



**FGA MELBOURNE
LEADERS NOTES**
August 2014

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OVERVIEW – Leaders Copy

LIVING FAITH

Series Summary

Series passage: *“I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”* (Galatians 2:20, ESV)

INTRODUCTION TO THE LIVING FAITH SERIES

BROAD TOPIC: DISCIPLESHIP

Related words: Spiritual formation, sanctification, maturity in Christ, growth, living your faith, church.

When Jesus invited us to follow Him, He promised we would live an abundant life, and experience life to the full (John 10:10). Living FAITH is a study series on discipleship as Jesus intended. We will see that discipleship is not a conversion program, but it is an integral part of our relationships living out what it means to be a Household of F.A.I.T.H. — connected to God and to one another.

The series we have just completed, *The World Is Not Enough* (TWINE), was the prelude to this series on discipleship. Based on the Gospel of John, TWINE challenged us to consider what it is to be fully dependent on Jesus as our Lord and Saviour. We learnt that salvation and acceptance by God it is not due to our own actions, but whether we are relating to God on an ongoing basis. John used various analogies such as being connected to the True Vine (John 14), being a sheep led by the Good Shepherd (John 10), walking in the Light (John 1), seeking the source of Living Water for a wellspring of life (John 4). All of these illustrations reach the same goal. That we must be, and stay, connected to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now that we are born again into this new life (John 3), what do we as followers of Christ? Living FAITH is a response to that question. This series definitely does not intend to adopt a 'works' or legalistic orientation, to say you must do such and such to keep in God's good books. Rather, we want to say now that we are married, grafted into Vine as part of the body, adopted into God's family, being led by the Good Shepherd, responding to the Holy Spirit — how should live out the life we have?

Remember: Being a disciple is not to earn our place at the table. Christ has already done that. Rather, now we are now part of the household of FAITH, safe and secure, how does the house owner want us to live?

We chose the series title as Living FAITH as it underpins that our walk of faith should be vibrant and dynamic — living was deliberately chosen as can be used a verb, i.e., doing or action word. Faith is active. It is also an adjective that describes our faith as a vibrant believer. We are highlighting normal healthy signs of life and of fruitfulness. Things that are alive must grow and replicate. We will learn from Scripture and see how Jesus interacted and activated his disciples, and challenge us to do likewise.

Through this series we want to specifically consider how **spiritual formation** takes place at FGA Melbourne. We want to look at how it is active now and what things we can put in place to make it better for us all and for the community and the world Jesus wants to reach through us. Without the Spirit daily working in people's lives it has the potential to be dry, some people may struggle with discerning the difference between outworking of living faith and following a set of instructions. This would be a huge mistake. As disciples of Jesus, our focus is to follow his command to make disciples, but we will discover discipleship takes on all types of faces, few of which are dry and unrewarding. Primarily, we are not called to do not do that alone, but we must do that together.

Specifically through this Living Faith series we aim to articulate:

1. What FAITH looks like in practice (Practical outworking of our faith)
2. What we need in order to grow our faith (Need to articulate what the next step is)
3. A Biblical mandate
4. Community and unity around certain core values
5. FGA Melbourne's culture and practices as we are a church of disciples

SERIES OVERVIEW AND GOALS

The series is designed to be really practical. Each session introduces an important component in discipleship and then lands on “standard” biblical examples of how that concept is applied in a Christian’s life. The first 2 sessions set the scene for FGA’s FAITH discipleship process, which builds up from being to doing, ending up with us being Faithful to the Mission that God has called us for.

Session Title	Main Point (Practical Example)
Session 1: Church is Discipleship Matthew 4:18-20	We are disciples of Christ
Session 2: Members of a Body 1 Corinthians 12:12-31	Disciples are members of a connected Body
Session 3: Holy and Set Apart 1 Peter 2:9	Disciples are all His (Sabbath and Tithe)
Session 4: Teachable in Discipleship Psalms 1	Disciples know and discover God’s world (Scripture)
Session 5: Intimate Relationally Galatians 5:6	Discipleship is for relationship (Hospitality)
Session 6: Active and Personally Involved Ephesians 2:8-10	Who you are flows into action (Serve)
Session 7: Faithful to the Mission Matthew 28:16-20	Disciples make disciples (Evangelism)

Note: Please do not get too hung up on the legality of the “practical example”. Each one can be supported by strong biblical evidence, but the idea of using the examples is not to convey legalism, but rather to present a well tested, recommended and practical discipline.

RESOURCES AVAILABLE

The accompanying videos are on Living Faith available from the church office. Also, video streaming and is available at <http://www.fgam.org.au/#/leaders/home-group-videos>. Member handouts are available at <http://www.fgam.org.au/#/leaders/home-group-notes>

If you are unable to access the files or DVD, or need assistance with printing notes, please let us know. We are more than happy to get hard copies to you. Simply contact megan.griffith@fgam.org.au (0422 284 404) or yc.goh@fgam.org.au (0425 799 576) and we will ensure that you get it.

The Living FAITH Home Group series will be augmented by:

- The "Living FAITH" preaching series at FGA Sunday Services for 8 weeks, from 13 July to 31 August 2014. Sermons are available online <http://fgam.org.au/#/media>
- Living Faith leadership podcast series, recorded at FGA's staff devotions. <http://www.fgam.org.au/#/leaders/leadership-podcast>
- Opportunities to exercise our faith every week in prayer, at the 9am Sunday prayer at Kingswood and the Wednesday corporate prayer at Lexton from 7:30-9pm.

LIVING FAITH – Leaders Copy

Session 1: Church is Discipleship

Key passage: "As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will send you out to fish for people." At once they left their nets and followed him." (Matt 4:18-20, ESV)

INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE OF THE SESSION

This introductory session looks at the core purpose for which God created the Church. As a leader, pause and think for a moment... what would your answer be if someone asked you what is the main purpose for the Church, worldwide? Would your answer be to pray, to preach, to save the lost, or to create a place to worship God? While all of these are good (and Biblical) answers, we understand that the core purpose of the Church is to make disciples. Discipleship is at the essence of the Great Commission in Matt 28:19 "Go into all the world and make disciples, baptizing them into the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit and teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age". All of these other activities such as prayer, worship, fellowship etc. naturally flow from living our lives as disciples and followers of Jesus.

When Jesus invited his disciples to "follow me" (Matt 4:18-22), the first called-out group was formed. This was the birth of the New Testament pattern of Church; note that it was not based on knowledge of Scripture, knowing the power of God, or having a task to do, but it was based on responding to an invitation to a relationship with God through Christ. Jesus first drew people into relationship with himself and as they belonged to the same group doing life together, relationships with one another formed and grew. As Jesus teaching and guidance impacted their lives, it resulted in multiplication through many others being healed and reconciled to God through their actions, and the millions of others that have followed this example. This is still the essence of discipleship, relationship with Jesus and with one another, which produces growth and replication.

The Church is presently viewed by many as source of Bible knowledge or counsel, a moral compass, a place to serve or use your gifts, or just a place to meet people; sometimes it's original purpose of discipleship gets lost among all the other identities. **We need to understand that you can make a church and not have disciples, but you cannot make disciples and not have a Church. Church is the result of discipleship taking place.** Today we look at what being a disciple of Christ looks like for us.

FORMAT FOR SESSION ONE

This is a suggested format for the session

Standard Home Group	Casual Home Group
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Worship (DVD)/Prayer2. Welcome3. Play Introduction Video (2 min)4. Play Session Video (5 mins)5. Read Scripture6. Summarise Main Point7. Open for discussion8. Application and Prayer	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Welcome2. Play Introduction Video (2 min)3. Play Session Video (5 mins)4. Summarise Main Point5. Discuss question 26. Food/Fellowship

A. Session Videos (Introduction, 2 minutes; Session One, 5 minutes)

The short Introduction video outlines the Living Faith series and explains how it flows from the previous home group study, The World Is Not Enough (TWINE).

The first session video presents a more in-depth introduction by exploring the purpose of the church and why Jesus' model of discipleship is so effective. The main points of the first session are:

1. Introduction to discipleship.
2. The relationship between discipleship, the church and being a Christian.
3. Explaining how the discipleship model works to produce change.

B. Scripture Reading (Matt 4:18-20)

Background to the passage:

Today's passage, early in the Gospel of Matthew, describes the birth of the Church as the first disciples respond to the invitation of Jesus. Jesus calls people from their ordinary lives into a relationship that will result in an extraordinary change and adventure. They responded willingly.

From the parallel passage in Luke (5:1-11), we see that the encounter with Peter was more in-depth than Matthew depicts. Jesus was down by the lake in the morning, where he first used one of the boats as a preaching platform. Then a miracle occurred as Peter obeyed Jesus in sending out a boat and letting down the nets to catch fish despite that they had caught nothing despite fishing all night long. It was at this point Peter had a revelation that Jesus was a holy man and he became acutely aware of his own sinful state. However instead of looking at Peter's sin and rejecting him, Jesus asked him to come closer and join him on his life and ministry journey. This offer was such an amazing opportunity Peter couldn't refuse. It's important to note that in very much the same way, Jesus calls you to follow Him as a disciple.

C. Main point

We are called to be disciples

First and foremost, being a Christian is to be a disciple of Jesus. We are not fans sitting on a seat, nor do we just follow his philosophy or value system. Discipleship is open to everyone who sincerely responds to the call of Jesus. The catch, if you can call it that, is you do not get to write your own job description, Jesus Himself sets the agenda. This is the heart of what Lordship is about. We are his disciples and we follow our Lord (John 14:15).

D. Discussion Questions

1. What do you call the people inside a Church? Take a shot at explaining the real reasons why people come to Church.

Answer Guide: Allow time for people to describe and discuss what they think is the main purpose for the church. It's best to be as honest as possible. Everyone can very easily jump to the "correct" answer, however, if they do, please do test him or her on it. Ask: "Is that really happening?" or "Why do you say that?"

After some discussion bring in the topic of discipleship. The answer to this question is a key to understanding the whole passage. This could possibly change the mindset of people to seeing what the core purpose for the church is. It has the potential to reorient our priorities and the way we do things.

For people who do not agree, hear what they are saying and listen to any Scriptural references to back up their statements. If you are stuck, or disagree, write to Ps Chris Ong (Chris.ong@fgam.org.au) as he would be more than happy to help you communicate why the answer is discipleship.

2. Many people can attend church, or even be broadly connected to a church without attending. What do you make of the statement: “you can make a church and not have disciples, but you cannot make disciples and not have a Church”?

Answer Guide: Try to explore the concept that people use church for all kinds of reasons e.g. Finding a life partner, help them raise kids in a godly manner, meet friends, listen to inspirational sermons etc. Some of these reasons aren't linked to discipleship. Take time to tease that out.

However, a WIDE RANGE of purposes and activities at church DO CONNECT to discipleship. It might be helpful to talk about how a DISCIPLESHIP MINDSET can actually change the way you look at church (and your Christian walk). A DISCIPLESHIP MINDSET means “you look at yourself as a disciple, and participating in church as discipleship”.

FGA's purpose and mission statement: “As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord” has it's core in discipleship and the Lordship of Christ. The word “serve” can be translated to include worship and follow. We follow the Lord, we are His disciples and we serve Him.

3. What do you think are the essential elements of discipleship?

Answer guide: (please email me a list of what your home group considers essential elements of discipleship – chris.ong@fgam.org.au). There are many elements of discipleship. This series will certainly explore quite a lot of these elements within our FAITH framework; however, at this stage it's just important to get your home group thinking and discussing what they feel are important elements.

Discipleship is always a good blend of BEING and DOING. It involves understanding who you are, the world you are in, the people you surround yourself with (BEING) and it involves putting that into action (DOING). Try to tease out a range of different answers in order to capture the fact that while discipleship can be broad, but certain key elements MUST be present.

4. Are you a disciple that makes disciples? Read Matthew 28:19-20 (The Great Commission)

Answer guide: Please don't let this question be too threatening or overwhelming. We have all been called to be disciples and to make disciples. This whole series will make the journey towards us being FAITHFUL TO THE MISSION, so really, it's designed to help your home group move towards living out the Great Commission.

However, at this stage, it's good to hear where everyone is at in the journey. Depending on the composition of your home group, it might be good to discuss if they even feel called to be disciples that make disciples.

New Visitor/Non-Christian Take Home:

Discipleship, the topic for this study, is not about being converted and converting others as a goal in itself. It is not about filling our minds with Bible knowledge or Christian doctrines. The core of discipleship is about relationship, one the expresses itself through loving God and loving others. We believe that the most loving thing we can do is to introduce others to the God that completely transformed our lives.

E. Application

As you go through the next week or so, take a look at your relationships through the eyes of a disciple of Jesus. What ways are you 'discipling' those you come in contact with? How are you drawing them closer to God? What ways are you being disciplined by those around you? Perhaps being disciples and discipling others is not so unattainable after all.

F. Potential Prayer Points

Commit all of your relationships to the Lord. Ask him to sanctify your relationships (both within and outside the church) and to establish his purposes in them.

G. Looking Forward

You are not just a disciple, but you are a member of a body. This is not a solo life or individual journey, but you are connected to the body, relationally connected as a son of the house, member of the body. Living out our faith as part of a community. In Session 2 we will be looking at what it is to be members of a body and living in community.

LIVING FAITH – Leaders Copy

Session 2: Members of a Body

Key passage: "You can easily enough see how this kind of thing works by looking no further than your own body. Your body has many parts—limbs, organs, cells—but no matter how many parts you can name, you're still one body. It's exactly the same with Christ. By means of his one Spirit, we all said good-bye to our partial and piecemeal lives. We each used to independently call our own shots, but then we entered into a large and integrated life in which he has the final say in everything."

1 Cor 12:12-13 (The Message).

INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE OF THE SESSION

In the first session we introduced the concept of discipleship, which is not a program where we must be converted and convert others, rather it is about relationship with Jesus and other people, together having the mutual aim of growing in our identity as Christ's disciples and all that it entails. Discipleship is done together. The passage above, deliberately taken from The Message translation, is an exceptional illustration referring to our different places in the body of Christ, with the message unity in diversity.

Sometimes when we think of discipleship we immediately think of a formal one-on-one Bible study or deep and meaningful conversation with another 'on fire' Christian where you talk about how many people you have witnessed to that week. While this model of discipleship can work effectively, it is not necessarily the Biblical model and should be the exception rather than the rule. You may say "but Jesus sent out the disciples two by two", while this is true (Mark 6:7, Luke 10:1) you will see that he called them all together after a period of time to spend time to rest and spend time with him and with one another (Mark 6:30-32).

When reading Scripture, you see that **the disciples and the early church were in it together**. It required the body functioning in all of their different gifts, with each persona having a specific role to play, to function healthily and produce growth (Eph 4:15-16). We should be keenly aware that one of the most effective weapons the enemy uses is to isolate individuals or groups of people from the body rest of the body.

Taking a human body for example, healthy cells will replicate and grow, mirroring the cells that are around them. However, a tumour develops as cellular growth that is unregulated. If it becomes malignant (i.e., turns into cancer) these rogue cells are independent, and are unable to respond to the normal checks and balances in a healthy body. Eventually they spread to all parts, consume all the nutrients and destroy the whole body. Likewise a community of believers, we need to grow in our connections to other parts of the body and not become isolated. One way for doing is actively developing an appreciation for other parts of the body that serve a different purpose. Supporting ministries.

Living together as a faith community means that we need to make authentic connections, recognise the different roles of the body and encourage one another to pursue their call and destiny in following Jesus. Today we will consider what are the keys to accessing to the culture that is right for you and how we respond to one another as members of one house.

FORMAT FOR SESSION TWO

This is a suggested format for the session

Standard Home Group	Casual Home Group
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Worship (DVD)/Prayer 2. Welcome 3. Play Session Video (8 mins) 4. Read Scripture 5. Summarise Main Point 6. Open for discussion 7. Application and Prayer 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Welcome 2. Play Session Video (8 mins) 3. Summarise Main Point 4. Discuss one question 5. Food/Fellowship

A. Session Two Video (Eight minutes)

This second video session looks at connectedness in discipleship. The major points of the this lesson are:

1. We were not designed to journey through life alone.
2. The church can be likened to a body. We are all part of the same body, all organs are connected.
3. How does the body of Christ affect your growth as a Christian?
4. Unregulated growth wreaks havoc on the body.

B. Scripture Reading (1 Cor 12:12-31)

Background to the passage:

Paul's letter to the Corinthians was written to address immaturity and division in the church. At the time the young church was growing rapidly, but they did not understand what it meant to be part of God's family and how they were to relate to one another. Spiritual gifts abounded, but people were using them to try and demonstrate superiority over another, rather than being secure in their identity and using them to serve each other. Paul was keen to relay the message that they are connected to one another, through Christ and that the body must work together: everyone has a part to play and each part is of equal importance, even if external appearances may suggest otherwise.

I've attached the whole passage in the Message Version. It may be worth reading out aloud in the group.

¹²⁻¹³ You can easily enough see how this kind of thing works by looking no further than your own body. Your body has many parts—limbs, organs, cells—but no matter how many parts you can name, you're still one body. It's exactly the same with Christ. By means of his one Spirit, we all said good-bye to our partial and piecemeal lives. We each used to independently call our own shots, but then we entered into a large and integrated life in which he has the final say in everything. (This is what we proclaimed in word and action when we were baptized.) Each of us is now a part of his resurrection body, refreshed and sustained at one fountain—his Spirit—where we all come to drink. The old labels we once used to identify ourselves—labels like Jew or Greek, slave or free—are no longer useful. We need something larger, more comprehensive.

¹⁴⁻¹⁸ I want you to think about how all this makes you more significant, not less. A body isn't just a single part blown up into something huge. It's all the different-but-similar parts arranged and functioning together. If Foot said, "I'm not elegant like Hand, embellished with rings; I guess I don't belong to this body," would that make it so? If Ear said, "I'm not beautiful like Eye, limpid and expressive; I don't deserve a place on the head," would you want to remove it from the body? If the body was all eye, how could it hear? If all ear, how could it smell? As it is, we see that God has carefully placed each part of the body right where he wanted it.

¹⁹⁻²⁴ But I also want you to think about how this keeps your significance from getting blown up into self-importance. For no matter how significant you are, it is only because of what you are a part of. An enormous eye or a gigantic hand wouldn't be a body, but a monster. What we have is one body with many parts, each its proper size and in its proper place. No part is important on its own. Can you imagine Eye telling Hand, "Get lost; I don't need you"? Or, Head telling Foot, "You're fired; your job has been phased out"? As a matter of fact, in practice it works the other way—the "lower" the part, the more basic, and therefore necessary. You can live without an eye, for instance, but not without a

stomach. When it's a part of your own body you are concerned with, it makes no difference whether the part is visible or clothed, higher or lower. You give it dignity and honor just as it is, without comparisons. If anything, you have more concern for the lower parts than the higher. If you had to choose, wouldn't you prefer good digestion to full-bodied hair?

²⁵⁻²⁶ The way God designed our bodies is a model for understanding our lives together as a church: every part dependent on every other part, the parts we mention and the parts we don't, the parts we see and the parts we don't. If one part hurts, every other part is involved in the hurt, and in the healing. If one part flourishes, every other part enters into the exuberance.

²⁷⁻³¹ You are Christ's body—that's who you are! You must never forget this. Only as you accept your part of that body does your "part" mean anything. You're familiar with some of the parts that God has formed in his church, which is his "body": apostles, prophets, teachers, miracle workers, healers, helpers, organizers, those who pray in tongues. But it's obvious by now, isn't it, that Christ's church is a complete Body and not a gigantic, unidimensional part? It's not all Apostle, not all Prophet, not all Miracle Worker, not all Healer, not all Prayer in Tongues, not all Interpreter of Tongues. And yet some of you keep competing for so-called "important" parts. But now I want to lay out a far better way for you. 1 Cor 12:12-31 (The Message)

C. Main point

Disciples are members of a connected body

Discipleship is done together. The key to good discipleship is having access to the culture that is going to shape you. You are not just a disciple, but you are a member of a body. This is not a solo life or individual journey, but you are connected other parts of the body or relationally connected as a son/daughter of the house. In essence, we live out our faith as part of a community. In the key passage, Paul likens the church to being different organs of a body. Just by comparing to a human body, we know that that each organ is alive, but to remain alive and to function as intended it needs to be connected in the right way to other organs of the body. Some of the organs are the base organs, or not outwardly attractive or noticeable (e.g., the liver or intestine), yet are absolutely essential for the body to function. Furthermore when they become visible it is usually because the body is sick and the person is undergoing an operation. From another perspective, there is no point in having great brain or a beautiful face alone. If it's not connected to the rest of the body, it cannot survive. Being part of a local church means that we belong to the same body and all members have a God-given role and purpose. We must know how to be truly connected on one another and work together and live in harmony for the body to function healthily, grow and reproduce.

D. Discussion Questions

1. How would you describe the culture of those who are closest to you? What elements of that culture (just pick one or two) do you see bleeding into your life (both good and bad)?

Answer Guide: This is an exposure question. It is designed to bring out the fact that discipleship most often happens through PROXIMITY. Those that are the closest to you that you surround yourself with will have the most impact on shaping you.

Spend time talking about the home (spouses, partners, kids), work (bosses, colleagues), and church.

Ask who are the positive influences in your home group member's lives, and how much proximity (time, energy) do they have with the member.

2. What is it that we can sometimes feel alienated in our discipleship process (or alienated at church)?

Answer Guide: We should be keenly aware that one of the most effective weapons the enemy uses is to isolate individuals or groups of people from the body rest of the body. This can be done through physical isolation from the congregation or by influencing their relationships to be superficial or distantly connected. This commonly occurs through ways such as:

- **Busyness:** *The busyness of life (Luke 8:14) has a big impact on our being able to effectively connect with other believers and stay in touch and encouraged by what God is doing.*
- **Inferiority:** *Becoming emotionally or physically isolated through a sense of inferiority to other believers causing withdrawal from the main group. Perhaps they feel that they are "not good enough" or shamed that their God may be punishing them for because of personal failure or trialling life situation. It is not uncommon to hear people profess they are nothing special, are intimidated to be part of the group with the fear that their 'immature' faith being revealed.*
- **Offence:** *Perhaps people withdraw through offence or feeling they are not recognised, have no leadership role, or the church doesn't need their gifts. This can happen to us all, but if we do not bring these feelings and perceptions to the Cross and be honest with God about it, our feeling will be expressed in other ways and if left unchecked will lead to the defilement of many (Heb 12:15).*
- **Superiority:** *Others have a false belief that they have superior gifting or calling. They lose respect for the role of others within the same body. Wherein fact this is just the outworking of one of the most deceptive tactics, Pride. This is why this session's Scripture passage is so important. Paul's massive statement could not be clearer: that **each person is valuable and necessary**. We are all part of the household of FAITH.*

We all love and worship the same Master. No one is perfect, but each part of the body is unique and necessary. We all must be connected to remain healthy and result in balanced growth.

3. Who do you do discipleship with? How can you connect and have access to the right culture/influence?

Answer Guide: Typically we tend to put the responsibility of discipleship on someone else. However, we are the ones called to be disciples, and it is part of our journey with Christ to be growing as an active part of his Body. It will take some careful "leading" but try to address the fact that each person needs to play their part in connecting into discipleship within the body of Christ. We have been given many vehicles for discipleship including: The Bible, books, podcasts, sermons, mature Christians, pastors, leaders, friends etc. Time spent together is not just about formal activities, but it intersects with normal everyday life, people gather together more in time of crisis, a place you feel safe to be yourself, somewhere you can grow, and somewhere you can give to make the household a better place.

Common myths:

- *"I am still looking for the right person to disciple me." Everyone is flawed, and you may never find only ONE person. You can learn something that points you closer to Christ from almost anyone who loves the Lord. (Editor's note, AMEN!)*
- *"I am discipled in so many ways: friends, online sermons, books, YouTube etc, I don't need to be accountable to a local church." Test this answer, because usually it reveals the fact that a person can just pick and choose the speakers/sermons they like... easily discarding those that rub them the wrong way. The great thing about being accountable to a local church is that you have to engage with the WHOLE body of Christ (those that you like and those you don't).*

New Visitor/Non-Christian Take Home:

*Living things grow! In his book *The Lego Principle*, Joey Bonefacio notes how photosynthesis brings energy to plants, similarly communication is the process of exchange that brings people together and creates life in a relationship. When we have good communication with God and with others we find our lives lean in that direction towards the light. Just as a lack of photosynthesis causes plants to die, likewise relationships will also die through lack of communication.*

E. Application

When thinking about how you connect and have access to the right culture, what things come to mind that could help you make healthier connections? Is it spending more time with particular people who you know have a stronger relationship with God, joining a fellowship group, or perhaps it is surrendering to God something that you are not sure is right for you.

F. Potential Prayer Points

As well as praying for the needs of the group. Ask God to lead and guide us in the discipleship journey. Ask him to help each of you become a influencer of others for His Kingdom. Perhaps wait on Him and see what the Spirit reveals about how steps you can take to be a greater influence to others as a group of believers doing life together.

G. Looking Forward

We did not chose God but he chose us, not because of our works but because of his love (Eph 1:4). Next session we will look at the letter H of the FAITH acronym in the context of what it can mean to be holy and set apart as a church community.

LIVING FAITH – Leaders Copy

Session 3: Holy and Set Apart

Key passage:

"But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light." (1 Pet 2:9, ESV)

INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE OF THE SESSION



What things are sacred? Is there anything we do as Disciples of Christ that is a non-negotiable part of our faith? Australia was considered to be a Christian nation 50 years ago. Back then it was generally accepted what things were sacred: all the shops were closed on Sunday as it was the Sabbath, there was no sport on Sunday mornings and especially not Good Friday, Christmas was primarily about spending time with family and less about partying. In our current post-Christian society, the word "sacred" carries little weight now. This is indicative of a rise of tokenism in society, where it is fashionable to have intense passion but low commitment. Marriage to the same person for life is rare, definitions of sexuality have changed considerably, and spirituality is often a composite of flavours as if we were choosing from the shelves of a supermarket. On top of that, these days it seems the things that shouldn't be touched and what we consider as "sacred" have moved from being things of God to things that give us pleasure. Dare to interrupt someone's sleep in on a Saturday morning! Sorry, did you say you couldn't take your elderly father to the airport as you have to watch your son's baseball game? It's a pity you are unable to help a friend out who is in need as it interrupts your gym routine. If we are honest, we will acknowledge such individualistic pursuits are rapidly becoming the non-negotiable areas of our lives rather than matters of faith.

"As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord" is the key missional verse for FGA Melbourne. In recent years we have been exploring what it is to live as part of a household of F.A.I.T.H., which we believe is the practical outworking of this verse. You may recall that we initially studied the FAITH model in a home group series early last year, but this was studied at a personal level. The rest of this Living Faith series is not a repeat of last year, but we look at the FAITH acronym from a different perspective, and answering the question what each of the core values means in the context of belonging to a faith community.

This session we look at the foundational step in this journey that is being **holy and set apart**. Discipleship begins as we have a revelation of who Jesus is (Matt 16:16-18), being called out and responding to him (Mat 4:18-22, Luke 5:1-12, Mark 5: 16-20). This is what sets us apart from the rest of humanity. Now that we are called out and sanctified as Christ's disciples it is imperative that we understand that we have a different usefulness.

The purpose that drives believers is different to those that do not know God (2 Tim 1:9, 1 John 2:15-17). If we use the analogy of water as an example, we see it can have many uses even though water is always water made of up many molecules of H₂O. Water can be used to wash dishes, provide moisture to plants, provide the environment necessary for life in the ocean, refresh us, wash waste away down the toilet, or be used in the temple of God. Water use in the temple was always considered to be holy and used for purification (Ex 30:17-21, Num 19). So it is not the substance of something that makes it holy but the purpose that determines whether you are and set apart to God.

This session uses the biblical example of the Sabbath (Ex 20:8-11, Lk 23:56, Mark 2:27) and the Tithe (Mal 3:10, Lk 6:38) as a template for all of our lives being set apart for God. Please remember that we are not talking about these as legalistic rules, but rather as a Biblical example of us being set apart. The study is not an in depth biblical look at the reason behind the Sabbath and Tithing. Please remember that we could have used any number of different examples including water baptism, quiet time in the morning with God etc.

FORMAT FOR SESSION THREE

This is a suggested format for the session

Standard Home Group	Casual Home Group
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Worship (DVD)/Prayer 2. Welcome 3. Play Session Video (8 mins) 4. Read Scripture 5. Summarise Main Point 6. Open for discussion 7. Application and Prayer 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Welcome 2. Play Session Video (8 mins) 3. Summarise Main Point 4. Discuss one question 5. Food/Fellowship

A. Session Three Video (Eight minutes)

This third video session reviews the FAITH triangle and develops the theme holy and set apart. The major points of the this session are:

1. Explanation of the FAITH acronym
2. What does it mean to be called out, holy and set apart by God
3. Indicators of our hearts, tithes and Sabbath
4. Challenge to think about the things that are sacred in our lives.

B. Scripture Reading (Acts 11:19-26)

Background to the passage:

Earlier on in the book of Acts (8:1) we read how believers were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria because persecution broke out against the Church. As they moved away from Jerusalem they testified about Jesus and many people turned to the Lord and believed, and began to gather together for fellowship and teaching. One of the successful locations was a seaport town called Antioch (11:19-21), a major centre for trade from other parts of the Mediterranean. This is where followers of Jesus were first called Christians.

In this passage we see the group of disciples is called a church, or original Greek word ἐκκλησία, ας, ἡ is transliterated as *ekklesia* (pronounced ek-klay-see'-ah). This is word is the combination of two root

words from *ek*, "out from and to" and *kaléō*, "to call" – properly, people *called out from* the world and to God, the *outcome* being the *Church* (the mystical *body of Christ*) – i.e. the universal (total) body of believers whom God calls *out* from the world and *into* His eternal kingdom (Helps Ministries Inc.). The word, or derivations occurs 144 times in the New Testament.

C. Main point

Disciples are all His, we are set apart

Application Example: Sabbath and Tithe

As Children of God and Disciples of Christ we are to be wholly His. Answering the call to discipleship is a call to die to the ways and life you have known (Matt 16:24-25). And Jesus repeatedly challenged those that wanted to follow Him. In a world where all that we do revolves around self-promotion, social acceptance, outwitting others, one upmanship, excelling in our natural abilities, self-preservation, seeking comfort, experiencing new heights of entertainment and technology, even ones own personal safety... Jesus calls us to die – To give up the old life and embrace a new life. Your life is now sacred.

On a practical level, some of the ways we demonstrate our commitment to God revolves around the things we consider sacred. From a longstanding Church tradition, even for thousands of years before Christ was born, the two indicators of being set apart for God was what people with did their time (Sabbath) and their money/wealth (tithe). It's important to realise these were inaugurated (Gen 2:2-3; Gen 4:3-4; Gen 14:18-20) well before Moses introduced the Law (Ex 20, Lev 19). As we know that these are important to God, the tithe and Sabbath can be used as indicators or templates for demonstrating our commitment to Him. History tells us that if you don't do it when you are young in age or young in the faith, you probably wont do it later on when you have excess money or have more time in life. From young you teach children how to work with time, when is study time, time to get up for school, when its time to brush our teeth, etc. This pays off later on as they see that time is to be spent wisely, such as date night with wives or time set apart for doing things with the children (such as holidays). Similarly we should consider aspects of sacredness early on in our walk with God.

*This session uses the biblical example of the Sabbath (Ex 20:8-11, Lk 23:56, Mark 2:27) and the Tithe (Mal 3:10, Lk 6:38) as a template for all of our lives being set apart for God. Please remember that we are not talking about these as legalistic rules (the law kills but the Spirit brings life 2 Cor 3:6), but rather as a Biblical example of us being set apart. The study is not an in depth biblical look at the reason behind the Sabbath and tithing.

D. Discussion Questions

1. What things are sacred and not negotiable in your life?

Answer Guide: This is a general introductory question, so just see where the conversation goes. You may want to seed the discussion by looking at various categories: time (what can't be touched?), beliefs, or values. If the conversation allows it, maybe you can move the chat to what things (relating to our FAITH) are sacred. Ideally this question should be: "What things about your Christian faith are sacred and not-negotiable". Tackling that question though is really dependent on the composition of your home group.

2. Why is the Sabbath important as a template for us being set apart? What does Sabbath mean to you?

Answer Guide: These questions can sometimes fall in the "can of worms" category, and there can be quite a large emotional response related. It's important to take those comments and concerns seriously. We are not talking about core issues of salvation and we are in for the longer haul to see the development of a mature disciple of Christ. That doesn't mean we water down God's standards or great disciplines (we should maintain our strong biblical view); however, it does mean that we allow time for the Holy Spirit to move and for a Christian to grow.

Basic premise is this. We say all of our life belongs to God. He asks for a token so that our words aren't just words, but that they are lived out. One day out of the seven that we have. It's a template that shows that we are committed to our whole life being set apart for God ... that one day is set apart and holy (just as we are). You might want to explore what keeping the Sabbath sacred means. It's a great way of expressing who we are. Please remember it's not an issue for salvation. Read: Colossians 2:16 ESV "Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath."

3. Why is the Tithe important as a template for us being set apart?

Answer Guide: These questions can sometimes fall in the "can of worms" category, and there can be quite a large emotional response related. It's important to take those comments and concerns seriously. We are not talking about core issues of salvation and we are in for the longer haul of the development of a mature disciple of Christ. That doesn't mean we water down God's standards or great disciplines (we should maintain our strong biblical view), however, it does mean that we allow time for the Holy Spirit to move and for a Christian to grow.

Basic premise is this. We say all of our life belongs to God. He asks for a token so that our words aren't just words, but that they are lived out. It is just 1/10 of what we have. It's a template that shows that we are committed to our whole life being set apart for God ...

Elder Peggy has written a fantastic paper on tithing (see Appendix II, page 35)

4. OPTIONAL: What things do people who are set apart keep sacred?

Answer Guide: If you get strong resistance from the two practical example topics above, you may want to explore how your home group lives out it's consecration to the Lord. Perhaps discuss the whole topic of Christians being called out and what is the purpose of God.

New Visitor/Non-Christian Take Home:

Choosing to follow Jesus wholeheartedly is not so much a matter of what we have to let go of, but whom we get to hold on to. Jesus offers far greater pleasure, indescribably more power, and a much higher purpose and meaning to life than the world could ever offer (David Platt, from his book Follow Me).

E. Application and prayer

Break into pairs and discuss with one other person an area of challenge you are facing in life or one you have faced in the recent past. Think about what area may need to surrender or die to so that you can see Christ be fully in control of your personal situation. Pray and encourage one another.

F. Looking Forward

Next session we move to the next letter in the FAITH acronym, the letter T for "Teachable in discipleship". We will discuss what it is like to live in the world when your citizenship is in heaven. How do we discover what God's world is? What is the pattern or way of God's life for us? Israel was called out, the disciples called out, Adam and Eve called out. Each time they were called out they were given instructions. We have to learn what God's world is and what path we should be following.

LIVING FAITH – Leaders Copy

Session 4: Teachable in Discipleship

Key passage: "Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers. The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away. Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous; for the LORD knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish." (Psalm 1, ESV)

INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE OF THE SESSION

The purpose for this session is to explore what happens after we are called out by Jesus. We want to ask the question, what does this world look like from God's point of view? How do we live in God's world as faithful followers of Jesus? Our old ways and pattern will not do anymore. As we live a life led by the Spirit we become aware that some of the things that we do are not pleasing to God. We realise that we need to renew our minds as part understanding what God's will is for our lives. Paul exhorts us in Romans 12:2, "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect."



Referring again to our pyramid of FAITH diagram, the next step is to build upon the foundation of being holy and set apart (2 Tim 2:19-21, 1 Cor 3:10-15). The best way to build something that will last and be what God wants is not just what you are building (i.e. the end product), but how you are going about building it (the journey along the way). Are you allowing God and others in your life to teach you in the process? As we let the Spirit guide, shape and mould what you are building, it will surely become fruitful in both your life and others, but we must continually humble ourselves to remain teachable.

Therefore the two key points for this session are: Understanding that (1) renewal of mind and (2) remaining teachable are essential ingredients for building a life in Christ that will be fruitful and give life to others.

This session uses the practical example of Scripture as a means for the renewal of our mind and for understanding the new world we have been born again into. "All Scripture is breathed out by God and

profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.” (2 Tim 3:16-17 ESV)

FORMAT FOR SESSION FOUR

This is a suggested format for the session

Standard Home Group	Casual Home Group
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Worship (DVD)/Prayer 2. Welcome 3. Play Session Video (7 mins) 4. Read Scripture 5. Summarise Main Point 6. Open for discussion 7. Application and Prayer 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Welcome 2. Play Session Video (7 mins) 3. Summarise Main Point 4. Discuss Question 2 5. Food/Fellowship

A. Session Four Video (Seven minutes)

This video session looks at the letter T, for teachable in discipleship within the church community. The major points are:

1. Now that we are called out how do we live in God's world? Our worldview changes as we draw near to Christ. What is important to him becomes important to us.
2. The Word of God is the principle source of guidance in discipleship. We need to grow to love the Bible.
3. There are always things we can learn if our hearts are open to God.

B. Scripture Reading (2 Tim 3:16)

Background to the passage:

In this Passage, Paul is writing to the young pastor Timothy and warning him of the difficulties in the time to come. He knows that the love of the world will grow cold and self-promotion, self-preservation and deception in pursuit of gain will cause endless trouble, even among the religious adherents. It is from this context that Paul exhorts Timothy, telling him that use of Scripture is the best way to teach people as it comes from God and was given for this purpose to exhort, correct and train others.

C. Main point

Disciples know and discover God's world

Application Example: Scripture

There was a pattern to this world before we even arrived in on the scene. Andy Stanley uses an example: Just as when you go to the workplace or school there is a pattern culture already established, there was a pattern in this world before you entered it. We spend our life figuring out what that pattern is: how do we succeed and understand the way things work in order to get ahead? Yet the Bible exhorts us in Roman 12:2, not to don't spend your life working out the pattern of the world. There is a way that God's world works, spend you life trying to figure what that is. That is the essence of being teachable. The primary source of teaching and revelation from God is through His Word. This is how we know Jesus loves us and has come to rescue us (John 3:16).

Greek word for disciple is *mathétés* in the Bible is defined as learner or pupil. Not a learner just to gain knowledge, but to have a lifestyle imparted to them. We need to adopt the posture of being lifelong learners. If we follow someone's teaching closely we become immersed in (living with) and if we undergo an apprenticeship we are required not just to gain knowledge but to act it out. Knowledge, by itself puffs up but with love it builds up (1 Cor 8:1, 1 Cor 12:31). Another key understanding is that no one arrives at being the perfect disciple, but it is a life of discipleship. We know God accepts us because He made the first move. We are sons and daughters of the one house (the church) already. We are

permitted, or rather expected to make mistakes along the way. The key thing is not the mistakes we make, but whether get up and try again.

There are so many ways for us to learn about God and His Kingdom! Even creation testifies to its creator (Rom 1:20). However, today we focus on Scripture as a great way of understanding the pattern of the image of Christ.

D. Discussion Questions

1. How do we know God’s world or even know about God?

Answer Guide: We know about God because he wants us to know Him. There is a range of answers that will work. We know him through:

- *Scripture (John 1:1-2, 18:2, 2 Tim 3:16, Heb 1:1-2)*
- *His Son (Heb 11:3, Col 2:9)*
- *The Holy Spirit (1 Cor 2:10, John 16:13-15)*
- *Through us (image of God), his church and creation (Rom 1:20, Gen 1:27)*

Maybe spend some time talking about Psalm 1, which talks about meditating on the Word of God and how that can affect in our lives. One of the primary ways we know God is because the Bible reveals Him.

2. What are the barriers we face to being teachable? What are some differences between a disciple who is teachable and one who is not?

Answer Guide: This can be a fun project for your home group. Perhaps work together as a group to look at traits, behaviours, mindsets that hinder a person from being teachable. For example:

Teachable and Learning	Not Teachable and Not Learning
There’s a lot about God that I don’t know	I already know a lot about God
Humble	Proud
Inquisitive and Curious	Passive (Rests on talents, gifts)
Able to receive different styles	Can only be taught a certain way
Allows Holy Spirit to correct	No one can correct them
Comfortable with being wrong	Need to be right
Etc.	

3. Name something you have learned this year from Scripture and share it with the group.

Answer Guide: Please use this time to really talk about Scripture. It’ll be great to hear what each person in your group is doing for their devotionals. Maybe they can share something they read earlier in the day, or during the week. Really encourage your congregation to open up their devotional scripture reading life. It will encourage others to also share how they are growing in their understanding of the Lord.

If there are a lot of people in your group that do not regularly study or read Scripture, then spend some time talking about it. Not from a legalistic view, but one from a way that God speaks, comforts and guides. You can share what you do, and things that you have learnt recently from Scripture, but please don’t prescribe a particular way or time e.g. You must read the bible from cover to cover, or it must be done in the morning etc. How are you growing in your knowledge of what the Bible says? and How are you growing as a Christian? These are the questions to ask in this Home Group session.

Remember it's not so much about "doing" the task of reading Scripture. It's more about how Scripture is transforming you ... that means, how are you being teachable by Scripture. If you read something in Scripture, and it doesn't match your life ... what do you do?

Ps. Chris will be running a Christian Education class on "How we know God" which will cover Scripture and the doctrines of our Faith.

New Visitor/Non-Christian Take Home:

In summary, the goal of teaching and being taught it not just to know more about do's and don'ts, rules and laws, but to grow in relationship with God and with one another. We all need encouragement from others in order to do this well.

E. Application

Pick one way to grow in your understanding of Scripture. Perhaps spend some time talking about the SOAP devotional method.

- Scripture: Write the verse or verses that stuck out to you in your reading. You can show the verses and even have them read to you with the click of a button. Not copying and pasting blocks of text.
- Observation: What did you observe about the passage that struck you. This can be one sentence or a whole paragraph.
- Application: How can you apply the observation so that it affects your life today.
- Prayer: Write out a prayer to God based on what you just learned and ask him to help you apply this truth in your life.

F. Potential Prayer Points

Pray for needs as a group and that God would help you to grow more in your relationship with Him and with one another. Pray that he would reveal to each person barriers to teachability and bring them to the cross. This may be fear, pride, insecurity, or self-centeredness. Know that there is no shame, we are all weak but God's love and power is more than able to help us in our time of need (Heb 4:16).

G. Looking Forward

In the next session we will look at the letter I — what it is to be Intimate Relationally, where we will apply the heavenly worldview in a relational context.

LIVING FAITH – Leaders Copy

Session 5: Intimate Relationally

Key passage: "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love." (Gal 5:6, ESV)

INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE OF THE SESSION

We often look up to people who achieve much, those who have persevered and overcome great obstacles. Those who sacrificially give and inspire others are often the motivation behind books and movies. From a Kingdom perspective, we may help the poor, pray for others, visit the sick, serve in the church, evangelise or even disciple. But the Bible is quite firm in stating that if this is not done in love then it counts for nothing (1 Cor 13:1-3). By looking at it another way, we can check whether we are motivated by guilt or legalism, or whether, at our core, we are inspired by God's love and concern for the individual you are helping. Our actions should not become legal obligations, but this can only be achieved as we remain in a healthy relationship with Christ – otherwise our works are just religious actions with no life in them.



If you stop at letter "H" and "T", then all you have is being set apart and a whole lot of understanding of the ways of God. However, the whole point of being saved (and for Jesus coming to save us) is to reunite us in relationship. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love (Gal 5:6b).

We are made in the image of God. We were created and saved to relate well to God and to those around us. It is the fostering of relationships to that is a crucial element within which all discipleship takes place. Our increasing intimacy in our relational connections can be broken down into the three components:

1. Intimate relationally with God

A relatively obscure book of the Old Testament Zephaniah there is a wonderful verse (3:17) that illustrates God's delight when you draw close to him, "*The Lord your God is in your midst the mighty one who saves, he will rejoice over you with gladness he will rejoice over you with singing, he will quiet you with his love.*" The Hebrew word for midst means literally innards, and refers to the core of our being. Who knows you better than God? Growing in discipleship must require that we draw close to the God we know (Jam 4:8). Having intimacy with God will maintain and grow out faith through the work of the Spirit, and keep us steady through all the challenges that life throws at us (Psalm 1).

2. Love his Church. The intimacy we have with God naturally flows to intimacy with others. Christ and his church are inseparable. He cannot be separated from the church but he died to save it. To quote David Platt (Follow Me), "To follow Christ is to love his church. It is biblically, spiritually, and practically impossible to be a disciple of Christ (much less make disciples of Christ) apart from total devotion to a family of Christians. The people of the church." How do we get close to his church?
3. Love the world. Interestingly Paul had little to say about evangelism in his Epistles but much to say about relationships within the body of Christ. The measure of our Christlike performance is our love for one another and for the world. John 3:16 states "For God so loved the world he gave..." the greatest gift he could ever give. Christians are called to emulate Christ.

Additional Scriptures: 1 John 4:10, 1 John 4:20 and John 17:20-26.

This session uses the practical example of Hospitality as a means of showing our faith through love. Hospitality is a good example because it involves us getting close and opening up our home and our lives to people. (Heb 13:2, 1 Peter 4:9, Luke 14:12-14)

FORMAT FOR SESSION FIVE

This is a suggested format for the session

Standard Home Group	Casual Home Group
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Worship (DVD)/Prayer 2. Welcome 3. Play Session Video (9 mins) 4. Read Scripture 5. Summarise Main Point 6. Open for discussion 7. Application and Prayer 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Welcome 2. Play Session Video (9 mins) 3. Summarise Main Point 4. Discuss one question 5. Food/Fellowship

A. Session Five Video (Nine minutes)

This video session looks at being members of a body and relating well to one another. The major points are:

1. Review on the FAITH steps of discipleship
2. We need to ensure our faith is relational not legalistic
3. Explanation of Gal 5:6, all things that we do as Christians needs to be done through relational love
4. Three steps of relational intimacy for us: God, then Church, and then others.

B. Scripture Reading (Gal 5:6)

"For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love."

The thrust of the book of Galatians is Paul trying to correct legalistic teaching. Jews had reacted to the Greeks that were coming to faith, seeing that they did not understand the law and follow the law properly. They were trying to cause them to conform to their ways instead of understanding that the law of God in Christ is about faith expressing itself through love.

If you stop at letter "H" and "T", then all you have is being set apart and a whole lot of understanding of the law of God. However, the whole point of being saved (and for Jesus coming to save us) is to reunite us in relationship. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.

C. Main point

Discipleship is for relationship

Application Example: Hospitality

The world will know that we are his disciples based on the quality of our relationships, first with Him and then with others. You may have heard people say they love God and love Jesus, but they hate the church. It's a bit like someone saying they want to get to know you well, but they hate your wife. They aren't going to get too close to you. Whether you like it or not, the way we view the church affects our intimacy with God and our ability to grow in discipleship. Think about it a little more, can you really be good friends with God and hate something that he loves. You know Jesus died for the Church, it is his bride to be, his example to the world of his love are his people. The way we view and speak about the church (or even parts of it) undeniably affects our spiritual walk (Heb 10:24, 1 Thes 5:11)

We are made in the image of God. We were created and saved to relate well to God and to those around us. It is the fostering of relationships to that is a crucial element within which all discipleship takes place. Our increasing intimacy in our relational connections can be broken down into the three comments:

1. Intimate relationally with God
2. Love his Church.
3. Love the world.

One example that we will use for showing our faith through love is that of Hospitality. Today's practical example involves us opening up our lives and homes for others in the name of the Lord. This doesn't need to mean going to unsafe extremes, but it does mean moving out of our comfort zone and allowing more than just our friends into our lives. Read Hebrews 13:2, 1 Peter 4:9, Matthew 25:34-46 and Luke 14:12-14

D. Discussion Questions

1. How can we grow in our intimacy with God? What things do you do to get a close relationship with God (different to just understanding God, which was the focus of the session before)?

Answer Guide: Each person relates differently to God. Use this question as a good way to get to know your home group members. Some will journal; others will use praise and worship. There'll be those who just talk to God through the day, while others will develop their relationship with God through speaking in tongues.

Take time to broaden your home group's palette, by encouraging them to grow in prayer. You might want to explore an old prayer Acronym called "ACTS":

- **Adoration:** This is adoring God, to worship Him and to love Him with all of our heart, mind and soul. We praise God for who He is.
- **Confession:** This allows us to clear away the things in the relationship that are in the way. All of us have sinned, and we all have areas where we need to bring up to God (1 John 1:8,9).
- **Thanksgiving:** We have so much to be thankful to God for, and giving Him thanks actually draws us closer to Him as it brings to our attention the many blessings He has given.
- **Supplication:** There are many needs around. The Bible asks us to ask God for our daily bread. We can also intercede for others and for other situations that concern us.

2. How can we increase in hospitality? What does Christian hospitality involve?

Answer Guide: During the application part of this home group it is important to remember (just with the previous sessions) that the things we do are not in the core part of our faith with Christ. These things don't save us, they are part of a healthy diet of every mature Christian and they reflect Christ and our growing faith.

With that in mind, take some time as a home group to come up with ways to be hospitable:

- *Inviting new people over (or out) for a meal. There are always new people at church, at school or at work*
- *Hosting a guest speaker*
- *Inviting a leader home. Either a youth or kids leader or your home group leader*
- *Play dates with kids*
- *Plus 1. Whenever you go out with your regular group of friends, add an additional person who you wouldn't normally invite*

3. What are some of the rewards for being intimate relationally?

Answer Guide: Sometimes stretching beyond our comfort zone takes some persuading and encouraging. Take some time as a home group to talk about some of the reasons why people would be more hospitable. Try not to tackle it from a theoretical point of view, but rather, share stories of your own life experience. Maybe someone was hospitable to you before? Surely at some point someone invited you to hear about Christ in a hospitable way.

Also talk about the long-term benefits of getting to know people really well through faithfulness and long-term relationship.

"We will all be aware of the many challenges of being intimate relationally, so let us look at the benefits of pursuing relationship building despite the obstacles. Some of these will be that we need people to be part of our lives who will pull us back when we wander too far from him" David Platt

New Visitor/Non-Christian Take Home:

"The Bible considers that our relationship is more important than accomplishment. God will get his work done! He does not demand that we accomplish great things; He demands that we strive for excellence in our relationships." Ted Wilhelm Engstrom, *The Making of a Christian Leader*.

The key way to having excellent relationships is to excel in Biblical love (1 Cor 13:8a).

E. Application

Come up with one area that you can stretch in in the area of hospitality. If you don't want to do something yourself, pair up with someone in the home group and organise a hospitality event. Lunch after church with new people is always a good idea and easy to do.

F. Potential Prayer Points

As the basis for being able to love others and love the world, is receiving God's love. Spend some time praying for one another to be able to experience more of the Love of God. But don't stop there, ask for the Spirit to empower you to be able to express that love to others both within and outside your Christian circles.

G. Looking Forward

What distinguishes the church from a social club is growing through involvement. Next session we will look at what the church needs to do and how we can work together to discharge these responsibilities.

LIVING FAITH – Leaders Copy

Session 6: Active and Personally Involved

Key passage: "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus, for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them." (Eph 2:8-10, ESV)

INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE OF THE SESSION



As this is Session 6, take some time at the start of the meeting to review what we have been learning and why. Initially we started by asking the question "What is the church is supposed to be doing?" or to put it in a corporate context "What is the core business of the church"? Like Rolex is to watches and coffee is the Gloria Jeans, we saw that the goal of the church is to grow in discipleship and help others to join the discipleship journey. We then looked as how it works as members of a body, where each person is unique and equally valuable, and must play their role in order for normal, healthy, functioning body.

In the three studies already covered for the FAITH acronym, we started with the letter H for Holy and Set Apart, where we understood that first and foremost we are called out by God and set apart to him. Our identity changes as we are adopted into his family. The letter T was for Teachable in Discipleship, where we discussed what's next after we belong to God's Kingdom, a primary way to learn is through his Word? We need our minds renewed so that we think and act like Jesus. In the last session we discussed how we can grow in receiving and giving love through genuine intimacy, firstly with God and then to one another and the world and used the example of hospitality. In essence, these all fall into the "being" category, related to our identity in Christ and our purpose as disciples. This session we shift our focus to "doing". In other words, how do we practically live out the gospel intentionally and purposefully?

For faith to grow and develop and our relationship with God to mature, our faith must be put into practice (Jam 2:17-18). Using an analogy of the human body, a person who gets fed without exercise stores and accumulates fat. It is well known that obesity leads to many other health problems; some of them are so serious they can kill you. Just as our physical muscles are to be put to work to maintain personal health, our spiritual muscles need to be exercised to be part of a normal spiritually healthy living faith. But stepping out does not need to be an organised program or orchestrated event such as

would be if we were going to concert or to the gym, but as our relationship with God deepens we aim for it to become part of our everyday life.

You may be thinking that discussing "Actively and Personally Involved" is a similar focus to what we have done in previous home group studies, such as last year when we first studied the letter A, and also when we looked at our gift set in the recent Gifted by Faith series. However, for those sessions the application was largely from a personal or individualistic point of view. For example, what are you doing? What is your calling and what are your personal gifts? This session we will look at the same question of how we can be active and personally involved; however the discussion will take a corporate viewpoint. Not just as a whole church, but how is your family involved, what about your home group, how are you making disciples together?

Encourage everyone in this session to be excited about having opportunities to serve this amazing God of ours, who is oh so worthy of everything we have. After all, what we do is all for him and the rewards will be worth it, both in this life and the next.

FORMAT FOR SESSION SIX

This is a suggested format for the session

Standard Home Group	Casual Home Group
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Worship (DVD)/Prayer 2. Welcome 3. Play Session Video (7 mins) 4. Read Scripture 5. Summarise Main Point 6. Open for discussion 7. Application and Prayer 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Welcome 2. Play Session Video (7 mins) 3. Summarise Main Point 4. Discuss one question 5. Food/Fellowship

A. Session Six Video (Seven minutes)

This video session looks at discipleship as a practical outflow of who we are in Christ. The major points are:

1. Recap on the FAITH triangle.
2. God transforms us so that we can become the body of Christ.
3. Being a healthy functioning body requires all of us to participate and play a part (1 Cor 12:27).

B. Scripture Reading (Eph 2:8-10)

Background to the passage:

The passage taken from Ephesians where Paul is addressing the wonderful grace that God has bestowed on each of us for our salvation. Yet it doesn't stop there, as Paul says that God has "good works" already prepared for us to do. The Greek word *ergois* comes from the root word *érgon* referring to a noun defined as "work, task, employment; a deed, action; that which is wrought or made, a work" (Strong's Concordance). The word *good*, means just that, something that is intrinsically good.

Through this passage Paul is saying God continues to invest in us, not just to give us eternal life but let those of this world see his incredible kind heart, bring hope for the poor, freedom to the oppressed, healing to the sick, moving in the Spirit just like Jesus did (Isaiah 61:1-4).

C. Main point

Who you are flows into action

Application example: Serve

Through this series we have discovered that the singular calling (or commissioning) of the Church is discipleship. This being so, the end goal of all our activities should draw people to closer to God and to positively influence those around us whether they be in the church, family or strangers. Creating an atmosphere where God's presence impacts us everyday is the challenge. This session, we ask the very practical question how we are actively and personally involved in this process.

Pause and reflect for a moment that although our walk with God is personal, our activity in the church is part of a corporate response to the call to discipleship. The way we walk with God impacts and influences others, for bad or for God. This does not necessarily only include home groups, but also groups of friends and our families and household. Using an analogy of the human body, a person who gets fed without exercise stores and accumulates fat. It is well known that obesity leads to many other health problems; some of which can lead to premature death. Just as our physical muscles are to be put to work to maintain personal health our spiritual muscles need to be exercised to be part of a normal spiritually healthy life.

You can do many things, but not all will lead to fruitfulness. To be fruitful we need to know and accept our purpose. There are activities we can do for the sake of doing something rather than nothing. Alternatively there is a purposeful way to actively live out our faith. Having a greater purpose than serving oneself is, ironically, the only way to experience deep personal satisfaction. Why? Because that is how we were designed to function. Therefore our activities need to have a relational relevance, and be to be connected to the goal of making disciples.

D. Discussion Questions

1. What is the difference between a club and a church?

Answer Guide: People pay money to join clubs because there are privileges and perks. In a club our money entitles us to expect a certain level of service without doing anything more than faithfully paying our membership fees. Furthermore, the higher the membership cost, often the greater the facilities and amenities, and even notoriety in society are amassed belonging to that club. There is no doubt clubs are exclusive. Being a member of a club is based on money and is about receiving. Church membership is the opposite, it is about giving and the motivational driver beneath it all is love.

Club membership	Church membership	Scriptural references
<i>You will be served</i>	<i>He who serves is greatest among men</i>	<i>Matt 23:11, Luke 22:26</i>
<i>Exclusivity</i>	<i>You are of equal worth to the person next to you</i>	<i>Rom 3:22, Gal 3:27-29, 1 Cor 12:13, Col 3:11, 1 Cor 7:19</i>
<i>Money entitles you to privileges and access</i>	<i>Money is given liberally to benefit others</i>	<i>2 Cor 9:7</i>
<i>Others take care of your needs</i>	<i>You care for others</i>	<i>James 1:27, Deut 24:19-22, Gal 6:2</i>
<i>Professionally cooked food</i>	<i>Be hospitable towards others</i>	<i>Heb 13:2, Acts 2:44-45; 28:7</i>
<i>Receiving</i>	<i>Serving</i>	<i>Luke 6:38, Gal 6:6</i>
<i>You have rights</i>	<i>You have responsibilities</i>	<i>Eph 2:6-8</i>
<i>Receive entitlements</i>	<i>Self-sacrifice</i>	<i>Matt 16:24-25</i>
<i>Others do the work for you</i>	<i>Everyone has a role or a function</i>	<i>Romans 12:4, 1 Cor 12:27, Eph 4:15-16</i>
<i>Grounded on economics</i>	<i>Grounded on love</i>	<i>2 Cor 5:14</i>
<i>Man-centred</i>	<i>God-centred</i>	<i>John 5:19, 30, 6:38, Rom 8:14-17</i>

2. Why did we go through three steps before getting to “Active and Personally Involved”? Or, What is the difference between doing things religiously v's out of love?

Answer Guide: Talk about the danger of only just focussing on action and activity for the WRONG reasons. When a Christian serves, it is wells up from their intimacy with God (I), their understanding of scripture and His will (T) and who they are (H). From the depths of their being, they pour out their lives and their activity. You see this in the lives of the great Christians throughout history. What drives a person to devote their whole life to God?

However, without the first three building blocks, our activity can be for our own gain, or it we can do things to form our own identity. For example, we can run a youth camp really well so that our reputation grows, or we are hospitable but are more concerned about what people think about our house and our cooking ... rather than the name of Christ.

The simple activity of going to church can have different reasons behind it:

Wrong: To meet girls, to meet friends, to make parents happy, to make wife happy etc.

Right: To draw near to God, edify the body of Christ, to learn, to serve etc.

3. Pick an area that you can serve and share it with the home group. Take particular care to articulate the purpose or the driver behind that choice.

Answer Guide: Take time to explore the reasons behind each choice of service. It does not need to be within FGA, but serving others in the name of Christ. I know that in our gifting series we covered how we can utilise our gifts. This question is slightly different from that. We now want to take time to check the underlying motives for our activity and involvement. Answers could include: “I have a real heart for new visitors” etc.

Talk about how we are all members of a body, each part of our body is active and involved in the overall function of the body.

New Visitor/Non-Christian Take Home:

God has an assignment for each one of us individually that affects how we relate to one another corporately. This assignment he knows will bring us ultimate personal satisfaction and fulfilment as well as contributing to the part of tapestry that shows his love and goodness to the world. Through experience we come to know that the benefit of the 'good works' applies to the giver as well as the receiver.

E. Application

Choose one of the action points you mentioned in Question 3 and put it into practice. Just as with any form of exercise initially it may be hard or inconvenient, but you will reap the rewards.

F. Potential Prayer Points

One way of being actively and personally involved is prayer. So everyone can pray, break into smaller groups and serve one another in prayer. Also have each person choose someone they have on their heart (either Christian or non-Christian) and pray for that person. The prayer of agreement is powerful (Matt 18:19).

G. Looking Forward

In our last session we will look at what it is to be Faithful to the Mission. We will explore ways we can be part of fulfilling the great commission by bringing good news and good works to the world and making disciples that make disciples.

LIVING FAITH – Leaders Copy

Session 7: Faithful to the Mission

Key passage: "Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Matt 28:16-20, ESV)

INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE OF THE SESSION



Absolutely all healthy living things grow and reproduce. What occurs in the natural is also reflected in the spiritual (1 Cor 15:44-46). God's intent is not just to save souls and make saints that are heaven bound, but that we make disciples that are fruitful and reproduce. We would like to use this session to do a spiritual stocktake, see what Christian activities are we doing and test whether they move towards fulfilling the underlying objective given by Christ, to make disciples of all ethnic groups.

In the previous session we looked at what it was to be active and personally involved. In this session we want to ensure that our activity is focussed on the final command that Jesus gave to his disciples in the Great Commission.

Fulfilling the Great Commission can involve a whole range of things including (but not limited to) missions, good works, training, prayer etc. This session, however, will use EVANGELISM as a specific practical example of being Faithful to the Mission

FORMAT FOR SESSION SEVEN

This is a suggested format for the session

Standard Home Group	Casual Home Group
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Worship (DVD)/Prayer2. Welcome3. Play Session Video (9 mins)4. Read Scripture5. Summarise Main Point6. Open for discussion7. Application and Prayer	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Welcome2. Play Session Video (9 mins)3. Summarise Main Point4. Discuss one question5. Food/Fellowship

A. Session Seven Video (Nine minutes)

This final video session looks at making disciples that make disciples so that all the world may know him. The major points are:

1. Living out our faith is discipleship.
2. The command of the Great Commission is the multiplication of disciples.
3. Our faith is not a personal experience, but one that we share with others.
4. Making disciples is about showing others a new way (John 3:16).
5. Being faithful to the mission (F) must depend on the AITH steps of discipleship to ensure it is authentic and living faith.

B. Scripture Reading (Matt 28:16-20)

Background to the passage:

A little earlier in the Gospel story, the disciples witnessed Jesus die on the cross. With their dreams shattered and sheltering in fear of the Jews they didn't know what to do. But Jesus' resurrection changed everything. Instead of being dead with his ideals, power, and promise of the kingdom dying with him, Jesus unequivocally demonstrated victory of death, and fulfilled numerous prophecies that said the Christ would reign, by being resurrected. Without Jesus raising again to life none of what we know of our faith today would be possible or even worthwhile. Such is the enormity of Jesus accomplishment, his final instruction to the church was to go and make disciples. In this passage, Jesus gives this final command that is commonly referred to as the Great Commission.

In the passage we read today, there are four verbs contained within this command. They are "Go", "make disciples", "baptize" and "teach". Which one is most important or are they all equal? It is clear from the original Greek, that only one is the imperative verb (command) and that is to "make disciples", all the other verbs form part of action to "make disciples".

To illustrate that making God known at the very heart of His desire and purpose in both the Old and New Testaments you can also refer to, Mark 16:15-20, Matthew 24:14, Acts 1:8, Matthew 24:14, Gen 12:1-2, Ps 46:10, Ps 86:9, Ps 22:27, Dan 7:27, Rom 10:12-15, 2 Tim 2:2, Rev 7:9-10 and there are many more.

C. Main point

Disciples make disciples

Application example: Evangelism

Jesus could have commanded us to go and build strong marriages, go and feed the poor, go and be successful in whatever we do, or even go and plant churches. Instead his command was to go and make disciples. Not only make disciples, but help others make disciples whoever they are or wherever they may be; to live and reproduce spiritually (1 Cor 12:27). Jesus is certainly not dead, but he is alive and

has promised be with us (Matt 28:20) and to give us everything that we need to accomplish the task (John 15:7).

We have different gifts, calling, talents, passions, circumstances, and life experiences. But collectively, out of all the things we can be doing, at the end of the day, our actions must lead to what God has called us to do in making disciples of all nations. Regardless of a person's circumstances, talents or gifts sometimes we should stop and reflect how, or whether, what we do is moving towards this singular aim.

A disciple is not a missionary, but it could be, it is not a pastor, but it could be, it is not someone that serves or poor or is a prayer warrior but it could be. The central idea in making disciples is seeing that people are propelled into their calling with a global and eternal perspective with the full assurance this is what they are called to do: to follow and obey Christ.

D. Discussion Questions

1. What are some ways we can disciple people so that they disciple others in the context of the Great Commission?

Answer Guide: You can start by asking the group who is discipling someone. Ask them to share what are some of the things they do to help them draw closer to God. For others, it may be subtler as they may not see that their actions are really driven by the heart of God to draw others closer to him. Sometimes we are afraid to challenge people for fear that we will offend or be too pushy, whereas other times we can be offensive or mistime the words we say. This is where we need boldness in our humility and the empowerment and sensitivity of the Holy Spirit.

To fulfil the great commission we do not all need to be missionaries, but we do all need to be involved in some respect. This can be through giving, prayer, encouraging those who are on the field, mobilizing others to go for their calling, or even going. The actuality of seeing disciples made in all nations and worshiping God in their own way and in their own language is an incredible privilege with eternal consequences that we are called to be part of.

2. Who are people we can disciple? And is that a job for us?

Answer Guide: Remind your home group that discipleship is open to everyone who sincerely responds to the call of Jesus. The catch, if you can call it that, is you do not get to write your own job description, Jesus Himself sets the agenda. At the top of commandments for God's church (comprised of the people in your home group) is the GREAT COMMISSION.

Discipling is not the same as evangelism (which is broadly the preaching of the Gospel or reaching out to the unsaved in the name of Christ, with the gospel of Christ). It actually involves the whole FAITH pyramid and the development of discipleship in another person. You can be involved with the whole process from start to finish, or be a part of the process for someone.

However, we all do need to be involved in it! And so we need to at least know who we are discipling.

3. The practical example for today's final session is based around Evangelism. What can you do to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ?

Answer Guide: Walk your home group members through some ways to do evangelism. Please do encourage them to go beyond their comfort zone to obey the instructions of Christ.

The most powerful way to do this is via "PERSONAL WITNESS". That means that they are sharing their own conversion story and their own experience with Jesus as LORD. That's why it's important for it to be at the top of the FAITH Triangle. You can only really be faithful to the mission if you've lived it out with your whole being (and doing). Otherwise it comes across as hypocritical. It's a form of religion and not the witness of a true disciple that is making disciples.

New Visitor/Non-Christian Take Home:

True followers of Jesus do not need to be convinced, cajoled, persuaded or manipulated into making disciples of all nations. If we truly believe Jesus' words, and know Jesus' worth then we are compelled to be part of this task, not because they have to but because they so want to. (David Platt)

Like the Israelites in the wilderness when Christians sidestep the call to make disciples they end up going around in circles instead of fulfilling their purpose on earth (Joey Bonifacio).

E. Application

Before the home group period closes for the summer break, consider hosting an outreach fellowship or do some good works in the community. How can you as a home group work together to honour Jesus' command?

Such an event could be a lead up to the Christmas celebration that we are planning. Closer to the time we will be giving you more information on the Christmas program, which you can invite your friends and family to.

F. Potential Prayer Points

Some people maybe experiencing guilt for not following the commands of Jesus. It is godly sorry that leads to repentance, which leads to Holy Spirit inspired change. If we don't change we run the risk of hardening our hearts to his voice or coming under condemnation from Satan. Jesus will give us all the grace and patience we need as we give our weakness to him. Perhaps take some personal time to come before the Lord and present yourselves to him afresh. Allow him to lead you, for he is faithful and will be with you always.

This is the last formal home group session for the series, pray for safe travels and other needs. Think of a way that you can pray and support each other (e.g. What's App group or email) until you formally meet again.

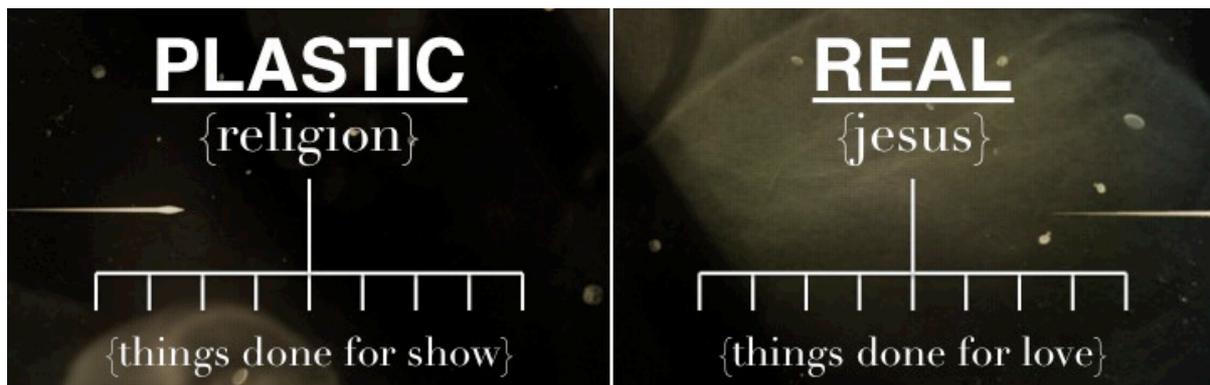
LIVING FAITH – Leaders Copy

APPENDIX I: JUSTIFICATION V'S SANCTIFICATION

This page has slides related to the sermon “What is Discipleship” by Ps. Chris Ong given at FGA Melbourne on the 20th July 2014. The entire message can be found at <http://www.fgam.org.au/media>

PLASTIC V'S REAL FAITH

In today's post-Christian world, there are many forms of Christianity. It's become possible to say you are a Christian without being one (Matthew 7:21-23). The dual series of “TWINE” and “LIVING FAITH” aims to address this issue by looking closely at Justification and Sanctification.

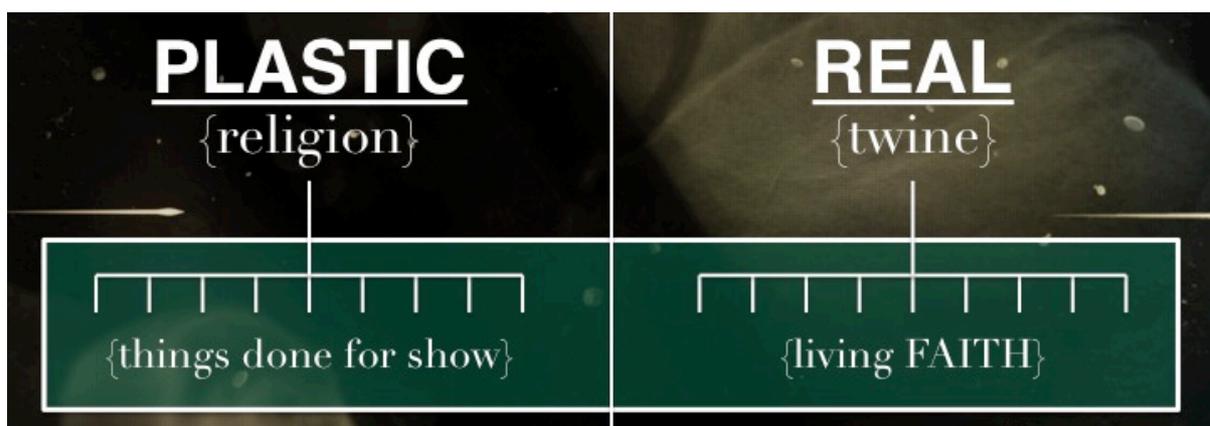


Justification (Are you receiving the real thing?)

Plastic FAITH comprises of a reliance on religion to save you. This can mean that you're dependent on your good works or some religious act (e.g. Going up for altar call, membership at a church etc.) for your salvation. However, true salvation comes ONLY through Jesus Christ.

Sanctification (What are you doing with the real thing?)

Plastic FAITH leads us to do things to earn our salvation or to do things for show. However, if our FAITH is really dependent on Jesus, the things we do are done for Jesus out of acting from love.



LIVING FAITH – Leaders Copy

APPENDIX II: PAPER ON TITHING BY ELDER PEGGY ONG

BOARD AND VISION TEAM PAPER ON TITHING

This paper sets out our church's theological view on 'tithing'. It will address the following questions or issues:

1. Is tithing still required of New Covenant believers, the present day church?
2. What is the New Testament teaching on tithing which is an Old Testament mandate?
3. Are we exempt from tithing if we are not able to do so 'cheerfully'?
4. Is it a sin not to tithe?
5. What should motivate out tithing?
6. Should we teach and require this of new Christians (which may put them off the faith)?
7. How should we distinguish tithes from 'special gifts or offerings' in FGA Melbourne?

Applicable to New Covenant Believers?

Tithing – which by its own definition means “one-tenth” - was prescribed as part of the Mosaic or Levitical Law under the Old Covenant (Lev 27:30; Deut 14:22) even though it had already been acknowledge/practiced before the Mosaic or Old Covenant (Abraham in Gen 14:20; Jacob in Gen 48:22). Many people however argue that as we are under the New Covenant, the Mosaic Law including tithing has been 'discontinued' and therefore is no longer required of New Covenant believers. In considering the continuity or discontinuity of the Mosaic Law to the New Covenant era, we recognise that the civil laws/regulations for adjudicating civil matters and the ceremonial parts of the law in relation to dietary regulations (Rom 14:14-20), the priesthood and animal sacrifices have been discontinued (Heb 8-10). Many commandments including the requirement of circumcision and observance of the Sabbath have likewise been overturned or reinterpreted in the New Testament by the apostles or by Jesus Himself.

A key hermeneutical principle to consider for assessing continuity of a particular Old Testament law is the acknowledgement or confirmation of the same in the New Testament. Hence, all of the Ten Commandments (Decalogue) apart from Commandment 4: Observe and keep the Sabbath holy, has been repeated in the New Testament either by Jesus or Apostle Paul. Accordingly, we need to examine the New Testament teaching on the Old Testament mandate of tithing.

New Testament Reference to Tithing

There is no New Testament passage or teaching annulling or proscribing the mandate of tithing prescribed in the Old Covenant/Testament. There is also very little written about tithing in the New Testament.

The only indisputable reference to tithing in the New Testament was however made by Jesus Himself and found in Matthew 23:23: *"What sorrow awaits you teachers of religious law and you Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you are **careful to tithe** even the tiniest income from your herb gardens, but you ignore **the more important aspects of the law - justice, mercy, and faith**. **You should tithe, yes, but do not neglect the more important things**"* (see also Luke 11:42).

Jesus was well aware that the Jews understood the need for tithing. He acknowledged their radical faithfulness in this, so that there appears to be no necessity for Him to expound or discuss it any further. His teaching was to remind them that whilst they should continue tithing, they were not to neglect the more important matters of justice, mercy and faith.

If Jesus thought that tithing need no longer be practiced He would have said something like, "I would rather you practice justice, mercy and faith than tithing." Instead, Jesus asserted that tithing alone is not good enough if one does not practice godly justice, mercy and faith. He is requiring the latter virtues over and above the base-line practice of tithing. This is so characteristic of Jesus' prescription for surpassing the minimum required by the Mosaic law or His "Do more than what is expected" principle preached at His Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5-8).

Each time Jesus said, "You have heard it said...BUT I say unto you", He was actually taking the law one bar higher. He was teaching a far more noble and gracious application of the law so that if someone "asks you to go one mile, you should go two miles for him." Jesus was well qualified and had the authority and right to retract the Old Covenant laws as He was the Maker/Giver of the Law, being God himself. However He never negated the Law as irrelevant. Rather He came to "fulfill the law" (Matt 5:17-19).

Even the superseded parts of the Law that is the civil and ceremonial aspects of the law can still teach New Testament believers godly principles (2 Tim 3:16,17).

Give Cheerfully

*"Every man according as he purposes in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loves a **cheerful giver**" (2 Cor 9:7).*

Paul is here referring to the attitude of our giving. Even if we tithe or give more than tithe but do this with reluctance or unhappiness, the giving will not please the Lord. He wants us to "give" (includes our tithe) cheerfully and willingly.

This teaching has often been badly misunderstood. I have heard some say that we need to tithe ONLY when we can do so cheerfully using this text as their pretext. Some have added we need only tithe when we can do so cheerfully otherwise we will not be blessed. Both lines of thought are so wrong and so self-centered, so opposite to the character and teachings of our Lord.

Let us look at a practical example. Let's say a husband says he is not a 'cheerful' giver to his wife/family. Does that exempt him then from contributing towards the upkeep of the household and leave his wife and children to fend for themselves. After all he is not a 'cheerful' giver and will not be blessed if he gave reluctantly or so the argument goes. Does somehow the reluctance to do what is right somehow justify our self-levied exemption from it?

If everyone in the church exempts themselves from tithing on account that they are not cheerful givers, who then funds the running of the church, the house of the Lord (Mal 3:10)? And does that exemption also mean they are not "robbing God"? (Mal 3:8).

Right Motivation for Tithing

Tithing or any form of 'giving' unto the Lord should never be motivated by God's promise of blessing (Mal 3:10-12). We should tithe and give more than tithe (called 'offerings' or 'special gifts' in the Old Testament) because:

- (i) We should grasp the biblical truth that all that we have is a gift from Father God from whom every good gift comes (James 1:17) and it is Him who has given us power to gain, retain and enjoy our wealth (**Ecc 5:19, 6:2; Deut 8:17, 18**); and
- (ii) We should be "good and faithful" stewards of God's finances entrusted to us and as those whose life values should place His Kingdom-establishment as the thing of first importance (Matt 6:9, 33). We should responsibly set aside that which God has entrusted us with, for precisely that priority purpose.

We should NEVER tithe or give (or exhorted to do so by church leaders) because we expect or desire blessing in return! The latter is terribly wrong self-interested motivation, a self-focused intent of the heart (which the LORD sees) rather than a Christ or Kingdom-focused motivation. Hence, even though Malachi 3:10-12 sets out God's promise of blessing for those who tithe into the "storehouse" of God, we should not motivate tithing on the basis of this promise. What if the LORD does not "open the windows of heaven and pour out a blessing that you shall not be room enough to receive it," does that mean we do not and should no longer tithe or give generously towards His Kingdom work? Also the promised 'blessing' in these verses is constantly being interpreted as financial blessing but reading the subsequent verses i.e. Mal 3:11-12, it would appear that it includes more than just preservation of their harvests - He will "rebuke the devourer for our sakes... and all nations shall call you blessed for you shall be a delightful land." (This, in my mind, is far more significant than just money!).

Is it a Sin Not to Tithe?

Disobedience with regard to tithing falls in the same category as any other disobedience to God's commands. Malachi 3:8 says that we have "*robbed God*" when we fail to tithe to provide for the "*storehouse*" of God. It is not in God's will that we are "*not rich towards God*" (Luke 12:19,20), but rich only unto ourselves.

In ministry, we should however be careful not to judge anyone for disobedience with regard to tithing. God is well able to convict the hearts of those who profess love for Him so as to give generously unto His Kingdom work ... to be "rich" towards Him. As God's under-shepherds to His sheep for whom we will be held to account on Judgment day, we are obliged to teach with biblical integrity that which is revealed in the Bible as the will of God and not to compromise His truth. The response to our teaching is however the prerogative as well as the accountability of each Christ-follower to his/her Lord and Saviour. As we disciple our "sheep" well and as they mature spiritually and become more and more willing to obey the Lord's commands or spiritual disciplines instituted by Him, they will do that which He requires of them as set out in His Word, not only in this area of tithing but in every area of their lives.

What about "new" or "spiritually immature" Christians?

When the heart of man is transformed progressively **by God's love** through the power of the Holy Spirit and through the Word of God, he/she will increasingly want to obey God's commands. We do not reach the desired levels of sacrifice and obedience the day we become a Christ-follower but we can grow in spiritual maturity daily and be **increasingly willing** to submit every aspect of our lives and precious belongings (whether it be money or people) to Him.

So it is with tithing. Money seems to be a very important belonging for most people. So it is that the Lord requires that we are not to love money (mammon) – for we can only love God OR mammon – but to seek after and love more, the things that are eternal and heavenly. Until we learn to love God more than our belongings including money, we will not be willing to give these to the Kingdom.

We must teach and not compromise on God's truth and mandates as set out in the Bible. However, let us be careful not to compel or pressure Christ-followers to obey God and His commands (tithing included) as "*able ministers of the new covenant—**not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life***" (2 Cor 3:6). We are to lead in particular, "new" or "spiritually immature" Christians to the Word of God and the Spirit, disciple them well and trust God to convict and transform their minds, hearts and will towards obedience of His commands. There is however no excuse for spiritually mature Christians and Christian leaders to exempt themselves from tithing. Those who argue vehemently against tithing are often defensive because they do not tithe or intend to tithe. Let us examine our hearts which Jeremiah attests are "*deceitful above all things and desperately wicked ...for the Lord searches the heart and try the reins and will give every man according to His ways, and according to the fruit of his doings*" (Jer 17:9-10).

Tithes and Offering in FGA Melbourne

In FGA Melbourne we have set up a fund called General Fund for all tithes from our church members – payable by way of internet banking, direct deposits to the church's bank account, credit card, cheques or cash dropped into the offering bags passed around during our Sunday services and Ministry services such as Fungus, 101 and Chinese services. Apart from 10% set aside for our Missions Fund (for financing the Missions activities both within and outside our church) this General Fund is used exclusively for the operating expenses of our church including staff payroll costs, rentals, ministry-running expenses, capital assets acquisitions (other than church building) e.g. musical and office equipment, church administration/office expenses.

When a church member desires to give to another cause for example, our new church building (BGH), Missions Fund, IPIN, or the Bursary Program for Koori students in Shepparton, it is important that the donor mark on his/her donation the Fund it is directed to. It is critical to note that members should give to these 'Special Purpose' funds **only that which is over and above their tithes** as tithes are to be taken to the 'storehouse' (Mal 3:10) or General Fund. Members should not direct their tithes from the General Fund to these other 'special' Funds as this will deprive the General Fund of badly needed finances to run the church.

Prepared by Peggy Ong, March 2010