



**ADVANCE
GROUP
MENTORING
GUIDE
YEAR 1**



YEAR 1 CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

3

YEAR ONE

6

SESSION ONE	WELCOME TO ADVANCE	6
SESSION TWO	THE IDENTITY OF AN EVANGELIST	10
SESSION THREE	THE MESSAGE OF AN EVANGELIST	14
SESSION FOUR	THE TASK OF AN EVANGELIST	18
SESSION FIVE	THE POWER OF AN EVANGELIST	22
SESSION SIX	THE DEVOTION OF AN EVANGELIST	26
SESSION SEVEN	THE SUBMISSION OF AN EVANGELIST	30
SESSION EIGHT	THE CHARACTER OF AN EVANGELIST	34
SESSION NINE	THE OPPORTUNITY OF AN EVANGELIST	39
SESSION TEN	THE COMMITMENT OF AN EVANGELIST	44
SESSION ELEVEN	THE INSPIRATION OF AN EVANGELIST	49
SESSION TWELVE	RETREAT	53

APPENDICES

GOSPEL DOCTRINE	57
GOSPEL NARRATIVE	58
YOUTH GOSPEL TALK EXAMPLE	59
YEAR ONE REFLECTIONS	61
ACCOUNTABILITY FORM	63

INTRODUCTION

**THE GOSPEL.
THERE IS NO PLAN B.**

**THE GOSPEL IS
GOOD NEWS TO BE
PROCLAIMED AND
HAS LOST NONE OF
ITS POWER TO SAVE.
ADVANCE EQUIPS,
ENCOURAGES,
AND EMPOWERS
THE CHURCH FOR
EVANGELISM THROUGH
SMALL GROUP
MENTORING, WHILST
ALSO STIRRING
AND DEVELOPING
EVANGELISTIC GIFTING
IN THOSE CALLED AS
EVANGELISTS.**

Advance is a global movement to support the whole church in taking the whole gospel to the whole world for the whole of God's glory. Advance supports this goal through a variety of training, resourcing and networking initiatives – the primary tool for this being Advance Groups.

Through monthly meetings, those in Advance groups receive teaching, sharpen one another through discussion, and share openly about their personal and spiritual lives. Updates and encouragements are shared with each other, between group sessions about opportunities group members have had to share the gospel and to support each other along the way.

After the first year of being part of an Advance group, each group member is encouraged – whilst remaining part of their original group – to start their own new Advance group of up to 12 others who want to grow in passion and ability to share the gospel.

Advance has grown from the first group in Manchester, England, into a global movement of thousands of groups meeting each month around the world. They are all committed to fanning into flame a passion for the gospel, a heart for the lost, and a commitment to evangelism through practical and spiritual support. Advance seeks to grow the number of Christians who will unashamedly and confidently share the gospel in any and every opportunity that God provides each day.

FIVE PRINCIPLES OF THE MOVEMENT

.....

1. REGULAR MEETING

Monthly meetings should be made a diary priority by group members. It is essential that when people join a group, they commit to the meetings. Groups should be encouraged to treat these sessions as sacred – members should do everything they can to avoid other engagements that might draw them away once the date is agreed. A deep commitment to being prepared for the work God has called us to is a foundational element of the Advance group journey.

2. SHARPENING

Each monthly session gives significant time to studying the Bible for a deeper knowledge of the gospel. Sessions also include opportunities for healthy critique of one another's understanding and application of evangelism and the gospel, primarily through times of discussion.

3. ACCOUNTABILITY

Honest self-evaluation through feedback questionnaires and open sharing within group sessions is designed to ensure that Advance group members live accountable and holy lives as we attempt to be faithful to living and sharing the gospel. Vulnerability and honesty in your group can take time to develop but should be encouraged and led by the example of the group leader.

4. COMMUNICATION

Keeping each other up to date with gospel opportunities, prayer requests and stories of salvation via email and/or group text

messaging ensures groups support each other as a community. Staying connected between sessions also creates a more familial dynamic in the group.

5. MULTIPLICATION

Advance members should be committed to exploring the idea of multiplication, with a view to group members taking on their own group (while continuing in their original group) after their first year. The Advance resources (like this one) should make this process as simple as possible.

IS IT FOR ME?

.....

The Bible tells us that the role of the evangelist is a specific gift from God for the building of his church (Ephesians 4:11–12). The evangelist will be fruitful in drawing people to Christ as they share the gospel, but they will also be fruitful in equipping and stirring the whole church to be faithful witnesses of the gospel.

However, Advance groups are not only for those who consider themselves gifted, or called to, the specific role (sometimes called the 'office') of the evangelist – they are for anyone who wants to grow in their understanding of the gospel and their ability to share it. The great commission of Jesus to go into the world and make disciples is for all believers. Therefore evangelism is the business of every Christian. Whether we are 'gifted' evangelists or not, we are all called to 'do the work of the evangelist' in revealing Christ to the world in our words and our actions (2 Timothy 4:1–5).

We use the word 'evangelist' in the Advance Group Guide to refer to anyone engaging in evangelism, not just those who recognise a specific gift or call to be an evangelist.

FAITH

Do you have faith that the gospel has lost none of its power, and is the only way by which a person can know true life and salvation?

CLARITY

Do you want to share the gospel with clarity whenever you have an opportunity?

INVITATION

Do you long to extend an invitation to the hope of the gospel, and see people move into eternal relationship with Jesus?

If your answer to those questions is 'yes', then Advance is for you. Start by gathering a small group of others who also say 'yes' to these questions, and use this Advance Group Mentoring Guide to begin the journey together.

YEAR ONE

SESSION ONE

WELCOME TO ADVANCE

Use your first group meeting as an opportunity to get to know one another and establish the framework for what the group will be. Along with this introduction, you will begin a dialogue about what evangelism is and explore the five characteristics needed to do the work of an evangelist.

SESSION IN A SENTENCE

Through the first twelve sessions of Advance, we will grow together in five evangelistic characteristics, encouraging and equipping each other as we rely on God's empowerment for the task.

SESSION BACKGROUND

A good place to welcome people to the Advance journey and to start a discussion about evangelism is to remember that the call to evangelism is *personal*. Look at how Jesus calls Andrew and Peter to follow him in Mark 1:16–18. He calls to the young fishermen from the shore and asks them to lay down their nets (their trade) and follow him, for he will teach them how to fish for people. Does God call you using those exact same words today? Unless you share the same career path as those two brothers, it is unlikely. Jesus called out to Andrew and Peter personally, using the fishing metaphor as a connection point.

God calls each one of us personally to his mission, by connecting our passions to opportunities to make sense of who God is. Whether you're a musician, artist, scientist, nurse, business owner... Whatever your vocation or gifting, God can use it to create opportunities for you to proclaim his good news.

The goal of evangelism is to connect people to God's good news. More fully though, the message of evangelism is a call to put our faith in Jesus Christ – to trust and be obedient to him, that we would turn from our rejection of God to an acceptance of his lordship. When we recognise that we are created for him, we understand what worship is, and experience the transforming power of the Holy Spirit in our lives. We find wholeness when we turn our lives into living expressions of worship through obedience, sacrifice, faith and love (Galatians 5:13–26).

In Exodus 8:1, God instructs Moses to go to Pharaoh with the message, 'Let my people go...' Today, God's desire is to set captives free from sin. Like Moses, we are asked to go into the world and declare a message of freedom: there is no need to be enslaved any longer, for God has made it possible for us to live in freedom through Jesus and by the power of his Spirit (Romans 8:2). The purpose of evangelism is as it was for Moses and the people of Israel – worship.

- ‘Let my people go, so that they may worship me.’

• EXODUS 8:1

We are to be worshippers who witness so that others may come to worship and witness.

SESSION GUIDE

.....

CATCH UP (20–30 MINS)

Take time to introduce everyone in the group and begin getting to know one another. You could use an ice-breaker activity, or just go round the group and ask people to share some basic information about themselves. After this, present in your own style or read through the Introduction section on page 9 as a way of explaining what the group will be and how it will run in the coming months.

PRAYER

Take some time to commit your whole Advance journey to the Lord, as well as any specific prayer needs that may have arisen during the catch up time.

TEACHING (20–30 MINS)

Work through the following teaching material in your own way, either by reading it word for word, or by reworking it into your own presentation.

- ‘However, I consider my life worth nothing to me; my only aim is to finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me – the task of testifying to the good news of God’s grace.’

• ACTS 20: 24

Put simply, ‘to evangelise’ means to ‘proclaim good news’. The good news is the message of Jesus: that sinful, or rebellious, humanity has been reconciled to God through the saving work of Jesus Christ. We can know eternal life today and forever, and enjoy restored relationship with God because Jesus took on himself the death we deserved.

Look at these two definitions of evangelism:

- ‘The **proclamation** of the **historical, biblical Christ** as **Saviour and Lord**, with a view to **persuading** people to come to him **personally** and so be **reconciled** to God.’

• THE LAUSANNE COVENANT

- ‘Evangelism is the **Holy Spirit-empowered** proclamation of the **Good News of Jesus Christ** to a **sinful** world in the hope that they **might** accept the forgiveness of God and **know his Lordship, love** and **life today and forevermore**’

Discuss: What can we learn about the task of evangelism from these short summaries (some words highlighted for specific discussion)?

Evangelism requires a verbal message, a presentation of the risen Jesus, and an invitation for the listener to receive and accept the good news. But while words are undoubtedly essential to evangelism, we must endeavour to go beyond verbal communication alone.

Evangelism is a spiritual activity, effective only when God moves in power. If evangelism was just about changing people’s minds, we could simply rely on persuasion. But evangelism is about salvation: through our sharing the message, the Spirit of God convicts, gives faith, and begins transformation of hearts. Evangelism without the power of the Spirit is merely marketing.

- ‘Unless there is a demonstration of the
- power of the Spirit, the proclamation
- of the gospel will be in vain. It will not
- be evangelism.’

• DAVID WATSON

Conversely, and to paraphrase the evangelist Leonard Ravenhill, we can have confidence that any method of evangelism can work if God is at work in it.

The purpose of evangelism is to form disciples – worshippers who worship in spirit and in truth (John 4:23). Therefore, evangelists must be authentic worshippers themselves. It’s been said that worship and evangelism are two sides of the same coin, and it’s true that our witness to the world is an act of worship – an act of obedience and devotion to our king.

These Advance group sessions will help you to mature as an authentic worshipper and see you grow in five core characteristics of an evangelist.

BIBLE-TEACHING EVANGELISTS

We must know the message we proclaim as deeply as possible. To do this we must be committed to the reading and study of God’s Word, so that our proclamation is not based on our own ideas and assumptions about the gospel, but on what the Word of God teaches.

PRAYERFUL EVANGELISTS

We are to submit to the power of the Holy Spirit for the task of evangelism, for it is not our power but the power of God which brings salvation. We should commit to living prayerfully, asking God to provide opportunities to share our faith and see lives transformed as a result.

ACCOUNTABLE EVANGELISTS

Holiness is at the heart of the gospel. Sharing the transforming power of the gospel in an authentic way means

living accountable lives, where our life ‘on-stage’ matches our life ‘off-stage’. Cheering each other on in success and standing with one another in failure is crucial as we seek to grow as holy people sharing a holy message.

COMMITTED EVANGELISTS

Intentionality is key to evangelism. We must be aware of – and seize – everyday opportunities to share God’s love, not simply telling the Jesus story, but inviting those who hear it into the new life it offers and helping them to start on a journey of discipleship.

INSPIRATIONAL EVANGELISTS

As we share the gospel message with a world who needs it, we must also stir the church to do the same. Evangelism is the business of every Christian, and so encouraging and stirring the church to the task must also be a commitment of any evangelist.

Discuss: Consider these five core characteristics. Where do you identify your own strengths and weaknesses in each area?

DISCUSSION (15 MINS)

Explore the following questions and/or the discussion quotation:

- What is our role in evangelism and what is God’s role in evangelism?
- How do we ensure we are authentic evangelists *and* authentic worshippers?
- How do you hope to grow in the coming months through this Advance group?

- 'If sinners will be damned, at least let
- them leap to hell over our bodies. And
- if they will perish, let them perish with
- our arms about their knees, imploring
- them to stay. If hell must be filled, at
- least let it be filled in the teeth of our
- exertions, and let not one go there
- unwarned and unprayed for.'

• CHARLES SPURGEON

APPLICATION (5 MINS)

Come up with your own biblically-sound definition of evangelism (preferably with references to scripture) and send it to the group (see **Messages and Dates** below). The goal here is not a word-perfect definition, but to express how you now understand evangelism based on this session and some further thought and reflection. If there is time in the next session you could look at a couple of these definitions in more detail together.

PRAYER

Give thanks to God for his amazing gospel. Thank him that he chooses to make you part of his saving work in the world. Pray he would empower you to be his messengers in word and action, as you worship him in spirit and truth. Ask him to help you to grow in the five characteristics of an evangelist as you move forward and grow together in this Advance group.

ACCOUNTABILITY (15 MINS)

Look through the accountability forms together, fill them out and share together in pairs or smaller groups. Finish by praying for one another.

MESSAGES AND DATES (10 MINS)

Close this session by asking everyone to download and log into a messenger system that works for everyone in the group. WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger are both free and work well. Create a group that you will use to communicate between sessions, with updates, prayer requests, testimonies and so on.

Finally, set the dates for as many of the upcoming sessions as you can. Six months in advance is ideal so that everyone can commit to the dates early and make them a diary priority.

SESSION TWO

THE IDENTITY OF THE EVANGELIST

In this session, you will explore the identity of an evangelist as it relates to the identity of God himself and his gospel story.

SESSION IN A SENTENCE

The identity of an evangelist is rooted in the identity of God the Father: we are his messenger children.

SESSION BACKGROUND

At the peak of Billy Graham’s ministry, Christian young people were inspired to follow his example and become preachers of the good news. Over the last twenty years there has been a perceptible shift in the aspirations of Christian young people. Where once the role of an evangelist was seen as the pinnacle of Christian service, the more common aspirations for Christian young people today are often to become a worship leader, youth worker or church pastor.

The church has certainly benefited from talented musicians, film-makers and other creatives using their gifts to facilitate others in personal and corporate worship, and God has been celebrated and glorified through the efforts of these faithful people. However, before somebody can become a true worshipper – a worshipper in spirit and truth (John 4:23) – they must have heard and responded to the gospel (Romans 10:14–17).

Similarly, the role of pastor or teacher is essential to discipleship and is not to be sidelined. But the pastor will have no congregation to look after if the seats become empty due to a lack of missional engagement and evangelism in the world.

Bringing people to a place of true worship requires us to explain the gospel to them, and with that in mind none of us should shirk our responsibility to share the good news with the world, by witnessing to our faith in Christ to all people in the power of the Spirit (Acts 1:8). The Bible teaches that *all* believers are called to *do the work of an evangelist* (Matthew 28:19; 2 Timothy 4:5), yet there are those who are specifically called to *be* evangelists (Ephesians 4:11). For these people especially, proclaiming the gospel isn’t simply day-to-day witness, but a primary focus of their lives.

SESSION GUIDE

.....

CATCH UP (20–30 MINS)

Take time to catch up with one another – sharing stories, encouragements, feedback on opportunities and anything else that would encourage the group. Ask the group to share their biblical definitions of evangelism (Session One – Application) and discuss them together for a few minutes as a recap from the last session. For smaller groups this can be done as a whole group exercise, for larger groups you may want to split into smaller groups for discussion. It may also be worth covering the basics of how the group works for anyone who missed the first session.

PRAYER

Commit the time to the Lord and pray over any situations, positive or challenging, arising from the catch up time.

TEACHING (20–30 MINS)

Work through the following teaching material in your own way, either by reading it word for word or by reworking it into your own presentation.

- ‘In the presence of God and of Christ
- Jesus, who will judge the living and
- the dead, and in view of his appearing
- and his kingdom, I give you this
- charge: Preach the word; be prepared
- in season and out of season; correct,
- rebuke and encourage—with great
- patience and careful instruction.
- For the time will come when people
- will not put up with sound doctrine.
- Instead, to suit their own desires,
- they will gather around them a great
- number of teachers to say what their
- itching ears want to hear. They will
- turn their ears away from the truth
- and turn aside to myths. But you, keep
- your head in all situations, endure
- hardship, do the work of an evangelist,
- discharge all the duties of your
- ministry.’
-
- 2 TIMOTHY 4:1-5

What does it mean to be *called* to be an evangelist? Aren't all believers called to share the good news of Jesus Christ with the world? Jesus' great commission in Matthew 28 appears to be a blanket call to *all* of his followers to go into the world and make disciples. But then we come across a short passage in Ephesians 4 (vv. 11–12) that highlights the specific role of the evangelist alongside that of pastor, teacher, prophet and apostle, each of which is to be used to build the body of Christ. We also encounter a man named Philip in Acts who is given the specific title of evangelist (Acts 21:8). What are we to make of the calling of the evangelist? Is it for everyone or for a specific few?

You may know the words of 2 Corinthians 5:17, where Paul talks about becoming a new creation through Christ. You might have even used this verse when you have shared the gospel previously. However, we don't often go on to quote the rest of the passage:

- ‘Therefore, if anyone is in Christ,
- the new creation has come: The old
- has gone, the new is here! All this
- is from God, who reconciled us to
- himself through Christ and gave us the
- ministry of reconciliation: that God
- was reconciling the world to himself
- in Christ, not counting people's sins
- against them. And he has committed to
- us the message of reconciliation. 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 5:17-20

Discuss: How does this Bible passage relate to the definitions of evangelism that were shared at the start of today's session?

God is in the business of reconciling creation back to himself and wants us – his reconciled people – to be ambassadors for his transformational message. This is not just for ‘professional’ evangelists, this is a call for all believers. However, this ambassadorship can look very different in practice from individual to individual.

Think about it like this: in a football (soccer) team, every player is pursuing the aim of winning the match. However, the strikers are those who are specifically tasked with scoring goals. This doesn't mean that other players can't and won't score from time to time, but the primary function of the striker in the team is to score.

Another illustration that might help would be to think of a wedding day. Any guest with a smart phone could take a great picture to capture memories of this special day, and some of these photos may well even make it into the couple's official photo album. And yet, the bride and groom will also bring in a professional to capture the day, using their skill, equipment, and singular focus on the day to capture some great images.

As the church we are all pursuing the restoration of God's perfect kingdom. We all have a role to play in witness and evangelism. But there are some who are specifically called to prioritise evangelism, most likely at the cost of other pursuits. These are the *evangelists*, like Philip whom we read about in Acts 21:8.

If some of the following statements ring true with you, then the calling of the evangelist could be upon your life:

- You long to see the lost saved.
- You are compelled to proclaim the gospel 'in season and out of season'.
- You persevere in the task no matter what hardships come upon you.
- You will not compromise the integrity of the message you share, no matter what the itching ears of your audience may want you to say.
- You are utterly single-minded in reaching the lost with the powerful, transformational, saving message of the gospel.
- You have had prophetic words spoken over you about being an evangelist.
- You are a clear communicator.
- You find yourself praying for the lost regularly.
- You are willing to go wherever the gospel takes you.
- You desire to help others share their faith.

Discuss: Spend some time talking through these statements and which of them ring true for you. If there is an evangelist in your group, ask them to share how they came to the realisation of their gifting and role.

The Bible tells us that God desires for no-one to perish (2 Peter 3:9). The

evangelist is compelled to go into the world having the same heart as the Father. We do not share the gospel out of duty or fear, we share it because our hearts are in line with our heavenly Father's. The evangelist's identity is not found in their role, but in their new identity as a child of God, having become his heirs (John 1:12).

Regardless of gifting or calling, no-one has the power to save themselves or anyone else. We can only be the messengers – for it is God alone who saves. He invites us to share in his heart for the lost as we grow to know him more fully as our loving heavenly Father and reveal his saving power to the world.

• 'Let us celebrate our smallness and walk in the power of the Spirit, because evangelism is rooted in the supernatural power of God! Let us keep learning the truth of the gospel and its profound relevance to everyone we meet, because evangelism is rooted in God's truth! Let us remember that love is the source and the means of reaching others – that nothing can pry open closed or resistant minds and hearts to the gospel more than expressing the love and compassion of Jesus, because evangelism is rooted in Christ's love!'

• REBECCA MANLEY PIPPERT

DISCUSSION (20 MINS)

1. Is there a difference between personal witness and evangelism?
2. If all are expected to *do the work* of an evangelist, why are there those who are called to be evangelists?
3. Evangelist or not, how do we develop the Father's heart for the lost for ourselves?
4. How could you help encourage those who think evangelism is only for the 'professionals' to become 'ministers of reconciliation' themselves?

APPLICATION (5 MINS)

We do not share the gospel simply because we are evangelists any more than those who are not called as evangelists are exempt from sharing it. All believers should share the gospel as a natural response to who God is and what he has done in their lives. As we are transformed by the Father's love, so we long for others to know that same transforming love for themselves.

Over the next month, work through the Gospel of Mark in your daily devotional time and pay attention to one of Mark's main themes – that Jesus is the Son of God, a servant who has come to do the will of the Father. As you read and re-read the Gospel with this perspective, ask God to affirm your true identity – not rooted in your gifting or ministry calling, but in who he is and what he has done.

PRAYER

Give thanks to God, our heavenly Father, that he desires for no-one to perish and has made the way by which all can be saved through trust in Jesus Christ. Spend some time praying for each other – that God will bring more clarity to your calling as an evangelist, that he might provide more opportunities to share the gospel, and that you would have more boldness as you do so.

ACCOUNTABILITY (15 MINS)

In pairs or small groups, ask each other if you consider yourself to be an evangelist (someone who is called to do the work of the evangelist). Provide space to reflect on the call of God in your life, and what being faithful to that calling means for you.

To finish, complete accountability forms, share in pairs or smaller groups and pray for one another.

SESSION THREE

THE MESSAGE OF THE EVANGELIST

In this session we explore the message of the gospel itself. What is the gospel? Do we have a sufficient understanding of the message we preach to communicate it clearly?

SESSION IN A SENTENCE

The message of evangelism is Jesus Christ: Christ come, Christ crucified, Christ risen and Christ returning.

SESSION BACKGROUND

St Augustine famously declared, 'You have made us for yourself O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.'

The gospel moves people from despair, darkness, brokenness and hopelessness, into joy, light, love and hope. The gospel moves restless hearts to fulfilment in their creator. Tragically, though, it seems that many followers of Jesus have lost confidence in the power of the gospel today. There are many reasons why believers don't share the gospel with others: fear, feelings of inadequacy, and hoping someone else will do it, all play a part. These reasons all find their root in the same place – a lack of understanding about what the gospel actually is, and a lack of trust in its power.

In Romans 1, Paul boldly declares, 'I'm not ashamed of the gospel,' and then immediately goes on to qualify why this is so: 'because it is the power of God to bring salvation to everyone who believes' (Romans 1:16). Understanding that the gospel is the power of God to bring salvation is to understand something of who God is, what he has done, and what that means for the world. It's all wrapped up in the reality of who Jesus Christ is. This is not detached or abstract

philosophy with no significance beyond the lecture hall or debate room. For one thing, understanding the gospel helps us to approach foundational questions about our existence and the identity of the God who created us. Questions such as:

Who Am I?

Everyone asks this question in some way. What is the meaning of life? Is there purpose? What is my identity? The gospel answer is that you are a child of God, created and loved by him. In many contexts around the world today, the primary concern of a person is no longer, 'What will happen when I die?' but, 'Who am I while I am alive?'

Who Is God?

There are many religions in the world. Even if God exists, how can we possibly know who he is and that we are worshipping the right one? God has made himself known through creation, through the Bible, through the experiences of Christians all over the world, and through the person of Jesus Christ. He is the creator and sustainer of life, the king of the universe, a perfect and loving heavenly Father who longs to bring a broken and rebellious humanity back into relationship with himself.

Who Is Jesus Christ?

Jesus is the most compelling figure in all of human history. Few historical scholars doubt that Jesus existed, but who was he? A wise teacher? A con man? A mad man? Actually, Jesus is who he says he is: the saviour of the world who, through his life, death and resurrection, has made it possible for a person to become a child of God and know the eternal king eternally.

While these types of question can serve as a starting point for a conversation about the gospel, they don't necessarily lead us to a fully sufficient understanding of what the gospel means. Rather, they

are connection points on which we can begin to build a relationship. We must dig deeply into scripture to ensure that through these questions we can point to the full and powerful gospel of Jesus Christ.

SESSION GUIDE

.....

CATCH UP (15–25 MINS)

Take time to catch up with one another, sharing stories, encouragements, feedback on opportunities and anything else that would encourage the group. Ask the group to share about their journey through the Gospel of Mark over the last month (Session Two – Application). Use this time to explore and affirm our true identity as children of God because of the saving work of God’s eternal Son, rather than a ministry calling. The response to our identity is to become ministers of reconciliation on behalf of the family, seeking out the lost so that they too may know that they can come home.

PRAYER

Commit the time to the Lord and pray over any situations, positive or challenging, arising from the catch up time.

TEACHING (25–35 MINS)

Work through the following teaching material in your own way, either by reading it word for word, or by reworking it into your own presentation.

- ‘And so it was with me, brothers and sisters. When I came to you, I did not come with eloquence or human wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.’

1 CORINTHIANS 2:1-2

Paul shows his commitment to the truth and power of the Jesus story by declaring, ‘I decided while I was with you to know nothing but Jesus Christ and him crucified.’ This is the heart of the gospel: that God himself stepped into the mess of our world in the person of Jesus Christ, lived a perfect life, died upon a cross to take the death we deserved, and rose again on the third day, breaking the curse of death once and for all. Salvation and true life are found through faith in him alone. We share this truth not merely to bring about changed *minds*, but to bring about new life – a transformation that can only be achieved by faith in Jesus Christ.

This session will explore what the gospel is. Use the following sections (found at the back of this guide) to spark discussion about what we believe the gospel to be.

GOSPEL DOCTRINE (PAGE 57)

The systematic layout of the gospel.

GOSPEL NARRATIVE (PAGE 58)

Broadly speaking, the same gospel is presented here as in the more systematic approach, but with more emphasis on a narrative explanation that reads more like a story.

YOUTH TALK AND GOSPEL METHOD (PAGES 59)

There are various explanations of the gospel in the gospel methods listed, each with its own focus on a particular part of the gospel narrative and a way of presenting it for someone to hear it with clarity.

Ensuring we are proclaiming the truth of the gospel is imperative. Remember: we can’t save anyone, the gospel is the power of God to bring salvation (Romans 1:16). If our gospel messages are watered-down, one-dimensional attempts to appeal to the heart of the listener, we might see lots of

APPLICATION (5 MINS)

Encourage every member of the group to start or continue a daily reading plan using the YouVersion phone app or other Bible reading notes. Our engagement with scripture is essential if we are to grow as followers of Jesus and understand the gospel deeply so that we can share it simply.

Using the material about the gospel in this booklet and your Bible, produce a concise explanation (3–5 points) of the gospel with supporting Bible verses that you can share with the group at the next session. This task is not a test, it is a devotional activity – a way for you personally to make sense of the truth of the gospel. The Gospel Doctrine on page 57 might be helpful.

not just about a Bible reading target, it's about the joy of knowing God and his gospel more fully day by day.

To finish, complete accountability forms, share in pairs or smaller groups and pray for one another.

DON'T FORGET...

Check out the seven-day Advance devotional 'Guardians of the Gospel' on YouVersion.



PRAYER

'Lord Jesus, thank you that you came and lived a perfect life, that you took our place upon the cross, and that through your resurrection we can share in new life. Help us to trust in you and to grow in your love. Help us to understand your Word more fully, to know your gospel more deeply and to be able to share it simply and truthfully with those around us. Thank you for the opportunities you give us, and please equip us to be faithful to those opportunities as we spend time in your Word and in your presence.'

ACCOUNTABILITY (15 MINS)

Be honest with one another about your Bible reading habits. In small groups or pairs, discuss your daily reading habits – good or bad – and some of the things you love about reading God's Word and some of what you find difficult. Think carefully about what a new season of Bible engagement could look like for you and set a target – stretch yourself a bit, but don't feel the need to bite off more than you can chew and set yourself up for failure. Ask your accountability group to check in with you next month to see how you've been getting on. Remember, it's

SESSION FOUR

THE TASK OF THE EVANGELIST

What are the differences between preaching and proclaiming? This session is an opportunity to explore these ideas biblically and practically, encouraging each other to develop and sharpen verbalisation skills – whether for interpersonal conversation or preaching – in complete submission to the Holy Spirit’s power.

SESSION IN A SENTENCE

The task of the evangelist is to verbalise the gospel as revealed through God’s Holy Word by the power of the Spirit.

SESSION BACKGROUND

According to tradition, St Francis of Assisi once said:

- ‘Preach the gospel at all times, and if necessary use words.’

This is a popular quotation for illustrating the importance of living a life marked by the gospel. But there are two problems with it. Firstly, there’s no real evidence that St Francis said it at all – at least he never wrote it down. Secondly, and more importantly, it simply doesn’t hold up as a statement. While it’s right that our lives should demonstrate the good news about God’s kingdom in the same way as our words, preaching the gospel is by very definition a word-based process. The sentence could be reframed more helpfully as:

- ‘Preach the gospel at all times, and, because it is necessary, use words.’

The words ‘preach’ and ‘proclaim’ have everything to do with words – they are

verbal declarations. You may live a perfect ‘gospel’ life, but if you never articulate the hope you have in Jesus then how will the world know the reason for your life being lived as it is?

- ‘To remain silent and let others interpret our actions is wrong; God himself did not do this. The pivotal points of God’s redemptive action in history are accompanied with verbal revelation.’

• WILL METZGER

Preaching was crucial to the spread of the gospel as recorded in the New Testament (Acts 2:14), yet there are some today who believe that preaching is old-fashioned and no longer the best way to communicate the gospel to the world. We surely want to be creative in our preaching and engaging in our communication (perhaps exploring other avenues of communication, such as film-making, or songwriting), but the Bible compels evangelists to hold onto preaching that helps listeners to both understand the message and have an opportunity to respond to an invitation to Christ’s lordship as a central element of the task of sharing the gospel (1 Corinthians 1:21; 2 Timothy 4:1–2; Mark 1:17; Luke 9:23).

Not all believers are called to be *preaching* evangelists. For most believers, evangelism and personal witness will look like interpersonal conversations, and this will be the primary way in which the gospel is verbalised or ‘proclaimed’ to others.

Either way, we must always remember that as essential as words are to evangelism, they alone will not do. Words spoken from an unsubmitted life will ring hollow and hypocritical, and words separate from the power of God’s Spirit will lack the power of God to bring salvation to all who believe (Romans 1:16).

With this in mind, evangelism should involve three things:

Proclamation: Through which we explain who Jesus is.

Demonstration: Through which we live out who Jesus is.

Invitation: Through which we offer the opportunity to trust in who Jesus is.

SESSION GUIDE

.....

CATCH UP (10–20 MINS)

Take time to catch up with one another, sharing stories, encouragements, feedback on opportunities and anything else that would encourage the group. Ask one or two volunteers to share their gospel presentation (Session Three - Application) and offer feedback. Don't forget to be positive!

PRAYER

Commit the time to the Lord and pray over any situations, positive or challenging, highlighted in the catch up time.

TEACHING (20–30 MINS)

Work through the following teaching material in your own way, either by reading it word for word, or by reworking it into your own presentation.

- 'If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that
- God raised him from the dead, you will
- be saved... for, "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 anyone preach unless they

- are sent? As it is written: "How beautiful
- are the feet of those who bring good
- news!"
-
-
-
-
-
- ROMANS 10:9, 13-15

There's a lot of talk about proclamation in the Bible: there are at least 33 different Greek words that we usually translate as 'preaching' or 'proclaiming'. In this passage from Romans, we find Paul using the word 'preach' in reference to sharing the good news. For Paul, preaching is vitally important, and he tells Timothy to keep preaching a priority in his ministry (2 Timothy 4:1-2). We see on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2) an example of how God chooses to use preaching to bring people to faith in him – thousands were saved not merely by encountering supernatural signs and wonders (tongues of fire, speaking in other languages), but through hearing Peter's Spirit-filled proclamation.

The Greek word from which we get 'evangelism' essentially means to *proclaim the good news* – an inherently verbal activity. But preaching can be perceived as a little old-fashioned in today's culture, with a preference for 'friendship' or 'personal' evangelism methods where relationship-based conversation is the focus. Some throw out the need for a verbal dynamic almost entirely and prefer to witness in actions only, with missional activity based around social action projects as the method through which God's love is revealed. And yet, as Paul asks in Romans, if believers never offer any explanation for the source of our loving action into the world, or of the hope that we have, how will anyone ever come to know the truth about Jesus and willingly trust him as Lord?

Discuss: If we know that proclamation is important to the task of being an evangelist, how do we ensure that the message of the gospel is communicated clearly enough for listeners to understand it and have an opportunity to meaningfully respond to what they have heard? What part does preaching play?

The best practice for our evangelism is not to be found in an 'either/or' from the options above, but in recognising the value of a diverse approach that reflects our own diversity. Using our words is essential though.

Whether we're engaging in public communication (like preaching) or personal communication (like conversation) there are always ways we can develop the clarity of our message. Knowing our audience and their context is important as it helps us to think carefully about any illustrations or connection points that may help them engage with and understand what we share. For example, if we're preaching the gospel to a group of teenagers, we may use different words and cultural connection points than when having a one-to-one conversation with a pensioner. The message of the gospel itself doesn't change, but the way we articulate it, the illustrations we use, and the cultural references we employ can be tailored for the people in front of us. In short, *what* we preach does not change, but *how* we preach does.

This is why preparing ourselves to share the gospel is an important part of our Christian walk. If we only rely on the same old gospel talk every time we get up to preach we are likely to become stale and lazy preachers. If we always rely on the same method of gospel explanation, we are unlikely to engage different kinds of people in conversations that help them discover Jesus. First and foremost, we should approach our preparation prayerfully, asking God to speak through us by his Spirit and give us the words to say. We should also be prepared to communicate the gospel in different ways that attempt to take into consideration the people we might come into contact with.

Discuss: Look at the following characteristics for verbalising the gospel and think of how you might apply them to your own evangelistic opportunities. How might this preparation be a worshipful act?

We should proclaim:

- **Clearly:** Clarity is the ultimate aim of good communication. To explain clearly, we should have a good understanding of the gospel itself, knowing it deeply enough that we can present it accurately with simplicity.
- **Spiritually:** For dead hearts to be revived by the message of the gospel the Spirit of God must be at work – so our preaching must be in submission to the Spirit's power for the task.
- **Lovingly:** We are not winning people to our own ideas and wisdom, but to the singular reality of Jesus Christ. We should preach with humility, giving respect to the one we share about (God), and with compassion for those we share with (his children).
- **Boldly:** Humility doesn't negate boldness as we offer the truth of the gospel. We can speak with conviction and confidence in the truth of our message whilst still being kind, gentle and humble.
- **Uniquely:** Christ is to be presented as unique before all others, and remain the central focus of our gospel conversations.
- **Personally:** We can demonstrate the truth of the gospel by sharing about its impact in our own lives, building bridges to the listener and their circumstances.

Whether we are speaking in a conversation or preaching from a platform, we should bear each of these points in mind. However, one characteristic that is unique to a conversational opportunity is listening. We should always be ready to listen well to those we speak with. Don't simply wait for your turn to speak, ask good questions in response to what you hear, be inquisitive not dismissive, and don't feel like you need to offer answers to every question you are asked or refute every point you disagree with. Conversations are journeys, and often unfamiliar ones. As with most unfamiliar journeys, we need a map to help us find our way. Really listening to your conversation partner will provide that map and in time

the destination may become clearer for those you speak with (See the sessions on *Personal Evangelism* and *Listening Evangelism* in Year Three for more on this).

As helpful as these characteristics may be for our proclamation, it is important to remember that no amount of skilful articulation will actually bring someone into the kingdom of God, only God himself can do that. Our communication must make space for the Holy Spirit to move in power. In the last session, we looked at Paul's commitment to know and preach the Jesus story in 1 Corinthians 2. In the very next verses, Paul goes on to share his commitment to proclaiming the Jesus story in the power of the Spirit so that new faith might rest on God rather than human reason:

- 'My message and my preaching were
- not with wise and persuasive words,
- but with a demonstration of the Spirit's
- power, so that your faith might not rest
- on human wisdom, but on God's power.'

• 1 CORINTHIANS 2:4-5

We long to worship God in spirit and truth (John 4:23) and our evangelism should be no different. We declare his truth in the power of the Spirit as worshippers giving testimony to the one we worship so that others may come to worship him.

DISCUSSION (20 MINS)

1. Is preaching still relevant today?
2. What are your strengths and weaknesses as a communicator?
3. How do you prepare for a gospel presentation compared to a gospel conversation? Do you approach the content differently?
4. What role does listening play in your proclamation?

- 'The difference between good
- preaching and great preaching lies
- mainly in the work of the Holy Spirit...

- We should do the work it takes to make
- our communication good and leave it up
- to God how and how often he makes it
- great for the listener.'

• TIM KELLER

APPLICATION (5 MINS)

Find a suitable YouTube clip of a gospel talk that you could critique, both in terms of style and content. Ask the group to watch the clip between sessions, make notes, and be ready to discuss next time, perhaps using the six tips from this session as a framework for evaluating some of the strengths and/or weaknesses of the gospel presentation.

PRAYER

Pray together for the Spirit of God to work through your humble offering of communication. Give thanks that God has chosen to make you a mouthpiece for his message and ask him to help you to live the gospel authentically so that the words from your mouths are not detached from the state of your hearts. Pray for those who will hear the message – that God would prepare their hearts and move them to a place of revelation from which they can choose to trust in him.

ACCOUNTABILITY (15 MINS)

In pairs, spend some time discussing your own attitude to communication in evangelism. Have you neglected good preparation for public or personal evangelistic opportunities? Have you avoided verbalising the gospel in favour of an action-only approach? Be honest with each other about where you might need to reset a little in the area of verbalising the good news and prayerfully commit to this before the Lord.

Complete accountability forms, share in pairs or smaller groups and pray for one another.

SESSION FIVE

THE POWER OF THE EVANGELIST

We long to see spiritually-dead hearts revived. This session explores what it means to be spiritually-empowered through prayer, leading us to an authentic revival in our own hearts that in turn we can offer to the world.

SESSION IN A SENTENCE

Prayer is a bedrock of evangelism, and it puts the power where the power belongs – not in human effort but in the hands of God.

SESSION BACKGROUND

The presbyterian minister and missionary Arthur Tappan Pierson made this striking assertion: 'There has never been a spiritual awakening in any country or locality that did not begin in united prayer.'

We'd be hard-pressed to find an example that contradicts his statement. It describes God's mandate to his people throughout scripture and the promise of what will follow. During Solomon's reign, God speaks to the rebellious Israelites and offers them hope in the face of their chaotic disobedience and the inevitable disastrous consequences that follow:

- '...if my people, who are called by
- my name, will humble themselves and
- pray and seek my face and turn from
- their wicked ways, then I will hear from
- heaven, and I will forgive their sin and
- will heal their land.'

• 2 CHRONICLES 7:14

In the same way, the gospel of Jesus is an opportunity to humbly relinquish lordship over our own lives, submit to Christ, confess that he is Lord and allow him to bring us healing and new life. We move from rebellion (our sin), to revelation (of God's truth), to repentance (faith in God), to revival (transformation that offers transformation to others).

The meaning of the word 'turn' used in 2 Chronicles is the same as the word we translate in the New Testament as 'repent'. Jesus began his preaching ministry with a call to do exactly that (Mark 1:15). The Israelites' problem in 2 Chronicles is the same as our own today – we too frequently look to other gods (including ourselves) in an attempt to command our own destiny. This disobedience can only lead to death, brokenness and chaos. God has been calling us to turn back to him from the moment we turned away. The gospel reveals that despite our rebellion, hope is found in the grace of God, and our humble response to him.

Pleading with a judge usually involves a plea of innocence in the hope of being exonerated, but here we are told to bow before the eternal judge and admit our guilt. Only then can we be pardoned. Justice demands punishment of our guilt in light of the appalling reality of our rebellion against a holy king, but God instead extends pardon to us via the perfect justice of the cross. Instead of death, we are offered healing, restoration and life. God revives the humble.

Another example of the power of prayer and unity (with God and with one another) for revival is found in the story of Job. The turning point for Job is not when he gets a heavy perspective check from God, but when he obediently prays for the friends who had been part of the problem of distorting his perspective in the first place. At this point in the story, Job

lifts his eyes from his own circumstances, graciously prays for others (who have wronged him) and is restored (Job 42:10).

Revival starts with one person choosing obedience to their heavenly Father and declaring their allegiance to the kingdom of peace. It takes just one person to declare that Jesus is Lord in word and action, relying on the Holy Spirit to empower them to be born again. By the grace of God, revival starts with us – and by that same grace, revival can spring up wherever a once-rebellious people unite in humility to call upon the power of God to heal the land.

SESSION GUIDE

.....

CATCH UP (15–25 MINS)

Take time to catch up with one another, sharing stories, encouragements, feedback on opportunities and anything else that would encourage the group. Use this time to talk about the gospel talk clip exam (Session Four – Application). What did people find helpful or unhelpful? What have we learned from the example that will help us to grow as proclaimers of the good news?

PRAYER

Commit the time to the Lord and pray over any situations, positive or challenging, highlighted in the catch up time.

TEACHING (20–30 MINS)

Work through the following teaching material in your own way, either by reading it word for word, or by reworking it into your own presentation.

- ‘I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people – for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Saviour, who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.’

1 TIMOTHY 2:1-4

In his first letter to Timothy, Paul gives his protégé some clear instructions for the worshipping life of the church in Ephesus. Paul tells him to give priority to prayers and intercession for all people, because it pleases God. It pleases God because he wants all people to know the peace of his kingdom. Prayer is the way by which we call upon God to do what *only* he can do – bring peace in chaos and bring life from death.

Prayer is a bedrock of evangelism because it is where we seek God’s power for the task, putting the power where the power belongs – not in human effort but in the hands of God.

- ‘The Bible is God’s Word; it is his story of his work in bringing rebellious men and women back to himself. It tells, not of man’s seeking a lost God, but of God seeking lost men. The Bible does not present an art of prayer; it presents the God of prayer, the God who calls before we answer and answers before we call.’

EDMUND P. CLOWNEY

United States founding father Benjamin Franklin once said, ‘By failing to prepare you are preparing to fail.’ We must prepare our hearts for evangelism through prayerful submission and petition to God.

We could reframe the saying as:

- ‘By failing to prayerfully prepare for evangelism, we are preparing to fail in evangelism.’

Even with faithful prayer and a spiritually-empowered gospel message, people can still choose to reject the gospel. But the power of salvation is God's alone, and we can trust God to be at work through our prayers even when we don't immediately see an outcome. The outcome of our evangelism is in the hands of the one who hears our message and God himself. Our success and failure in evangelism isn't measured by how many people are saved, but by our obedience to do what God asks us – to pray and to proclaim.

Our primary motivation to pray is that God commands us to do so. However, this motivation should mature from responding to God's simple command as we grow in relationship with our heavenly Father, to the extent that we would lovingly desire to glorify him and seek his goodness and blessings for our own lives and for those we pray for. We discover God's will more clearly as we know him more fully. The more we pray, the more we know God. The more we know God, the more we desire to pray so that his will may be done on earth as in heaven.

What is the state of our prayer lives? For some, prayer comes naturally. For others, it takes more effort. Preachers could ask themselves this question to self-evaluate: 'Do I find it easier to preach or to pray?' How often would you happily continue to preach beyond your allotted sermon time, and how frequently do you continue to pray beyond the limits of your regular devotion/quiet time? What about singing worship songs? Many find it easy to get lost in the music and experience of corporate singing, yet not so when it comes to prayer.

If we want to be effective in evangelism we need to be prayerful people, whether it comes naturally or not. The length of our prayers doesn't matter, but the sincerity does. As we continue to sincerely petition the Lord for his transforming work in our own lives and the lives of others, we find that our capacity to spend longer in his presence will grow. This time will honour him, be good for us, and be a blessing to others.

Discuss: The Westminster Shorter Catechism describes prayer as, 'an offering up of our desires unto God, for things agreeable to his will, in the name of Christ, with confession of our sins, and thankful acknowledgement of his mercies.' How does this description shape your understanding of prayer, specifically in relationship to evangelism?

Beyond offering to pray for others as part of our evangelism, we can understand and apply prayer in at least three ways when it comes to preparing ourselves to share the gospel:

First, as part of the process through which we can **grow in maturity** as children of God and as disciples of Jesus Christ who help others to grow likewise (Ephesians 4:14–16).

Second, as the way by which God's power can bring **opportunities to witness** and work through us and shift our evangelism from merely marketing the Christian faith to **stirring hearts** from death to life (Colossians 4:2–6).

Third, as the way by which we can be **equipped with spiritual armour** to defend against the attacks of the enemy as we go onto the front lines of spiritual battle, and to **open the eyes** of any who may have been deceived by his schemes that they may instead see and know the light of Jesus (Ephesians 6:10–20).

Just as Paul did with Timothy, let us urge and encourage each other to be prayerful for *all* people, and that it would be pleasing to God as we submit to his power in the hope that the world would come to know and submit to his saving truth.

DISCUSSION (10 MINS)

1. What are your prayer habits or disciplines before preaching the gospel or engaging with a specific witnessing opportunity?

2. Do you use prayer within the task of your evangelism? If so, how?
3. How do you understand and deal with the issue of 'unanswered' prayer, and how would you help someone understand this idea if asked while sharing your faith with them?

- 'The coming revival must begin with a great revival of prayer. It is in the closet, with the door shut, that the sound of abundance of rain will first be heard. An increase of secret prayer with ministers will be the sure harbinger of blessing.'

• ANDREW MURRAY

PRAYER AND ACCOUNTABILITY, PART ONE (20–30 MINS)

In pairs or threes, spend some time reflecting on your prayer life, patterns and habits. Be honest with each other about your strengths and weaknesses in your approach to prayer and resolve to grow in making space for personal prayer each day.

Pray together in the following three ways.

1. Pray for each other. Pray that God would help us to be a humble people who grow daily in our relationship with him.
2. Spend time praying for your community, town or city. Pray for the lost to be saved and ask God to heal our land. (Broadly: 'God, give me opportunities to share today; God, stir hearts to life today').
3. Spend time praying for yourself. Pray to be equipped in the full armour of God as you head out onto the front line.

APPLICATION (5 MINS)

Write a list of at least five friends, family members, colleagues or even strangers that you are aware of who do not yet know Jesus as Lord. Keep this on your phone, in your wallet, in your Bible or somewhere accessible where you will see it every day. Faithfully pray for these people every day, asking God to revive them and bring them to trust in him.

ACCOUNTABILITY, PART TWO (15 MINS)

Complete accountability forms, share in pairs or smaller groups and pray for one another to close.

DON'T FORGET...

We love to hear how God has been at work in your prayer and through your evangelism. You can share your stories with us at advancegroups.org and encourage others in their journey as you do.

SESSION SIX

THE DEVOTION OF THE EVANGELIST

How do we maintain authenticity in our lives and our evangelism? Building on our exploration of prayer in the previous session, here we explore the importance of the full devotional life in our Christian walk and our evangelism.

SESSION IN A SENTENCE

Devotion moves us to a place of holiness as we spend time with our holy, heavenly Father, which in turn prepares us to be effective ambassadors of the kingdom, carrying a message of hope on our lips that is shown to be authentic by the transformation of our hearts.

SESSION BACKGROUND

Returning from their annual pilgrimage to Jerusalem for the Passover festival, Mary and Joseph realised that Jesus was missing. After three distressing days, they were eventually reunited with their son, finding him with the teachers in the temple precincts. Jesus was sat among the wise teachers, learning from them, but also contributing and astonishing them with his remarkable understanding of scripture at just 12 years of age. When asked by Mary why he would worry his parents by wandering off as he did, Jesus appears confused by the question.

Jesus' confusion is prompted because he rightly assumes that you can only be lost or missing if those trying to find you don't know where you are. How could they not have known that he would be in his Father's house? This is the natural place for him to be. It would be like looking everywhere except the White House when trying to track down the US president, only to be baffled when you find him at

his desk in the Oval Office, and asking exasperatedly, 'Where have you been?'

Luke recounts specific language in Jesus' response to Mary that reveals his claim to a unique relationship to God: 'Didn't you know I had to be in **my Father's** house?' (Luke 2:49). There seems to be no equivalent to this statement anywhere in scripture, apart from when Jesus is speaking. Jesus' first recorded words see him declaring that he is the Son of God.

The work of the cross means we can be adopted into God's family. We are given the right to be called children of God by faith in Jesus, so the question for us becomes: how natural is it for us to spend time in our Father's house?

It is in the place of devotion that we discover more fully who we truly are. We grow. We are refined. We are emboldened. We are convicted of our wrongdoing. We are instructed in our purpose. We are fulfilled in our existence. Through devotion we are made holy as he is holy. Devotion is central to the Christian life because it forms holiness, and it is crucial to the task of evangelism because the gospel is to be lived and proclaimed by a holy people.

God is asking us as we come into his presence, not with exasperation, but delight: 'Where have you been?'

SESSION GUIDE

.....

CATCH UP (10–20 MINS)

Take time to catch up with one another, sharing stories, encouragements, feedback on opportunities and anything else that would encourage the group.

MARK 14:32–41: PRAYING IN GETHSEMANE BEFORE BEING ARRESTED

What does this teach us about bringing the weight of our circumstances to God?

Informal and spontaneous prayer throughout the day is great, but setting aside intentional time to pray and read the Bible is crucial. Some are great at praying and not so good at opening the Bible; others have a great Bible study ethic but come unstuck when it's time to pray. It can be really effective to combine the two by reading a chapter or more of scripture and then praying over what the passage says and how it can be applied to our lives. It's also important to spend time adoring and offering thanksgiving to God, and bringing your requests and your needs to him.

Jesus had no need to confess any sin, but confession is a central part of the prayer he teaches his disciples: 'Forgive us our sins...' (Matthew 6; Luke 11). David's prayer of confession and repentance in Psalm 51 is a great example for our own approach to humbling ourselves before God in repentant prayer when necessary.

The first step towards holiness is recognising that God is holy and that we are not. We need him, and as we take the time daily to step into his presence, the transforming power of his love will ensure that we are never the same again. It is this transformation that stands as the strongest evidence that the gospel is true and has the power to save. As we proclaim the goodness of God and share the Jesus story, those we reach can grow in confidence of the authenticity of our gospel message by examining the work of God through our wholly-devoted lives.

Jesus has made the way for us to be holy through the saving work of the cross, calling us to die to our old life and put our trust in him. As we walk into new life, Jesus has shown us what it looks like to pursue holiness through daily devotion to the Father. We are not perfect, and we will not always get it right in life, but as we bend the knee before our gracious

and holy king, we can make ourselves available for his grace to heal and his power to help that we might become holy as he is holy.

DISCUSSION (15 MINS)

1. Do you make enough space for daily devotion in your life? What are some of your good habits, and what habits might need some work?
2. Do you notice a correlation between the health of your devotional life and the quality of your evangelism?
3. How can you open yourself up to more instruction, refreshment, perspective and repentance through intentional devotion in the coming weeks?

- 'The purpose of [spiritual] Disciplines is freedom. Our aim is the freedom, not the Discipline. The moment we make the Discipline our central focus we will turn it into law and lose the corresponding freedom... Let us forever centre on Christ and view the spiritual Disciplines as a way of drawing us closer to his heart.'

• RICHARD FOSTER

APPLICATION (5 MINS)

Begin praying through the Psalms, spending a few minutes every day reading and praying on top of any other Bible study and prayer time. If you can, stretch yourself to keep it up for a whole month or an entire year. You can do this by simply opening your Bible and working through the Psalms one by one, or by following a devotional plan such as Tim Keller's *My Rock; My Refuge: A Year of Daily Devotions in the Psalms*.

PRAYER

Give thanks to our heavenly Father that he desires relationship with his children. Commit prayerfully to a life of devotion that moves us from being spiritual tourists to being children who dwell in the Father's house and in his presence. Ask God to help us become holy as he is holy, and that the transformation of our lives would be the foundation upon which our evangelism is built.

ACCOUNTABILITY (15 MINS)

Discuss in pairs what things in your life can threaten to – or already have – become an idol for you and take away your primary devotion from God. Gently question each other as a way of helping to look beyond any blind spots you might have.

Complete accountability forms, share in pairs or smaller groups and pray for one another.

DON'T FORGET...

The Advance Proclaimers series can be used as material for group sessions in the future, but also works well as personal devotional reading to help you in your daily walk. Find out more at advancegroups.org/APS

SESSION SEVEN

THE SUBMISSION OF THE EVANGELIST

In this session we will expand upon the idea of holiness explored in the previous session, specifically as it relates to the identity of God, the hope of the gospel and the life of the Christian. We will explore accountability as being crucial to the journey of a disciple.

SESSION IN A SENTENCE

God desires for his people to be holy as he is holy, and it is through submission to the Holy Spirit and accountability in community that we can grow in holiness.

SESSION BACKGROUND

The words *holiness* and *holy* appear more than 700 times throughout the Bible. Holiness is a central theme of the Bible, and God desires for it to be a central reality of our lives.

God is holy, which means he is set apart. He is perfect, sovereign and unique, and there is no other like him. We are not holy: every single one of us has fallen short of the perfect standard of our holy God. The writer to the Hebrews tells us that only the holy will see the Lord (Hebrews 12:14) and Jesus tells us that the pure of heart will see God (Matthew 5:8). Our lack of holiness is a major problem for humanity if we are going to have any hope of a relationship with God. How can the unholy become holy, acceptable to the Lord and able to dwell in his kingdom?

The good news is that Jesus has provided the way by which an unholy people can enter the presence of the perfect holy God and dwell with him forever (Ephesians 5:25–26). Those who put their trust in

Jesus share in his holiness, stepping into a brand-new life. True life is *holy life*.

Holiness is also the theme of Jesus' message about saltiness in Matthew 5:13. In the same way that salt is useless if it loses its flavour, our message is hopeless if we lose our distinctive holiness. Even though our lives are an unfinished work this side of eternity, we are called to live differently so that the world might recognise the authenticity of the message we proclaim.

- 'God's love for us in Christ, as poured
- out by the Spirit (Romans 5:5), has
- brought us into fellowship with Him
- and the Son; from there, we have
- come to behold the beauty of His
- holiness, and by beholding it, we
- become as lovely as He is.'

JACKIE HILL PERRY

The gospel is a holy message, testifying to a holy God who acted in a holy way to make it possible for an unholy people to be restored to their true identity – as the holy people of a holy kingdom.

SESSION GUIDE

CATCH UP (10–20 MINS)

Take time to catch up with one another, sharing stories, encouragements, feedback on opportunities and anything else that would encourage the group. Ask the group to share about their experiences of reading prayerfully through the Psalms (Session Six – Application).

PRAYER

Commit the time to the Lord and pray over any situations, positive or challenging, highlighted in the catch up time.

TEACHING (30–40 MINS)

Work through the following teaching material in your own way, either by reading it word for word, or by reworking it into your own presentation. There are three core scriptures for this session.

1. GOD ALONE IS HOLY

- 'I will make known my holy name
- among my people Israel. I will no
- longer let my holy name be profaned,
- and the nations will know that I the
- Lord am the Holy One in Israel.'

• EZEKIEL 39:7

The Bible reveals who God is so that we can know and worship him in spirit and truth. As we read we discover that he is the one true God. Though indivisible, he exists in triune nature, (Father, Son and Holy Spirit). He is perfect. He is eternal. He is king.

But what the Bible makes especially clear about God is that he is holy. Holiness is the primary characteristic of God. It means that there is no one like him and that he is set apart from all others: no other being can match up to his identity, to his character, or to the reality of who he is. And it is this characteristic God desires for his people – that we would become a holy people, set apart in our worship and obedience to him, a people of righteousness and purity (Leviticus 11:45). Our lack of holiness – our rejection of God's holiness – has created a catastrophic problem for humanity. God's kingdom is a perfect kingdom, but we have chosen imperfection and exclusion from his presence.

2. THE HOLINESS OF JESUS MAKES POSSIBLE THE HOLINESS OF HIS PEOPLE

- '...but because Jesus lives forever,
- he has a permanent priesthood.
- Therefore he is able to save completely
- those who come to God through him,
- because he always lives to intercede
- for them. Such a high priest truly meets
- our need – one who is holy, blameless,
- pure, set apart from sinners, exalted
- above the heavens. Unlike the other
- high priests, he does not need to offer
- sacrifices day after day, first for his
- own sins, and then for the sins of the
- people. He sacrificed for their sins
- once for all when he offered himself.'

• HEBREWS 7:24–27

We are made in God's image and have the potential to be a holy people, but our rebelliousness gets in the way. If God were to allow even the smallest fragment of imperfection into his kingdom, it would cease to be perfect. So, our rejection of holiness excludes us from the holiness of God and the blessings of his kingdom.

The gospel tells us that Jesus stepped in to be our substitute on the cross, taking the death that we had chosen for ourselves. He was able to take our place because he is perfectly holy (without sin or blemish). The unpayable debt of the world's rebelliousness has been charged to the account of the perfectly obedient Jesus. He has settled the debt that we could never have paid through the inexhaustible treasure of his holiness. Now, when God looks at those who put their trust in Jesus Christ, he sees not the imperfection (unholiness) of man, but the perfection (holiness) of Jesus.

Think about it like this: can you think of a time when you wore a piece of clothing that made you feel especially good about yourself? Perhaps you were getting dressed up for a special occasion, and as you stepped out of the house you felt a little more confident. When we put our trust in Jesus, the Bible tells us God credits the righteousness of Jesus to us and we

are *clothed* in his perfection (Romans 5:18; Philippians 3:9; 1 Corinthians 1:30).

Paul tells us that instead of gratifying the desires of the flesh, we should 'clothe ourselves with Christ,' literally wearing his goodness (Romans 13:14). Compare this to James, who implores his readers to rid themselves of (better translated 'take off') all moral filth (James 1:21). We are to take off the former things that were against God and give them to Christ, and in a great exchange he replaces them with his own righteousness.

Have you ever been turned away from somewhere because you didn't meet the standard of the dress code? The entry requirement for God's perfect kingdom is perfect holiness, which we do not possess. But as an imperfect people we can enter his perfect kingdom because we now fit the 'dress code' through Christ. Nothing less than perfection will do, but nothing less than the perfection of Christ is offered for to us to wear. On the day we finally enter the full reality of the kingdom, we won't be bringing our imperfection with us, but the clothing of righteousness.

3. SUBMISSION TO THE SPIRIT AND SELF-DISCIPLINE PRODUCE HOLY LIVING

- 'You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.'

• EPHESIANS 4:23-24

God desires for us to grow in maturity, not repeating the same mistakes over and over as we live for him today. We are covered by his grace, but the evidence of sincere and authentic faith is transformation and growth (discipleship). We must not be content to wear the righteousness of Christ as a get-out-of-jail-free card, but choose to honour the cost of the righteousness we wear by

living in obedience to the one who paid the price for us. This is our discipleship journey: moving from our initial moment of new birth (justification) to an ongoing development of new life (sanctification).

Not only does this give us an assurance of the future eternal perfection that awaits us, but it gives us the means by which we can live differently today.

The transformation that takes place in the life of a disciple is powerfully expressed by Paul's exploration of the spiritual fruit that flows from the life of a true follower of Jesus (Galatians 5:22-23). The final facet of the fruit mentioned is self-control, or self-discipline. God, by his Spirit, empowers us with self-discipline – but we have to partner with him (Philippians 2:12-13).

Here are four practical things we can do to grow in holiness and obedience to God:

DEVOTION

The more time we spend in God's Word, the more we will know who God wants us to become. Likewise, by spending time in prayer we can also ask God to help us overcome our weaknesses and temptation. To spend time with Jesus is to learn what it means to be holy while being empowered to become so.

SELF-AWARENESS

As we read the Word, so the Word reads us, helping us to examine our own lives and become increasingly self-aware. This self-awareness helps us to recognise our weakness, and means that we can begin to deny ourselves the things that cause us harm.

COMMUNITY

Being watchful of the life that we live is not only achieved through self-awareness. By committing to Christian fellowship and community, we open ourselves up

to loving examination by those around us. Investing in community breeds opportunities for others to speak into your life, and for you to do likewise. Being open with others might bring challenges, but the risk of vulnerability should not deter us from the biblical ideal of journeying graciously together to grow as individuals and as the family of God.

CONFESSION

James tells us to confess our sins to one another, not for absolution but accountability (James 5:16). Finding a group of trusted friends with whom you can be completely honest and transparent about your struggles, temptations and failures is essential. The enemy wants to keep your struggle in the dark where he can twist it into shame, but God is calling us to journey together, helping to hold one another to account by bringing our failures into the light where he can restore and redeem. Failure need never be final with God: accountability is a way by which we can deal with our struggles in humility and submission to his grace.

As evangelists, the message we proclaim is not just about seeing responses but creating disciples who grow and mature – a holy people (Colossians 1:28–29). It is authentic disciples who will carry God’s message with integrity and power into the world. It is a holy task for a holy people.

DISCUSSION (15 MINS)

1. How would you describe the holiness of God to someone who doesn’t know him?
2. How do we ‘clothe ourselves’ in Christ?
3. What helps you to be, or hinders you from being, authentically accountable to others?

- ‘If you think you can walk in holiness
- without keeping up perpetual
- fellowship with Christ, you have made

- a great mistake. If you would be holy,
- you must live close to Jesus.’

CHARLES SPURGEON

APPLICATION (5 MINS)

If you don’t already have a small group of trusted friends (separate to the accountability aspect of this Advance group) that you meet up with regularly and to whom you can be completely honest, open and accountable, think about who you could do this with and get something organised as soon as possible. If you are already doing this, share with someone else who isn’t why it is important for you, and help get them set up with any advice, encouragement or tips you can offer.

PRAYER

Recognise and celebrate God’s holiness in prayer. Seek his forgiveness for our rebellion, and give thanks that because of Jesus’ saving work we can share in his righteousness. Ask that God would continue to work in your life to make you holy. Commit to living with discipline in submission to the Spirit’s power as you seek to grow as disciples and become ever more fit-for-purpose as a holy people with a holy message.

ACCOUNTABILITY (25 MINS)

In pairs, use this time as an opportunity to confess to one another any way in which you find yourself falling short repeatedly. By bringing this to the attention of the other person, resolve to ask each other from time to time about how you are getting on in this area and continually pray for one another.

Complete accountability forms, share in pairs or smaller groups and pray for one another.

SESSION EIGHT

THE CHARACTER OF THE EVANGELIST

The most holy Christians are the most humble, so what does it look like to have humility in our evangelism?

SESSION IN A SENTENCE

Humility is a chief virtue of any ambassador of God's kingdom: modelled for us perfectly in Jesus, refined and empowered within us by the Holy Spirit to the glory of our Heavenly Father.

SESSION BACKGROUND

From the moment the angel Gabriel tells Mary she is expecting a child, humility – a central theme of the Jesus story – emerges. Mary worships God and gives thanks to him that he has been mindful of her, his servant, in her *humble* state. In other words, she says, 'I'm just an ordinary girl... why would God want to use me?'

Have you ever wondered why God would use you?

Sometimes we can become self-assured in our gifts and talents, believing that God chooses to use us because of these things. God's call is for our character, not our talent, and the character that pleases him most has humility at its centre. Mary continues in her praise by singing of how her holy God scatters the proud and lifts up the humble. As a young Jewish woman, her knowledge of the Old Testament would have supplied her everything she needed to make this claim about God with confidence. And now she was experiencing this reality for herself. God has always chosen to use the humble for his purposes in the most unexpected ways, defying the wisdom of the world and revealing his power and grace through the

least likely people. The first step towards being used for great things by God is in realising our total reliance upon him.

Jesus' birth couldn't have taken place in more humble circumstances. The king of kings was laid in a manger – an animal feeding trough! The riches of the birth of a king were replaced with the poverty of the birth of a nobody. Our reconciliation to the creator of all things was initiated in staggering humility.

Wherever we look in scripture – whether it's Isaiah 53, where we hear about the suffering servant of the Lord who will be pierced for our transgressions, or Jesus' declaration about coming to serve rather than be served, or the washing of his disciples' feet, or his submission to his Father's will in the garden of Gethsemane, or his allowing himself to be beaten, mocked and crucified when, with a single word, he could have wiped out anyone who caused him harm – the Bible presents a portrait of a servant king who defeats the curse of human pride by the power of holy humility.

God rescues his people in the very way he intends for them to live. Pride led us to destruction, and humility will bring us back.

- '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

SESSION GUIDE

CATCH UP (10–20 MINS)

Take time to catch up with one another, sharing stories, encouragements, feedback on opportunities and anything else that would encourage the group. For smaller groups, ask each person to share one win and one struggle since the last meeting. For larger groups, select four or five people to share specific testimonies since last meeting.

PRAYER

Commit the time to the Lord and pray over any situations, positive or challenging, highlighted in the catch up time.

TEACHING (25–35 MINS)

Work through the following teaching material in your own way, either by reading it word for word, or by reworking it into your own presentation.

• ‘Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

• In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:

• Who, being in very nature God,
 • did not consider equality with God
 • something to be used to his own
 • advantage;
 • rather, he made himself nothing
 • by taking the very nature of a servant,
 • being made in human likeness.
 • And being found in appearance as a
 • man,
 • he humbled himself
 • by becoming obedient to death—
 • even death on a cross!’

• PHILIPPIANS 2:3–8

To paraphrase C.S. Lewis: ‘Being humble doesn’t mean thinking less of yourself, it means thinking of yourself less.’

The Bible doesn’t ask us to be self-deprecating or to have low self-esteem. You are cherished and loved by God – and called his precious child. But there is a fine line: thinking too highly of ourselves puts us in danger of the kind of pride that got humanity into the sin business in the first place. To think too little of ourselves is to reject the identity that God has bought for us, whereas to think too much of ourselves is to fail to recognise the sovereignty and kingship of God.

Pride sits at the heart of all sin. Proverbs tell us that, ‘When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with humility comes wisdom’ (Proverbs 11:2). The Bible’s wisdom literature repeatedly affirms the virtue of humility as the opposite posture of pride and celebrates the blessings that flow from it.

We live in an age of self-promotion. Can you imagine if David had slain Goliath today? The temptation for a blood-still-fresh, severed-head victory selfie would be strong! Many of us would surely welcome songs to be written about our achievements, movies to be made and titles to be bestowed, yet not once in all of David’s psalms does he mention his victory, a point to which the great evangelist D. L. Moody drew attention in a famous sermon on humility. Today, at the first sniff of greatness we are encouraged to champion ourselves, to build our status and our platform. But God does not ask you to build a ministry or to elevate yourself to a position. He’s far more interested in your character, and how you might be elevated to his purposes through humility (Luke 14:11).

Jesus took the lowly road, the position of the servant. He is the king who came not to be served but to serve (Mark 10:45). Notice what John says about Jesus immediately before the washing of his disciples’ feet:

- ‘Jesus knew that the Father had put all
- things under his power, and that he
- had come from God and was returning
- to God; so he got up from the meal,
- took off his outer clothing, and
- wrapped a towel around his waist.’

• JOHN 13:3-4

Knowing that all things were under his power, and knowing the fullness of his identity, Jesus chose to be a servant to demonstrate the will of his Father. You may have done a Bible study on this which involved actually washing one another’s feet. Yet washing someone’s feet today doesn’t quite do justice to the full significance of what Jesus was showing his disciples. It’s hard for us to comprehend just how uncomfortable it would have made them to have their rabbi – their messiah – undertaking this duty as a mark of his humility and servant heartedness.

Think of it like this: you hear a knock at the door to find the ruling monarch of your nation on your doorstep. They proceed to come into your house, pick up your baby and begin to change its very full nappy. The stench is awful and you look on in horror as your baby’s waste makes contact with royal hands. And yet the monarch looks completely at ease with the situation, even enjoying their time with the child, in this unpleasant but necessary activity.

Don’t forget that as Jesus was washing his disciples’ feet, he knew that Judas was about to betray him. He knew that Peter was going to deny him. He knew that his followers were still often prideful and weak men, and yet in his power and majesty he humbled himself before them, setting an example for them to follow. Not merely were they to wash each other’s feet, but they were to become humble servants in all things.

There’s a well-known anecdote about Charles Spurgeon, who, upon seeing one of his preaching students step up to the pulpit with a little too much arrogant swagger only to come down afterwards crestfallen at how badly the sermon had gone, supposedly remarked: ‘If you’d

gone up the way you came down, you might have come down the way you went up.’

No matter the grandeur of our calling, the impressiveness of our gifting, the size of our opportunity, or the reputation of our ministry, we are powerless to save anyone. The wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23), but the wages of humility is life (Proverbs 22:4). Through the humble suffering servant who took our place on the cross, we can now place our trust in him and take up our own cross by humbly dying to our old prideful existence. We can move from death to life. Humility is not merely a virtue, it is the only appropriate response we can make to Jesus when we recognize he is Lord.

- ‘For the LORD takes delight in his
- people; he crowns the humble with
- victory.’

• PSALM 149:4

Humility in evangelism does not mean that we pander to people, water down the gospel, or back off from sharing the truth where it might cause offence. The gospel is often an offensive message to hardened hearts. Equally, boldness in evangelism does not mean that we ram the gospel down people’s throats with little consideration of how we might help them to truly understand the hope we carry. Humility in evangelism means at least the following four things.

Discuss: Take some time to talk through these four areas of humility in evangelism. How might you apply these principles?

1. HUMBLY SERVE THE LORD

Our primary responsibility and desire should be to serve God, however challenging, uncomfortable or costly it may be. Are we willing to put on the nature of a servant and be obedient to our master?

2. HUMBLY EMPTY YOURSELF

Humility involves emptying ourselves so that we can be filled with the Holy Spirit. This is a humble act in itself, but when we invite the Spirit to take up residence in our lives, we move from being committed to humility to being empowered for it.

3. HUMBLY ACCEPT HIS WORD

Humble yourself before God's Word. Learn to read it well and accept it on its own terms, not forcing it to say what you want it to say to suit your needs. Humbly seek to hear God's truth, no matter how challenging it may prove to your preconceived or culture-shaped ideas. Discovering God's truth and applying his wisdom requires humility.

4. HUMBLY SERVE THE LOST

Proclamation is essential, but we must also love those to whom we proclaim. We must serve those in need. As we aim to love people well we must listen to them well. If all we ever do is speak at them, then we are likely to miss important connection points between the gospel and their lives and minimize the possibility of a meaningful relationship with them.

By honouring God, making space for his Spirit to work in us, and building upon the truth of his Word we can be effective servants into the world – who meet practical needs, listen well to people (a massively neglected area of evangelism), and faithfully proclaim the Jesus story. If we want to be fruitful in our evangelism, our starting posture must be humility before the Lord. D.L. Moody put it this way in his sermon on humility:

- 'I have a pear tree on my farm which is
- very beautiful; it appears to be one of
- the most beautiful trees on my place.
- Every branch seems to be reaching
- up to the light and stands almost like
- a wax candle, but I never get any fruit
- from it. I have another tree, which
- was so full of fruit last year that the
- branches almost touched the ground.

- If we only get down low enough, my
- friends, God will use every one of us to
- His glory.'

DISCUSSION (15 MINS)

1. Are there areas of your life in which you struggle with humility?
2. Is there an inherent conflict between sharing the gospel with boldness and sharing it with humility?
3. How can we lovingly address a lack of humility, or the presence of false humility, in others?
 - 'I am persuaded that love and humility
 - are the highest attainments in the
 - school of Christ and the brightest
 - evidences that he is indeed our
 - master.'
 -
 -
 -
 -
 -
 -
 - JOHN NEWTON

APPLICATION (5 MINS)

Think carefully about how you could serve and bless those around you in an unexpected and costly way. Does your church or ministry employ a cleaner? Tell them to take the day off to spend with their family or in spiritual retreat and do their tasks for them. Be the first to make tea or coffee in the office each day. Tip your waiter generously after a meal and write them a note expressing the love of God to them... Be creative and be intentional.

On the one hand, none of these things could capture the full effect of Jesus washing his disciples' feet, but on the other, neither should they simply be so-called 'random acts of kindness'. These are the intentional actions of thoughtful, loving and humble people who see opportunities all around to bless others in ways that point back to the suffering servant. We don't do these things to win favour with God or look good in front of others (maybe think twice before shouting about the things you do on social media).

We do them both as a way in which we can learn to grow in humility, and as a natural product of the humility that God is growing in us.

PRAYER

Give thanks for the humility of Christ and his example of servant-heartedness. Ask God to help you see yourself as he sees you, and that you might grow in humility and wisdom daily. Pray for each other, that you would be bold and humble in your proclamation of the gospel.

ACCOUNTABILITY (15 MINS)

Invite anyone who struggles with pride to acknowledge this - which is admittedly a hard thing for a prideful person to do - and pray with and for them, that God would help you all grow in humility and develop servant hearts.

Complete accountability forms, share in pairs or smaller groups and pray for one another.

SESSION NINE

THE OPPORTUNITY OF THE EVANGELIST

One mark of evangelistic gifting is the ability to see – and a desire to seize upon – any and every opportunity to share the gospel with those around us. In this session we will explore how we can make the most of every opportunity.

SESSION IN A SENTENCE

We should always be ready to seize upon any gospel opportunity that comes our way, explaining the good news with clarity in every situation and circumstance.

SESSION BACKGROUND

Peter tells us that we should always be ready to share the gospel with anyone who enquires about the hope we have (1 Peter 3:15). Paul tells Timothy to be ready to preach the gospel in every season and circumstance of life (2 Timothy 4:2), and writes elsewhere that we must make the most of every opportunity (Colossians 4:5). Jesus demonstrates a lifestyle of readiness to serve and share at all times. Sometimes that means looking in unexpected places to see an opportunity (as with Zacchaeus in Luke 19:1–10), being ready in socially-challenging situations (like with the Samaritan woman in John 4:1–26), being bold in places of privilege (remember the sinful woman at the Pharisee's house in Luke 7:36–50), sharing with social outcasts (like healing lepers in Luke 17:11–19), or declaring truth during your own suffering (as with the thief on the cross in Luke 23:39–43)... and so the list goes on.

Billy Graham's crusades – through which he preached to more people than any other person who has ever lived – were the most famous aspect of his evangelism. But this wasn't the only way in which he

shared the gospel throughout his life. Whether meeting with presidents or royalty, appearing on mainstream talk shows, bringing aid to areas hit by natural disaster, ministering to troops overseas, or sharing with individuals he met along the way, he was always ready, prepared and willing to share the gospel with those he met.

Billy Graham's evangelistic preparedness wasn't motivated by a heightened interpretation of the great commission. His motivation to see and seize upon any and every opportunity came from having truly understood, received, and submitted to the gospel himself.

One mark of those gifted as evangelists is that they are likely to have a (super) natural compassion for the lost that extends beyond the satisfaction of fulfilling an evangelistic engagement or preaching opportunity. An evangelist is desperate for everyone to hear and receive the gospel, and, even under threat of rebuke and harsh consequences, would not be able to stop themselves from talking about Jesus at every opportunity (Acts 4:18–20). But the truth is, the more any believer – not just those gifted as evangelists – understands the good news for themselves and lives within its precious grace, the more they will grow in compassion for the lost, to share in God's own compassion as we grow into new life in his own image.

The remarkable true story of Desmond Doss, told in the Hollywood film *Hacksaw Ridge*, reveals a man who was compelled to enlist as combat medic during the Second World War, but who refused to pick up a gun under any circumstances because of his devout faith in God. Deployed to the Japanese island of Okinawa, Doss found himself behind enemy lines on 'Hacksaw Ridge'. Under heavy fire from the enemy, yet able to hear the cries of the wounded – both

American and Japanese – Doss began to save anyone he could, which involved lowering them down from the ridge using a makeshift rope pulley system. Doss was shot in the arm by a sniper and was later discovered to have seventeen pieces of shrapnel in his body, and yet he kept going for as long as he was able, to save as many as possible.

Interviewed about this incredible feat years later, Doss explained that whenever exhaustion kicked in and he felt that he couldn't help anyone else he prayed, 'Lord, help me get one more.' Doss saved at least 75 men that day.

Doss's prayer is the cry of the evangelist. It is the cry of all who share the heart of God for the lost. 'Lord, through every opportunity, however hard or costly, help me get one more.'

SESSION GUIDE

CATCH UP (10–20 MINS)

Take time to catch up with one another, sharing stories, encouragements, feedback on opportunities and anything else that would encourage the group. For smaller groups, ask each person to share one win and one struggle since last meeting. For larger groups, select four or five people to share specific testimony since last meeting.

PRAYER

Commit the time to the Lord and pray over any situations, positive or challenging, highlighted in the catch up time.

TEACHING (20–30 MINS)

Work through the following teaching material in your own way, either by

reading it word for word, or by reworking it into your own presentation.

• 'One day Peter and John were going
• up to the temple at the time of prayer
• – at three in the afternoon. Now a
• man who was lame from birth was
• being carried to the temple gate called
• Beautiful, where he was put every
• day to beg from those going into the
• temple courts. When he saw Peter and
• John about to enter, he asked them for
• money. Peter looked straight at him,
• as did John. Then Peter said, "Look
• at us!" So the man gave them his
• attention, expecting to get something
• from them. Then Peter said, "Silver or
• gold I do not have, but what I do have
• I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ
• of Nazareth, walk."'

ACTS 3:1-6

It's easy to miss opportunities. Many of the regrets people face in later life revolve around missed opportunities – the things they wish they had done if only they had had the confidence to try, or had they worried less about what people might think of them.

The world of social media has given rise to a particular phenomenon – the 'Fear Of Missing Out', or FOMO. In a constantly-connected world, we can always see what other people are doing – and when it looks like others are having a better life experience than ours, FOMO can kick in. Generally speaking, FOMO is considered to be an unhelpful and often unhealthy side-effect of our connectedness, but how about when we read the Bible? Have you ever experienced FOMO as you've read about what Jesus disciples and the early church got up to in the book of Acts?

Reading about the Apostles in the New Testament can leave you feeling like you are missing out on the same level of adventure that they experienced in sharing the gospel. While most of us don't crave the scary stuff – like being stoned to death(!) – we would love to see and experience more of the signs and wonders that accompanied the apostles' ministry.

In Acts 3, Peter and John find themselves presented with an everyday situation: a lame beggar is asking them for some money. It would have been easy for the apostles to simply walk past this unfortunate man, or to have given a small donation and moved on.

Look at how specific the language is here: instead of moving on, Peter and John look right at him. The NRSV translation sees Peter and John looking *intently* at the man, who in-turn *fixed his attention* upon them in expectation of receiving something.

Discuss: How intently are you looking at the world around you? How good are you at seeing and seizing upon the opportunities that arise to share the gospel?

The lame man saw an opportunity to get the thing he thought he needed most: money. Fortunately for him, the apostles were paying attention to the opportunity in front of them, meaning they were able to give him what he really needed most: Jesus. It was a love for the lost that caused Peter and John to stop, not simply a compassion for his disability or social status.

The Bible tells us that he who honours God will in turn be honoured by God (1 Samuel 2:30). This is never more true than when we honour God in life's 'small things'. As we prove to be trustworthy in the secret place – in the smaller, less noticeable areas of life – God entrusts us with bigger things. That could be a bigger platform, but why settle only for a bigger audience? Better than a larger platform is a greater demonstration of the Holy Spirit's power in our lives. The full measure of the Spirit of the living God is available to you today as you submit to the Lord, but he seems to entrust it most fully and most often to those he knows will use it best for his service. Anyone in the Israelite army could have defeated Goliath with God's help, but it was David who stepped up and proved trustworthy in the specific task, and so the road to the throne was set.

If you want the full adventure, be faithful in the little things, those everyday opportunities, and see what God does. If you are struggling to get motivated about seizing those opportunities, ask God to take you out of your comfort zone and press on with *choosing* to be intentional even when you don't feel like it. If you are feeling guilty about missed opportunities and feel like you're letting God down, remember that God doesn't want you to feel guilty about missed opportunities, he wants you to love the lost out of your love for him.

Not one of us is perfect. The apostles made mistakes in their evangelism and surely missed opportunities along the way. The point is not to hold ourselves to an impossible standard that piles on the pressure, but to hold ourselves in the incomparable love of God that piles on the grace. It is from this reality that we grow, maturing to become increasingly faithful to the opportunities he puts in front of us day by day.

D.L. Moody famously said, 'God has given me a lifeboat and said... "Moody, save all you can."' Your capacity to row, to see those drowning and pull them from the water is found in your love for God, and his love for the world.

Here are three practical suggestions for how to become more aware of everyday opportunities and to be faithful in them:

1. JOURNAL

There are many helpful aspects to keeping a journal. With opportunity in mind, write down details about your day. Who do you spend time with at work? Do you walk past the same homeless person regularly in your city? Who do you speak to at the school gates? Writing in your journal will keep these people fresh in your mind so that you can keep them in prayer, and it can also be used as a personal accountability check: are you being intentional about faith-based conversations with them over time? Have conversations been trivial for weeks, or have you made attempts to go deeper?

If you feel able, you could also ask accountability partners to read your journal and ask you questions about these areas too.

2. CHALLENGE

Why not set challenges for yourself if you struggle to seize daily opportunities? For example, 'This week I want to talk to at least one stranger about Christ.' The challenge can be practical as well as proclamational, and should stretch you beyond your normal practice of evangelism.

3. ADVENTURE

Shift your mindset from duty to adventure. We have an evangelistic responsibility and we want to be obedient to what God asks us to do, but without love we are missing the point. Think of the opportunities in your week ahead not simply as a burdensome duty, but as the high point of adventure. Many people in the nine-to-five grind – even those who love their jobs – can't wait for the weekend to come. Could we be people who can't wait for the next opportunity to share Jesus with the same anticipation? If we can, we will begin to embrace the adventure with a healthy mindset, so that even when it's challenging, we can dust ourselves off and go again.

In the words of Martin Luther,

- 'If he has faith, the believer cannot
- be restrained. He betrays himself. He
- breaks out. He confesses and teaches
- this gospel to the people at the risk of
- life itself.'

DISCUSSION (20 MINS)

1. Have you ever missed an obvious opportunity? What did you learn from the experience?

2. What are the biggest challenges you face in seizing every opportunity to share the gospel?
3. How do you intentionally create opportunities for sharing the gospel that otherwise might not be there?
4. Discuss the three suggestions from the teaching (Journal, Challenge, Adventure). Do you see the value of these things and could you implement them?
 - 'Here is the principle – adapt your
 - measures to the necessity of the people
 - to whom you minister. You are to take
 - the gospel to them in such modes and
 - circumstances as will gain for it from
 - them a hearing.'
 -
 - CATHERINE BOOTH

APPLICATION (5 MINS)

Be intentional this month about seizing opportunities that you might usually walk past or choose not to engage with. Is there an old friend you could reach out to? Could you take some extra time to sit and talk to a homeless person? Do you regularly get coffee from the same barista, and if so could you turn the conversation to Jesus?

It is almost certain that everyone in the group will be able to think of an opportunity in their regular week in which they could be more intentional about sharing Jesus. Commit to taking this opportunity between yourselves and hold each other to account for how you got on next month. Remember, this isn't just about setting arbitrary goals and targets, but changing habits and patterns of behaviour. What starts out as intentional practice can develop into natural behaviour over time.

Consider starting a journal.

PRAYER

Thank God that he provides us with opportunities to proclaim his gospel and share our faith with others. Ask him to provide some specific opportunities in situations where you have been hoping for breakthrough, and for general opportunities day by day. Pray for each other that you will be perceptive of the opportunities around you, and faithful to each one as it arises.

ACCOUNTABILITY (15 MINS)

In threes, discuss some obvious opportunities that you have ignored. Talk about why you think this is and really try to get to the root of the issue. Seek forgiveness from God where necessary, and encourage each other in practical ways so as to make progress in seizing these opportunities in the future.

Complete accountability forms, share in pairs or smaller groups and pray for one another.

DON'T FORGET...

Encouragement between groups is an essential part of the journey, stay active in your communication (via whatever messenger platform your group has chosen), celebrating successes and breakthroughs, sending out and responding to prayer requests and cheering one another on.

SESSION TEN

THE COMMITMENT OF THE EVANGELIST

The Bible is the revelation of the invitation from God to turn away from our rebellion and into relationship with him, through faith in Jesus Christ. How do we ensure that we are not only explaining and presenting what the gospel is, but boldly calling people to respond to and act upon what they have heard?

SESSION IN A SENTENCE

The task of evangelism is a commitment to proclaiming the full message of the gospel, which includes an invitation to the listener to change direction and experience true life through faith in Jesus Christ.

SESSION BACKGROUND

Imagine a bridegroom at the front of the church on his wedding day. He looks around the beautifully-decorated building, full of his excited friends and family in anticipation of the entrance of the bride. The woman of his dreams is due to arrive at any moment. Ten minutes go by and the bride hasn't arrived. 'It's customary for the bride to be late,' he thinks to himself. Twenty minutes go by and there's still no sign of her. He laughs nervously. Thirty minutes go by and there is *still* no bride and no word as to why she is late. Now he begins to panic a little as the murmurs of the gathered crowd begin to rise. Forty-five minutes go by, then an hour, and still no bride. The murmuring amongst the guests has reached fever pitch. What on earth is going on? Is she just running ridiculously late or has she done the unthinkable and decided not to come at all?

The groom's mind begins to race through all the potential reasons for why she hasn't arrived, and then, suddenly, his stomach sinks as the realisation hits him. He never actually asked his bride to marry him.

An invitation is essential if the opportunity you have for someone requires a response. The shortest version of Jesus' gospel message is recorded by Mark as follows: "'The time has come,'" he said. "The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!" (Mark 1:15).

The word 'repent' can cause a few problems – mainly because many people don't know what it really means. Repent has often been associated with a 'turn or burn' approach to gospel preaching, meaning that many hear in it only a pronouncement of judgement. For many people today, the word repent doesn't sound like a 'good news' word.

But when we properly understand it, the word 'repent' holds an amazing revelation of the truth of the gospel. It literally means to have a change of mind, to change the course of your life. 'You are going the wrong way,' Jesus is saying, 'but because of me you can go the right way – the way of truth that leads to the Father.' Repentance is good news because it offers anyone who hears it an opportunity to know life instead of death. We have brought judgement on ourselves by our rebellion against God: repentance is both the fire alarm to alert us to this reality and the invitation to discover Jesus as the truth that can set us free.

Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel explain that repentance (conversion) has three elements:

- ‘First, it is a turning from something,
- which includes specific sins, false gods,
- or simply a life lived for oneself (1
- Thessalonians 1:9; Revelation 9:20,
- 21 and 16:11). Second, conversion is
- a product of the will of God and his
- gracious working in the world (Acts
- 11:18; Romans 2:4; 2 Corinthians 7:10;
- 2 Timothy 2:25; 2 Peter 3:9). Third,
- conversion is a turning to someone,
- a commitment of one’s whole life to
- God in Jesus Christ (Acts 14:15; 1
- Thessalonians 1:9; 1 Peter 2:25). It
- is thus a total reorientation, whether
- spectacular or undramatic, sudden or
- gradual, emotional or calm, in which
- a person transfers his or her total
- allegiance to God.’

The first preachers of the gospel were careful to include an opportunity for their listeners to respond to their message, just as Jesus did. An appeal for repentance was made as the climax of the preaching of the Jesus story (Acts 2:37–39; 3:25–26; 4:12; 5:31; 10:43).

The gospel extends an invitation for humanity to stop running away from God. Through faith in Jesus Christ we can turn around and face God – and as we do so, allow our minds to be changed by the truth of who he is, seeing our lives transformed by the power of his Spirit.

SESSION GUIDE

.....

CATCH UP (10–20 MINS)

Take time to catch up with one another, sharing stories, encouragements, feedback on opportunities and anything else that would encourage the group. Share about extra opportunities you encountered in light of the last session (Session Nine – Application).

PRAYER

Commit the time to the Lord and give thanks for the opportunities you’ve had in the last few weeks to share the gospel. Pray for those who have put their trust in Jesus through those opportunities.

TEACHING (30–40 MINS)

Work through the following teaching material in your own way, either by reading it word for word, or by reworking it into your own presentation.

- ‘When the people heard this, they
- were cut to the heart and said to Peter
- and the other apostles, “Brothers, what
- shall we do?”
-
- Peter replied, “Repent and be
- baptised, every one of you, in
- the name of Jesus Christ for the
- forgiveness of your sins. And you will
- receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The
- promise is for you and your children
- and for all who are far off – for all
- whom the Lord our God will call.”
-
- ACTS 2:37-39

Invitation is as much a part of the gospel message as the cross itself. Having experienced the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, Peter began to preach to the gathered crowd. Through the power of the Spirit at work in his preaching the audience was ‘cut to the heart’ as they heard the message of the gospel.

Can you imagine here the story taking a different turn? Just as the crowd are ready to put their trust in Jesus, Peter says, ‘Thank you and goodnight!’ and walks off for a well-deserved post-preaching meal with his friends. The crowd, left moved by his message but confused about how to apply it to their lives, wander away back to their lives with more questions than answers, having had no opportunity to put their faith in the Jesus Peter told them about.

Thankfully that's not what happened! Peter invited a response and called the crowd to repent – giving them a concrete way to act upon the message they have understood and to respond to the call of the Spirit they have experienced in their hearts. The full gospel includes an invitation to repentance, and an explanation of how to act upon what has been heard. The disciples were thoroughly committed to preaching the full gospel. So should we.

For those of you who regularly prepare sermons or talks, you'll know how important it is to include some ways to apply your message to everyday life. Jesus' preaching, and that of the apostles, was full of application. Jesus' first gospel presentation in Mark – a call to 'repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand' – is pretty much all application: he is saying, 'You are going the wrong way, you need to turn around and experience a transformation!'

Throughout the gospels Jesus repeatedly extends an invitation: 'Come to me all who are weary' (Matthew 11:28), 'Come and see' (John 1:39), 'Come and follow me' (Matthew 4:19), 'Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink' (John 7:37), 'Come and eat' (John 21:12).

These invitations are not arbitrary or trivial. They reveal Jesus' identity to the world and have real consequences when taken up or rejected. The defining aspect of an invitation is that it demands a response. Even to sit on the fence is to reject the invitation, for only a 'Yes' brings acceptance of the invitation and the blessings that follow.

Discuss: Take a look at these three biblical examples of invitation and discuss them as a group:

1. THE CALLING OF THE DISCIPLES (MARK 1:17)

The call of Jesus is personal

2. THE CALL UPON THE RICH YOUNG MAN (MATHEW 19:16–22)

The call of Jesus is costly

3. THE CALLING OUT OF THE DEAD (JOHN 11:43)

The call of Jesus is powerful

The opportunity to respond to the gospel is the most important aspect of our preaching. To proclaim the gospel authentically, we must always make room for an invitation to accept Jesus as Lord and Saviour.

This can be tricky – and some gospel opportunities seemingly lend themselves better than others to inviting a response. So how can we faithfully 'invite' a response in our evangelism, whatever context and situation we find ourselves in? Whether from a platform or in a one-to-one setting, we should be committed to not simply asking people if they want to come to a Sunday church service (although do this by all means), but committed to inviting people into the kingdom of God. We don't find a step-by-step guide for this in scripture, but these principles offer a good place to start:

ASK DIRECT QUESTIONS

Keep your questions direct and simple. Having explained who Jesus is and what it means to follow him, you could simply ask: 'Would you like to put your trust in Jesus Christ today and begin new life in relationship with him?', or: 'Is there anything stopping you from putting your trust in Jesus today?'

If you used an illustration or parable that connected with your audience, use this as a focal point. For example, if sharing from the story of the prodigal son: 'God is calling you home today. Do you want to come home into the Father's embrace, just as the prodigal son did?' This question helps you to see if the listener is open to

saying yes to Jesus. Next, you can bring more clarity about their response, but your initial question should be direct, simple and connected to the message you have already shared.

TAKE THE TIME NEEDED

When speaking to a crowd, wait for as long as you feel led to let the Spirit touch people's hearts. How long it takes (or how awkward it feels!) is largely irrelevant. What matters is that people have time to consider what has been shared, and that you allow the space for God to do what he wants to do. In one-to-one situations, it may be that the person needs time and space to think and therefore you can arrange to meet up again at another time to explore this again. Remember, we are not trying to force or coerce a response, we are looking for God to move in his timing. Be open to letting the response play out in the time that is needed.

MAKE THE EXPECTATION CLEAR

Explain what will happen if the person says 'yes' and what they are being invited into. For example, explain that you will pray together, perhaps that you will give them a Bible and a reading plan, and that you will connect them with your/a church. Make it clear that their life may not instantly change for the better, but that through daily devotion to Jesus the fullness of the life that he offers will come into sharper focus. Explain something of the practical next steps, and the spiritual reality of the life of discipleship that follows our first response to Jesus.

CELEBRATE ACCEPTANCE, BE GRACIOUS OF REFUSAL

As a person indicates they want to accept the invitation, be affirming and joyful. Don't let it be manufactured – if you are not *genuinely* joyful at this response you may be getting ahead of yourself to be sharing the gospel in the first place! Equally, if the person says a qualified or

outright flat no, be gracious and humble. Try to leave the person who refuses the invitation with an open-ended invitation that they can accept on their own should God reveal himself to them at another time, and if possible give them some contact details for yourself or a local church that they could connect with should this happen.

One of the most common reasons people don't respond to the gospel message is that no-one asks them to. One of the most common reasons evangelists don't call out a response is a fear that no-one will respond and then they (or the gospel) will look foolish. But the power of salvation is not yours, and even Jesus had people walk away from him and reject his invitation. We are simply called to be faithful to the gospel message, invitation and all, whatever follows next. In fact, the invitation of Christ is for us to come and die to ourselves, to take up our cross and follow him (Matthew 16:24). That means dying to ourselves in our evangelism too, whatever the cost and however foolish we may look.

- 'The gospel is God's summons, through
- the act of preaching, to the listener to
- make a decision which will usher him
- into a new dimension of existence.'

• MICHAEL GREEN

Jesus and his apostles offered invitation as they proclaimed the gospel, and so must we. Whatever the response, we can be assured that we have been faithful to the gospel message and its central call to repentance and trust in Jesus Christ. God will take care of the rest.

DISCUSSION (15 MINS)

1. Is it possible to authentically preach the gospel without offering a response to faith in Jesus?
2. What do you find easy/difficult about the response aspect of evangelism?
3. What have you learned about how to help people to respond to the gospel as you have shared the gospel?

- ‘Repentance is not just the gateway into relationship with the triune God; it is the pathway for that continuing relationship, as Luther wrote: ‘the entire life of believers should be one of repentance’. The Christian life involves a lifelong relationship, and as long as we are in this fallen world repentance will be an enduring part of our lives.’

• MARK J. BODA

APPLICATION (5 MINS)

Be intentional about extending an invitation to respond to the gospel every time you share it. Perhaps you are a platform preacher who has been struggling in this area. Experiment with different ways of calling out a response and don't be afraid of looking foolish if no one responds. Equally, you may be someone who is great at initiating and having conversations with people about Jesus, but are struggling to make a connection to the next steps. Step out in boldness this month and ask at least one person off the back of a gospel-centred conversation if they want to put their trust in Jesus.

PRAYER

Give thanks to God for the invitation he offers us each to be reconciled to him. Ask him for boldness as we share the gospel, and that we would be clear and confident in calling people to repentance – helping them see not condemnation but hope.

Pray that hearts might be receptive to this invitation.

ACCOUNTABILITY (15 MINS)

In pairs, discuss which area(s) of your life you think might need a bit of work in terms of ‘dying to yourself’. We can all struggle with areas of idolatry, or character deficiencies that need work. When thinking of extending the gospel invitation to others, let's also consider the same invitation afresh that God offers us – to die to ourselves and follow him. Encourage and pray for one another as you share in this area.

Complete accountability forms, share in pairs or smaller groups and pray for one another.

SESSION ELEVEN

THE INSPIRATION

The ministry of the evangelist is not only to preach the gospel into the world but to stir the whole church to evangelism. In this session we explore how we can all play a role in being fire-starters in the church to help encourage and equip those around us to be faithful to God in evangelism.

SESSION IN A SENTENCE

Alongside proclaiming the gospel to the world, an evangelist will also be committed to stirring the church to evangelism by encouraging and equipping all believers for works of service.

SESSION BACKGROUND

Since the advent of social media, a new form of celebrity has developed: the so-called 'influencer'. These are people who have developed such a following on a social media platform (particularly YouTube) that they are able to exert a mass-appeal influence over people. It's not an entirely new concept – celebrities from the entertainment and sports world have been telling us for years through advertising what to wear, eat, drink and smell like. But this generation of celebrities are arguably the first to have gathered a following for the purpose of influence itself.

Paul tells us in Romans not to conform to the influences of this world, but to be transformed by the renewing of our minds through submission to the Holy Spirit (Romans 12:2). As God's holy people, we are the original influencers, with a message that brings life, freedom and hope.

In Session Seven, we reminded ourselves that salt with no flavour is good for nothing. A social media influencer's power hinges

on how many followers they have and how well those followers engage with whatever they promote. For the church, our distinctiveness is far more important, and to lose it is far more costly. A social media influencer may lose their fame and career as they fade in influence, but if the church fades in influence and loses its distinctiveness, the world will miss opportunities to see the gospel lived out and hear it proclaimed in a way they can understand.

Evangelists are passionate to see the world receive the gospel, but they must also be passionate to continuously stir the church to bear gospel influence in the world. After all, there is no 'plan B' when it comes to the gospel, and the church of Jesus Christ are its only ambassadors. Whenever the church forgets this or becomes distracted, evangelists and those who are passionately engaged in evangelism in any capacity can lovingly fuel and stoke the fires of evangelism once more so that the influence of the gospel can shine brightly for all to see: that the whole church would take the whole gospel to the whole world for the whole glory of God.

SESSION GUIDE

.....

CATCH UP (10–20 MINS)

Take time to catch up with one another, sharing stories, encouragements, feedback on opportunities and anything else that would encourage the group. Share about your experiences inviting people to respond to the gospel in light of the last session (Session Ten – Application). Have you had opportunities to be intentional in this area since last time? If so, what has been the result?

PRAYER

Commit the time to the Lord and pray over any situations, positive or challenging, highlighted in the catch up time.

TEACHING (20–30 MINS)

Work through the following teaching material in your own way, either by reading it word for word, or by reworking it into your own presentation.

- ‘So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.’

• EPHESIANS 4:11-13

Even those who have a huge platform need some inspiration in life, as Hollywood action hero Dwayne ‘The Rock’ Johnson testified in an interview:

- ‘When I was eight years old, I saw *Raiders of the Lost Ark* in Charlotte, North Carolina. I walked out of there and was so inspired. I loved the movie, and I knew I wanted to be that guy.’

Discuss: Have you ever encountered someone so inspirational that you immediately wanted to do what they do/be like them? What was it about them or what they were doing that had this impact upon you?

Whether from a family member, historical figure, pop culture icon or even a fictional character, we can find inspiration in all sorts of places. Some of this inspiration affects the hobbies and careers we pursue and can even shape our character and worldview. Sometimes it works the other way – you can see someone so talented that it actually discourages you from pursuing something: ‘What’s the point, I’ll never be as good as them!’

There are many inspirational biblical figures, and it’s good to look to heroes of the faith both on and off the pages of the Bible – especially as we realise that, as impressive as they may be, they were just ordinary people being faithful to God. Knowing that the reason Moses could speak in power to Pharaoh had nothing to do with his oratory skills, and everything to do with his faithfulness to the call of God and submission to his power, is encouraging as it is inspiring. God is the same, so we could do the same things too.

Ultimately there is only one person who can inspire *and* empower us. In Jesus we have both the perfect model for what our lives should be, and the perfect power by which we can hope to live in such a way. As we are compelled by the example and teaching of Jesus, and as we are empowered by him for our life of faith, we should be considering the potential influence we have upon those around us.

Paul teaches in Ephesians 4 that Jesus has blessed the church with different gifts that are useful for his kingdom purposes. Evangelists are listed alongside apostles, pastors, teachers (or pastor-teachers) and prophets, and Paul states that people who hold the gifting to fulfil these callings are to equip the church for works of service and to build up the body of Christ.

- ‘...somewhere, an idea emerged and became very popular in the Christian community...It is that the ministry of the church is to be done by the paid, professional, theologically-trained clergy. According to this view, the whole purpose of the laity is to receive the benefits of ministry, in terms of preaching, counselling, comfort, and those other things that we seek to provide in the church. But the reason why certain gifts are given for leadership is to equip the believers for ministry. The church is to be a mobilised army.’

• R.C. SPROUL

It would be a mistake to look at the ministry roles in Ephesians 4 and conclude simplistically that they refer to certain special people in our churches. Paul’s

letter reveals something far better. These ministries exist because the church is special, and God is at work through ordinary people to ensure that it grows to maturity as one body. We take care of those in our church community while reaching those outside of it. Everybody gets to play.

We have a responsibility to use our gifts well, and that means being intentional about being inspirational. It also means that, by the humility and holiness we have explored in previous sessions, we must lead the way in protecting against any misuse of these gifts that can cause division in the church. Pride, ego, envy and the abuse of power are each a shortcut to division.

Discuss: Who in your church is most likely to be considered inspirational, and with that in mind what roles and functions in the church do you see people aspiring to today? Perhaps it's to become a pastor or youth worker, a worship leader or a Bible teacher. Are people aspiring to witness and evangelism, and if not, why not?

Here are five ways in which we can attempt to inspire others – whether we consider ourselves to be evangelists or not – to share the gospel faithfully:

1. PROCLAIM THE GOSPEL

One of the best ways to inspire people to share the gospel is to do so regularly in our gatherings. Another way is to invite our Christian brothers and sisters to come to events where we are preaching (not least for their prayerful support, but also to build their faith as they see its power at work as people encounter Jesus for the first time), or to come with us where/when we know we will have opportunity for gospel conversations with someone. As we share the gospel either publicly or personally we can constantly affirm that evangelism is a privilege and joy for all believers.

2. PREPARE TESTIMONY

Help people to think through their own testimony and the impact God has had upon their life from the time they first met him until now. How did they first come to put their trust in him, and what has he been doing in their life recently? Deliberately preparing personal testimony is both a great way to inspire and equip each other for evangelism and an act of worship as we give God thanks for what he has done in our lives.

3. PRIORITISE STORYTELLING

In our gatherings and conversations we should regularly share stories about our evangelistic activity. Celebrate and be encouraged when you see God at work through you, and choose to think positively and constructively about what you can learn from situations that didn't seem to go so well. As your community hears stories of God at work through ordinary people just like them, they will grow in confidence that God could use them too.

4. PRACTISE TOGETHER

It might seem odd to 'practise' evangelism by role playing with each other, but it is actually a great way to prepare for conversations we might have and help to build people's confidence. We wouldn't expect someone to drive a car on a public road without any practice or support, and neither should we expect people to witness without offering them an opportunity to grow in confidence through practising and learning together.

5. PROVIDE OPPORTUNITY

Through your church and in your wider friendship group, make opportunities for people to get involved in evangelism. Organise local and international mission opportunities, invite people to be part of a ministry team at events you are running, or take a few friends out for a couple of hours of street evangelism. The ways in which you could do this are

numerous: run some training before you go and debrief when you get back. In time people will become more comfortable taking the experiences of these 'formal' opportunities into their everyday lives and their evangelism will move from an organised mission week to an everyday opportunity.

However we go about doing it, let us commit to stirring and helping our brothers and sisters in Christ step into the fullness of their identity as the messenger children of God.

DISCUSSION (15 MINS)

1. What does it mean to build up the church in the way that Paul describes in Ephesians?
2. How do we maintain our distinctiveness in the world as followers of Jesus, and in the church as passionate evangelists?
3. Other than the five ways we explored in this session, how can we inspire others to evangelism?

APPLICATION (10 MINS)

Hopefully you will have a desire to stay in this group beyond the end of its first year and continue to journey together to grow as evangelists into Year Two. But with inspiring the church to evangelism in mind, now could be a good time to consider what it would look like to run your own Advance group alongside being in this one.

Multiplication is a core principle of the Advance movement because it should be our desire as evangelists to encourage others in their evangelism. Take some time to compile a list of people who might be interested in following the same journey you've been on and then begin reaching out in the coming weeks. Use your experience from this group and the Advance resources to help you plan and organise your own group.

PRAYER

Spend time praying for the local church, that all within it would be faithful to the gospel call on their lives. Pray for opportunities to encourage others, and pray to commission each member of the group to not only proclaim the gospel to a world in need, but to inspire and equip other followers of Jesus to do the same.

ACCOUNTABILITY (15 MINS)

Have you ever felt frustrated or angry at the church or people within it for what you perceive as a lack of evangelistic action or even heart for the lost? It's understandable to feel this way but the enemy can so easily twist these feelings into lingering resentment, superiority or even outright unforgiveness. Chat about this idea as a whole group and then pray in pairs for soft hearts towards our brothers and sisters, and wisdom in how to encourage them to faithful witness.

Complete accountability forms, share in pairs or smaller groups and pray for one another.

DON'T FORGET...

The Global Network of Evangelists offers support, fellowship and equipping to evangelists all around the world. Visit their website at evangelist.global to find out more and as you head towards the end of your first year of Advance, consider applying to join the network as part of your ongoing Advance journey.

WORD

A key aim of the Advance group is to help each other grow as evangelists who are committed to the Word of God. This retreat time is a great opportunity to go deeper into his Word.

EXTENDED BIBLE READING (SOLO READING)

Extended time spent with the Word of God is never time wasted. Taking the time to read through all of Mark's gospel or one of the New Testament letters in one sitting is a great way to get a full perspective on the contents of that book. If it is a shorter book, why not re-read it multiple times, praying and reflecting between each reading, making notes, and then going again? You could all choose to read the same thing, or have a few different options that people then share about their time of reading and reflection.

BIBLE STUDY (GROUP READING)

There are a number of ways that you could facilitate Bible study together on the retreat. Perhaps you will want to revisit some of the key passages you have explored over the Advance group sessions. Alternatively, you may feel led to a particular passage or theme that will set the tone for the retreat. As ever, be sure to keep it in line with developing each other as evangelists.

PRAYER

Set aside significant time for prayer during the retreat. Plan for prayer times with a specific focus, as well as time for both praying through scripture and spontaneous prayer. Whatever else you do in prayer during the retreat, the following three focuses are recommended.

PRAYING FOR EACH OTHER

Be sure to pray for one another as a primary element of your time together. Ask people to share one area they are feeling thankful to God for and one area in which they need provision or breakthrough. Encourage people to be specific and honest in their requests, and don't rush through each person but dedicate real time to one another. Be sure to keep a note of words and encouragements that come from this time.

PRAYING FOR THE LOCAL AND THE GLOBAL

Take time to pray for your local context and also the global spread of the gospel. If there are specific situations you have a heart for in either a local or global context then pray for them. Lift up individuals, churches, ministries, missionaries, situations from the news and so on.

PRAYING FOR THE ADVANCE JOURNEY

Give thanks for the journey that you have been on in this group, reflecting on personal growth and stories of fruitfulness and salvation. Ask the Lord to continue the work in you that he has begun, and that you would be transformed into his image with ever increasing glory (you could pray through 2 Corinthians 3:17-18).

WORSHIP

Time spent in God's Word, prayer and fellowship are all part of worship. But spend time in additional specific acts of collective devotional worship – whether it's through singing or other creative expressions.

SUNG WORSHIP

If you have someone who is musically talented, invite them to lead a time of sung worship. Alternatively, there are

many great collective worship apps and videos available online, many of which are free. A quick YouTube search for your favourite worship songs will likely bring up a version of the song with lyrics that can be played for the group to sing along to. There is power in the people of God joining together in song to declare his glory.

STORIES AND PRAISE

Spend time sharing stories of how God has been at work in your life this year – stories of growth, breakthrough, evangelistic opportunity and fruit. After each story spend time praising God through prayer, song or any method that works for your group as you seek to give thanks to God for who he is and what he has done/is doing.

COMMISSIONING

Another way in which you could share in a corporate act of worship would be to commission each other before God in the evangelistic task that he has called you to and empowered you for. At the end of this first year of your Advance group it will be encouraging and affirming to recognise this milestone, so give thanks to God for it and pray over each other as you look to go again with the gospel for the salvation of the world and to the glory of God.

ANNUAL REFLECTION

Using the form found on page 61 create space to reflect on the questions provided, fill in the form and pray over the answers given. This can be done individually or as a group.

FELLOWSHIP

As we gather together, we grow in friendship with and trust of one another. The fellowship of your Advance group has hopefully been a blessing to each

person, and on retreat you can continue in your commitment to hold each other to account and your enjoyment of each other's company.

ACCOUNTABILITY

Accountability has been a core part of every session so far, and in this final session of the year, once again commit to the same process to ensure you are living holy and humble lives.

FASTING/FEASTING

You may want to commit to a period of fasting as part of the retreat, or base your time together around meals through which you can gather together and make space for discussion. There is no right or wrong way to do this – all that matters is that it helps you achieve the goals of your retreat time.

ACTIVITIES

You may want to plan an activity together – for example, if you are retreating into nature somewhere, go on a walk together and fold some of the devotional activities above into this time. If based in a more urban environment, you could visit an art gallery together and do the same thing, using some of the art as a stimulus for reflection and devotion.

Equally, you might want to do something simply for fun together – a team activity, sport, entertainment option... Whether it's fellowship to encourage devotion, or fellowship to enjoy each other's company and grow in relationship with each other, invest in quality time with each other.

NEXT STEPS

The first year of Advance is done. Before you bring the year (and the retreat) to a close, be sure to look at the next steps for this group and the new groups that will launch from this one.

THIS GROUP

Create space for people to share about how the Advance group experience has been for them. Share feedback about how you've all grown and developed, and think about what the biggest learning has been from the year. Encourage each other in these things.

Pray and give thanks for the first year of Advance and commit what is ahead to the Lord.

Take the opportunity to set dates for starting Year Two together.

NEW GROUPS

It will also be worth picking up on the development of new groups that was started in the last session. Check how people are getting on with the possibility of starting their own group, and if there are new groups going to start, pray for them.

However you run your retreat time, keep the core values of Advance in focus, reflect on the journey you have been on as a group, and pray for what lies ahead the future.

APPENDIX

GOSPEL DOCTRINE

- You are not an accident. You are created by and in the image of the perfect and loving God (Father, Spirit, Son) who is the source and sustainer of life (Genesis 1).
- We have all rejected God (sinned) by going our own way, instead of living in obedience to our creator. This is why the world is broken and full of suffering. This injustice aggrieves God, who does not trivialise sin by ignoring or excusing it, but who justly punishes those who offend (Romans 3:23).
- We are powerless to put things right once we have rebelled against God, having committed an act of treason against the king of the universe. Rejection of God is rejection of life itself. We are left with eternal death, the natural product of our rejection of life and of God's punishment (divine justice) for breaking his standard for right living (Romans 6:23).
- But God desires for none to know death, for he is love itself and wants to be in eternal relationship with us, his dearly loved children. God graciously set in motion a rescue mission to save us (1 Timothy 2:4–6).
- God sent his Son, Jesus Christ, into the world as a human being, to live the perfect human life that never rejected the Father. Jesus was killed upon a cross, acting as our substitute and choosing to take upon himself the death we deserved for our rejection of God (John 3:16; Romans 3:23–25).
- Three days later, Jesus rose from the dead, showing that the curse of death is broken. New life is possible only through trust in Jesus Christ and the seeking of forgiveness for sin (Proverbs 28:13; Ephesians 2:1–10; 1 John 1:7–9).
- Jesus' death and resurrection achieved reconciliation, redemption, propitiation (appeasement), and the defeat of evil. Our sin was credited to Jesus, and his righteousness is credited to us. The only requirement on our part for this transaction to take effect is that we trust in Jesus as Lord (faith), and believe that God raised him from the dead. We are saved by faith alone. (Matthew 20:28; Romans 10:9; 2 Corinthians 5:18–21; John 12:31; Colossians 2:15).
- We can now access a restored relationship with our heavenly Father. We have peace and are adopted into his family. We die to our old life and are born again into a new life. (Luke 9:23; Colossians 1:20, 2:13–14; Romans 5:1–2; Galatians 4:4–7).
- Jesus ascended to heaven, where he reigns at the right hand of the Father, but he has sent believers the gift of the Holy Spirit to empower us to live obediently in the fullness of life, and to help us share his good news with the world. We become new creations – disciples – transformed by the work of the Spirit in our lives, which leads to fruitfulness. We work as God's ambassadors in the world, representing the kingdom of peace, serving as witnesses to the truth of the Jesus story in word and deed (Micah 6:8; Acts 1:8; 2 Corinthians 5:11–21; Galatians 5:22–23).
- One day, Jesus will return to judge the living and the dead. God's perfect kingdom will be restored and eternal life with our loving Father awaits those who trust in Jesus as Lord. Eternal death (hell) awaits those who do not. The good news is that no one needs to perish eternally, all can know eternal life and joy in relationship with God, through faith in Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 15; Revelation 21:1–8; 22:1–5).

APPENDIX

GOSPEL NARRATIVE

Before all things, God existed in perfect relationship with himself, Father, Spirit, Son. God created the world and it was very good, and he shared a unique relationship with humankind. We were created for perfect life with him, the King of the universe, and life itself! But God did not force humanity to love him, he let us choose for ourselves. With this free will humanity chose to go their own way, rejecting God.

Rejecting the King of the universe is treason without equal, rebellion against life itself. Death, suffering and pain entered the world. Humanity doomed itself to separation from their perfect heavenly Father with no way back. God couldn't excuse the rebellion, for there would be no justice in that action. A just and righteous God must demand a penalty be paid for the crimes committed. The punishment for rebellion against life is death.

But God so loved the world that he initiated a plan to save humanity from death – to make it possible for us to know the fullness of his life and love forever. God sent his son Jesus into the world to live the perfect human life, a life that never rebelled and became guilty of any crime against God.

Jesus willingly died upon a cross to take the punishment of death that humanity deserved for its rebellion and in doing so he became our substitute. Three days later he came back to life, because he is God and death cannot hold him. In this moment it became possible for humanity to not only receive forgiveness for rebellion against God, but to share in the new and eternal life that Jesus has made possible. The curse of death was broken.

All we need to do is believe that Jesus is who he says he is – the crucified and resurrected Saviour of the world, the King of the universe – and choose to make him Lord of our lives. There is salvation and life for all who trust in him, and the empowering of his Holy Spirit enables us to live the kind of lives we were created for: lives that reveal the image of God so that all may know true life. By placing our trust in Jesus, we die to our old life and are born again into new life. One day Jesus will return and his perfect kingdom will be restored. All who trust in him will live forever within his kingdom, and so we are called and compelled to share God's love with the world so that all may know this eternal hope today and forevermore.

APPENDIX

YOUTH GOSPEL TALK EXAMPLE

ONE: YOU ARE NOT AN ACCIDENT!

So many people go around thinking that they are a cosmic accident, that they are here because the universe just came into being from nothing, and then we somehow arrived a few billion years later. But that doesn't make any sense, nor does it offer any hope for what life can mean!

The Bible says that God has always existed and created the world from a desire to share his love with his creation – humanity. So you are not an accident – you are God's creation, you are loved and you have purpose. God has decided the universe is better with you in it, and that is why you are here!

TWO: YOU HAVE MISSED THE POINT!

The problem is, when people don't know that God created them and that he loves them, they miss the whole point of life! Knowing God is living life as it was meant to be lived – in friendship with our creator, in relationship with a loving, kind, merciful, gracious, patient and wise God. The Bible talks about God as a perfect Father, who wants good things for his children – that's you and me! But the Bible also talks about us as being rebellious children, we've run away from our Father's love.

Not knowing God is like running onto the pitch of the Football (Soccer) World Cup final but not bothering to set up any goals... no one would be able to score a goal, no one would be able to win the trophy – it would be pointless, just people running around until the end of the game.

THREE: YOU CAN KNOW FULL LIFE!

The Bible tells us that when we reject the life God has for us, bad stuff will happen in this world because we think we know how

to live this life better than the perfect God who created us. Our less than perfect way of running things will result in a less than perfect world. The Bible calls this sin – which means missing the mark of what we were created for. Another way of thinking about sin is selfishness. We choose our way instead of God's way. We say, *'Hey God, I'm better than you; I know more than you; I don't need you; I can be a better God than you.'* We only have to turn on the news to see the messed-up world we live in, and this is the result of people missing the point, living for themselves, or anything other than their loving Father God who is the source of life. All the suffering, injustice and chaos we see in the world exists because we think we know better than God – we've rejected him.

This rejection puts a barrier between us – an imperfect and rebellious people – and the perfect God of all creation. When we reject God there are consequences to our actions. If you go against your teachers and break the rules at school you might get a detention, the negative consequence of making the wrong choice. But when we go against our creator God the consequences are not a simple punishment to correct our behaviour, these consequences are the natural reality that follow our actions. In rejecting God we reject life and if you reject life what are you left with? Death.

But God doesn't want you to die, he created you for life in all its fullness in relationship with him. The Bible tells us that God has done something to fix the problem we created, he sent his Son Jesus into this world – God in human form – to live the perfect human life that shows us how we were supposed to live, and to take the consequences of our rejection upon himself.

Jesus was killed on a cross to take the death that we chose when we rejected God, to take our eternal detention. Here's the amazing news though, three days later he came back to life!

People might say, "Are you crazy? How can a man come back to life from death?" But remember, Jesus is God and God is life – death can't hold him! The Bible says that if you say sorry to God for running away

from his love and trust in Jesus as Lord – that means the perfect One we were created to live for instead of the imperfection and chaos of living for ourselves – we can move from the death we had chosen and into true life in relationship with Jesus, today and eternally in Heaven: God’s perfect kingdom.

[The prodigal son story could be told here to illustrate everything said up to this point, about running from a loving father, ending up in a mess, and in turning back to home realising we have a better welcome than we hoped for. We are welcomed back as sons and daughters with all the blessings and privileges attached.]

FOUR: WHO IS IN THE HOTSEAT OF YOUR LIFE?

Do you have a favourite chair in your house? The place you get annoyed if someone else sits in and gets the best view of the TV? Our lives have a hotseat – a throne from which we rule and reign over our existence. We don’t want to allow anyone else to sit on this throne, to have reign over our life. We say to God, ‘Hey God, you can’t sit in the hotseat of my life, I want to be in control!’

But God loves us so much that he wants us to know the true life that he created us for, to help us, to guide us, to sit where he belongs, the throne of our heart. Putting God in his rightful place means we can be truly fulfilled in his love, that we can truly live.

So many of us are confused about what life is about. Some of you might struggle with depression, self-harm, eating disorders, understanding our identity. Some are not happy with what they see in the mirror. Some are worried about the future. You don’t think you will achieve anything meaningful. Some of you are deeply unhappy and stressed. Some of you are feeling pretty good about everything in life, and yet there is still something missing that you can’t quite put your finger on...

[A short testimony could be used here to connect the ideas you are presenting to real experience.]

God has an answer to all these realities, he says ‘You feel that way because you are

not truly alive, you are experiencing the shadow of life, mere existence. All who have breath in their lungs exist but that only ends in death, you were created for life and that is found in putting your trust in my son Jesus and living for him.”

Don’t miss the point of life. Turn to God, say sorry for rejecting him and he will forgive you. Put your trust in him as Lord and he will show you who you really are. He will give you full life, real life, and you will never experience death. When you draw your last breath in this life you will be more alive than you’ve ever been as you are with him eternally. To be sure, this life will still have challenges, not every problem in your world will instantly be fixed when you follow Jesus – and you might even discover some new challenges that come *because* you are following him – but God will help you. He will give you his Holy Spirit to help you live the life he has for you in this complicated world. He will bring you into his church, which while not perfect, is his family on earth, designed to help you know him more, keep going even when life is difficult, and reveal his love and care the world. You will never be the same again.

You are not an accident, you are loved beyond compare by a perfect God. But God will not force you to trust him. True love is always a choice. You have to choose it for yourself. You can turn back to God today and know real life in relationship with him.

What will you choose?

QUESTIONS:

1. What is good about this presentation?
2. Is there anything lacking?
3. Why might this be considered a ‘youth talk’?
4. How would you adapt this talk for another specific audience (eg. a student meeting, a mother and toddler group, a business leaders’ lunch, a retirement community)?

YEAR ONE REFLECTION

HOW DID YOU HOPE TO GROW THROUGH THIS FIRST YEAR OF ADVANCE?

HOW HAVE YOU GROWN?

WHAT IS YOUR BIGGEST LEARNING FROM THIS YEAR?

WHAT IS THE MOST SURPRISING THING TO COME OUT OF THIS YEAR IN ADVANCE?

WHAT HAS BEEN THE GREATEST ENCOURAGEMENT IN YOUR EVANGELISM?

WHAT HAS BEEN THE GREATEST CHALLENGE?

WHAT SCRIPTURE HAS MOST IMPACTED YOU THIS YEAR AND WHY?

HOW HAS GOD BEEN AT WORK IN YOUR PRAYERS THIS YEAR?

HOW DO YOU HOPE TO GROW IN YEAR TWO OF ADVANCE (AND WILL YOU SET UP YOUR OWN GROUP THIS YEAR)?

WHAT EVANGELISTIC OPPORTUNITIES ARE YOU LONGING FOR IN THE COMING YEAR?

At the end of this first year of Advance, use this form to reflect on what you've learned, how you've grown, and what your hopes are for the next year of the Advance journey. If there are any stories you reflect on here that you think would encourage others, share them with us at advancegroups.org/stories

ACCOUNTABILITY FORM

KEY

✓ Good

— Okay

✗ Bad

• ‘Search me O God and know my heart’ (Psalm 139:23)

Accept one another (Romans 15:7)

Confess your faults to one another (James 5:16)

Encourage one another and build each other up (1 Thessalonians 5:11)

• ‘Live out your God-created identity. Live generously and graciously towards others the way God lives towards you.’ (Matthew 5:48, MSG)

How clear is my vision for my life?	Are my relationships with those I serve healthy? (Peers, leaders, the opposite sex)
How clear is my vision for the work I'm involved in?	How healthy is my response to being hungry, angry, lonely, or tired?
Am I enjoying what I do?	Am I engaging in inappropriate lustful thoughts?
Do I feel God's pleasure in what I'm doing?	Am I getting enough rest?
How passionate am I?	Am I managing my time well?
Am I pursuing intimacy with Jesus?	Am I spending my spare time in a healthy way?
Am I making enough space for prayer?	Am I keeping a healthy balance between church, work and home life?
Am I spending time in personal Bible study?	Am I forming and maintaining relationships with non-Christians?
Did the Bible come alive for me today?	Am I exposing myself to sexually alluring material?
Am I seeking evidence of God's power in my life and ministry?	Am I defeated in any part of my life: jealous, impure, critical, irritable, touchy or distrustful?
Is Jesus real to me?	Am I managing my money well?
Am I teachable and accountable?	Am I giving generously?
Am I available and approachable?	Am I choosing not to envy other people?
Am I listening well?	Am I choosing to not grumble or complain?
Am I making myself vulnerable to others?	Am I walking with integrity?
Am I leading with a servant heart?	Am I decisive and confident?
Am I trustworthy?	Am I willing to take risks?
Am I keeping my promises?	Am I making goals and reaching them?
Am I holding on to healthy perspective?	Am I willing to make sacrifices?
Am I handling pressure well? (from people, work, circumstances)	Am I keeping my cutting edge?
How is my health?	Am I moving in the power of the Spirit?
Am I eating healthily?	Am I withholding forgiveness from anyone?
Am I sleeping well?	Am I pursuing freedom from destructive patterns and strongholds?
Am I allowing my mind to dwell on inappropriate thoughts?	
Am I remembering the sick, hurting and needy?	
Are my family happy?	
How are my friendships?	

• ‘Trust God from the bottom of your heart. Don't try to figure out everything on your own. Listen for God's voice in everything you do, everywhere you go. He's the one who will keep you on track. Don't assume that you know it all. Run to God! Run from evil.’ (Proverbs 3:5-7, MSG)

THE GOSPEL. THERE IS NO PLAN B.



ADVANCEGROUPS.ORG



Advance Group Mentoring Guide
© The Message Trust, 2024.

Published by
The Message Trust
message.org.uk

Unless otherwise indicated scriptures are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. www.zondervan.com The “NIV” and “New International Version” are trademarks registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by Biblica, Inc.™

Scripture quotations marked NLT are taken from the Holy Bible, New Living Translation, copyright ©1996, 2004, 2015 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked ESV are taken from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® (ESV®) Copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked NRSV are taken from New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright © 1989 National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Scripture quotations marked MSG are taken from THE MESSAGE, copyright © 1993, 1994, 1995, 4996, 2000, 2001, 2002 by Eugene H. Peterson. Used by permission of NavPress. All rights reserved. Represented by Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.

All rights reserved. Except as may be permitted by the Copyright Act, no part of this publication may be reproduced in any form or by any means without prior permission from the publisher.

The Message Trust has asserted his right under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 to be identified as the author of this work.

Edition: E2.0, Printed in the UK.