

Way of Discipleship Small Groups

Bible Themes 11: New Testament: Relationship with God



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 next three sessions look at the lifestyle of a disciple, firstly by examining what these letters and the book of Revelation show about the relationship God wants with us, secondly by exploring our identity, and thirdly about our callings.

Opening question(s) (5 minutes)

Can you remember any verses from the letters in the New Testament which describe the kind of relationship God wants with us?



Understanding the information (25 minutes)

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

What does the New Testament show about the relationship God wants with us?

God is self-giving, cross-shaped love. The starting point for a relationship with God is His love, and in Jesus Christ the full nature of that self-giving love has been fully revealed. John writes, "God is love....This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins." (1 John 4:8-10)



God reconciles us and all creation to Himself, bring peace and wholeness. "For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross." (Colossians 1: 19-20)

Rather than having to wait until the end of time, in Jesus the fulness of God's promise to restore the order and wholeness of creation and people is offered now. We are no longer cut off from God in any way.

God adopts us as His children. "In love he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will— to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves." (Ephesians 1: 5-6) By using the language of adoption, the New Testament emphasises how much we receive as God's heirs. In the film Ben-Hur Judah (a Jew) escapes from a sinking ship in which he is a slave. In doing so, he saves the life of a Roman commander, Arrius, whose son has been killed. Arrius adopts Judah, leading to his being forgiven for his supposed crimes, being given a new name, "young Arrius," and receiving a full inheritance. Arrius declares the adoption by giving his ancestral signet ring to young Arrius, who says he has received "a new life, a new home, a new father". In the same way, a relationship of adoption means our debts are cancelled, and we receive all that belongs to heirs of God.

God justifies us. Justification by faith has rightfully been emphasised as an important part of understanding salvation. It emphasises the complete forgiveness and right relationship we gain with God because of what Jesus did. It means we find ourselves before God in a place in which it is as if we had never done anything to disobey Him. A much-loved priest in the Philippines carried around the burden of a secret sin he had committed many years before. He had asked for forgiveness but still had no peace. In his parish was a woman who loved God and who claimed to be able to speak with Christ and He with her. The sceptical priest wanted to test her and said, "The next time you speak with Jesus, I want you to ask Him what sin I committed while I was in training college." The woman agreed. A few days later they met and the priest asked her, "Well, did Christ visit you in your dreams?" "Yes, he did," she replied. "And did you ask him what sin I committed in college?" "Yes." "And what did he say?" "He said, 'I don't remember.'" God's final judgement has already taken place on the cross.

God restores us through grace. God's grace is not just a New Testament revelation – the Jewish people were never driven by works or effort - Judaism was always a religion of grace. Jewish people believed that they were saved because they had been chosen by God. Nevertheless, they were marked out by ways of life given to them by God and by signs of His relationship with Him – such as circumcision, or keeping certain food laws. The good news is that no one is excluded because they haven't obeyed particular laws which act as 'boundary-markers'. "...it is by grace you have been saved, through faith-and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works, so that no one can boast." (Ephesians 2: 8-9)

Discuss: God reconciles, adopts, justifies, restores me by His grace. Which of these four promises is the most important to me and why?

Reading the Bible (15 minutes)

Read Ephesians 1: 15-23 which describes some of the amazing things God has done for me.

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)

There is no video, but you are invited to discuss your experience of God's reconciling and restoring love.



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.

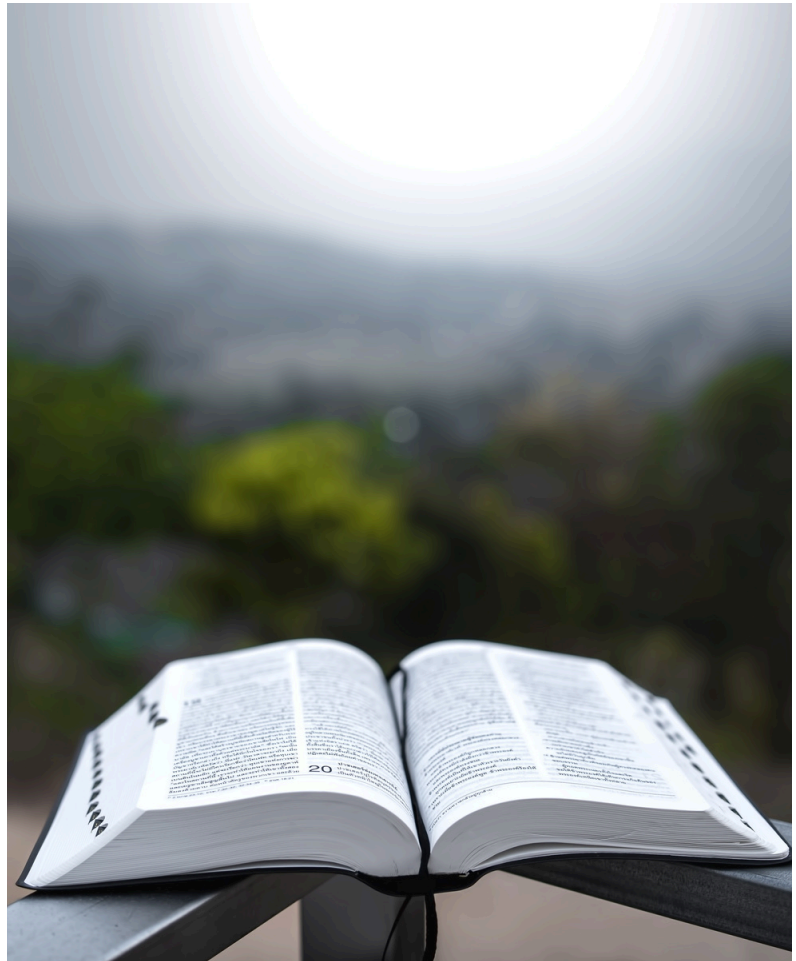


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