

Way of Discipleship Small Groups

Bible Themes 13: New Testament: Our calling



Touching base (5 minutes)

Open in prayer as is helpful for your group.

If this is your first session take time to introduce yourselves and set any ground rules you want to for your time together.

If you met previously take the opportunity either as a group or in pairs to check in with each other about how your response from last time has gone.



Introduction: These final three sessions on Bible themes look at how the letters of the New Testament, and the book of Revelation, unpack the meaning of God's story and the significance of Jesus' life, death and resurrection. Written to early Christian disciples, they also tell us a lot about what it means to live as followers of Christ in the world. These three sessions look at the lifestyle of a disciple. The first session examined what these letters and the book of Revelation show about the relationship God wants with us. The previous session explored our identity. This session will look at our callings.

Opening question(s) (5 minutes)

Who are called to be as disciples? What are we called to do?



Understanding the information (25 minutes)

Share these thoughts in your own words or read them together:

What does the New Testament emphasise about our callings and joining in with God's work?

The New Testament describes how our calling as Jesus' body – His church – is to join in with His work in the world as we look in hope for God's Kingdom to come to earth in its fulness.

But it's not just about doing things for God. As Bishop Newbiggin wrote, the life of the church is to be a "sign of God's reign and a foretaste of His rule". In other words, before we even think about calling in terms of activity, we need to know that who we are is as important as what we do.

The New Testament offers many images and descriptions to describe our callings – as individuals and a community.



Who we are called to be.

We are God's chosen and "holy" people – set apart by Him to continue His purposes in the world - and "dearly loved". (Colossians 3:12). We are God's "bride" (Revelation 21:2) – reminding us that throughout the Bible God has called people into covenant relationship with Him. Paul describes how the way in which a husband and wife are united as "one flesh" is a picture of this deep covenant intimacy God wants with His people, (Ephesians 5:21-22).

Knowing ourselves to be loved and united in this way, we live as one body, the fulfilment of God's plan for a newly created humanity in which "each member belongs to the others" (Romans 12:5), a "family of believers" (Galatians 6:10), no longer strangers, separated by ethnicity or background, but "fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household". (Ephesians 2:19)

God's plan was always to call, not just individuals, but a people to be a blessing to the world, set apart for Him, worshipping Him, demonstrating His love, acting in a priestly way to connect God to people, and people to God. The New Testament reveals this calling to Israel is now extended to all people. The church becomes God's temple and priesthood. No longer is God's presence focussed in a particular building, but in Christ we "are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit." (Ephesians 2:22) "Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in your midst?" (1 Corinthians 3:16)

We are "like living stones...being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." In Christ we are "a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light." (1 Peter 2:5,9) As such, we are living representatives of Christ in the world. "We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us." (2 Corinthians 5: 20)

How we are called to live.

The New Testament describes the life of the church as being distinctive in world-changing ways. As we have seen, the life of this new temple, creation and humanity is uniquely multi-ethnic, breaking down barriers and marked by love.

The New Testament also describes how these early Christian churches live as salt and light within surrounding cultures. They have a calling to bring life to their wider communities, but challenge many of its values through their life together. Within a context in which Christians were supposed to obey Caesar as the highest authority, a continuing theme is how to live with integrity under a different Lord – Christ. By treating men and women, slaves and their owners, rich and poor as equals within God's people, Christians challenged the very structures of societies around them.

What we are called to do.

The New Testament describes in very practical terms what it looked like for God's people to be joining in with the Spirit, as they lived within the salvation of God's kingdom and sought to offer that salvation to others. They did so both through their active witness and a Spirit-empowered life which put the message on display, transformed every part of life, and was energised by hope.

Active witness. "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." (Acts 1:8)

The life of the community. Acts gives us two pictures of the life of the church, meeting together daily in the temple. In other words, this new community is demonstrating what the Temple, as the place where heaven and earth meet, should be. Luke describes this young church as having three defining features, which act as a framework for a healthy church. (Acts 2: 42-47)

They were devoted to God, living out the practices that helped them to be with Him, and open to His presence.

As Jesus' body on earth, they demonstrated the life of God's kingdom in their life together and in their individual lives. The church is the prime example of what the future kingdom will look like – a 'film trailer' for the ultimate masterpiece of God's recreated world.

They experienced people being drawn into God's salvation through the visibility of their life together. They were "enjoying the favour of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved."

Every part of life. Through the church, God's wisdom is to reach every part of creation: "His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms..." (Ephesians 3:10) As such, Christians live in the world as "children of Light". (Ephesians 5:8) All of human life, including the most everyday activities, is lived for God's glory. "So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God." (1 Corinthians 10:31)

Energised by hope. The New Testament calls human beings to live out God's kingdom in anticipation of Jesus' return and the final renewal of all things. To live in hope today is to live in anticipation of what we will one day experience. Only a conviction about the future can give meaning and shape to life in the present. The New Testament wrestles with changing expectations of when this might happen but for disciples, joining in with God's vision, the New Testament is immersed in this hope which gives confidence: "Therefore, since we have such a hope, we are very bold." (2 Corinthians 3:12)

Discuss: What difference can God's calling to live in His future promise make to my daily life?

Reading the Bible (15 minutes)

Read 1 Peter 2: 9-17 which links our sense of who we are, with how we are called to live.

Discuss the Discovery Bible Study questions:
What does this passage teach me about God?
What does this passage teach me about people?
How does this passage call me to obey God?
What might I do in response to this this week?



Seeing how it looks in real lives (10 minutes)

Watch the video at:

<https://youtu.be/Nfz5TLtxRsA>

What struck you as important in the video?



Responding to God's leading (5 minutes)

Give people an opportunity to think about, "What might God be showing me and how might I respond?" They may like to write this down and/or share it with the group and/or share it with one other person. A friendly question is to ask each other, "Is there anything that would be helpful to ask you next time?"



Group prayer (5 minutes)

God our Father,

On our journey you long for us to be with you, to rest in you and to hear your voice.

You have made us for covenant love - Our hearts are restless until we find ourselves in you.

We praise and adore you.

Lord Jesus,

We become more ourselves the more we grow like you.

Shape us as your disciples, growing in kindness, faithfulness and above-all self-giving love.

We praise and adore you.

Holy Spirit,

You are at work in our lives, closer to us that we can imagine.

You are at work in the world, releasing the life of God's healing reign.

In every part of our lives we join in with you, living each day for your purpose and glory as disciples.

We praise and adore you.



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