

Just for Starters in Simple English

Six Studies

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Trusting in God

Ephesians is a letter written by Paul to the Christians who lived in Ephesus. He wrote it to help these Christians understanding better how much God loves them and to help them understand better God's purposes for them.

READ EPHESIANS 2:1-3

2a) What were the Ephesians like in the past? (v1)

b) Why were they spiritually dead?

c) What does Paul mean by spiritually dead?

d) When someone is dead, is there anything they can do to make themselves alive again? Is there anything their friends can do? What about when we're spiritually dead, is there anything we can do to make ourselves spiritually alive? Anything our friends can do to help us?

3a) Who did the Ephesians follow in the past? (v2)

b) What is the world's evil way?

c) Who did they obey? (v2)

d) Who is the ruler of the spiritual powers in space?

4a) How did the Ephesians decide what to do? (v3)

b) What are our natural desires?

5a) So Paul describes the Ephesians as having been spiritually dead, disobedient, sinful, followers of the world's evil way, obeying Satan, controlled by their natural desires. Who else does he describe like this? (v2b, 3)

b) What do you think? Is everyone like this? Are you like this? Were you like this before you became a Christian?

6a) How does God feel when we live according to our natural desires? (v3)

b) Why is he angry? Why is it a problem if we live according to our natural desires? What's wrong with our natural desires?

(SEE MARK 7:20-23)

c) Is there anything we can do to change our natural desires?

So in our natural state we have a problem – we're spiritually dead and we can't make ourselves alive; we're controlled by our natural desires and we can't change them.

READ EPHESIANS 2:4-10

7a) In verse 3 God was described as angry. What else do we learn about him in verse 4?

b) What did God's mercy and love cause him to do for us?

So we are unable to make ourselves spiritually alive, but God is able.

c) What does this teach us about God?

d) How did God bring us to life with Christ? What did Christ do?

e) If you know that God has given you spiritual life, how do you feel about it? How do you respond to his love?

Remember Paul is writing to Christians.

9) Why does God rescue people from spiritual death? Is it so they can have a comfortable life? Is it so they can boast about how good they are?

10a) So God is able to make us spiritually alive, because Jesus died for us. But what do we need to have before we can receive this spiritual life? (v8) How are we saved?

b) What does it mean to have faith?

c) Have you put your trust in God?

11a) So does God save us and make us spiritually alive because of what we do?

b) Why does God make us spiritually alive as a gift?

c) If spiritual life is nothing to do with what we do, can we feel proud about it?

d) How do you feel about the idea that we can't make ourselves spiritually alive, but God offers us spiritual life as a gift?

e) What do you learn from verses 8-9, how will it affect the way you live this week?

12a) v 10, so if we are saved only because of God's grace and not because of anything we do, does this mean we can do whatever we like and it doesn't matter?

b) How are we able to do these good deeds that God has prepared for us? What needs to happen first? What does our relationship with Jesus need to be?

c) How should a Christian life be different to a non-Christian life?

d) Why is it different? What should motivate a Christian to do good deeds?

e) If you are a Christian what do you learn from verse 10? How will it affect the way you live this week?

Living God's way

Last week we learnt that we are saved by God's grace – it is a gift, we don't deserve it and there is nothing we can do to earn it. However when we are saved God has prepared good deeds for us to do. Today we are going to look at what some of these good deeds are – how we can live God's way. Our motivation for living God's way is not that we are scared he'll punish us if we don't, it is because we love him and so want to please him.

Titus is a letter written by Paul to a man called Titus. Titus was a gentile who became a Christian and then helped Paul with his missionary work. In the letter Paul explains to Titus how he should teach the Christians in his church.

READ TITUS 2:1-15

- 1a) How should older men behave?
 - b) How should older women behave?
 - c) How should young women behave?
 - d) How should young men behave?
 - e) What do you think about this teaching? What do you learn from it?
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- 2a) How can Titus help them to obey this teaching? (v7)
 - b) Do you have friends who have been Christians longer than you have?
 - c) What can you learn from their behaviour?
 - d) What can you learn from their teaching?
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- 3a) How should slaves behave?
 - b) In our culture we don't have slaves and masters. What is the most similar situation in our culture?
 - c) So what does this teaching to slaves mean for us? How should we behave towards our employers?
 - d) What do you think about this teaching? Is it easy to obey? Do you want to obey it?
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- 4) Paul wants Titus to see why it's important we follow this teaching even if it is difficult or we would prefer to do things our own way. What reasons does Paul give in v11-14?
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- 5a) What does God's grace teach us (or instruct us to do)?
 - b) What is ungodly living? What is godly living?
 - c) What are worldly passions?
 - d) What worldly desires do you struggle with?

- e) What does it mean to give them up?
- f) How does God's grace teach us to give up godly living and worldly passions?
- g) When we are tempted to sin by behaving in a way that is ungodly or controlled by worldly passions, what should we do?

6a) How long must we live in the world in this way? When will we be free from the temptations of the world? What are we waiting for? (v13)

b) How can this thought encourage us to obey God's teaching now?

7a) How is Jesus described in v13?

b) What does it mean for him to be God and Saviour?

c) How can this help us to obey God's teaching now?

8a) Why did Jesus die?

b) How can this thought encourage us to obey God's teaching?

READ COLOSSIANS 1:9-14

9a) What does Paul pray for the Colossian Christians?

b) v10, why does Paul pray this for them?

c) What does it mean to live as the Lord wants? What will we do? (v10b)

d) How does knowing God's will help us to please God?

e) How can we know God's will?

f) Is knowing God's will enough? Does knowing his will mean we will do what pleases him?

g) What else do we need before we can live as the Lord wants us to live?

h) What is wisdom? Where does it come from? How does it help us to please the Lord?

i) So can we by ourselves live as the Lord wants? Who can help us?

10a) Sometimes in life we have troubles and difficulties. How does God want us to react to these things (v11-12)

b) Is it easy to endure patiently?

c) How can we endure patiently?

d) Is it easy to be joyful when life is difficult?

e) What can we always be joyful about in all circumstances?

f) In what way has God made us fit to have our share in what he has reserved for his people?

11) When we try to live as the Lord wants we will often fail and make mistakes. How can v13-14 help us when this happens?

Listening to God

We're going to think about how we can listen to God. We're also going to think about some of the consequences of listening to God.

Timothy is a letter written by Paul to a man called Timothy. Timothy was a young Christian who had a Jewish mother and a Greek father. He worked with Paul as a missionary and became the leader of a church. Paul wrote this letter to him to explain how he should lead his church.

READ 2 TIMOTHY 3:10-17

- 1a) What had Timothy already learnt from Paul?
- b) How had he learnt this from Paul?
- c) What had he learnt about Paul's conduct?
- d) What does this show us about Paul's purpose in life?
- e) What is your purpose in life? What can you learn from Paul?
- f) Is your conduct like Paul's? What can you learn from him?

- 2a) What happened to Paul while he was in Antioch, Iconium and Lystra?
- b) How do you think he felt when he suffered this persecution?
- c) How did God help him? Does this mean he didn't suffer? What does it mean?
- d) Who else does Paul say will be persecuted?
- e) What does it mean to live a godly life in union with Christ Jesus?
- f) Why will we be persecuted if we want to live a godly life in union with Christ Jesus?
- g) In what ways might we be persecuted?
- h) How do you feel about the thought of being persecuted?
- i) Why was Paul willing to suffer in this way (v10)?
- j) How can we be willing to suffer like this?

- 3a) What do evil people do as well as persecuting those who want to live a godly life in union with Christ Jesus? (v13)
- b) What would happen to Timothy if he listened to these evil persons?
- c) What will happen to us if we listen to evil people today?

So it's really important that we know what the truth is.

4a) How did Timothy know the truth? (v14-15, 16)

b) How can we know the truth?

c) Where does Scripture come from? (v16) Who is its real author?

d) How much of Scripture is inspired by God? So how much of it can teach us the truth?

5a) If the Bible is inspired by God what should be our attitude to it?

b) How can it help us to hear what God wants us to say to us?

c) So if we want to listen to God what do we need to do?

d) What makes it difficult for you to read the Bible?

e) How do you think God feels when we don't read the Bible?

f) How can you make reading the Bible more a part of your life?

6a) v15, What can the Scriptures give us?

b) What does this wisdom lead to?

c) How can the Scriptures lead us to salvation? How can the Scriptures help us to have faith?

d) So if we want to have more faith, what do we need to do?

7a) What four things is the Bible useful for?

b) What do these things mean?

c) How does this help us to follow God? (v17)

d) So, if we want to do good deeds, what do we need to do?

We don't know who wrote Hebrews. It was written to a group of Christians who were thinking about leaving Christianity, because they were being persecuted for their faith.

READ HEBREWS 4:12-13

The word of God is another expression for the Bible

1a) Why do you think the Bible is called the word of God?

b) How is the Bible described here?

c) In what way is the Bible alive and active?

d) Have you experienced this when reading the Bible? Can you think of times when it seemed it was alive?

d) How would it feel if a sword was pushed into your body? Why is the Bible described as a sword? What part of us does it cut into?

e) If the Bible is a sword, then when we read it we should expect to feel uncomfortable, we should expect to feel challenged. Have you experienced this when you've been reading the Bible? Can you think of times when it seemed to cut into you?

f) How is it possible for the Bible to judge our desires and the thoughts of our hearts? How does God know what we desire and what we think?

g) How do you feel about the idea that God sees everything, even your desires and your inner thoughts?

h) Why do you think God wants us to know what he thinks about our desires and thoughts? What will happen in the future? (v13) What can we do now if we know what God thinks about us now?

i) So what do we need to do if we want to have right desires and right thoughts?

Guided by God

Today we're going to think about how God guides us, how we can know what God's will is for us. This is a huge topic and we don't have time to look at it in great detail. This is more an introduction.

As Christians we are supposed to live for God. He must be the first priority in our lives and we must always try to do what pleases him. But how can we know what he wants us to do? We constantly need to make decisions in our lives: What job shall I do? Where should I live? Shall I get married? Who should I marry? Should I have children? What should I do with my spare time? How should I solve this problem? Should I get baptised? When should I get baptised? Should I go to church today? Should I read the Bible now? And so on. These are all important decisions and as Christians we need to learn to make these decisions under God's authority. We need to learn to discern what God's will is for us.

God's revealed will

There are some situations where we can be very clear about what God's will is, because he has told us very clearly in the Bible:

READ PSALM 119: 9-16 (p620)

- 1a) How can we keep our lives pure?
 - b) How can we know what God's commands are? (v12, 13, 15)
 - c) How can we avoid sinning against God? (v11, 16)
- 2a) How does the writer feel about God's laws and commands? Why?
 - b) Do you feel like this?
- 3) Can you think of any specific things God has definitely told us in the Bible?

1 THESSALONIANS 4:3
 1 THESSALONIANS 5:18
 EXODUS 20:1-17
 MATTHEW 5:17-7:5
 ACTS 2:38
 HEBREWS 10:23-25
 COLOSSIANS 3:1-17

In the Bible we are told God's will for us. We can see that there are some things that are always right and some things that are always wrong. However it is clear that this is about what kind of people we are and how we live. It is not about exactly what job God wants us to do or where we should live or who we should marry. The Bible doesn't answer these questions for us directly.

God's specific will

However, sometimes in the Bible we see God giving people a specific instruction – something he especially wants them to do.

- 4) Can you think of any examples of this?

EXODUS 3:1-10

1 SAMUEL 16:1-13
LUKE 10:1-12
ACTS 9:1-19

These things happen only to a few people, and only occasionally. Sometimes God speaks to them directly in a voice they can hear. Sometimes he sends an angel to tell them. Sometimes they have a dream or a vision. But every time it is absolutely clear that it is God speaking to them. Sometimes at first they are unsure about whether it is God speaking to them, but eventually it always becomes very clear to them. If God speaks to us like this we will eventually know! If we think God might be speaking to us about something but we're not sure then we need to pray that he will show us if it is him or not.

Making decisions where God's will is not absolutely clear

How can we know what God wants us to do when we need to make a decision about something that is not dealt with directly in the Bible and we don't have a dream or a message from God telling us what to do? We need to pray that God will show us what he wants us to do, but sometimes we just need to make a decision (and pray that if it's not what God wants us to do he will show us)

In general when we are deciding about these kind of questions God is more concerned about our hearts than he is about our actual choices. He wants to see that we love him and really want to do his will whatever that is. If our hearts are like this then he is less concerned about what decisions we actually make.

READ 2 CORINTHIANS 8:16-17

- 5a) What did Titus do?
- b) How did he decide to do this?
- c) What did Paul think about his decision?
- d) What does this teach us?

To some extent God gives us freedom to make our own choices about what job we should do and who we should marry etc. But he does give us some guidelines. For example, it is clearly wrong for me to be a prostitute or to marry someone who is already married, because the Bible says these things are wrong.

Sometimes I have to make a choice between a number of things, none of which is wrong. But one may be better than the others. How can I learn to make the right decision in these situations?

READ ROMANS 12:1-2

- 6a) What needs to happen to us so we can know the will of God?
- b) How can God change our minds?
- c) What do we need to do?

As we understand the Bible better we will find it easier to know what God's will is in a specific situation. If you need to make a decision and you're worried that you don't know enough about the Bible then talk someone who knows the Bible better than you.

READ 1 JOHN 5:14-15

7a) When does God hear and answer our prayers?

b) So what do we know if God answers our prayers?

But we need to remember that John is writing to Christians who loved God and wanted to follow him. We need to have this attitude when we pray. We need to really desire to do God's will. Then we know that if he answers our prayers it is his will.

What if I make the wrong decision?

We need to remember that sometimes we will make wrong choices but God is forgiving so we can always ask him to forgive us. And he is wise and powerful so he can help us to deal with any problems we face because of our bad choices.

Meeting with God's family

We don't know who wrote Hebrews, but we know it was written to some Jewish Christians who were being persecuted because of their faith. Because of this persecution they were being tempted to stop following Jesus. This letter was written to encourage them to continue as Christians despite the persecution.

READ HEBREWS 10:19-25

- 1a) What was the Most Holy Place for the Jews?
 - b) What is the Most Holy Place for Christians?
 - c) Who was allowed to go into the Most Holy Place in the Temple? When was he allowed to go there? (Leviticus 16:2-3)
 - d) Why were other people not allowed to go there? Why could he go there only once a year?
 - d) When are Christians allowed to go into the Most Holy Place and meet with God? Why do we not need a priest to go there for us? (v19-20, 21)
 - e) Why are we allowed to go there so freely when the Jews were not allowed? What is the curtain that Jesus allows us to go through?
- 2a) How do you feel about the idea of meeting with God like this? What is your experience of meeting with God?
 - b) When do you most feel like meeting with God?
 - c) When do you not feel like meeting with God?
 - d) How can this passage help you?
- 3a) What do we need to have before we can come near to God? (v22)
 - b) What do these things mean?
 - c) Why are these things necessary?
 - d) How can we have a more sure faith? How can our faith grow?
 - e) How can our hearts be purified?
- 4a) What is the hope they profess?
 - b) Why did the writer need to tell them to hold on firmly to it?
 - c) What reason did he give them for holding onto it? Why is it a reasonable thing to do?
 - d) What promise was he thinking about?
 - e) Do you find it difficult to hold on firmly to your hope in Christ? What makes it difficult? How can this passage help you?

f) Do you know any people who were Christians but now seem to have lost their faith? Do you know why?

5a) What should be our attitude to other Christians?

b) What should we be concerned about for each other?

c) How can we help each other to show love and to do good?

d) How can the Bible and prayer help us to do this?

6a) If we want to help each other in this way, what do we need to do together?

b) Why do some people not meet with other Christians?

c) How much of a priority is meeting with other Christians for you? What affect does this have on how you spend your time?

d) What does it mean to have a habit of meeting together? How often should we meet? Why is it important that it's a habit?

e) Do you have a habit of meeting with other Christians? How could you develop this habit?

f) When you meet with other Christians do you try to help them to show love and do good deeds? Do you try to encourage them? How could you do this more?

7a) What is the Day of the Lord?

b) What should we do as we see it coming nearer?

c) How should thinking about the Day of the Lord affect our attitude to other Christians?

d) Why is it important to encourage each other when the Day of the Lord is coming nearer?

In this passage Jesus is talking to his disciples. It is just before he is arrested so he knows he is going to die soon.

READ JOHN 13:34-35

8a) What did Jesus command his disciples to do?

b) How much should we love each other?

c) How did Jesus love us? How did he show his love for us?

d) What does this mean for how we should love each other? What does it mean to die for each other?

e) How do you feel about the idea of loving other Christians this much? Can you do it? What help do you need?

9a) What will happen if we do love each other like this?

b) How will this help people who aren't Christians?

c) Do you know anyone who first became interested in Jesus because they saw how much Christians love each other?

Meeting the world

Last week we thought about how we should relate to other Christians. Today we are going to think about how we should relate to non-Christians.

Colossians is a letter written by Paul to the Christians in Colossae, a town in Asian Minor (Turkey) east of Ephesus. Paul heard that there were people teaching these Christians things that were untrue. So he wrote to them reminding them of the truth they had learnt about Jesus in the past.

READ COLOSSIANS 4:2-6

- 1a) How does Paul say they should pray?
 - b) What does this mean in practice?
 - c) How persistent are you at praying?
 - d) Why is it important to be persistent when we pray? Why does God want us to be persistent?
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- 2a) What will keeping alert help us to do?
 - b) How does keeping alert help us to do this?
 - c) Why is it important to be alert and give thanks in this way?
 - d) How often do you give thanks when you pray? How often do you give thanks for answered prayers? How much do you think about whether or not God is answering your prayers?
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- 3a) What did Paul ask them to pray for him? (v3,4)
 - b) There were many things Paul could have asked them to pray for him. Why do you think he asked them to pray this for him?
 - c) What do you think about the fact that Paul needed God's help so that he could explain the message? What does this mean for us?
 - d) How often do you pray that God will give you opportunities to share the message about Jesus with others?
 - e) How often do you pray this for your Christian friends?
 - f) How often do you ask your Christian friends to pray this for you?
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- 4a) How should we act towards those who are not Christians?
 - b) What does this mean? How can we be wise in the way we act?
 - c) How easy do you find it to relate to non-Christians in a wise way?

- 5a) What kind of opportunity is Paul talking about in verse 5?
- b) How might acting wisely lead to opportunities to talk about God?
- c) What sort of opportunities have you had to share your faith?
- d) Do you always make good use of them to share your faith or do you sometimes let them pass without saying anything? What sort of things stop you talking about your faith?
- e) How can we make good use of opportunities when we do have them? How can we prepare for sharing our faith?

6a) What should our speech be like?

- b) What does this mean?
- c) Why is important that our speech is pleasant (full of grace)?
- d) Why is it important that our speech is interesting (seasoned with salt)?
- e) Are there anyways your speech needs to change?

7a) What does Paul mean when he says we should know how to give the right answer to everyone? What kind of question is he thinking about us answering?

b) How can we know how to give the right answer to everyone?

8a) Let's think again about what Paul asked them to pray for him in v 4. When you try to share your faith with non-Christians, do you find it easy to explain it clearly?

- b) How often do you pray that God will help you to explain the message about Jesus clearly?
- c) How often do you pray this for your Christian friends?
- d) How often do you ask your Christian friends to pray this for you?

READ 1 PETER 3:15

- 9a) What should be our attitude to Jesus?
- b) How can we honour him as Lord?
- c) What should we do if someone asks us to explain why we're a Christian?
- d) How can we be ready to do this?
- e) In what way should we explain our faith?
- f) When might we be tempted to do it without gentleness and respect?

10a) How much do you want non-Christians to become Christians?

b) Why do you want them to believe?

c) Are there specific people you especially want to become Christians?

d) What can you do and say that might create an opportunity for you to talk with them about God?

11a) What have we learnt today about what we need to do?

b) What have we learnt today about what we need God to do?