jesus.

On our own, we are no match for these evil forces. But our God has not left us alone. His Holy Spirit remains with us and he has given us tremendously powerful weapons to fight with.

Good soldiers will always be well-acquainted with their equipment, and we too need to be familiar with and able to use each piece of armour that God has given us:

The belt of truth gives us the conviction to defeat Satan's lies.

The breastplate of righteousness brings assurance that we are blameless before God because of Jesus' death for us.

The shoes of readiness keep us prepared to serve God.

The shield of faith deflects all temptation and discouragement that Satan fires in our direction.

The helmet of salvation protects our minds, assuring us that we are set free from sin and death by God's grace.

The sword of the Spirit is the powerful truth of God's word.

Prayer is constant communication with God. Through it, we receive power, guidance and encouragement for the fight.

The power of these weapons is their capacity to shine a light on the lies that Satan uses to undermine our faith in God. Freedom comes from choosing, day after day, to put on this armour.

So often, we rush headlong into our busy days unprepared for spiritual battle. We forget our armour and leave ourselves unprotected against Satan's schemes.

Yet we're told twice in this passage to put on 'the full armour'. A helmet or a shield alone is not enough to protect a soldier in the midst of battle. Every single piece is vital.

So have another look at the armour of God. Are you missing any of it in your life right now? How will you put it on today?

RESPONSE

Where do you recognise there may be a spiritual battle going on in your life? How intentional are you about 'putting on' the armour of God?

DEVOTIONAL | Disarm the lies

An audio version of this devotional is available at

www.kca.church/chapterone

We've seen that God's armour is nothing like the world's. So, it's clear that *spiritual* warfare is not like *worldly* warfare. As Christians, then, what are we fighting for and how should we fight?

The purpose of spiritual warfare is to disarm lies and demolish strongholds. Strongholds are deeply-rooted lies – mindsets and patterns of thinking that are not consistent with God's word.

They don't just deny the *existence* of God, they also lie about his *character* – casting doubt on his goodness, his love for us and his saving work for us through Jesus Christ.

Satan is a liar and we need to beware, because his lies saturate the world. Under the influence of Satan, our society loudly insists that 'truth' is whatever we want it to be, that good and evil are relative and that we are therefore free to choose how we live.

We all come to faith with ways of thinking that are, to some extent, influenced by claims like these. Not only so, but we all have hurts, disappointments and sins in our past that have shaped our beliefs – often bringing with them fear, confusion and shame.

We can often be blind to our strongholds, and so we need the help of the Holy Spirit – and other Christians – to see any areas in our lives where

we're believing things that simply don't line up with Biblical truth. Once we recognise them, we can capture and disarm these strongholds using the mighty weapons we looked at yesterday.

The world tells us that freedom is found by believing and doing what we want. But this is just not true. Genuine freedom comes through renewing our thinking and replacing lies with truth, discovering the perfect will of God and choosing to walk in it.

RESPONSE

Is there anyone in your life who speaks truth to you about Jesus, and helps you see any areas where you're believing a lie? Do you do this for anyone else?

Reading: Matthew 4:1-11

DEVOTIONAL | What victory looks like

An audio version of this devotional is available at

www.kca.church/chapterone

All Christians face temptation.

Although it's not a sin to be tempted, we sin when we give in to it and break God's rules. So how can we resist? The story we read today gives us a perfect example of how we should handle temptation, and what victory looks like.

Jesus is alone in the desert. He hasn't eaten for forty days. He's lonely, hungry, no doubt tired and probably stressed. And Satan is persistent. He's not going to give up easily.

Underlying the temptations faced by Jesus are the same doubts the serpent presented to Eve in Eden (in a passage we looked at back in week one): *Will God look after you? Does he really care? Wouldn't it be easier to give up on God's way of life and take matters into your own hands?*

Unlike Eve, Jesus uses truth to displace the lies, He turns straight to God's word for that truth, quoting from scripture and exposing Satan's dark lies directly to the light it provides.

Satan knows when we are most vulnerable to temptation, maybe in times of loneliness, difficulty or even boredom. It's easy then to make excuses for our sin.

But God calls us to take responsibility for our behaviour and to overcome evil. What's more, he promises to equip us, by giving us 'everything we need for life and godliness' (2 Peter 1:3).

After trying his utmost to tempt Jesus, Satan eventually gives up, backs off and leaves Jesus alone. God's promise to us is this: if we resist temptation, not giving in to it, but trusting in Him, the temptation will eventually pass and Satan will have to leave us alone (James 4:7). This is the way to freedom.

So, whatever trials, temptations or fears you're facing, the truth is that you too can be the kind of person from whom Satan flees. *Wouldn't you love to live in that kind of victory?*

RESPONSE

Write a prayer thanking Jesus for the victory He won over Satan. As you read the Bible, ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you more of the truth of who Jesus is.

The Rhythm of Generosity

“ALL THE BELIEVERS WERE TOGETHER
AND HAD EVERYTHING IN COMMON. THEY SOLD PROPERTY AND
POSSESSIONS TO GIVE TO ANYONE WHO HAD NEED.”

Have you ever been on the receiving end of somebody else’s generosity? When someone invites you for a meal or buys you a gift... When they open their home to you or come and help at yours. When someone is generous with their words, their forgiveness, their time, their actions...

Experiencing generosity is wonderful. At the same time, *being* generous comes with a cost – and often with a risk. ‘What if they don’t look after my things?’ ‘What if they don’t show the same kindness back?’ We’d all like to be known as generous people, but what empowers us to live like this? Where does true generosity come from?

Jesus’ early followers (full of the Holy Spirit) lived in a way that was radically and counter culturally generous. They sold their property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. They held their things lightly, making sure no one went without.

Why did they do it? The Christian author, Tim Keller, writes: “the source of radical generosity is a gospel-transformed heart that has received the costly grace of God.” As we look this week at the rhythm of generosity, let’s allow our hearts to be transformed by the outrageous truth of the Gospel – to be so stirred by what Jesus has done for us, that it changes the way we live for good.

RHYTHM SIX

The Rhythm of Generosity

"ALL THE BELIEVERS WERE TOGETHER
AND HAD EVERYTHING IN COMMON. THEY SOLD PROPERTY AND
POSSESSIONS TO GIVE TO ANYONE WHO HAD NEED."

BIBLE PASSAGES

Use the notes on 'How to read the Bible' to reflect on or study one of these passages each day in the week leading up to small group session.

DAY ONE

Reading: John 3:16-17

DAY TWO

Reading: Psalm 24:1-2

DAY THREE

Reading: Luke 19:1-9

DAY FOUR

Reading: Mark 10:17-30

DAY FIVE

Reading: John 12:1-6

DEVOTIONAL | A generous God

An audio version of this devotional is available at

www.kca.church/chapterone

We're focusing this week on what it looks like to live a life of generosity. But to live radically generous lives that are so counter-cultural that the world takes notice, we must first grasp something of the generosity of our God.

It's no wonder that John 3:16 is one of the best-known and most-often-quoted verses of the Bible. In it is the very heart and character of God. But if we're not careful, the words can become so familiar that we miss their outrageous truth.

"For God so loved the world that He gave his only son..." Here is the essence of what He has done for us. The Gospel in a nutshell.

In response to our rebellion against God, God acts with unmerited generosity, extraordinary grace. We have a debt against God that we simply cannot pay, and so God pays it on our behalf, by giving himself. He is generous with his love, with his acceptance, with his forgiveness, with himself.

Here too, God sets out the pattern for love – the basis for all our relationships. *He shows us what real love looks like.* When you love, you give. True love is always generous. When we're generous, we reflect the image of God.

As we spend time this week looking at what it means to live generously, we must be clear that we're not trying to earn the love of God. We're not trying to buy his favour. He loves you. He sent his Son to pay the debt against God that you cannot pay.

Our generosity to others is simply a response to His generosity to us. We love because he first loved us. We give, because He gave everything.

RESPONSE

Do you believe that God has paid your debt against Him? Read John 3:16, and ask God to speak to you through it in a fresh way. Allow it to bring you to thank Him.

DEVOTIONAL | Owner or manager

An audio version of this devotional is available at

www.kca.church/chapterone

Toddlers tend to have a distorted idea of ownership.

Watch a couple of two-year olds playing in a crèche, with toys that don't belong to either of them, and it's amazing how often you'll hear the word: "mine".

The truth is that as adults, *our* understanding of ownership can get off-kilter, too. We think in terms of '*my home, my time, my money.*' "I'm not giving it up because I worked hard to earn it." But freedom comes from realising that, actually, none of it really *belongs* to us.

Psalm 24 begins with the words: The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it. He's the source, the creator. The air we breathe, the sun that warms the earth, the plants and animals we eat – it's all from Him.

And he's the provider of everything we have – our time, our finances, our God-given gifts and abilities, our influence.

He is the owner and investor who entrusts us with worldly wealth and possessions, and we are simply the managers responsible for taking care of them and investing them on his behalf.

Just like a manager of a business is responsible for his or her

department and employees, so we're responsible for the things we've been given. However much, or however little we may feel we have, we are to make decisions on how and where to invest.

Of course, the better we know the owner, the better we'll understand his priorities, and the things He wants us to invest in.

So look around you. What has He given you? What money or possessions? What gifts, what skills, what passions, what time? Knowing everything you know about the heart of God, how can you invest these things wisely and generously on his behalf?

RESPONSE

How does it affect your view of yourself and the things you have to know that God is the owner and you are a manager? What do you think wise investment looks like?

DEVOTIONAL | A life transformed

An audio version of this devotional is available at

www.kca.church/chapterone

It's no overstatement to say that, in their day, tax collectors like Zacchaeus were among the least popular people in Israel.

Tax collectors were known for cheating people out of money. They had a reputation for being corrupt – they'd collect more than they needed and keep the extra for themselves.

Worse still, they worked for the oppressive Roman Empire. So, they would have been despised as traitors who loved money and possessions more than people.

But, for Zacchaeus, his whole life changed in that wonderful God-ordained moment when he met with Jesus.

You get the feeling that it wasn't just Zacchaeus' finances that were affected. His transformed heart would have led to different expressions of outward generosity, and a restoration of relationships with the people he had wronged. Sure, they may have had questions, but they would have seen that the transformation was authentic.

Why was Zacchaeus suddenly able to loosen his grip on his money and his things? *Because he had found something of infinitely greater worth.*

This true story reminds us what happens when sinful, greedy man comes face to face with a generous God.

Our focus shifts. Our priorities are realigned. What seemed important before is now shown for what it really is – faded, dull and temporary. Earthly things lose their shine. And the eternal glory of knowing Jesus, spending time with Him, and becoming more like Him, become our reason for living.

When we have a genuine encounter with the person of Jesus, we are undone. He transforms us, from the inside out.

Because, when we've received grace like this, how could we ever stay the same?

RESPONSE

What earthly things have lost their 'shine' since you met with Jesus?
How has He changed your attitude towards money, possessions, and people?

DEVOTIONAL | It's a freedom thing

*An audio version of this devotional is available at
www.kca.church/chapterone*

Generosity isn't *just* about money. We are called to be generous with all kinds of things – our time, our words, our forgiveness, our thoughts, our possessions. But ultimately, it must affect our finances too.

Jesus talked about money a lot. In fact, He spoke more about money than He spoke about heaven or hell combined. And what He said was incredibly challenging.

Jesus suggested that how we spend our money is a decent gauge of what we think of his teaching. He suggested that a good indicator of our faith is our bank account.

Unlike Jesus, we *don't* tend to talk about money. We see it as personal, and taboo. And if a church keeps mentioning money and tithing, well then, we can start getting cynical about the motives.

In today's passage, the short line in verse 21 is key: '*Jesus looked at him and loved him*'. Jesus asked this rich young ruler to sell everything he had and to give to the poor because he knew it was a heart issue for him.

He wasn't trying to back him into a corner, he wanted to set him free. *Jesus talks about money a lot because he loves us a lot.* Jesus gets money, and he gets the human heart. He understands the power money can have to help us accomplish God's purpose. But He also knows the power it has to distract us, and to make us think we are sufficient without Him. He knows that money and possessions can become idols in our lives, and strangle the very purpose we were created for

God doesn't *need* our money. The One who made everything from nothing doesn't require our handouts. But we *need* to give. It's a discipleship issue, a freedom thing. He asks us to give, because He wants to set us free.

RESPONSE

What is your own relationship with money? How easy or difficult do you find it to give? What barriers are in the way?

Reading: John 12:1-6

DEVOTIONAL | A generosity that God loves

An audio version of this devotional is available at

www.kca.church/chapterone

There are two hearts on display in today's passage – and they are very, very different. One is a heart of extravagant generosity, the other is a heart of selfishness.

On the surface, what Judas says seems prudent – wise even. The pure nard that Mary poured on Jesus' feet was a fragrant ointment imported from the mountains of India. It was incredibly expensive, and the amount Mary used was worth a year's wages.

To many bystanders, Mary's actions may have seemed foolish – Judas would have sounded like the generous one. But Jesus knew his heart. He always does. Judas's underlying motives were anything but pure.

While Judas is rebuked for his selfish motives, Mary's generosity seems to impress Jesus. In fact, in the account of this story in Matthew's Gospel, Jesus says that this woman's act of worship would be told everywhere the gospel was preached.

So, what was it about Mary's generosity that impressed Jesus? Was it the amount she gave? Remember, this is a God of majesty and glory. Revelation 21 says that the streets of heaven are lined with gold. There's no lack in the throne room.

So, what kind of generosity impresses God? The truth is, it is never about the amount, it's always about what's under the surface. It's about the motive. It's about the heart.

And so, we can give financially, and still not be generous. We can give our time to serve at church, we can give our money to charity, we can give away all our possessions – and, if we do it from selfish motives, still totally miss the point.

Why? Because it's all about the heart. God loves a heart that is so in love with Jesus – so grateful and undone by who He is and what He has done – that it results in a transformed life of extravagant generosity.

RESPONSE

Take some time to examine your heart. What motives are behind the things you spend your time doing?

The Rhythm of Reaching Out (part one)

“... AND ENJOYING THE FAVOUR OF ALL THE PEOPLE.
AND THE LORD ADDED TO THEIR NUMBER DAILY
THOSE WHO WERE BEING SAVED.”

In Genesis 12, God encourages Abraham that He is going to bless him in order for Abraham to be a blessing to the world. The same is true of us – we’ve been blessed to be a blessing to others.

This mission to bless isn’t just an add-on – one more thing to squeeze into our already busy lives. Instead, for a Christian, it’s the reason to get out of bed in the morning, the core of our purpose for each day.

Next week, we will look at a simple five-step process to bless the people God has placed in our lives. But in this first part, we’re looking at the heart behind the mission.

Because of course, reaching out to others mustn’t come from a *need* to evangelise or an item to tick off a list, but from a compassion for people, a heart of love. He has blessed us. Now we have the joy of blessing others.

RHYTHM SEVEN

The Rhythm of Reaching Out (part one)

BIBLE PASSAGES

Use the notes on 'How to read the Bible' to reflect on or study one of these passages each day in the week leading up to small group session.

DAY ONE

Reading: Colossians 1:15-16

DAY TWO

Reading: Matthew 5:13-16

DAY THREE

Reading: Romans 12:3-8

DAY FOUR

Reading: Matthew 9:35-38

DAY FIVE

Reading: Mark 5:21-39

Reading: Colossians 1:15-16

DEVOTIONAL | A bigger purpose

An audio version of this devotional is available at

www.kca.church/chapterone

Rick Warren starts his book 'The Purpose Driven Life' with the words: "It's not about you. The purpose of your life is far greater than your own personal fulfilment, your peace of mind, or even your happiness. It's far greater than your family, your career, or even your wildest dreams and ambitions."

When we're trying to discover what we're here for, we can easily make the mistake of simply asking self-centred questions: What do I want to be? What should I do with my life? What are *my* goals, *my* ambitions, *my* dreams? These things are important of course – but should they be the starting point?

Self-help books teach us that if we can 'find ourselves', we'll find success. But being successful and fulfilling your purpose are not the same thing. You can be a huge success by the world's standard and still miss the purpose for which you were made.

We struggle with purpose because we start in the wrong place. Ultimately, it's not about us. If we want to know why we were placed on this planet, we have to begin with God. We were made by Him and *for* Him. We were created for *his* purpose. Until we realise this, our lives will never make sense.

For as long as we believe we're the lead characters in the stories of our lives, we'll likely be woefully disappointed. But get excited. He's calling you into a purpose that is greater than yourself.

As we'll see this week, it's a purpose that involves loving God and loving the people around us.

RESPONSE

What would you say is the 'purpose' of your life right now? What gets you up in the morning? To what extent do you think it is aligned with God's purpose for you?

Reading: Matthew 5:13-16

DEVOTIONAL | Salt and light

*An audio version of this devotional is available at
www.kca.church/chapterone*

You have influence – probably more than you know.

Whether you are aware of it or not, the people you come into contact with each day are impacted by the way you live, the things you say – and don't say – and the choices you make.

Some of these people may never open up a Bible, but they'll read the story of your life, and it speaks volumes.

In today's passage, Jesus is sitting on a hill, talking to his followers – this bunch of people with fears and flaws, doubts and worries – and what he says is remarkable. "You are the salt of the earth."
"You are the light of the world."

To understand the breadth of it, it helps to understand the value of salt and light back then. Without modern day fridges, salt was used as a preservative, to prevent food from going bad. It had medicinal value too, stopping infection and healing wounds.

In a time without light switches and halogen lamps, light was a precious commodity. Of course, to be most effective, light needs to be placed strategically. With something so precious, who would

light a lamp and then hide it under a bucket? Jesus' point is that in a world that is decaying, our purpose is to preserve what is good, and to bring healing and restoration. In a world that can be very dark, our role is to expose the darkness and show people the way out.

We have been placed, strategically, around other people. The hope for these people – the hope of the world – isn't science or enlightenment or clever ideas, it's Jesus.

If you're a follower of Jesus, He looks at you, with your fears, doubts and imperfections and says: You are the light of the world. In Jesus, you have the answer to the world's deepest problems. Are you hiding that light, or sharing it?

RESPONSE

What sorts of things stand in the way of you sharing what you know about Jesus? How could these be overcome?

Reading: Romans 12:3-8

DEVOTIONAL | Wired to reach out

An audio version of this devotional is available at

www.kca.church/chapterone

Once we believe that our purpose is part of something bigger than ourselves, what next? Where can we best be used? How can we *really* make a difference in the world?

To answer these questions, it's important that we understand how the Father has wired us, and how the Holy Spirit equips us.

The Holy Spirit gives us Spiritual Gifts, specific to each one of us. The main New Testament passages that teach on Spiritual gifts are the passage from Paul's letter to the Romans that we've read today, as well as 1 Corinthians 12 and Ephesians 4:3-8.

Every Christian has at least one spiritual gift, and many people have more than one gift. The Holy Spirit gives us these gifts to help accomplish God's work in the church and in the world.

You may be wondering at this point what gift or gifts you've been given. If so, do take time to read the Bible passages, and ask God to speak to you.

If you're not sure, ask others what they see in you – sometimes it's hard to see what we're gifted in until someone else points it out

and encourages us. Then, look for ways to test out and use the gifts you think you have.

Of course, knowing your gifts doesn't mean you'll never be stretched to live for Jesus outside your comfort zone. But we generally see the most impact when we are operating in our gifts.

When followers of Jesus use their different gifts together, amazing things can happen. God is building his church – a wonderful mix of people, with different stories and different gifts, working together like a well-oiled machine.

Or, to use a better analogy – the Bible's analogy – like a *body*, with Jesus as the head – working purposefully in unity to serve and change the world around us.

RESPONSE

Take some time to look at the New Testament passages on Spiritual Gifts mentioned above. What gift or gifts do you think you have? How are you using them?

Reading: Matthew 9:35-38

DEVOTIONAL | A Godly ache

An audio version of this devotional is available at
www.kca.church/chapterone

What makes God's heart ache?

In today's passage, as Jesus went through 'the towns and villages', though many people would doubtlessly have been materially poor, it was a *deeper* lack that really stirred and moved Him.

When we think of poverty simply in material terms (a lack of things like money or possessions) we are missing half the story. Much deeper and more profound is the spiritual poverty we all experience without God.

Perhaps you know people who are financially poor and yet spiritually rich? Or others who have material riches but go through life stomach-achingly poor? By our nature, we are broken people in need of God. What we lack, more than anything, is a shepherd.

Jesus' response is wonderful. When He saw these 'harassed and helpless people', his response was *compassion*. This doesn't just mean he felt sorry for them. The word we read as 'compassion' is the colourful Greek word *Splagchnizomai* (splangkhnid'-zom-ah-ee). *It's from the root, 'Splagchnon', which means the bowels, the gut. To have 'compassion' literally means to be 'moved to the*

gut'. Jesus *aches* for people – and time and again throughout the gospel accounts of his life, his compassion moves Him to action.

In Matthew 9:36, He 'had compassion on them and healed their sick'. In Matthew 20:34, Jesus 'had compassion on them and touched their eyes'. Mark 1:41 – Filled with compassion, Jesus 'reached out his hand'.

This same ache stirred Him to go after you. When he saw you lost in your worries and disappointments, your plans and your ambitions, He ached for you – and it moved Him to act. He came down to live for you and to die for you. Our response to the lost people around us should be the same.

For followers of Jesus, compassion isn't simply an emotion we should feel. It's a lifestyle that is demonstrated in practical acts.

We ache for people, and we move into action.

RESPONSE

Do you have compassion for the people in your life who don't yet know Jesus? Begin to pray for some of these people, asking God to show you how He sees them.

Reading: Mark 5:21-39

DEVOTIONAL | A life interrupted

*An audio version of this devotional is available at
www.kca.church/chapterone*

Around this time in your Chapter One experience, you'll have the opportunity to serve people in your community.

It's a powerful thing when we go out of our way to help people who need it – but of course, God's desire is that this isn't just a one-time thing, it is that serving becomes a lifestyle.

The majority of times when Jesus served others, it was what we would see as an interruption. In today's passage, he was already on his way to heal a dying girl. When he stops to handle another pastoral matter – a woman who has been bleeding for 12 years – you can just imagine his followers thinking, "Jesus, I'm not sure this one's quite so urgent..."

And yet, Jesus stops. The truth is, serving can seriously interrupt your life.

When we are open to serving God by loving his people in a hands-on way, the Holy Spirit makes us aware of needs around us – and it may not always be in our timeframe or schedule. But God's purpose is for us to love the people He has placed in our lives, and to use our gifts, talents and time to serve them.

In our fast-paced way of life, time is a precious commodity – and one of the best ways we can value and serve people is by giving them our time. Opportunities to love people may not always be life-changing or dramatic – but they can still be a chance to point people towards the kindness of God.

Who has God placed in your life – in your workplace, your street, in your family? What genuine needs do they have? Who is He calling you to love?

We've looked this week at the *heart* of reaching out. Next week, through five simple steps, we'll talk more practically about how outreach can move from an interruption to an intentional lifestyle.

RESPONSE

Begin to put together a list of people who God has placed in your life. Ask Him, who does he want you to intentionally bless?

The Rhythm of Reaching Out

(part two)

“... AND ENJOYING THE FAVOUR OF ALL THE PEOPLE.
AND THE LORD ADDED TO THEIR NUMBER DAILY
THOSE WHO WERE BEING SAVED.”

God has placed us intentionally in the lives of countless people.

Family members, friends, neighbours, work colleagues. People we bump into each day – on the school playground, at the shops, in our school or University halls, on the train.

So, how do we go about blessing these people? There are many ways, but this week we'd like to introduce to you a very practical and simple acronym: 'BLESS'. It's about intentionally finding simple but significant ways to bless people.

The 'B' stands for 'Begin with prayer', the 'L' is 'Listen', 'E' – Eat together, 'S' – serve, and the final 'S' – share your story.

This week's devotionals are deliberately practical, as we look at each stage of BLESS in turn.

The Rhythm of Reaching Out

(part two)

BIBLE PASSAGES

Use the notes on 'How to read the Bible' to reflect on or study one of these passages each day in the week leading up to small group session.

DAY ONE

Reading: Luke 6:12-16

DAY TWO

Reading: Luke 18:35-43

DAY THREE

Reading: Matthew 9:9-13

DAY FOUR

Reading: John 13:1-15

DAY FIVE

Reading: John 9:13-25

Reading: Luke 6:12-16

DEVOTIONAL | Begin with prayer

An audio version of this devotional is available at

www.kca.church/chapterone

We're looking this week at how we can develop a lifestyle of intentionally blessing the people that God has placed around us.

So, once you have a group of people in mind – once you have a 'BLESS list – where do you start? *The place to begin is prayer.*

In today's passage, Jesus goes out to pray, and spends the night talking to his Father. Imagine being there for that night of prayer. The Son talking to his Father about people – in the joy of the Spirit.

I wonder, was it a night of joy, of singing, shouting? Was it a night of peaceful, quiet listening? Perhaps both. Either way, it seems from Luke's account that Jesus' choice of his 12 disciples was a direct result of this night of prayer.

Pursuing Jesus' mission in our lives should always begin with prayer. It's unlikely we'll have the opportunity every day to sit with people, to listen to them or to eat with them. But one thing we can commit to is to pray. To lift these people up to God, and to ask for opportunities to bless them.

I wonder, what sorts of things stop you from praying for the people God has placed in your lives? A lack of **time**? If so, find a short,

regular time each day when you can begin to pray. Put your prayer time in first and build your life around it.

Or is it an **apathy** to the needs around you? If so, begin with prayer. Be honest with God about the way you feel. Lift people up to Him, asking Him to break your heart for the things that break His.

Or is it, if you're honest, that you don't actually *like* your colleagues and neighbours that much? Do you feel anger towards them? Have you been hurt by them? If so, begin with prayer. It's amazing how God can shift your attitude towards someone when you start to pray for them.

Jesus spent a night in prayer – but *you* don't need to give up a whole night. Just make a daily commitment to lift up the people on your BLESS list – asking God for opportunities to bless them. Or saying at the start of each day, "Lord, who can I bless today?"

Begin with prayer – and see what the Lord will do.

RESPONSE

If you've not yet done so, take time today to write your BLESS list – people in your life who don't yet know Jesus. Then, simply start praying for these people – and commit to doing the same tomorrow. See what the Lord will do.

Reading: Luke 18:35-43

DEVOTIONAL | Listen

An audio version of this devotional is available at
www.kca.church/chapterone

At the heart of today's passage is a simple question from one man to another: "What do you want me to do for you?"

In one sense, the answer to Jesus' question to the blind man seems obvious (I mean, come on, Jesus, surely you can work it out...) And yet, there's something honouring in the way Jesus talks with this man.

So often, we rush into judgements about people without listening to their needs and desires. We make assumptions, we give our opinion, we may even offer a solution. But there's a humility in approaching a conversation as a learner rather than an adviser.

Listening means resisting the urge to make a conversation all about me. Listening says: 'right now – in this moment – what *you* have to say is more important than what *I* have to say'. It's about shifting my focus from me to you.

Of course, listening doesn't always mean agreeing with a person, but it does mean giving them a voice – allowing someone to say what they think and feel. Listening requires a compassion for people – and a security in our own identity.

I wonder how the blind man felt to be asked this question? Conversations like this are memorable. It's rare that we are heard – wholly, genuinely heard. We feel valued, honoured and loved.

And so, as you look to bless people intentionally today, be open to listening to them. Listen to their stories, their hopes and dreams. Listen to their disappointments, their struggles and pain. Listen for any areas where you can serve them. And listen, too, for anything that God wants to say to encourage them.

Jesus heard the man's cry for help – and then asked the simple question. "What do you want me to do for you?"

Perhaps the greatest way you can bless another person today is not by having all the answers. Perhaps it's simply by taking the time to listen.

RESPONSE

Pray for opportunities to listen to the people on your BLESS list. When those opportunities come, listen to their hopes, dreams struggle and pain. What are they facing? How might God want you to help?

Reading: Matthew 9:9-13

DEVOTIONAL | Eat together

*An audio version of this devotional is available at
www.kca.church/chapterone*

Have you ever noticed how much time Jesus spent eating?

Robert Karris, a New Testament scholar, writes that in Luke's Gospel, "Jesus is either going to a meal, at a meal, or coming from a meal." Why did Jesus do this? Was he wasting time? Or was there something deeper, and more intentional, going on?

We can miss this in a Western culture, but in many parts of the world, eating together is about more than just food.

A shared meal represents friendship and community. It is a powerful expression of welcome and inclusion. So, we can learn a lot about Jesus' mission by his choice of dinner Jesus' companion.

In today's passage, Jesus is eating with tax collectors and sinners. You can imagine the scene – joyful, raucous, unsanitised – with Jesus right in the middle of it. Of course, the Pharisees didn't like it one bit. In their view, Jesus was mixing with the wrong crowd.

But Jesus spent his time eating with sinners precisely because he knew the mission he was on. He had come to seek and save the lost – and his compassion for people, from all walks of life, led him to share life with them.

So, if eating was part of Jesus' strategy to bless people, then why not *ours* too? What if we became 'missional eaters'? What if we 'ate for Jesus'?

Even in a Western culture, there's something powerful in sharing a meal. Eating together allows for conversation, for intimacy.

The book of Revelation, at the end of the Bible, says there's a wedding feast coming for those who follow Jesus. God promises us a feast when Jesus returns. '*Blessed are those invited to the wedding supper of the lamb.*' When Jesus eats with a roomful of sinners, the message is clear: the invitation is for everyone.

If we want to see the people we care about in heaven, what if we got serious about meals? What if we made eating with people a deliberate part of our strategy for blessing them?

RESPONSE

Have a look at the 21 meals you will eat in the next week. Which **one** of these could you use as an opportunity for mission? It doesn't need to be expensive and eating together is one of the fastest ways to move a relationship to friendship.

Reading: John 13:1-15

DEVOTIONAL | Serve

An audio version of this devotional is available at www.kca.church/chapterone

The reality is, many people would like to be *thought of* as a servant, but no one wants to be *treated* like one. It's why Jesus' actions in today's passage are nothing short of extraordinary.

In our self-obsessed world, we go after and celebrate things like position and power, rank and title. But Jesus turned the whole thing on its head. He demonstrated a totally counter-cultural way to live.

Washing feet wasn't the job of the leader, it was the job of the servant, and the *lowest* servant at that. But someone forgot to book the servant in the upper room that night, and no one was prepared to do the dirty work. *Jesus initiated servant leadership in a way that no one else would.*

In this simple, deliberate act, Jesus demonstrates the servant heart of God – the same servant heart that took Him, out of choice, to the cross – and the humility that Jesus calls his disciples to imitate.

So, how do we serve like this? Well, first, as we saw yesterday, our motivation must be love. If we're going to serve the people around us, we'll need to value people over position. Relationships over reputation.

Secondly, it requires a security in our identity. Jesus could serve others because He was totally secure and confident in who He was. He knew that He had 'come from the Father and would return to the Father', and so He had no need for titles. He had nothing whatsoever to prove.

It is not natural for us to serve other people in this way. The world we live in doesn't promote or celebrate this kind of living. It goes against the grain, it is hard, and everything in us might cry out for recognition and fame.

But it's when we get down and serve the people around us, when we put their needs above our own, that we're really living for God. That's when we look most like Jesus.

RESPONSE

Take some time to be honest with God. What do you find hard about serving the people around you? Is there anything you need God to shift in you to make it possible for you to serve others?

Reading: John 9:13-25

DEVOTIONAL | Story

An audio version of this devotional is available at www.kca.church/chapterone

What are some of the most memorable stories you've ever heard?

Perhaps there have been novels you've read by the pool on holiday. Maybe there's a plot of a book or film that has particularly resonated with you. What was it that drew you in?

Stories are provocative and powerful. Stories go far beyond just relaying facts and data, they bring emotion, colour, depth. Stories can be messy and complex – because they're about people and places, not ideas and concepts.

Stories allow people to connect with a message in a deep, meaningful way. And of course, story doesn't have to be confined to fiction alone – in fact, we tell stories every single day.

In today's passage, the Pharisees are incensed that Jesus has healed a man born blind. Intent on finding answers, they question the man, then the man's parents, and then the man again. Each time, the parents and the man respond by just telling the Pharisees what Jesus has done.

They're not interested in arguments about whether or not this man born blind was a sinner. They simply tell their story.

People can argue about doctrine, about where sin comes from, or

about why there's suffering in the world. But it's difficult to argue with the story of a life transformed – particularly when that transformed life is standing right there in front of you.

Many people think they don't have an exciting story to tell. And it's true that your story may not be as dramatic as the story of the man born blind. But it's authentic – it's real – and so it's powerful.

Telling the story of the difference that Jesus has made to your life is the most effective way to share the salvation offered through Jesus. So, what's your story? Where is God in it, and what has He done in your life?

When the opportunity comes, tell your story.

RESPONSE

As you pray today for the people on your BLESS list, ask for the chance to love them, to serve them and to share with them. And when the opportunity comes, just tell your story.

A life of community

“EVERY DAY THEY CONTINUED TO MEET TOGETHER
IN THE TEMPLE COURTS.”

We really hope that you’ve enjoyed this Chapter One journey.

Over the past nine weeks, we’ve explored seven ‘rhythms’ together. *Scripture, prayer, power, freedom, worship, generosity and reaching out.*

We believe that these seven rhythms are key to living the life we have all been created for – a life that is exciting and energising, a life of meaning and purpose.

There’s one final thing to explore – one final thing that marked out the lives of the early followers of Jesus: they did life together.

In world where many people are lonely and isolated, the church can be a wonderful expression of community. Ordinary people, growing in relationship with God, capturing his heart for mission, and learning what it looks like to love each other.

So in this final week of Chapter One, we’ll ask what it means to belong, what it looks like to journey together, and where we are headed on this wonderful adventure with God.

A life of community

BIBLE PASSAGES

Use the notes on 'How to read the Bible' to reflect on or study one of these passages each day in the week leading up to small group session.

DAY ONE

Reading: John 13:34

DAY TWO

Reading: Acts 2:42-47

DAY THREE

Reading: 1 Peter 2:9-10

DAY FOUR

Reading: Acts 2:37-47

DAY FIVE

Reading: Revelation 21:1-7

DEVOTIONAL | You were made to belong

An audio version of this devotional is available at

www.kca.church/chapterone

It's not good for man to be alone. We just weren't designed for it.

God has made us for community. We were wired this way. And the most important reason for this is that God himself is relational.

As we said at the start of our journey back in week one, Father, Son and Spirit have always lived in community together. And because God has made us in His own image, to be in relationship with others – to *belong* – is in the very core of our being.

As Christians we are to belong to a church, to the body of Christ. And of course, there is a vast difference between simply *attending* and *belonging*.

Attending doesn't necessarily require you to give of yourself, or make yourself vulnerable, or allow yourself to be known. With attending, you can show up late and leave before things get complicated. But *belonging* asks more of you.

Belonging involves things like sharing, practising hospitality, honouring others. To *belong* to a family is more than to just show up for meals. A family is a place where we love, and are loved, in a way that helps us become all we should be.

Belonging is more messy – and sometimes a whole lot more inconvenient. But it's more rewarding, too. And it's also incredibly attractive to the outside world.

People are drawn into relationship with God through the kindness of authentic Christian love more often than through theological arguments. Loving others is the proof that we love God. "By this", Jesus says, "everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

In our final week together, we are going to look more at what it means to do life together.

RESPONSE

What sorts of things make you feel like you *belong* in a church? Do you feel like you belong at King's? Why? Why not?

DEVOTIONAL | Intentional togetherness

An audio version of this devotional is available at

www.kca.church/chapterone

We are all prone to drift – and all the more as we become adrift.

In today's passage, the word 'together' is written three times. It is there to emphasise the importance of togetherness. Your personal growth is a community project, not an individual one.

The early church knew the value of walking through life together. They prayed daily for one another, served together, and encouraged one another. Recognising each other as brothers and sisters, they shared all they had so that everyone could benefit. God's family works best when we all work together.

The visual aid of the early church in the towns and cities of that day must have been staggering. Jew and Gentile, slave and free, male and female, all one in Christ. An eye-opening revolution involving an immense diversity of people of different culture and status being built together.

But it doesn't just happen. People rarely drift into deep community. The microwave is a great invention, but you can't do microwave friendships. Togetherness takes time, and requires intentionality, particularly in an individualistic culture like ours.

Bronnie Ware wrote a book on the top 5 regrets of the dying. Most of them involved the common thread of relationships.

“I worked too hard and never made time for my family”

“I should have made more time for my friends”

“I should have said, “I love you” a lot more”

Small groups have always been a key part of life at King’s – and they remain so today. They’re a way of being intentional about knowing Jesus, being known, and knowing others.

We hope you’ve experienced togetherness throughout Chapter One, and we’d love you to think about how you can deliberately maintain this next term. Your own personal growth depends on it.

RESPONSE

Which relationships in your life are the ones you want to make sure you maintain? How will you prioritise community with other Christians following Chapter One?

DEVOTIONAL | The hope of the world

An audio version of this devotional is available at

www.kca.church/chapterone

A church leader once said: "There's nothing like the local church when the local church is working right – it's the hope of the world."

Of course, when church is NOT working right, it can be heart breaking. When mature Christians bicker over things that aren't important (or over things that *are*, but in an ungodly way...) When guests feel judged and unwelcome... When selfishness prevails over generosity...

The truth is, church can be hard. Resources get stretched, people get tired. The church is made up of broken people, with hurts that haven't necessarily healed, with misunderstandings, and with our own questions and disappointments. The brokenness that is 'out there' in the world, is undoubtedly 'in here' too.

But when church is working right, its capacity is like nothing else.

A church that is working right sees people coming to faith in Jesus. It sees hurting people find deep healing. It's where people feel needed and known, and where the beauty of true community is expressed, across generations and across cultural diversities.

It's where, despite the reality of hardship, people come together with expectation, excitement and life. And it's where that life is taken

purposefully out into the world – imperfect people, who’ve experienced the grace and kindness of God, showing that same love to others. *That* is a community that can change the world.

Of course, there’s no perfect church. (As someone once said, if you find the perfect church, don’t join it, you’ll only ruin it.) But Jesus believed in the church – and so should we.

If you tend to find yourself focusing on the negativities of church, see the potential. Get stuck in. We are ordinary people changed by Jesus to change the world.

RESPONSE

Who in the Church is God calling you to forgive? Where in the church is God calling you to serve?

DEVOTIONAL | Commitment

An audio version of this devotional is available at www.kca.church/chapterone

Some people find commitment scary. "If I commit (to this decision, this relationship, this career path) what will it mean?" "Am I tied in for life?" "What if I change my mind?"

It's fair to say that the early disciples were a *committed* people – committed to Jesus and committed to each other.

Here are two steps of commitment we get excited about: commitment to Jesus through **baptism** and commitment to the church through **membership**.

At King's we see baptism in water as a public expression of inward faith – and a powerful and foundational part of following Jesus.

As Peter says in today's passage, the immediate response to understanding what Jesus has done for you is to repent – to turn away from your old life – and to get in the water. *"Those who accepted his message were baptised, and about three thousand were added to their number that day."*

At King's, we also value membership. The early disciples *devoted* themselves to the apostles teaching. Devotion is an *active* thing. It's about agreeing with the vision, the beliefs and the values of the church, saying this is where I believe God is calling me to be.

Not all churches have membership, of course, but we see it as an important step in mutual commitment – a commitment from the church to its leadership, and commitment from the leadership to the church.

If you've not yet been baptised, or you're not yet a church member, we'd love to chat to you about it.

RESPONSE

If you've been baptised, think back to that time. What do you remember about it? If you haven't been baptised, what are your thoughts about it? What does church membership mean to you?

Reading: Revelation 21:1-7

DEVOTIONAL | Where the story ends

*An audio version of this devotional is available at
www.kca.church/chapterone*

When you're starting out on an adventure, it's helpful to keep in mind where you're going.

There may be times along the journey when things get tough, when the road becomes hard, and progress feels limited. Keeping your eyes fixed on the endpoint gives you courage to keep going.

It's the pub at the end of the hike, the bed at the end of the night shift, the prize at the end of the race. When others stumble, you can remind them of where you're heading.

The penultimate chapter of the Bible gives a glimpse of where we are heading – and it is glorious. If we will only lift our eyes, there's enough to keep us going, to fill us with courage. To stir us to faith.

The picture is of a renewed earth and a renewed heaven. No more death or mourning, sadness or pain. The creation set free from the effects of the fall. And all evil is destroyed.

And at the centre of it all, is a relationship. The church – no longer trampled and fearful, but glorious – like a bride, beautifully prepared and perfected, to be with Him, forever. Where all else

fades away, the church will stand. And the most glorious promise of all: the intimate presence of Jesus.

Unhindered relationship, the fog removed. *He will be with them. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. And He will be your God, and you will be his children...*

If you are a follower of Jesus, this is your inheritance. It is an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. It is done. It is finished. The end is set – won by the victory of Jesus.

Whatever the next step is in your own personal journey with God, keep your eyes fixed on the immovable ending.

RESPONSE

If you know you have eternity with Jesus to look forward to, read today's passage again and allow it to lift your eyes to Jesus. Then, worship.
