



the Bible talks
where the Bible does the talking...

Gospel Truths

to live by

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These eight studies are designed for use as 1-to-1 Bible Studies, to follow on from *Just for Starters*.

Each study follows roughly the same structure. At the beginning, there is a 'Starter question' to kick off discussion and provoke thought. Before reading and studying the passage, read the 'Context' paragraph and pray for God's help in understanding His word. The 'What does it say...?' questions are intended to help you understand what the Bible actually says. The 'So what...?' questions are to help you work out how to apply the passage to your own life. At the end of each study, the 'And finally...' section encourages you both to focus on something that you have learnt and to think how you will respond. Several additional passages are given at the end. Only look at these if you think they will be helpful. Do pray together about what you have learnt and your response. The studies are based on the New International Version of the Bible.

If you are using these studies to encourage and teach a younger Christian, make sure that you yourself have contact with an older Christian, perhaps from your church, who can encourage you and pray for you. Teaching others is a privilege - it is also a responsibility. If you are going to study the Bible 1-to-1 with someone, it is wise to study with someone of the same sex.

To prepare, read through the passage, putting it into your own words and trying to understand each verse as best you can. Then work through the questions and decide what you think is the main point of the study. Make sure that you have learnt something and that you are applying the passage to yourself - not just to other people!

1: The heart of the matter

Starter question: What things make people unsure of their Christian faith?

Look up Ephesians 2:1-10

Context: We know from Acts 19 that the apostle Paul had preached the gospel in Ephesus for almost three years. Now, some years later, he is writing to encourage the Christians there, reminding them of the good news of the gospel and urging them to live in response to it. In Chapter 1, he reminds them of the blessings God has given Christians, he thanks God for them and prays for them.

Read the passage.

What does it say...?

1. What were the Ephesian Christians like? (v1-3). How does Paul describe them? What does it mean to be 'dead'?

2. From v 2-3, what were the three influences on the people of Ephesus before they were Christians? In what ways were they influenced by these things?

3. What is God's response (v3)?

So what...?

1. v 1-3 are true of everybody who is not a Christian. In what ways is this description a shocking one?

2. In what ways can we see the influence of the world, the devil and the sinful nature upon people's lives today (and upon your life before you were a Christian?)

3. Why do we face God's wrath? To what extent is it possible to get ourselves out of this situation? (Think a little more about what it means to be 'dead'.)

What does it say...?

1. From v 4-7, describe what God is like and what he has done. What does it mean that he 'made us alive' (5)?
2. How are we saved, according to v 8-9? What does God do? What do we do? (Make sure you understand 'grace', 'saved', faith', etc.)
3. We're not saved by the things we do - so what place do these 'works' have in the life of a Christian (10)?

So what...?

1. What strikes you about the contrast between how we deserve to be treated and how God has actually treated us? What should our response be in light of this?
2. v 8-9 speak of God's undeserved generosity towards us. How might these verses help someone who is doubting or feeling that they are a hopeless Christian? (Look back at the answers you gave to the starter question).
3. What kind of 'works' might God have prepared for you to do for your Christian friends and family? For your non-Christian friends and family?

And finally...

What one thing has particularly struck you from this passage?

What are you going to do in response?

Other passages you could look at:

John 10:27-30, Romans 5:1-11, Romans 8:28-30

2: God's perfect rescue plan

Starter question: What do you think is the greatest problem facing the world today? What would solve this problem?

Look up Romans:21-26

Context: In this letter to Christians in Rome, the apostle Paul explains the gospel - God's rescue plan for the world. In the first three chapters (up to 3v20), Paul has been describing the predicament that faces the human race. In Chapters 3-11, he explains God's gospel solution and in the final chapters (Chapters 12-16), he sets out the implications of that gospel for believers.

Read the passage.

What do you understand by righteousness, justified, redemption etc....?

What does it say...?

1. According to v22b-23, what is the problem facing the human race? What is God's response to this? (See Romans 1v18 and Romans 2v5-6).

2. What is the consequence of our on-going rebellion against God? (See Romans 1v20).

3. What is the solution that Paul announces in v21-22a?

4. How does Paul show that the solution is entirely God's initiative and God's achievement (v21-22a)?

So what...?

1. How did your answer to the starter question compare with Paul's diagnosis in Question 1? Why do you think people often underestimate the seriousness of sin and the reality of God's wrath? Do you?

2. How do we show that we're underestimating the seriousness of sin in our own lives?
3. Why is it important that it is God Himself who makes us right with Him?

What does it say...?

1. From v24-25a, describe the role of the Lord Jesus in dealing with the problem of sin and God's wrath. What is the main idea behind justification, redemption and sacrifice of atonement?
2. In what ways does Paul show the Romans that they can do nothing to deserve this rescue (v24-25a)? What is required of them?
3. How does Jesus' death on the cross demonstrate God's justice (v25b-26)?

So what...?

1. In our thoughts, prayers and conversations, how much credit do we give Jesus for our salvation?

2. To what extent do you feel more accepted by God and closer to Him when you've been doing good things than when you've done wrong? How much are we trusting in Jesus' death rather than our own performance?

3. Jesus death on the Cross in our place shows us the depth of God's love for us and His wrath because of sin. How should these truths affect our lives (our attitudes towards God, others and ourselves, and our behaviour)? Try to be specific.

And finally...

What one thing has particularly struck you from this passage? What are you going to do in response?

Other passages you could look at:
Luke 23:44-49; 2 Corinthians 5:14-21

3: Holiness - keeping in step with the Spirit

Starter question: What do you think it means to be holy?

Look up Galatians 5:16-26

Context: The Galatian Christians were being led astray by false teachers who said that the Christians needed to be circumcised in order to be saved. Paul writes to remind them of the true gospel, assuring them that they are saved by faith in Jesus Christ, not by any religious ceremony or by anything they do.

Read the passage.

What does it say...?

1. What do you know about the Spirit? What do you know about the sinful nature?

2. According to v16-17, why is the Christian life characterised by conflict?

So what...?

1. What are some of the difficulties you face as a Christian - situations where your sinful nature and the Holy Spirit are in conflict?
2. Why should we be concerned if we experience no conflict at all? Who will not experience this sort of conflict?

What does it say...?

1. What types of sin are represented by the acts of the sinful nature (v19-21)?
2. What effect will the Spirit have (v22-23)? What do these qualities have in common?

So what...?

1. Which of these 'acts' (v19-21) do you need to watch out for in yourself?
2. Can you see ways in which the fruit of the Spirit is developing your life and your relationships (v22-23)? In what areas do you need to pray for the Spirit to be at work, producing love, joy, peace, etc?

What does it say...?

1. What has already been done and what is an on-going process in the life of a Christian (v24-26)?
2. Throughout the passage, Paul urges the Galatians to 'live by the Spirit', to be 'led by the Spirit' and to 'keep in step with the Spirit' (v16, v18, v25). What does he mean? How is this to be done?

So what...?

1. When we are discouraged in the Christian life, how does the fact that the sinful nature has been crucified encourage us (v24)?

2. If we're to keep in step with the Spirit, we will need to fight against sin and pursue holiness. What will this mean in practice?

And finally...

What one thing has particularly struck you from this passage?

What are you going to do in response?

Other passages about the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives:

John 16:7-15; Romans 8:5-17; Titus 3:3-8

4: The cost of discipleship

Starter question: In evangelism, why do you think it is important to explain the cost of being a Christ to someone?

Look up Luke 9:23-26

Context: In his gospel, Luke presents an account of the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In the opening chapters, Luke describes Jesus' early years and his ministry to the lost and helpless. Once Jesus' true identity is recognised (9 c18-20), Luke begins to focus on what discipleship means for those who follow Jesus...

Read the passage.

What does it say...?

1. What does Jesus predict about his own future (v22)? Why do you think He told His disciples that all this would happen?

2. What does following Jesus involve (v23)?

3. Jesus contrasts two ways of living. What are they? What are the results of each? (v24-25)

What does it mean...?

1. What will it mean for us to deny ourselves? What will it mean for us to follow Jesus? (v23)

2. Taking up the Cross means to (literally) walk the way to death. What do we need to put to death?

So what...?

1. What might being a Christian cost us today?
2. In what ways are you encouraged and challenged by v24-25?

What does it mean...?

1. In what ways are people ashamed of Jesus and His words (v26)?
2. Why is being ashamed of Jesus and His words such a serious matter?
How will Jesus be ashamed of someone when He comes again?

So what...?

1. When and why are you tempted to be ashamed of Jesus and His words?

2. If we are to be with Christ in the future, what will our attitude to Jesus and His words be in the present?

And finally...

What one thing has particularly struck you from this passage?

What are you going to do in response?

Other passages you could look at:

Luke 9:57-62; Luke 14:25-33; Daniel 1:6-21

5: Sex - and all that

Starter question: In what ways do you think God's view of sex and relationships differs from those of society today?

Look up 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8

Context: Paul had been forced to leave Thessalonica rather abruptly, soon after establishing a church there (Acts 17:1-15). The Christians were having a difficult time and Paul writes to encourage them to keep going. Towards the end of his letter, he instructs them on how they are to live to please God.

Read the passage.

What does it say...?

1. Why does Paul talk in terms of living 'to please God' (v1)? What does this imply?

2. By what authority does Paul instruct the Thessalonians on how they should live (v2)? Why is this important?

3. Why should Christians be holy (v3a)? What does 'be sanctified' mean? How will it be demonstrated?

So what...?

1. To what extent do we think in terms of how we can *please* God in the way we live - or do we think more in terms of what we can get away with? How can we live to *please* God?
2. What has most influence on the way we live - friends? society? family? The Bible?
3. What will it mean in practice for us to live 'holy' lives?

What does it say...?

1. How does Paul continue to develop this theme of being sanctified (v3-8)?
2. How does he describe those who don't like this?
3. What reasons does this whole passage give for living a holy life (v1-8)?
4. How does v7 sum up this section?

So what...?

1. What will it mean for us to avoid sexual immorality (v3)? In the Bible, sexual immorality means all sexual activity outside marriage. Why do you think that God designed sex to be enjoyed within marriage?

2. In what ways can we wrong or take advantage of others in relationships (v6)?

3. What should characterise Christian relationships? What implications does this have for Christians going out with non-Christians?

4. How will this passage apply to someone who is a) married; b) single; c) going out with someone/engaged?

And finally...

What one thing has particularly struck you from this passage?

What are you going to do in response?

Other passages you could look at:

Genesis 2:18-25; 1 Corinthians 6:15-20

6: Sharing our lives as well as the gospel

Starter question: Who first told you about Jesus? Can you remember what they said? Did you always listen? Did the way they live have an impact on you?

Look up 1 Thessalonians 2:1-13

Context: Paul had been forced to leave Thessalonica rather abruptly, soon after establishing a church there (Acts 17:1-15). The Christians were having a difficult time and Paul writes to encourage them to keep going. In this chapter Paul recalls his visit to Thessalonica.

Read the passage.

What does it say...?

1. Why might the Thessalonians think that Paul's visit had been 'a failure'? Why does Paul say that it wasn't a failure (v1,2)?

2. What traps does Paul insist that he didn't fall into? Who was he aiming to please? And why? (v3-6)

So what...?

1. What makes us feel that our evangelism is a failure? How do v1-2 help?
2. How might we fall into the traps of v3-6? How would adopting Paul's attitude change things?

What does it say...?

1. Paul says that he and the other apostles were like mothers and fathers (v11,12). In what ways? What was absolutely key (v10)?
2. How do Paul's roles of preacher (v1-2, v9) and parent (v6b-12) complement each other?

3. Why is Paul so thankful that they received the gospel 'as the word of God' (v13)?

So what...?

1. Why do we need to share our lives with our friends as well as the gospel (v6-12)? How can we do this?

2. To what extent can v10 be said of us a) in the way we relate to people, b) in the way we tell them the gospel?

3. We need to be careful that we are telling people 'the word of God', not 'the word of men' (v13) so we explain God's gospel, not our own ideas. How well can you do this? Take some time to explain the gospel to each other. (See below if you need some help.)

And finally...

What one thing has particularly struck you from this passage?

What are you going to do in response?

There are many ways to explain the gospel. Here is one **gospel outline**:

God... God made the world and he made us - to be in relationship of loving obedience with Him and to rule over his world, under His authority (Revelation 4 v11)

Man... But all of us have rebelled against God - some are openly hostile, others just ignore God. (Romans 3 v23)

God... God is just and *judges* us for our rebellion. But He *loves* us so much that he sent Jesus to take the punishment we deserve, by dying on the cross in our place. God *calls us* to turn back to Him. (1 Peter 3 18)

What if you don't... If we don't turn back to God, we live with the consequences of our choice, and will be cut off from Him for ever. (2 Thessalonians 1 v2,9)

What if you do... But if we turn back to God, He treats us as if we've never turned away - He forgives us completely and welcomes us into His family. (1 John 1 v8,9)

7: Money, money, money

Starter question: The New Testament has a great deal to say about money, our attitude to it and how we use it - why do you think this is?

Look up 2 Corinthians 9:6-15

Context: In his letter to the church in Corinth, Paul holds up the Macedonian Christians as an example of outstanding generosity (8 v1-9v5). He reminds the Corinthians of the collection they had started for the Christians in Jerusalem and urges them to complete it. And, as he concludes his advice on money and giving, there are several things he wants to point out to them.

Read the passage.

What does it say...?

1. What characteristics does God love to see in people who give (v6-7)?
2. Note that God doesn't promise to give us financial wealth if we give generously. What does he promise in v8-9? Why?

So what...?

1. What will 'generous' mean for you, in your situation? (In the Old Testament, believers gave a tenth of 'tithe' of their income eg Leviticus 27 v30. The New Testament does not stipulate an exact proportion to be given but stresses that we should give sacrificially and generously according to the needs we see.)
2. What stops us giving willingly and cheerfully? How can we become willing, cheerful givers?
3. To what extent does fear of not having enough for ourselves prevent us giving generously? Many of us live off money given to us from parents, loans, etc - are there areas where we could economise, to enable us to give generously?

What does it say...?

1. What things happen when Christians give generously (v12-14)?

2. What is the greatest gift of all? Why does Paul mention this 'indescribable gift' here (v15)?

3. From the following verses, list some of the principles of Christian giving:
 - Chronicles 29 v14
 - Matthew 6 v2-4
 - 1 Corinthians 16 v1-2
 - 2 Corinthians 9 v6-7, v12
 - Ephesians 4 v28
 - 1 Timothy 6 v6-10

So what...?

1. Discuss the opportunities you have to give to 'supplying the needs of God's people'.

2. In what ways does the thought of what Jesus gave for you encourage you to be generous? Could you describe yourself as 'generous'?

3. In what ways do you need to change your attitude and practice concerning money and giving?

And finally...

What one thing has particularly struck you from this passage?

What are you going to do in response?

Other passages you could look at:

Proverbs 30:7-9; 1 Chronicles 29:10-20

8: Run with perseverance

Starter question: How often do you think about heaven? How much does it feature in your Christian life as an encouragement to persevere?

Look up Hebrews 12 v1-11

Context: This letter was written to some Christians who were tempted to revert to their old, Jewish religious practices. The writer urges his readers to keep their eyes fixed on Jesus who is unique, supreme and sufficient, and to persevere in living for Him.

Read the passage.

What does it say...?

1. The 'cloud of witnesses' (v1) are the people listed in Chapter 11, who were all commended for their faith. What is 'faith' according to 11 v1,13-16?
2. What two things stop the Hebrews running the Christian race effectively and with perseverance (12 v1)? Why is the writer so worried about sin?
3. What do these verses tell us about Jesus? (V2-4) What does the writer urge his readers to do in light of this?

So what...?

1. What does the writer want us to learn from the example of the men and women of 'faith'? How can we follow their example?
2. What are the things that 'hinder' you in your Christ life and stop you looking to Jesus? What can you do about those things? How should we deal with the sin that entangles, so that we can keep running?
3. How can we fix our eyes on Jesus? And how can we emulate His attitude of looking beyond the cross to the joy set before Him (v2-3)?

What does it say...?

1. Why does God discipline us? List all the reasons given in v5-11. What goal does God have in view?

2. What response is demanded of the Hebrews (v5-11)?

3. Who will benefit from this discipline and how (v11)?

So what...?

1. How should we react to difficulties, failures and disappointments in life?
How will this passage change your attitude?

2. The world we live in has various priorities (eg comfort, security, health, wealth etc). What does this passage tell us about God's priority for us?
How will this help us in the years ahead?

And finally...

What one thing has particularly struck you from this passage?

What are you going to do in response?

Other passages you could look at:

Romans 8:28-39; Ephesians 1:11-14; 1 Peter 1:1-9

Mary Davis 1997