THE NAVIGATORS

The Backpack

A Navigator Resource
to help you on
the Christian Journey

Table of Contents

Introduction to the Backpack 3

Things We Need to know 4

What God is like 5

1. The God We Can Know 6
2. The God of Power 8
3. The God of Love & Grace 10
4. The God of Peace 12
5. The God who knows everything & is everywhere 14
6. The God of Holiness & Justice 16
7. The God who is Faithful 18
8. Summary 20

What God is Doing: the Good News of Jesus .. 21

1. Creation 22
2. Fall 24
3. Redemption- the Big story 26
4. Redemption – NOW 28
5 Future Hope 30
6. Summary 32

What We are Called to do 33

1. Called to Follow Jesus 34
2. Sent to be Workers for God's Kingdom 36
3. Discipling life to life 38
4 With Generations in Mind 40
5. Summary 42

Things to help us relate to God 43

Holy Spirit 45

1. Holy Spirit – at work in us 46
2. Holy Spirit – detecting God's presence 48
3. Holy Spirit – keeping in step 50
4. Holy Spirit – help in temptation 52
5. Summary 54

Prayer 55

1. Prayer – What is it? 56
2. Ways to Pray: Quiet Time 58
3. Ways to Pray: Using the Bible 60
4. Ways to Pray: Anywhere, Anytime, Anything 62
5. Ways to Pray: Big Day Out 64
6. Summary 66

The Bible 67

1. The Bible – What is it? 68
2. The Bible – read it 70
3. The Bible – study it 76
4. The Bible – memorise it 78
5. Summary: Bible 80

Things to help us relate to others 81

Sharing Faith 83

1. Sharing Faith – now 84
2. Sharing Faith – our presence 86
3. Sharing Faith – Our actions 88
4. Sharing Faith – Our words from the Bible 90
5. Sharing Faith – Our words from our lives 94
6. Summary 96

Mentoring 97

1. Mentoring basics 98
2. Mentoring: 3 stories meet 100
3. Mentoring: listening in 3 places 102
4. Mentoring: 3 Key activities 104
5. Summary 106

Community 107

1. Community – building the Body 108
2. The One Another's 110
3. Giving generously 112
4. Small Group basics 114
5. Small Groups- exploring faith 116
6. Summary 118

Introduction to the Backpack

Life is a journey…

Yes, it's a well-worn cliché, but before rolling your eyes, let's suspend judgment and imagine for a moment that life really *is* a journey. What would you need for the trip?

Like any good trip, you'd want to know where you are going, you'd want some travelling companions to go with you, and you'd want to have the right skills and equipment to get you there safely. And you would carry some of these things in a *backpack*.

In our walk with Jesus through this life, there are some things that we will find helpful to *know* and to be able to *do*. The Navigator Backpack is a series of short studies addressing some of these things. It is divided into 3 sections:

Things we need to know	Things to help us relate to God	Things to help us relate to others
What God is like	Holy Spirit	Sharing Faith
What God is doing - Good News of Jesus	Prayer	Mentoring
What We are Called to Do	Bible	Community

These studies aren't everything you need to know about everything. After all, a backpack isn't a caravan or a holiday home – it's just a backpack. Neither are they designed to get you there alone. They are best used when worked through with someone else… for example, a person who has been on the journey a little longer helping a newer traveller on the way.

So, if you've been on this faith journey a little while, can we encourage you to use the Backpack with someone who could benefit from your help. And if you are fairly new to it, find an 'experienced traveller' you trust and admire and suggest you work through it together.

Whatever the case, give this a go, because this journey is just too important to make unprepared.

Things We Need to know

As the name suggests, this section of the Backpack deals with *things we need to know*. What is the author of our journey – God – like? Where have we come from? Where are we headed? What sort of journey is this? How should we travel? What sort of travellers should we be?

This section is divided into 3 parts, with each part having a number of short studies in it, as follows:

What God is like

- *1 The God We Can Know*
- *2 The God of Power*
- *3 The God of Love and Grace*
- *4 The God of Peace*
- *5 The God who Knows Everything & is Everywhere*
- *6 The God of Holiness and Justice*
- *7 The God who is Faithful*
- *8 Summary*

What God is doing – *Good News of Jesus*

- *1 Creation*
- *2 Fall*
- *3 Redemption - The BIG story*
- 4 Redemption *NOW*
- *5 Future hope*
- *6 Summary*

What We are Called to Do

- *1 Called to Follow Jesus*
- *2 Sent to be Workers for God's Kingdom*
- *3 Discipling life to life*
- *4 With Generations in mind*
- *5 Summary*

Each study is 2 pages and we would encourage you to spend half the time looking at it by yourself, and the other half talking it through with someone else… because this is a journey in which we really need each others help.

So please read, pray, share your life and open your heart. And let's trust that the LORD of ALL will meet you to encourage, inspire and challenge you in significant ways.

Enjoy!

THE NAVIGATORS

Things we need to know:

What God is like

"In the beginning God…"

This is how our story, the Bible, begins. God was already present before anything happened, and He is there at the end of the story calling us into the future. From one end of time to the other, He is the *LORD of ALL*!

Although God is beyond our reach, and we cannot by our own efforts understand who He is, He chooses to reach out to us, inviting us to know and relate to Him, the Maker of everything. He offers us eternity to know Him for only in the pursuit of Him will we find our ultimate satisfaction in life (John 17:3).

Gaining this knowledge of God is worth every ounce of sweat and effort we can give, because more than anything else, it will shape how we see the world, how we see others, how we see ourselves and how we choose to live.

Psalm 46:10 says, "Be still and know that I AM God". May you enter into these studies with a prayerful expectation that you will encounter the Living God, and as you do so, you will only become more alive yourself.

The studies are as follows:

1 *The God We Can Know*
2 *The God of Power*
3 *The God of Love and Grace*
4 *The God of Peace*
5 *The God who Knows Everything & is Everywhere*
6 *The God of Holiness and Justice*
7 *The God who is Faithful*
8 *Summary*

1. The God We Can Know

You can learn some 'external' facts about a person by using your investigation skills, but to really know someone, they need to be willing to be open with you… they need to reveal who they really are.

The Bible paints a picture of a God who does just that with us. God longs to show us who he really is, and throughout the Scriptures we see a progression of God revealing himself to the world in a way that they can understand, building on the knowledge and experience of the previous generations. The story reaches its highest moment in the Gospels where God himself comes to earth in the person of Jesus, and through his death, resurrection and ascension the Lord gives us free access to know and approach him through his Spirit in us. This is Good News indeed!

Things to do/ Questions to consider

Read through at least one passage from each bullet point below, and note down the things you observe about how God is revealing himself through:

- ***The Bible*** – 2Timothy 3:16-17, Hebrews 4:12, Psalm 119:130
- ***His Creation*** – John 1:1-5, Psalm 19:1-4, Isaiah 45:18-19
- ***His Own Chosen People*** – Exodus 6:1-8, and Exodus 33:12-34:9
- ***Jesus Christ*** – John 1:9-18, Hebrews 1:1-3, John 14:5-14
- ***The Holy Spirit living IN us*** – John 14:15-21 and John 16:5-15
- ***Our promised future with God*** – Revelation 21:1-7 and 22:1-6

For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.
Jeremiah 29:11-13

Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.
Hebrews 4:16

- In what ways has God revealed himself to you thus far in your life? When have you felt the most free to approach him?

- Read the additional thoughts in the box on the right. As you consider these points as well as your answers to the questions above, write down any thoughts you have been particularly struck by in terms of how God reveals himself so that we can know him.

- **Spend some time praying:**
  Thank God for what you have learnt
  Ask God to help you put some of these learnt things into practice
  Ask God to help some of your friends know him better

Some thoughts on God's revelation of Himself…

John 1:3 the message of God is woven into the very fabric of the universe.

Exodus 6:1-8 As God comes and introduces himself to various people throughout the Bible, he continually builds on the knowledge of previous generations' and on what he has already revealed of himself.

Exodus 33:15-23 God wants to be known but there needs to be a humble attitude in approaching the Lord for, in every way, he is more than we can handle.

Hebrews 1:3: In Jesus we see, very tangibly, what God is like. He displays the glory of God and is the exact representation of his being. If we want to know what God is like, we look at Jesus.

By receiving the Holy Spirit, God's peoples' experience of him goes from being an outward or external relationship to an internal knowing and relating, closer than is possible with any other human.

Because of Jesus' death, God's people now have unlimited access to Him. Hebrews 4:16

Thought to finish

From start to finish, the Bible tells the story of God who searches for lost people (Gen 3:9) and longs for real relationship with us (Rev 3:20). But sadly, the 'noise' in our busy lives regularly stops us from hearing and seeing the Lord of the Universe who is seeking us out. He calls to us, "Be still and know that I AM God" (Ps46:10) but too often our hearts have lost the sensitivity to feel and respond (Mat 13:13-15). Fortunately the Lord is persistent. He who raised Christ from the dead is able to give hearing to our ears, sight to our eyes, and feeling to our hearts so that we can see and know him. So, as the writer of Hebrews tells us:

> *"Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts… See to it, brothers and sisters, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called "Today," so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness… "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts…"* Hebrews 3:7-15

Today is the day to respond to the One who wants to be known by us. How will you respond?

2. The God of Power

Power is measured by how much strength, ability, control and authority you have. As we read through the Bible, it becomes clear that God has maximum amounts of all of these, and so we can rightly call Him the All-Powerful, Sovereign Lord. There is nothing that can defeat him or his purposes; he can accomplish whatever he wills to do.

In all of this, however, he is no crazed and oppressive tyrant. Rather, he is motivated by love so that, not only is God all-powerful, but he uses his power for the good of his people!

Things to do/ Questions to consider

Read through some of the following passages, noting down anything you see with regards to…

- The extent of God's power
- How God chooses to use his power
- What this power means both for his people and for those who are against him

Psalm 33
Exodus 14:29-15:18
Isaiah 40:12-31
Mark 4:35-41
Ephesians 1:18-23 and 3:14-21
Philippians 2:5-11

"…for I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand and I will accomplish all my purposes."

Isaiah 46:9-11

"Ah, Lord God! It is you who have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and by your outstretched arm! Nothing is too hard for you."

Jeremiah 32: 17

- When I underestimate God's power, how does it affect my thoughts…
  - ❖ about me?
  - ❖ about others?
  - ❖ about life in general?

> *"I am the LORD, the God of all mankind. Is anything too hard to me?"* Jer 32:27
>
> *Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God."* Mark 10:27
>
> *I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.* Philippians 4:13

- Taking into account what you've studied here as well as what you already know, write down any thoughts you have that particularly strike you in terms of God and his power.

- **Memorise a verse** to help you remember how the God of power can help you in everyday situations. (For example, Philippians 4:13)

Thought to finish

God calls his people to be a part of his plan to free the world, and he gives them access to his power for the sake of this mission. But too often, we don't grasp the reality of this and so we can be extremely limited by our fears.

This was true for Moses. When God called him in the desert and sent him to Pharaoh to free the Israelites from slavery (Exodus 3), Moses first response was "*Who am I* (a nobody, desert-wanderer) to go to *Pharaoh* (the superpower of the world)?" God replied "I will be with you", and ultimately that would make the difference. Moses got there in the end, but it took him a while to trust God on this.

That was okay for Moses, but what might the Lord say to us? *"All authority on heaven and earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations… And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age"* (Mat 28:18-20). Like Moses, we have been sent on a co-mission with God to free those around us from slavery. Like Moses, we receive the same promise from the God of all power: "*I am with you* always". If the All-Powerful Lord is really with us and on our side in this, what difference should this make for us? How will *you* respond?

3. The God of Love & Grace

God loves people. This love for us is wider, longer, higher and deeper than we can ever get to the end of, and what it's like is well-described in 1Corinthians 13 (see box on the left). This love works itself out in *Grace*: the kind, open-handed, big-hearted, giving to others at a cost to self. Grace is the undeserved gift of God that is motivated by love, and this is at the centre of what God is like. He alone chooses to show love and mercy to those who are undeserving and have no merit, and apart from this grace of God we cannot not be saved. Amazingly, he chooses to show this love and grace to you and me!

> Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonour others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.
>
> *1 Corinthians 13:4-8*

Things to do/ Questions to consider

Read through some of the following passages, noting down anything you see with regards to…

- the nature of love
- some of the ways that God's love and grace are given to people
- what difference this love and grace makes for his people

Psalm 103
Isaiah 53
Matthew 20:1-16
John 1:14-18
John 15:9-17
Romans 8:28-39
1 John 4:7-21

> *The LORD your God is with you, the Mighty Warrior who saves. He will take great delight in you; in his love he will no longer rebuke you, but will rejoice over you with singing."* Zephaniah 3:17

- When I underestimate God's love and grace, how does it affect my thoughts…
  - ❖ about me?
  - ❖ about others?
  - ❖ about life in general?

> *"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast."*
> Ephesians 2:8-9
>
> *"For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich."*
> *2 Corinthians 8:9*

- In what ways or situations have you felt most connected with God's love and a recipient of his grace?

- Although my conscious mind may agree that God is loving and gracious, does my outward life demonstrate that he is? Take some time to think prayerfully about what I could change in my life to better reflect this reality.

Thought to finish

In the business world, the market economy sets the rules, and the most basic rule is that you need to give something in order to get something. As they say, 'There's no such thing as a free lunch!'
But in the bigger reality of God's world, this is not the way. The rules to life are derived from the character of God – of who God is – and the most basic rule is love and grace. God continually takes the initiative to do good to us, not because we deserve it, but because it is in God's nature to love. The grace of God is a form of reckless generosity that doesn't calculate what might be gained in exchange for doing something nice; rather, to be loving and generous is what God does, just because! It may make no sense to the business world, but it makes the world of difference to us. Does this make sense to you?

4. The God of Peace

Peace is more than just the absence of conflict. It is a total and complete state of well-being, a unity in relationship, a wholeness of fellowship.

At the Creation of the world, the Lord took the formless and empty earth and created order, beauty and meaning out of the chaos. But as the first humans rebelled against God, the Fall sent humanity into a spin of angst, selfishness, war and guilt as they fought against God, against each other and against themselves. Only the God of peace could bring *reconciliation* out of the mess; only he could overcome this state of war with an everlasting peace that truly prevails.

Things to do/ Questions to consider

Read through some of the following passages, noting down what they tell us about God's peace and reconciliation and any implications this has for the way we relate to…

- God
- Each other
- Ourselves and our inner life

Isaiah 9:1-7 (c.f. Matthew 4:12-17)
Romans 5:1-11
Romans 8:5-11
Romans 12:14-21
2 Corinthians 5:14-21
Philippians 4:4-9
Colossians 1:15-23

"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid."
John 14:27

And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.
Philippians 4:7

For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility
Ephesians 2:14

- What do you think is the significance of Jesus' death for our experience of peace?

- Are there any recurring moments or situations in your life in which you experience a lack of peace?

- Can you recall some time(s) when God has given you an experience of his peace in your life? What do you believe made it possible for you to experience this peace and how did it make a difference for you?

In peace I will lie down and sleep, for you alone, LORD, make me dwell in safety. Psalm 4:8

The LORD sits enthroned over the flood;
the LORD is enthroned as King forever.
11 The LORD gives strength to his people;
the LORD blesses his people with peace. Psalm 29:10-11

You will go out in joy
and be led forth in peace;
the mountains and hills
will burst into song before you,
and all the trees of the field
will clap their hands. Isaiah 55:12

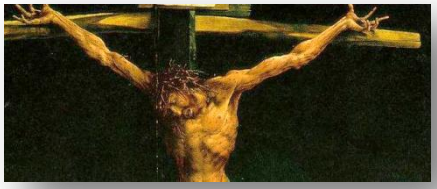
But he was pierced for our transgressions,
he was crushed for our iniquities;
the punishment that brought us peace was on him,
and by his wounds we are healed.
Isaiah 53:5

Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times and in every way. The Lord be with all of you.
2 Thessalonians 3:16

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Colossians 3:15

- **Memorise a verse** to help you remember and enter into God's peace, especially during those times you feel a lack of peace. (For example, Philippians 4:6-7, Matthew 11:28-30)

Thought to finish



Peace is not just the lack of noise; it is the presence of God's rest in our lives. For too long, we spend time busily pursuing things that promise happiness and meaning (money, jobs, clothes, houses…) but that leave us unsatisfied. In an unexpected way, the place where we find lasting contentment and well-being is through an execution: Christ brought us peace by way of his humiliating and excruciating lonely death on the cross… *'by his wounds we are healed'* (Isaiah 53:5). He calls us to not waste our valuable lives chasing smoke and mirrors. Instead, we're invited to lean on him who disperses the fog and cleans up the clutter of our lives as he gives us the very real gift of His peace. But to receive this peace we have to let go some things that are dragging us in the wrong direction. What are you willing to let go of?

5. The God who knows everything & is everywhere

The opening line of the Bible tells us that God created the heavens and the earth. Not long after, the LORD of All got his hands dirty and created the first human being from the soil and breathed into the man the breath of life (Gen2:7). God's act of creation, however, didn't end at the Beginning. Rather, God continued – *and continues* – to keep everything going, including keeping people alive, moment by moment. He is ever-present with each one of us, whether from the past, the present or the future. He sees us, knows us, and is as close to us as every breath we take.

"Am I only a God nearby," declares the LORD, "and not a God far away? Who can hide in secret places so that I cannot see them?" declares the LORD. "Do not I fill heaven and earth?" declares the LORD.
Jeremiah 23:23-24

"Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory."
Isaiah 6:3

Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the duty of every human being. For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil.
Ecclesiastes 12:13-14

"Look, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what they have done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.
Revelation 22:12-13

Things to do/ Questions to consider

Read through some of the following passages and the ones in the box on the left, noting down what they tell us about what God knows and where God is, and any implications this has for the way we relate to…

- God
- Each other
- Ourselves and our inner life

Job 28:12-28
Psalm 139
John 1:1-5
Acts 17:22-28
Colossians 1:15-20

- What is our response when we realise that God knows the secrets of our hearts?

> *From that time on Jesus began to preach, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near."*
> Matthew 4:17
>
> *Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.*
> Hebrews 2:18
>
> *Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you." So we say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can human beings do to me?"*
> Hebrews 13:5-6

- Although my conscious mind may agree that God is always with me, does my outward life demonstrate that he is? What specific emotions, attitudes or actions might show that I am aware that God is with me?

- Given that the Lord is always present and already knows all about me and what is going on in my life, how might this positively affect my prayer life?

- In the busyness of life, it is too easy to forget that the Creator of the Universe is right there with you. **Memorise a verse** to help you remember the Lord's presence with you and his knowledge of you (For example, Hebrews 13:5-6, Isaiah 41:10, Psalm 139:23-24)

Thought to finish

The Gospels tell the story of Jesus' life on earth. They regularly show Jesus praying in a variety of settings and they communicate how very closely Jesus experienced the Father's presence right there with him (e.g. John 8:29). So when Jesus cried out from the cross, "*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*" (Mat 27:46), it was a truly Hellish moment of separation from the Father for him. That moment, however, opened up the possibility of a new closeness to the Lord *for us*. God sustains all life and so is already ever-present and all-knowing with all of Creation. But through Jesus, we can have a special relationship – a family relationship – with the Lord who is not only 'ever with us', but is also 'ever *for* us'! He knows all the bad we have done, but loves us and stays with us anyway. Let us therefore make the most of this bond with our ever-present, ever-loving Lord. Let's not try to live in secret, on our own without his help and presence, because that makes for a lonely and Hellish life. Instead, let's find ways to help us remember and realise that God is with us and is our Helper. With him on our side, ultimately nothing can go wrong.

> *Jesus said, "The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what pleases him."*
> John 8:29
>
> *But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.*
> Ephesians 2:13

6. The God of Holiness & Justice

The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia describes holiness in a general sense as being the 'separation from all that is human and earthly'. It describes the 'absoluteness, majesty, and awfulness of the Creator in his distinction from the creature.' God really is separate, uniquely '*other*' and beyond anything else we know.

Holiness, however, describes more than just the 'otherness' of God. It is a way of talking about the purity of the character of God, and this is something that the Lord calls us to aim for: "Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy" (Leviticus 19:2). We can't resemble God in His 'otherness', but we can reflect his likeness as loving, righteous and just people.

"Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts, the whole earth is full of his glory!" Isaiah 6:3

"I am God and not man, the Holy One in your midst." Hosea 11:9

"You are to be holy to me because I, the LORD, am holy, and I have set you apart from the nations to be my own." Leviticus 20:26

And a highway will be there; it will be called the Way of Holiness; it will be for those who walk on that Way. The unclean will not journey on it; wicked fools will not go about on it. Isaiah 35:8

Therefore, since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God. 2 Corinthians7:1

Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord. Hebrews 12:14

But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy." 1 Peter 1:15-16

Things to do/ Questions to consider

- Read through the following passages plus the ones in the box on the left, noting down what they tell us about holiness.

  Exodus 3:1-14
  Psalm 15
  Isaiah 6:3-7

- If fear or reverence is the right response to God's holiness, how might we express that?

This is what the LORD says: "Let not the wise boast of their wisdom or the strong boast of their strength or the rich boast of their riches, but let those who boast boast about this: that they understand and know me, that I am the LORD, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight," declares the LORD.
Jeremiah 9:23-24

"I hate, I despise your religious festivals; I cannot stand your assemblies. Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them. Though you bring choice fellowship offerings, I will have no regard for them. Away with the noise of your songs! I will not listen to the music of your harps. But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!
Amos 5:21-24

Yet the LORD longs to be gracious to you; therefore he will rise up to show you compassion. For the LORD is a God of justice. Blessed are all who wait for him!
Isaiah 30:18

Your arm is endued with power; your hand is strong, your right hand exalted. Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne; love and faithfulness go before you. Blessed are those who have learned to acclaim you, who walk in the light of your presence, LORD. They rejoice in your name all day long; they exult in your righteousness.
Psalms 89:13-16

He has shown all you people what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.
Micah 6:8

- Justice is a deeply-rooted characteristic of the Holy Lord. Read through the following passages plus the ones in the box on the left, noting down what they tell us about the Lord's interest in justice.

  Isaiah 42:1-4
  Isaiah 59:1-16

- Although my conscious mind may agree that God is holy and just, does my outward life demonstrate that he is? Take some time to think prayerfully about what I could change in my life to better reflect this reality.

Thought to finish

When Moses asked to see God's glory, the Lord said Moses could see his goodness, but said he couldn't see the glory of the Lord's face and live (Exodus 33:18-23). Like staring into the sun, the pure brightness of the Holy Lord would be too much for him – Moses would only be consumed by the overpowering fire.

Like Moses, we too could not survive the overwhelming gaze of the Lord. But through Jesus, we have a mediator who makes relationship with the Lord possible. Through Jesus we enter the family of God and we start to take on the family likeness, with holiness and justice being foundational characteristics. These are not just 'religious' attributes – they are ways of seeing and living that affect every area of life. Yes, we regularly fall short, but this is no reason to give up. The Lord urges us onwards to be more *Holy* and *Just* because we are made for a higher calling; we are made for a better way of living and interacting with others. Therefore, let us not give up! *'Though the righteous fall seven times, they rise again'* (Proverbs 24:16). Let us strive on!

7. The God who is Faithful

'Many claim to have unfailing love, but a faithful person who can find?' (Proverbs 20:6). In our world today, there is no shortage of promises. Whether it's politicians, advertisers, romantic suitors, 'how-to' book authors, 'we must get you over for dinner' acquaintances, or many others in between, there are plenty of people promising us something that they don't always deliver on. In this climate it's easy for us to become a little cynical and weary.

But when it comes to dealing with issues of eternal and ultimate significance, the stakes are too high; we can't afford to be let down. The trouble is that we all have to believe something – and someone; there is no 'fence' to permanently sit on. So who will you rely on to tell you what is true? Who will you trust to fulfil what they promise? Joshua confronted the Israelites of his day with a question which could equally be asked of us: "*If serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve… as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.*" (Joshua 24:15). Let us also positively answer this question and trust him, for ultimately he alone is faithful.

Joshua said, "Now I am about to go the way of all the earth. You know with all your heart and soul that not one of all the good promises the LORD your God gave you has failed. Every promise has been fulfilled; not one has failed." Joshua 23:14

Solomon said, "Praise be to the LORD, who has given rest to his people Israel just as he promised. Not one word has failed of all the good promises he gave through his servant Moses." 1 Kings 8:56

Balaam said to Balak, "God is not a human, that he should lie, not a human being, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill? I have received a command to bless; he has blessed, and I cannot change it." Numbers 23:19-20

'the LORD comforts his people and will have compassion on his afflicted ones. But Zion said, "The LORD has forsaken me, the Lord has forgotten me." "Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you! See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands; your walls are ever before me." Isaiah 49:13-16

Things to do/ Questions to consider

- Read through the following passages plus the ones in the box on the left and over the page. As you consider this theme of God's faithfulness, what are some of the big ideas that come through?

Joshua 21:43-45
2 Corinthians 1:16-22
Hebrews 6:12-20

- God is faithful to what he promises, but does that mean our lives will be trouble-free? Read the following verses and note what is and what isn't promised.

  John 12:27-28
  2 Corinthians 4
  Hebrews 5:7

- Read Romans 4:16-25 and Hebrews 11.
  As people realise the reliability and dependability of the Lord, this has an impact on what they do and how they live. As you better understand the Lord's faithfulness is there anything about your life you would like to change?

If we are faithless, he remains faithful, for he cannot disown himself. 1 Timothy 2:13

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. 1 John 1:9

May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it. 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24

The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. 2 Peter 3:9

Thought to finish

In our world, there are too many random events happening beyond our control for us to be absolutely certain that we can deliver on our promises. Only someone with ultimate power over all time and space can do that, because they alone have the ability to guarantee outcomes. The Lord God *has* that power.

There are many things he doesn't promise us in this world – for example, being always healthy, wealthy, happy, treated justly and never lonely. Jesus was dearly loved by the Father and yet he never received promises of these things, but instead his life was marked by suffering. Should we who follow him expect any better treatment or different promises?

But the Lord does promise to love us, to be with us, to be on our side, and ultimately to take us home to be with him. He sees the beginning from the end and has the power to deliver on these promises. And so we're invited to say with the Apostle Paul, *"I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."* (Romans 8:38-39). He is faithful and he will do it. Amen!

8. Summary

Things to do/ Questions to consider

Go back over the studies in this section and briefly note down the main new things you have learnt, or the things you already knew but have been freshly reminded of …

- About yourself…

- About your world…

God may have got your attention on one or two things you need to *do* as a result of going through these studies. You will have the best chance of succeeding in these things if you tell someone else about them and, if possible, if you practically plan *when* you will do these things.
Write these things down somewhere that will help you to act on them!

Thought to finish

> *For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*
> Isaiah 9:6

To be supreme in power, love and grace; to be the ultimate source of peace, holiness and justice; to know everything and be everywhere… this is the Lord, the Maker of all things seen and unseen. It is a humble privilege to begin to know him who with a dogged determination personally seeks us out for relationship. That he should love and care for us seems like too much for us to ask… so it is just as well that we are called to follow the One who chooses to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine (Ephesians 3:20). He is the Lord, and this is Good News.

Things we need to know:

What God is Doing: the Good News of Jesus

The life we live and experience is not some random coincidence of time and chance. Rather, we are part of a big story which is dominated by the relationship between God and mankind. Our story has twists and turns and promises a hope-filled future, but we have not yet reached the end – we are somewhere in the middle of the story – and so much hangs in the balance for us.

It starts with God creating beauty, order and meaning out of nothing – including the creation of people made in God's image. The story takes a tragic turn as these people rebel against God, choosing to go their own way and creating their own 'world' – one which is strongly afflicted with pain, separation and destruction. But God loves and cares too much to let things run their natural course at the hands of mankind towards ultimate obliteration. God enters creation through his Son, Jesus Christ. He lives among the people, he reveals God to the people, and he dies for the people. And just when it seems all hope is lost, Jesus overcomes death as he is resurrected to new life as King of all creation, and in doing so he opens a new way back to God. This is the centre of our story: the Good News of Jesus. This new life through Jesus begins now, but it is lived out in the context of a 'falling apart' world. One day, however, God will bring it to an ultimate conclusion where there will no longer be death or pain or tears, but rather the dwelling of God will be with people.

In this section of the Backpack, we'll look at the four main themes or chapters of our story to help us understand where we've come from and where we're going, and to help us interpret our world so that we know how to live today.

The studies are as follows:

1. *Creation*
2. *Fall*
3. *Redemption – the Big Story*
4. *Redemption – NOW*
5. *Future hope*
6. *Summary*

1. Creation

The story we find ourselves in begins a long time ago…

> *"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters." Genesis 1:1-2*

The Bible starts out with God – that's where our story begins. We're told the earth was 'formless and empty', and like an artist-architect-engineer, God set about creating beauty, order and meaning out of the chaos. He then crowned off his creation with making people…

> *Then God said, "Let us make human beings in our image, in our likeness… So God created human beings in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground."* Gen 1:26-28

The first man and woman lived in peace and harmony with themselves, with each other, with their environment and with God. And *"God saw all that he had made, and it was very good."* Gen 1:31 God called them to work with him, and so although God made the garden, he gave responsibility to his co-workers to 'work it and take care of it' in order to see the growth continue. Although God made the animals, it was his co-workers job to name them (– without names the animals would not be complete). In true power-sharing style, God gives people significant creative work to do that is a part of God's on-going creative acts in the world.

Things to do/ Questions to consider

- Read through Genesis chapters 1-2 and Psalm 104.
- Note down anything you see with regards to…
  - The range of activities that God as 'creator' is involved in
  - How power is used
  - diversity and similarity
  - how things are related together

If we are part of a universe that is more than time and chance; if there is a purposeful, loving, awesome (but invisible) creator behind it all, we would expect to have a sense of this from time to time.

- Are there moments in the past when this sense has been particularly powerful for you?

- In your day to day life, when do you most feel like someone created by The Creator?

If we are created in God's image, it is logical that we will have the creative instinct as part of our DNA. Being a 'chip off the old block' we will go about creating things.

- What have you created lately?

- What would you like to create?

- Read the additional thoughts on Creation in the box on the right. As you consider these points as well as your answers to the questions above, note down one or two big ideas that have particularly grabbed your attention from this study. How might these ideas affect the way you live?

Thought to finish

We truly are fearfully and wonderfully made! (Ps 139:14) God created us as unique individuals of great value, and he calls us to the significant work of being God's co-workers, participating with God in making a world that is beautiful, functional, well-balanced and relational. Although we now live in a fallen world, with awe and in humility, it is our responsibility to take up our calling of being God's co-workers in Creation. Random acts of beauty and creativity are not wasted! What will you create today?

Some thoughts on Creation…

- In Gen 1:2, the 'chaos' or 'formless void' is the raw material that God uses to create. When God begins, that chaos ceases to exist.
- God's work isn't just to do with humans; most of Gen 1 shows the creation of non-human entities. And all that God made was 'very good' (1:31) - nothing is intrinsically evil.
- God also uses things already created as a means to bring about further creations: e.g., the earth brings forth vegetation (1:11-12), and man is formed from dust while the woman is formed from the side of the man (2:7,22)
- In 2:7 God 'the potter' works the clay of the ground to form the first person; this is a Creator who gets his hands dirty.
- Being made in God's image is for everyone, not just kings and 'important' people; nor just Christians.
- Rivers flow from Eden to give water to the world outside Eden (2:10-14), so when Adam and Eve are excluded from the garden they don't move from a place full of blessing to one totally without blessing; rather it's from total blessing to partial blessing.
- In 2:15-17 God gives purpose (work the garden and take care of it), freedom (may eat from any tree) and limitation (except *that* tree). Purpose, freedom and limitation need to be held carefully in balance in order to live well.
- male & female were given God's blessing and command to fill, subdue and rule the earth Gen 1:28 – to God this meant working and taking care of it Gen 2:15
- If everything is made by God, then a connection and affinity exists between all parts: people, animals, nature.
- God was at work before the arrival of Israel (and us) onto the scene. Israel didn't bring God with them to a place; rather, God was already there to meet them (and us).
- God is creator; everything else is created; everything and everyone is reliant on God.

2. Fall

When God told Adam and Eve not to eat from one particular tree, there was no explanation that came with it. They weren't told why they would die if they ate the fruit; that was just part of the deal.

Then the snake approached and threw in a doubt. He said to the woman, *"Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?"* He followed this up by saying *"You will not certainly die, for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."* Gen 3:1

In essence, the serpent was asking the question: "Did God really give you that limitation for *your* benefit? Surely he's just keeping something good back from you." The first couple were faced with a dilemma: would they *trust* that God was doing things for *their* best interests or would they 'break free' and determine their own boundaries? They chose to live beyond the God-given limitation, and the consequences were disastrous. They placed themselves in the driver's seat of this thing called 'life' but they didn't have an instruction manual, they didn't know where they were going, and they couldn't drive. They thought they could do it on their own. They were wrong.

As soon as Adam and Eve had eaten the fruit, they knew they had done wrong. Their immediate response was that "*they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden*." (Genesis 3:8). The next 3 chapters of Genesis (Genesis 3-6) tell the story of the falling apart of creation. The beauty, order and meaning that God created in life is marred by guilt, fear, shame, pain, anger, murder, vengeance and separation. Relationships fall apart as people struggle within themselves, with their interaction with others, with their abuse of the world and ultimately with their life with God. This falling apart is what the bible calls 'sin', and once sin got a foothold in the lives of people, there would be no going back.

> *"The LORD saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time. The LORD regretted that he had made human beings on the earth, and his heart was deeply troubled."* *Genesis 6:5-6*

Things to do/ Questions to consider

- Read through Genesis chapters 3-4 and 6:1-8.
- Note down any negative occurrences following on from the first sin *(e.g. fear, sense of exposure, hiding 3:10).*

- The New Testament also throws light on the universal effects of the Fall, which it calls 'sin'. Read the following passages and note down some of the big ideas about sin and us…
  Romans 6:23
  Romans 8:1-8
  Galatians 5:16-21
  Ephesians 2:1-3

- In what ways or situations do you feel you most experience this 'falleness'…

  - as someone who creates chaos and brokenness
    (eg when cutting someone down to size with negative words)

  - as someone who experiences chaos and brokenness at the hands of others
    (eg when my boss puts the blame on me for a mistake he made)

- Read the additional thoughts on the Fall in the box on the right. Note down 1 or 2 big ideas from this and any ways this might affect how you think and act.

Thought to finish

Although mankind was still made in God's image, showing moments of beauty and love, that image was now fundamentally flawed. Regardless of how things looked on the surface, people were like buildings with corrupted foundations that one day would be found out. Sin had entered the world, and death was the ultimate result of sin (Romans 5:12). And even when people wanted to do the right thing, they found it hard to do because sin was proving too powerful a force for them to control or master (Romans 7:15-25).
The Fall – into sin – is a crippling disease that slowly kills us from the inside out. We're all infected, we all need help, and we all need some Good News.

Extra thoughts on the Fall…

- Genesis 3 describes a setting whereby options are presented to the humans (by a snake); 'choice' is a God-given characteristic of humanity but it presents the opportunity to lead people away from God.

- In considering what the snake said (3:5-7), they did not consult God or each other, but in silence merely thought about what the tree had to offer without obviously considering God's prohibition.

- The description of the temptation in Genesis 3:6 matches a description of 'worldliness' in 1John 2:15-16: 'the woman saw the fruit was good for food ('cravings of sinful nature'), pleasing to the eye ('lust of the eyes'), and desirable for gaining wisdom ('boasting of what you have').

- The snake said their eyes would be opened (3:5), which they were (3:7), and they now saw themselves and their world differently: naked and in need of external resources. Already they could not handle their new knowledge

- The immediate fallout is broken relationship with God (hiding –3:8), brokenness inside (fear and shame –3:10), broken relationship with each other (blaming –3:12) and broken relationship with their world (cursed is the ground because of you –3:17)

- Gen 3 describes the first sin, but that is not where it ends. The chapters following on from ch3 show the process whereby sin infects everything and everyone: family relationships (conflict between Cain & Abel –4:8), family structure (Lamech marrying two women –4:19), inter-tribe rivalry (Lamech killing a man for wounding him –4:23), the earth (being flooded in judgement –6:7) and the cosmic sphere (the Nephilim 6:1-5).

- The 'fall' is really a falling out and a falling apart.

3. Redemption- the Big story

As soon as Adam and Eve ate the fruit, they knew they had done wrong. When they heard God coming they tried to hide… "***<u>But</u>*** *the LORD God called to the man, 'Where are you'?"* Genesis 3:9. From then on, the rest of the bible tells the story of God's ongoing pursuit of people who in one way or another were running away from him.

God knew it was beyond the ability of humans to fix the problem, so he chose to enter into the world as a person, becoming like one of us, so as to heal and renew the broken humanity himself. Jesus Christ was God himself in human flesh.

Jesus lived among broken people, and through his words, his actions and his presence he showed them that God genuinely loved them with a passion and that God would go to unfathomable lengths in order to restore the relationship with them. As a result, Jesus was killed on a cross by people filled with brokenness, but he passed through death and came out the other side, alive! He died for us and God brought him back to life, opening a new way forward for us. Jesus bore the consequences of our sins so that we could have life – a new life in him – that would begin now and would continue out beyond physical death into an eternal future.

Things to do/ Questions to consider

- Read through some of the following passages and summarise what Jesus says about himself.

Matthew 11:28-30 "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

Mark 10:45 "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Luke 7:19-23 "John the Baptist sent us to you to ask, 'Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?'"… So (Jesus) replied to the messengers, "Go back and report to John what you have seen and heard: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor. Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me."

John 6:35 Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."

John 8:12 When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

John 10:11 "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep."
John 11:25-26 Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Anyone who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?"

John 14:6 Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

- Read through the following passages and summarise what these New Testament writers say about who Jesus was and what he accomplished…
  - John 1:14,18
  - Colossians 1:9-22
  - 1Peter 2:21-24

Our response

- Read through the passages in the box on the right and summarise what they say about what we need to do in order to receive this new life in Christ …

- In your own heart and mind, are you clear what's required in order to become a Christian?

"Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with them, and they with me." Revelation 3:20

Jesus said "Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life." John 5:24

"Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God" John 1:12

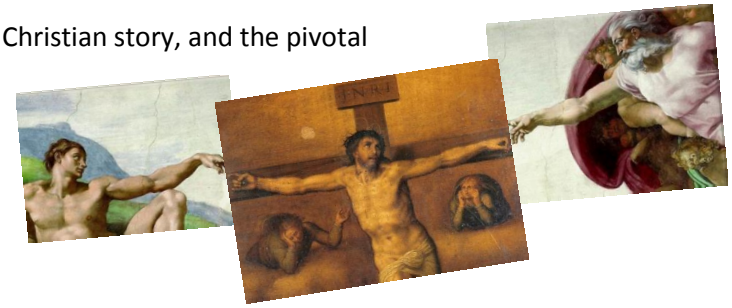
For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. Ephesians 2:8-9

"Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord" Act 3:19

Thought to finish

There is no special ceremony, no set words, no specific place you need to be. Rather, it is a heartfelt prayer in which we give up relying on our own efforts to do everything. It is acknowledging that we just can't get there on our own and we need God. It is surrendering to the love of Jesus and allowing God to take his rightful place in our lives.

This is the pivotal moment and centre of the Christian story, and the pivotal moment of our own story. Through Jesus' death and resurrection we come out alive in the Kingdom of God.



4. Redemption – NOW

The world has been lurching and stumbling under the effects of the Fall, but the Good News is that, through Jesus, God has redeemed it. This redemption will reach completion at the end of the world as we know it, but we don't have to wait till then to start seeing the signs of change. Rather the work of redemption has already begun in the world – and in us – right now.

However, one of the difficulties we face is knowing *what* difference this Good News of redemption really makes for us. Intuitively we may know that God is at work and has been changing us for good. However, when we have to pinpoint some of the ways those changes take effect, we can struggle to give details. This is worth exploring further!

Things to do/ Questions to consider

- The most crucial change for us as we believe in Jesus is the arrival of the Spirit of God in our lives. Read the following passages and note some of the effects of the Spirit of God living in us…

Eph 1:13-14 And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory.

Rom 8:1-16 Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death… Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires… if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ. But if Christ is in you, then even though your body is subject to death because of sin, the Spirit gives life because of righteousness. And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you… For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, *"Abba,* Father." The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.

Over the page is a table which gives some thoughts on different ways the Good News of God's redemption makes a difference. Read through some of these, including looking at the verses mentioned, and consider the following questions.

- For you at present, which aspects of the Good News are particularly meaningful? What makes it good news for you?
- How does this aspect (or aspects) of the Good News make a difference in the way you think, feel, relate and/or act?

In what ways is this Good News for us today?

Good News is:	Good News is not:	What it means	New Testament examples
Hope	Despair	A better future in this life and the next, where death no longer holds power as the ultimate ending; also, with hope we are able to move towards redeeming what seems hopelessly broken (e.g. relationships)	Luke 23:39-43 John 11:21-44
Belonging	Loneliness	Solitary confinement drives people insane, and yet too many suffer their own personal isolation. Life was meant to be lived in community. God gives us a sense of belonging – we all rightfully belong in this world, it is not owned by the rich and powerful. God's acceptance of us opens the door for our acceptance of each other – a powerful force for good	Mark 5:24-34
Ability to change	Being stuck in helpless repeating patterns	We all recognise aspects of ourselves that we don't like, but it is so hard to change things. The good news offers us power to be transformed – slowly but surely, not in surface issues but in deep ways that really matter	John 4:9-26
Contentment & peace	Restless searching for more	We search for meaning happiness and a sense of accomplishment. We spend our lives pursuing the many things that promise (money, job, beautiful house, beautiful clothes…) but ultimately none deliver. The good news offers a contentment that money cant buy	Luke 19:1-10
A life of value	Worthlessness	People & 'the system' have a way of making us feel lowly valued. But we are greatly valued by God: we're not losers or hopeless – we are special. And that is good news.	Luke 5:27-32
Love	Indifference or hate	Hate is the extreme form, but indifference or apathy is more common – a not caring enough to even get angry	Mark 1:40-42
Meaning & purpose	Chaos	Life without purpose is death; we need to be able to make sense of life, otherwise there appears to be no point to anything. Meaning & order are crucial	Mark 5:1-20
Forgiveness	Guilt	Guilt is a crippling weight that is often unarticulated. We experience the pain of knowing we have done wrong, but are unable to do anything to make that pain go away apart from trying to shut it out (which we can do for a while, but not forever). Forgiveness comes from the One who has ultimately been wronged; if God says we are forgiven then we are truly free from the weight of that burden. Gaining forgiveness is more freeing than being let out of a prison – don't underestimate its positive effect on us even now.	John 8:3-11 Mark 2:1-12
Healing	Brokenness	We have all experienced brokenness and carry around various forms of pain and handicap. God is able to take our brokenness and make something of beauty and meaning out of it. In the good news the healing process has begun.	John 9:1-7

Thought to finish

Through the Spirit of God, Jesus miraculously lives in us, to empower us to live a life of reckless generosity and love as strong as death. It is the energy of God that enables us to persevere despite major setbacks. It is the love of God within that is able to absorb the pain, to break the chains of revenge, and to help us walk in freedom to help others out of their chains. In many different ways, the Good News of Jesus is at work within us right now. Let's regularly take time to reflect on this so that we can be encouraged, we can be thankful, and we can share our Good News with others.

5 Future Hope

Jesus paints evocative pictures of what the future with God holds: growing trees (Mat 13:31), hidden treasure (Mat 13:44) and great banquets (Luke 14:15) all feature. In a proverbial-like way Jesus also gives some thoughts on what we have to hope for in the beatitudes… the poor and persecuted will receive the kingdom of heaven, there will be comfort and mercy and filling with righteousness and peace (Mat 5:3-12). But perhaps one of the most 'hope-filled' passages is in Rev 21:3-4:

> *"Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."*

All the pain and angst and fear and brutality and loneliness and poverty will be no more in God's New World Order. Instead there will be love and comfort and belonging and fair justice and partying! And the only tears will be those of joy.

This will be the work of a God rich in compassion and reckless in generosity. Things will be how they always should have been. All our shortcomings will be lost in a great homecoming. Surely this is a day worth looking forward to.

Things to do/ Questions to consider

The following passages talk about the return of Christ and life after death. Although it's not completely clear what this will all look like, try to piece together what these passages say about this eternal life.

- 1 Corinthians 15:42-58
- 1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11
- Revelation 21:1-5

Warnings about rejecting God's offer of life

Being saved through Christ means we move towards a future of eternal life and move away from a future of eternal death or separation from God (which is our default starting place). Although the overwhelming emphasis in the New Testament is on this wonderful salvation, it is good to keep in view that the Bible also gives us warnings about rejecting the life offered to us through Jesus…

Read

- Matthew 13:36-43, 47-50
- John 3:16-18
- John 5:24-29

Confidence in our Future

It is normal in life to have doubts about anything and everything! But we can have confidence that God will bring us to His promised eternal life after death. In the box on the right are some reasons why we should be assured of this. Read through these and the *Thought to Finish* below and discuss your thoughts on our *Future Hope* and what difference this might mean for how you live today.

Thought to finish

This picture of the future places things like fame, money, job titles, new houses, overseas trips and 'winning' in a whole new light; it changes the emphasis on what is and what isn't important.

It also leaves us with some serious questions to consider: Are we currently encouraged by the certainty of our future hope in God? If this future hope in Christ has such an impact on absolutely everything for us, do we spend enough time contemplating it? What would be different for us if we considered it more? How might this change what we see and do in our day? Week? Year?

Assurance of hope

1. First and foremost it hangs on the belief that **Jesus himself rose from the dead**. He could only rise from the dead if God accepted his sacrifice on our behalf. So if he rose, then so will we who believe…
   But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? … For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men. But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.
   1Corinthians 15:12-20

2. Secondly, we get the **Spirit** as a down-payment by God, giving us the security of knowing that 'full payment' will be made by God at the end of life…
   For no matter how many promises God has made, they are "Yes" in Christ. And so through him the "Amen" is spoken by us to the glory of God. Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.
   2Corinthians 1:20-22

3. We also have the **Bible**, showing God's dealings with people over thousands of years. As we *carefully* read and *enter into* the stories of old, we get a feel for what God is like - that He wont let us down…
   For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.
   Romans 15:4

   The Bible also directly reminds us why we should be assured of what God will do…
   11 And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. 12 He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. 13 I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.
   1 John 5:11-13

4. And of course we have **one another** to share stories of what God has been doing with us, and to generally encourage each other on in our way…
   And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage each other with these words…
   He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him. Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.
   1Thessalonians 4:17-18, 5:10-11

6. Summary

Things to do/ Questions to consider

Go back over the studies in this section and briefly note down the main new things you have learnt…

- About yourself…

- About your world…

God may have got your attention on one or two things you need to do as a result of going through these studies. You will have the best chance of succeeding in these things if you tell someone else about them and, if possible, if you practically plan when you will do these things.
Write these things down somewhere that will help you to act on them!

Thought to finish

Think back to yesterday (– it seems so long ago!) What did you do with your day? How did you decide what to do? Was it a good day? What criteria did you use to decide? These questions all come down to your worldview, or the picture in your head that makes sense of life. We all have a picture (worldview), but we don't often clearly know what our own one is.

The studies you have looked at in this section represent the bare bones of the Christian Story (or worldview) of how life works, where we began and where we are heading.
Creation, *Fall*, *Redemption* and *Future hope* are the major themes of our story. They outline the big story of all humanity, but these themes are also played out in small ways in our own lives. Each day we experience something of God's good creation while at the same time experiencing some of the frustration and brokenness of things not being as they should. But at the most fundamental level, through Jesus, God has changed us for good. So whatever happens, we know we can look forward to a bright future with God. And we may not be able to put things completely 'right' as they ought to be, but because of what God has done in us we are able to follow Jesus in living and acting redemptively. We do our bit to bring order, beauty and meaning out of the chaos, while trusting that one Great Day, God will bring all this to completion.
This is the story we are a part of. This is our story.

Things we need to know:

What We are Called to do

This is the last part of the first section of the Backpack. This first section has been exploring ***Things we need to know*** in order to help us grow and move forward in our faith journey with God. Thus far we have looked at *What God is like* (looking at some aspects of the character of God) and *What God is doing* (looking at the Big Story that we are involved in with God). Now we turn to the next logical step: given what God is like and what he is doing in the world, w*hat is it that WE are called to do?*

This part looks at four different aspects of what we are called to do as we seek to thrive - and not just survive - in our walk with the Lord.

The studies are as follows:

1 *Called to Follow Jesus*
2 *Sent to be Workers for God's Kingdom*
3 *Discipling life to life*
4 *With Generations in mind*
5 *Summary*

1. Called to Follow Jesus

"The time has come," Jesus said. "The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!" *Mark 1:15*

With these words, Jesus announced the beginning of something totally new in the world. The Almighty, All-Powerful God had stepped into human history as a human being: *Jesus Christ*! But rather than majestically arriving with pomp and ceremony as a conquering Caesar, he came as the humble 'Son of Man' who came not to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many. (Mark 10:45)

He lived amongst, and died for, the people. And when he rose from the dead, he showed that there were new rules for life. Everything we used to believe about everything needed to change, because this Jesus had opened the door on a totally new type of life: eternal life with God.

To get this life requires radical change for us. We are called by Jesus to repent, believe and *follow Him*, and this means dying to ourselves...

> *Then Jesus said to them all: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it. What good is it for you to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit your very self?"* *Luke9:23-24*

It is a free gift of life, but in order to experience this life we need to 'die' to our old ways that lead to death - and we can only do this as we answer Jesus call to follow him as the Lord of our lives. The road to following Jesus is a demanding one! But it's not impossible, for as Jesus said, "Everything is possible for one who believes." (Mark 9:23)

Things to do/ Questions to consider

- Read through the following description of Jesus from the Book of Colossians.

The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross. *Colossians 1:15-20*

- Note down how Jesus is described in relation to…
  - God
  - Creation
  - Rulers and authorities
  - The church

- To make this more personal (but just as true), substitute your name for the words 'all things'. According to this passage, who is Jesus in relation to you and what has he done for you?

The Apostle Paul had excellent credentials as a religious Jew, and yet we read in Philippians how he changed his view on the worth of these credentials.

- **Read Philippians 3:4-14**
- Why do you think Paul had such a radical change in the way he viewed what was and what wasn't important?

- In practical terms, in what ways did Paul's changed beliefs and values cause a change in the way he lived his life? (see Acts 9:1-30, 20:17-35)

When Jesus said 'repent and believe the good news' (Mark1:15) the Greek word used for 'repent' – *metanoéō* – carries the idea of turning and changing your opinion or direction. It highlights the fact that there is no neutral place; you're always going somewhere and believing something. There is no fence to sit on! Jesus said the only way to go is in His direction!

- As you look to *follow Jesus*, what might be something you need to change about the way you think and act? It may be...
    - *Things to start doing/stop doing to nurture your walk with God*
    - *The way you relate to other believers*
    - *The way you relate to people who aren't believers*
    - *Something else?*

Thought to finish

"Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts..." *(Hebrews 3:7-8)*

The simplest way to keep following Christ is this: when you sense He is asking you to do or stop doing something, then respond and do it straight away. If you don't do it today, the Lord may get your attention on it tomorrow. If you don't do it tomorrow, He may speak to you about it again the next day, but by then you risk no longer hearing God, because you have become used to not responding to His voice. Like the guitar player's fingers, you can develop callouses that deaden your ability to feel. Then you will be in danger of becoming like those Jesus describes in Matthew 13:13-15 who have eyes but don't see, ears but don't hear, and a heart that has become unresponsive. Following Jesus is the most significant thing you can do for your own life and for those around you that you love. So "*Today, if you hear his voice"... act!*

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.
Galatians 2:20

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God--this is true worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is--his good, pleasing and perfect will.
Romans 12:1-2

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.
Hebrews 12:1-3

2. Sent to be Workers for God's Kingdom

Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I. Send me!" *Isaiah 6:8*

The Bible tells the story of God continuing to reach out to people, showing them love and inviting them onwards into real life. But interestingly enough, one of the most significant ways God communicates with humanity is *not* through miraculous exhibitions of power, nor through loud voices from heaven, nor through grand visions of the future – rather, it's through people. The Lord gets things done and speaks to men, women and children primarily through His messengers – through the people He sends. And this has major implications for us…

Things to do/ Questions to consider

Moses was someone who had been brought up for 40 years within the royal political Egyptian system, only to be forced to flee for his life and live out the next 40 years as a desert sheep farmer well away from anywhere important. Then the Lord called him.

Read Exodus 3:1-12

- When the Lord speaks to Moses about the Israelites, what does God say He is doing? (note particularly the 'I am' and 'I have' statements in Exodus 3:7-9)

- Given what the Lord says in 3:7-9, what can you conclude about how God get's things done from verse 10?

- Moses doubted his ability to fulfil what God asked him to do. This was true of others that God sent: Gideon (Judges 6:11-16), Jeremiah (Jeremiah 1:4-8), and Jesus' disciples (Matthew 28:16-20). What is God's common promise to the people in each of these situations that ultimately guarantees success in the mission?

Being sent as a worker for God's Kingdom isn't just about activity; it's more fundamentally about ***identity***. As such, it can be helpful to see how Jesus saw His own identity.

- **Read** through some of the verses listed in the box on the right. These are taken from John's Gospel and show the number of times Jesus refers to Himself as being sent from the Father.
- How do you think Jesus' understanding that He was sent by the Father affected how he spent his time, what He did and with whom?

'Sent' in John's Gospel
John 3:34;
4:34;
5:23,24,30,36,37,38;
6:29,38,39,44,57;
7:16,18,28,29,33;
8:16,18,26,29,42;
9:4,
10:36;
11:42;
12:44,45,49;
13:16,20;
14:24;
15:21;
16:5;
17:3,8,18,21,23,25;
20:21

- Amidst the busyness, the crowds of people and the competing demands, how do you think Jesus maintained his clear sense of being sent by the Father? Consider Mark 1:24-38. What things can we learn from this?

- Think about your own faith journey. Who have been some of the significant people that God has sent to help you?

- As you read the verses in the box on the right and John 1:35-51 (a good example of how the gospel moves among people), prayerfully consider this question: For this season of time, who might the Lord be sending *you* to?

"Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will send you out to fish for people."
Matthew 4:19

We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.
2 Corinthians 5:20

"Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!"
Romans 10:13-15

When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field." Matthew 9:36-38

Thought to finish

When God took hold of our lives, bringing us from death to new life, that was Good News for us. However, we discover soon enough that we we're not called to be just consumers and beneficiaries of this Good News but, like Jesus, we too have been sent to be workers for God's Kingdom, bringing Good News to others.

Being sent by Jesus is not primarily about geography (specifically where we're sent) but rather about our identity and sense of purpose: we are to be intentional workers for God's Kingdom, and the place we've been sent to is right here! (until God tells us otherwise). The work can be incredibly hard, but incredibly significant and eternally rewarding. So today, as the Lord asks 'Whom shall I send?' let us respond like Isaiah: 'Here am I. Send me!'

3. Discipling life to life

God's ultimate communication with humanity was not in the form of a DVD, a T-Shirt, a text message, a Facebook page or an App. Rather, God connected with the world through a person: Jesus Christ. After living, dying, and then coming back to life, Jesus' last words to his followers before he returned to heaven were:

> *"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."* *Mat 28:18-20*

Just as Jesus had raised up disciples and had given them the vision and practical skills to follow him, so too he asked them to make disciples of others. But what did this involve and how were they to do it?

Things to do/ Questions to consider

Jesus is our model of one who disciples others.

- Read the verses in the box to the right.
- What do you note about the type of relationship Jesus had with his disciples?

"I no longer call you servants, because servants do not know their master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you." John 15:15

- Discipling is about helping someone else follow the Lord. What are the advantages of just concentrating on passing on to others what *we ourselves* have learnt from God? (as opposed to all the theory that exists)

- Jesus spent some time in formal settings preaching in synagogues, but the vast majority of the stories about Him and His disciples come from interactions with people in a wide variety of everyday locations and settings. How might this help us as we think practically about us discipling someone else?

The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighbourhood. We saw the glory with our own eyes, the one-of-a-kind glory, like Father, like Son, generous inside and out, true from start to finish.
John 1:14 (Message version)

"If you really know me, you will know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him." Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us." Jesus answered: "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father." John 14:7-9

Jesus went up on a mountainside and called to him those he wanted, and they came to him. He appointed twelve that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach and to have authority to drive out demons.
Mark 3:13-15

When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus.
Acts 4:13

The Apostle Paul was someone who also spent significant time discipling others, and one of the places he spent time doing this was in Thessalonica.

Read 1Thessalonians 1:1- 2:13

- From this reading (see particularly 2:7-12), what was the relationship like between Paul and the Thessalonians? (was it organisational, hierarchical, like that of a business consultant, or something else?)

- What were some of the things Paul did as he tried to help the Thessalonians grow as disciples of Jesus? (see particularly 1:2, 5,6; 2:1-2, 8, 9, 12)

- What did Paul leave for God to do in this process? (see particularly 1:4-6, 2:13)

Thought to finish

Discipling at its best can only be done by using the most complex, sophisticated, multi-dimensional means known to mankind, using methods far beyond the realms of any other technological approach. In other words, discipling is done best when a person shares not just information, but their life with another.

There clearly is some content that needs to be communicated and skills to be passed on (which we explore in more detail later in the Backpack) but fundamentally when helping someone else grow in their walk with the Lord, the emphasis is on seeing this as a *relationship* rather than a *transaction*. The Good News of Jesus and His Kingdom is passed *from life to life*.

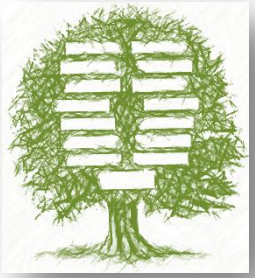
So we don't need to be rocket-scientist experts nor super-relational friends of everybody. Rather, we just have to be ourselves as we share our lives and what we know about the Lord with the people in our world. And we can leave to the Spirit of God the more difficult task of working in the hearts and minds of those we live amongst.

Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears. "Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified. I have not coveted anyone's silver or gold or clothing. You yourselves know that these hands of mine have supplied my own needs and the needs of my companions. In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: "It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"

Acts 20:31-35

(Paul's words to the Ephesians before he left them for the last time)

4 With Generations in Mind



Within us all we have a longing for significance and a sense that our lives count for something, that somehow or other we make a positive difference in the world. That is why we hear stories of the great lengths that many people go to – athletes, business people, explorers, scientists, artists – in order to leave their mark on life, as they seek to go higher, faster, further, longer and win more world cups!

We, however, have been let in on a different type of legacy. The Lord has given us the opportunity to make our contribution in a way that is worth more than all the gold medals, memorial statues, and bulging bank accounts put together. We can be part of the Story of God, making an eternal contribution in God's Kingdom as we simply help one or two people in their walk with the Lord in such a way that they are able to then also help someone else. It does require some focus, vision and commitment, but it isn't rocket science: being a Kingdom Worker with generations in mind is within reach of us all.

Things to do/ Questions to consider

In Genesis Chapter1 and 2, we're told of the beauty, order and meaning that God created out of the chaos. But by Chapter 3 it had all started to unravel, and even the flood couldn't halt the tendency of humans towards evil, so that by Genesis Chapter 11 we see all people united in their evil intent. So, what would be God's grand solution to this enormous problem? It was a promise given to an elderly, landless, childless man and his wife.

- **Read Genesis 12:1-5**
  God promised to Abraham that all people on earth would be blessed through him. And yet when he died, the only child Abraham and Sarah had was Isaac. But as Isaac grew, the Lord also spoke to him...
- **Read Genesis 26:2-4** - *(note some of the same words used here as in Genesis 12:1-5)*
  Isaac married Rebekah, and they had two children, Jacob and Esau, and the Lord also spoke to Jacob as he grew up...
- **Read Genesis 28:12-15**
  Jacob had 12 sons who were founders of the tribes of Israel *(note the same words used again)*. The story and the promise then continued through the generations:
  Jacob's sons/family tribes → Moses and the Israelites in Exodus → Joshua entering the promised land → the Judges → David and the Kings → the Exile → return from Exile → 400 years of silence, until finally we reach the New Testament.
- **Read Matthew 1:1 and Acts 3:25**
  The opening line of the New Testament shows that, although this may be the 'New' Testament, it is still very much connected with the 'Old', and as Peter recounts in his speech, the original promise given to Abraham had found its way to Jesus.

- **Read Galatians 3:7-9**

  In Paul's letter to the Galatians, he explains to them that the promise to Abraham *(note the same words used again)* is not just for Jews but for all those who have faith in Jesus.
- **Given the above, what are the implications of this for us?**

- **Read Matthew 28:18-20, John 17:20, 2 Timothy 2:2** (see box on right)

  See the connections between the person speaking, the ones they're speaking to, and the 'others'.
- What difference do you think it would make to the way you helped someone in their faith if, when you're helping that person, you're not just focusing on them, but you also have in mind any people that *they* might go on to help?

- As you consider your responsibility of passing on this faith to others, is there someone in your orbit that you can help? Is there someone who can help you as you seek to help this other person?

- It is easy to just concentrate on the details of practically living today. What things can we do that will help us remember we are called to be part of a generation of believers who is to pass this belief on to others?

"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."
Matthew 28:18-20

"My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message…
John 17:20

"And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others."
2 Timothy 2:2

Thought to finish

In this Big Story of Humanity, God is redeeming a people for eternity. Beginning small with an unlikely couple, God made a promise of salvation that would be passed from Abraham, through the generations, until Jesus came to fulfil what had been promised. However, it didn't end there. Jesus entrusted the promise to his followers whom he called to carry this through to future generations, from one end of the world to the other.

We are part of this Big Story and we have a very significant contribution to make. Starting where we are, with what we have, we are to pass on what we know of God and this Good News story to someone else – and we are to help them pass it on to someone else.

We may feel that we are the wrong person and that doing this is beyond us. But our storyline tells us that, since we come from a long line of unlikely heroes and heroines who were part of something immeasurably bigger than all they thought or imagined (Ephesians3:20), we should expect to be no less.

5. Summary

Things to do/ Questions to consider

Go back over the studies in this section and briefly note down the main new things you have learnt…

- About yourself…

- About your world…

God may have got your attention on one or two things you need to do as a result of going through these studies. You will have the best chance of succeeding in these things if you tell someone else about them and, if possible, if you practically plan when you will do these things.
Write these things down somewhere that will help you to act on them!

Thought to finish

There is a natural flow to what we have been looking at in this section. First, we explored what God is like, looking at different aspects of His character. Then we turned to the Big Story that we find ourselves in (What God is doing), to help us understand where we've come from and where we're going. Now in this part, we have been trying to answer the next logical question: what do we do with all of the above? How then should we live?

To answer these questions, we've looked at four things that we believe we need to do. First, we must follow Jesus. He is central to everything; without him there is no way forward. Therefore, following him is foundational to anything else. But as we follow Jesus, we quickly find ourselves being sent to help others, just as he was sent to help us. And the way we help them is the same way He helped his disciples: by sharing our whole lives, because we know that the Good News is passed from life to life. In doing this, we take our part in the Big Story of God, because as we help our friends, we also encourage them to help others, so that the Good News continues to pass from one generation to the next. This is what we're called to do, and it's good news for everyone.