

OUR GOD WHO



GROWTH GROUP STUDIES TERM 3, 2022

Leaders Notes

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ENGADINE &
HEATHCOTE
ANGLICAN

OUR GOD WHO ...

If someone were to ask you to describe who your God is, what would you say?

This term we take a break from our usual “exegetical” reading of the Bible (chapter by chapter) to think “systematically” (topic by topic). We’ll be digging through the Bible to think big, as we consider some of the core beliefs we have as followers of Jesus. We have chosen to centre these topics around our God and who He has gloriously revealed Himself to be.

One term you might hear throughout this series is “Systematic Theology”. This involves the gathering together of all the Bible has to say on any particular topic, seeking to organise it in such a way that we can understand God’s word on the matter.

Some tips for you to get the most out of this term:

- Keep your Bible open, for that is where our God speaks to us.
- Expect to have more questions than you will have time for! Each topic we cover is huge and there will be so much more that could be discovered. Each study ends with a passage and question to help you keep reflecting on God’s word during the week. Continue your conversations outside of Growth Group, take notes during the sermons, use your connect slips on a Sunday or email the ministry staff to ask about anything.
- Take time each week to develop and strengthen your “system” of beliefs by reflecting each week on how all these different truths about God connect with each other.

ONE: Our God Who ... *Speaks*

Study 1: Before we discuss who God is, we need to recognise that we can only do so because He has chosen to reveal Himself to us! As the topics we will cover this term can go in many directions, we want to make sure that our Growth Groups keep coming back to God's word in "**the Bible**". This is where we build our doctrine from, for this is where God speaks.

Scripture: 2 Timothy 3:14-17; Hebrews 1:1-4; 2 Peter 1:16-21; Romans 15:4

Getting started:

What is your earliest memory of reading the bible?

Reading the Bible:

- 1) Look up the following passages. How has God chosen to speak?

Hebrews 1:1-4; John 1:1-4, 14-18

- 2) Use the following passages to create a mindmap with the Bible at the centre.
What is the connection between Jesus, salvation and Scripture?

John 16:12-15; 2 Timothy 3:14-17; Romans 1:1-4; Ephesians 6:17; 2 Peter 1:16-21, 3:15-18; Romans 1:1-4, 15:4



3) How would you summarise the doctrine of Scripture?

God speaks to us in the person of Jesus Christ. By the work of the Holy Spirit we have access to Jesus in the Bible. Therefore, in the Bible God speaks to us, so that we might know the truth of Jesus for salvation.

Implications:

Have you ever had to defend the Scriptures with a friend or family member or colleague?

How might you respond to someone who says the following:

- *"Why do you care about the bible so much? What is its relevance for the 21st century?"*
- *"You shouldn't use the bible to prove the bible. That's circular!"*
- *"I agree that's what it says in the Bible. But I like to think of God as ..."*
- *"You should put less weight on Paul's sexist views and more time on Jesus' loving views."*
- *"If I have the Spirit, the bible should be easy to understand. But I find it hard to understand...am I really a Christian?"*

DURING THE WEEK

Psalm 119 is all about God's word. Read Psalm 119:169-176, and thank God for his word.

TWO: Our God Who ... *Is One and Three*

Study 2: The next two studies focus on two important elements of who God is. This week we'll explore what it means that our God is three persons, who relate to each other. We call this **"the Trinity"**. If you are new to Christianity and are trying to get your head around the maths of how God could be 3 in 1, don't fret – the concept is hard for all of us to understand.

A note about analogies – many earthly objects that have 3 elements (e.g. egg yolk, egg white, egg shell) have been used to describe the trinity – but they all fall short in some way, for God is unlike anything in all of creation! If you want to explore these further, watch this 4 minute video: bit.ly/trinity-satire. We'll also briefly look at the implication that humans are made in God's image – and so relate to each other.

Scripture: John 1:1-4, 14; 5:19-23; 14:6-11; 16:12-15; 20:21-28

Getting started:

Do people need to believe that God is both one, and three, in order to be saved?

Reading the Bible:

- 1) The word "trinity" never appears in the Bible. What do the following passages reveal about God?

Genesis 1:1, 26	<i>One God and "let us" is plural</i>
Deuteronomy 6:4-5	<i>There is one God</i>
Matthew 28:18-20	<i>In the [one] name: "Father, Son, Spirit"</i>
Matthew 6:9	<i>The Father is God, Jesus says pray to him</i>
John 20:27-29	<i>Jesus is God</i>
Acts 5:3-4	<i>The Holy Spirit is God</i>

- 2) How do The Father, The Son and The Holy Spirit relate to one another? Use the following passages to create a diagram:

John 1:1-4, 14; 5:19-23; 14:6-11; 16:12-15; 20:21-28*

THE FATHER

THE SON

THE SPIRIT

- 3) * Note the pronoun used of the Spirit in John 16:12-15 – “He”. Is this surprising? Why is it important that we get this right?

The Spirit is not an impersonal force, He is the person of God. God lives in us!

- 4) God is relational in His very being and we have been made in His image. What implications can you begin to see for our lives?

Genesis 1:26-28, Genesis 9:6, Colossians 1:15-17, Colossians 3:5-10

We are made for relationships - with God and with each other. These relationships are best enjoyed when they are other-person centred and seeking to glorify God, for that is what God is like.

- 5) Are we in God’s image now or do we have to wait until heaven?

Colossians 1:15-17, Colossians 3:5-10

Implications:

How might you respond to the following people?

- *"The word 'trinity' isn't mentioned in the bible so it must not be true."*
- *"If there is no illustration for the trinity, it can't be true."*
- A Muslim person who says *"As Muslims, we believe God is logical. 3 persons = 1 God is illogical."*
- A Jehovah's Witness who comes to your door and mentions *"Jesus is God's son, but he is not God, because God the Father created him."*
- *"If the Holy Spirit is God, why do we pray to the Father?"*

DURING THE WEEK

Read 2 Corinthians 13:11-14, the end of Paul's letter to the Corinthians. Reflect on what it teaches us about God as Father, Son and Spirit.

THREE: Our God Who ... *Is Holy*

Study 3: There is God. And then there is everything that He has made. God is completely distinct from His creation, especially in His perfection. The word the Bible uses to describe this is: **"Holy"**.

We saw an element of this last week, where God can perfectly relate within Himself in the three persons of the trinity. But how could a holy God relate to his sinful creation? Can we have any hope? These are some of the questions we'll be wrestling with this week.

Scripture: Exodus 15:11-13, Ezekiel 36:22-24, Habakkuk 1:12-13, Amos 4:2, Romans 6:15-19

Getting started:

When you were growing up, what family traditions did you have that were distinct from those around you?

Reading the Bible:

- 1) The word "holy" means "distinct" or "set apart". Use the following passages to create a mindmap as we begin to explore what the Bible says about God's "holiness":

Exodus 3:14, 15:11-13, 34:5-6; Leviticus 11:44-45; Ezekiel 36:22-24; Amos 4:2; Habakkuk 1:12-13; Revelation 4:8, 15:3-4.

— HOLINESS —

- 2) The bible paints a very different picture of humanity. We are not like God, especially because of our sin. How does humanity's unholiness impact our relationship with God?

Habakkuk 1:12-13; Romans 3:10-12.

- 3) Read Isaiah 6:1-7. What is the tension? How does God resolve it? You might find it helpful to draw the scene in the boxes below:

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- 4) What Isaiah experienced in part, we can experience in full. Explore the following passages. What do they teach us about what God *has done* and *is doing* in Jesus?
Colossians 1:21-23; 3:12-14; Hebrews 10:5-15; 1 Peter 1:13-16; 2:9-10.

God has, and is, making us holy. That is: God has made us, and is making us, distinct from the rest of humanity.

a) We have been made blameless in his sight - forgiven through the death of Jesus. This means we can have a relationship with Him, the world cannot.

b) We are being transformed to be like God in the way we live - this is distinct from the world.

- 5) What do you think? What is God's purpose in making us holy – distinct – like Him?
It's not just that we can have a relationship with Him, it's also so that we can display His holiness to the world, that they might come into relationship with Him as well.

Implications:

How might you respond to someone who says the following:

- *"If God has forgiven me, then he doesn't care if I sin, does he?"*
- *"If God has made Christians holy, this means we cannot come into contact with any non-Christians, because we risk being made unholy."*
- *"Why did Jesus have to die under God's wrath?"*

God's holiness exposes sin. His wrath opposes it. This is what Isaiah thought he was about to experience!

Sinful people cannot approach God (or He would not be holy). And God cannot tolerate sin (or He would not be holy). His wrath is His righteous (holy) opposition to sin. It is not only a feeling, but an action.

For us to have a relationship with God then, it's not just our sin (unholiness) that needs to be dealt with. But also God's wrath. For otherwise, He would be condoning our sin. And if he condones our sin, then His own holiness would be compromised.

For God to forgive our sin He needed to deal with His wrath.

- *"How is it right that God can condemn people to an eternity in hell?"*

DURING THE WEEK

Read Romans 6:15-23 and reflect on who God has made us to be and what it means for our lives. Make sure to look out for the word: "holiness".

FOUR: Our God Who ... Took on Flesh

Study 4: The next 3 studies focus on the life and work of Jesus Christ. We'll begin with his humanity. In the ancient church some denied that Jesus was truly human. Today there are some who would deny that he is God. However, the Bible affirms that Jesus is truly God and truly man. We call this "**the Incarnation**".

Scripture: Matthew 1:18-25, John 1:1-18, Hebrews 2:10-18.

Getting started:

In small groups, come up with a list of details about the life of Jesus that are essential in understanding Christianity (eg. death on the cross) and ones that are peripheral (eg. he lived in Galilee).

Which category would you place the humanity of Jesus under? Why?

Reading the Bible:

- 1) Read John 1:1-18 using the print out on the following page. Highlight in different colours (or underline with different squiggles) what it says about:
 - a) Who Jesus is (**God + Man**)
Note: the fact that all things were made through Jesus means that he cannot himself have been made. He is eternal, he is God.
 - b) What Jesus has done (**Creation, revealed God, made us God's children. What's really significant here is that only God can do these things!**)

Summarise your findings in the spaces above.

- 2) Why is Jesus' **divinity** so important? **Allows him to fully make God known. He has the right to make us God's children.**

John 1:1-18 [New International Version]

¹In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was with God in the beginning. ³Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. ⁴In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. ⁵The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

⁶There was a man sent from God whose name was John. ⁷He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. ⁸He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light.

⁹The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. ¹⁰He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. ¹¹He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. ¹²Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— ¹³children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

¹⁴The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

¹⁵(John testified concerning him. He cried out, saying, "This is the one I spoke about when I said, 'He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.'") ¹⁶Out of his fullness we have all received grace in place of grace already given. ¹⁷For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.

3) Read Hebrews 2:14-18 below, highlight what it says about:

a) Who Jesus is

He became one of us, taking on flesh and blood. Note, that he came to share in our humanity suggests he was already God.

b) What Jesus has done

Broke the power of the devil, who holds the power of death.

Helped Abraham's descendents (= God's children)

Has become our high priest – he is able to represent us before God because he is one of us.

Has made atonement for our sin – because he was perfect.

Summarise your findings in the spaces above.

Hebrews 2:10-18 [New International Version]

¹⁴ Since the children [of God] have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—¹⁵ and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.

¹⁶ For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham's descendants. ¹⁷ For this reason he had to be made like them, fully human in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. ¹⁸ Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

4) From Hebrews 2:10-18, why is Jesus' **humanity** so important?

He is able to represent us before God and help us in our relationship with God, because truly he is one of us.

Implications:

How might you respond to someone who says the following:

- *"I find it hard to talk to God in prayer because I am so ashamed of my sin."*
- Israel Folau once tweeted: *"Jesus Christ was the vessel of God, God is a spirit. He formed the body of Jesus Christ and was in him."* What do you make of this?

Jesus' body was not just a vessel for a "spirit". If this were the case, then Jesus did not truly become one of us. He is fully God and fully man.

- *"Mary was a virgin? That's ridiculous! Do I really need to believe that myth?"*

The virgin birth does not prove the incarnation. But it is certainly consistent. It shows that Jesus truly is the divine son. And that he truly is human

DURING THE WEEK

Read Philippians 2:1-11 as you reflect on what the incarnation means for our lives together as God's children.

FIVE: Our God Who ... *Atones*

Study 5: This study covers what God achieved in Jesus' crucifixion. Throughout history, various attempts have been made to explain the nature of the cross. For example, some argue that Jesus' death was simply a model of selfless love for us to follow; others argue that it was about conquering evil through sacrifice. Both are true, yet neither is complete. At the cross, God poured out His wrath on Jesus – our substitutionary sacrifice – rescuing us from the guilt, power, and penalty of sin. We call this: **"Atonement"**.

Scripture: Exodus 12:1-42, Romans 3:21-26, Revelation 5:6-10.

Getting started:

What images come to mind when you think of a lamb?

Reading the Bible:

- 1) Read Exodus 12:1-42. This passage describes the events of the Passover, as God rescued His people from slavery in Egypt. As you go, note what happens to:
 - a) The lambs?
It is sacrificed. Its blood is painted on the doors of the houses of Israel - a sign to 'the destroyer' to 'pass over' that house.
 - b) The Egyptians?
Without the blood of the lamb, their firstborns are struck down. This is because of their sin - v. 12. The wages of sin is death.
 - c) The Israelites?
Important to notice three things: 1) they are spared God's wrath. 2) They are freed from their slavery in Egypt. 3) So that they can worship God (v. 31).

2) Read together the following passages. How is the Old Testament imagery of Passover applied to Jesus?

1 Corinthians 5:7	<i>Jesus is our Passover Lamb - sin, slavery, in order to worship.</i>
Romans 3:21-26	<i>Jesus is the sacrifice of atonement that makes us right with God. It's by faith - like Israel trusting God's instructions about the lamb.</i>
Romans 5:6-11	<i>While we were sinners (like Israel) Jesus died to save us from God's wrath. We have been reconciled to God.</i>
1 Peter 1:18-19	<i>Christ is our lamb without blemish - our perfect sacrifice.</i>
1 John 2:1-2	<i>Jesus is our advocate with God. Indeed, anyone can trust in him and have their sin atoned for.</i>
1 John 4:10	<i>God sent Jesus to atone for our sin = love.</i>
Revelation 5:6-10	<i>Jesus is the lamb who rules from heaven. He purchased us for God = saved to serve/worship.</i>
Revelation 12:10-12	<i>Satan (the accuser) has been defeated. Jesus has set us free from the one who enslaved us.</i>

Implications:

How might you respond to someone who says the following:

- *"The God of the Old Testament is full of wrath. But the God of the New Testament is full of love."*
- *"There are many paths to the top of the mountain - it doesn't matter which god you believe in, as long as you believe in one."*
- *"Jesus died on the cross so that we might have an example of selfless love to follow. Our focus as a church should be on helping those oppressed by the evils of injustice."*
- *"The songs we sing at church don't make me feel close to God. I feel distant from Him."*

DURING THE WEEK

Read John 19:28-41. It was a "special Sabbath" because Jesus died at the time of Passover. Reflect on how John's account of Jesus' crucifixion shows him to be the Lamb who atoned for your sin.

SIX: Our God Who ... *Raises*

Study 6: This study will look at the fact of Jesus' resurrection. Many non-Christians mock us for our belief that Jesus rose from the grave. But for the Apostle Paul, it was the exact reverse – we are to be mocked if there is *no* resurrection. **“Resurrection”** simply means a dead person coming back to life, and it is central to the Christian message. It has implications for our lives – both now, and in eternity.

Scripture: Ezekiel 37:1-12, 1 Corinthians 15:1-34

Getting started:

If Jesus' bones were dug up today, how would you respond?

Reading the Bible:

- 1) How did the Old Testament anticipate the idea of Resurrection?

Ezekiel 37:1-14	
Daniel 12:1-3	
Hosea 6:1-3	

- 2) Read 1 Corinthians 15:1-8. What does Paul say happened to Jesus? Is there a possibility that Jesus' resurrection was simply symbolic (a story like the parable of the good samaritan)?

The listing of his resurrection appearances shows the truth of Jesus' resurrection. Paul's comment "most of whom are still living" acts like an invitation for the Corinthians to go and ask the people who witnessed it.

- 3) Read 1 Corinthians 15:12-34. What would the implications be if Jesus hadn't risen from the dead? What are the implications of the fact that he has?

How foolish for us to have given our lives to Christ if he's still dead. For not only does it result in suffering now, it means our sins are not forgiven, and there is no hope of life.

But Christ has been raised (v. 20-28). This means our resurrection is assured. But more than that, it indicates that we now live at the time when Christ is reigning in heaven. We live in the resurrection age.

- 4) Look up the following passages to explore how the resurrection of Jesus affects our lives both now, and for eternity.

Ephesians 2:1-7	<i>We were dead, but now raised up with Christ - alive!</i>
Romans 8:18-25	<i>We are alive in Christ, but our physical resurrection is still yet to come.</i>
1 Corinthians 15:50-58	<p><i>Everyone will be resurrected (cf. Dan 12). "Therefore ... give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labour in the Lord is not in vain."</i></p> <p><i>It's not in vain because people are what last into eternity.</i></p>

Implications:

How might you respond to someone who says the following:

- Sandy likes the morals and principles that come with Christianity and enjoys her close circle of friends that she has found at church. She recently said, *“Even if Jesus’ bones were to be found, I think I’d still be a Christian because of the lifestyle.”*
- *“It’s really great that Christians have a hope in life after death but for me it’s just wishful thinking in trying to come to terms with death.”*
- *“You don’t really believe that Jesus physically rose from the dead, do you!? Science tells you that people don’t. I believe his resurrection was a spiritual one. And besides, the cross is what really matters.”*

DURING THE WEEK

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. How does the resurrection shape the way we grieve as Christians?

SEVEN: Our God Who ... *Recreates*

Study 7: This study focuses on the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Christian. Throughout the gospels we see Jesus call people to repentance and faith (Matthew 4:17, Mark 1:14-15). Repentance means turning away from sin to serve the true and living God. Faith means trust, which will always express itself in action. Repentance and faith are the work of the Holy Spirit who is **“Recreating”** us in the image of Jesus.

Scripture: John 16:7-15, Ephesians 1:13-17, Galatians 5:22-26

Getting started:

Spend some time sharing together how you came to put your faith in Jesus. Discuss some things that you found particularly influential in leading you to make that commitment.

Reading the Bible:

1) Read John 16:7-15.

- a) In this passage Jesus is talking to his disciples. Who is “the Advocate”, when will He come, who will He come to?

The Advocate is the Holy Spirit. We know this is the case as Jesus continues to speak about him throughout this passage and describes his role, then in verse 13 Jesus directly refers to him as “the Spirit of truth”. He will come after Jesus ascends into heaven. He will come to the disciples.

- b) In what ways will the Holy Spirit prove to the world to be wrong about (v. 8-11): ***Hint: Jesus gives an explanation of each one!***

- Sin – ***that they need to turn from their sin, they need to live with Jesus as their Lord.***
- Righteousness – ***that the only way to be “right with God” is through the one who has gone to be with the Father.***
- Judgement – ***the Spirit will prove that the world is following the wrong one. Satan has been defeated and now stands condemned (Jn 12:31).***

c) How will the Holy Spirit do this work? (v. 12-15) (See also Eph 5:17)
Jesus is speaking to the disciples, who will soon become the Apostles. To them, Jesus is promising the Holy Spirit. To them, Jesus is promising to reveal all truth - the full and final revelation from the Father. This is a key piece of information about the authority and reliability of the New Testament. To put it another way - the Holy Spirit will convict the world about the truth of Jesus as the disciples proclaim the truth of who Jesus is. Ephesians 5:17 - the Spirit does his work by the word of God.

2) Split into pairs or small groups to read and discuss the following before sharing what you discovered with the whole group:

	What is the role of the Holy Spirit?	What is the role of God's word?
John 3:1-8	<i>Gives new birth into the kingdom of God</i>	<i>Jesus is revealing the truth to Nicodemus - he wouldn't have known otherwise.</i>
Ephesians 1:13-17	<i>Guarantee of our salvation, growing us in our relationship with God.</i>	<i>Salvation happened when we heard the message of truth. Gives wisdom and knowledge to grow us.</i>
2 Corinthians 3:16-18	<i>He reveals Jesus - bringing us freedom. He is transforming us into the image of Jesus.</i>	<i>All by 'unveiling' Jesus, i.e. making him known. He does this through the word.</i>
1 Thessalonians 1:4-5	<i>The Holy Spirit powerfully and deeply convicted them of the truth.</i>	<i>The gospel was proclaimed, the Thessalonians were convicted.</i>
Galatians 5:22-23	<i>He produces the fruits that make us to be like Jesus.</i>	<i>How do you keep in step with the Spirit? By reading the word - for that is his sword.</i>

Implications:

How might you respond to someone who says the following:

- *"What's the point of telling our friends and family about Jesus if it's only through the work of the Holy Spirit that they might come to believe?"*

The sword of the Spirit is the word of truth, look at the example of 1 Thess 1:4-5.

- *"I look at that list of the fruits of the Spirit and I really need to pull my socks up and try harder."*

It's the Spirit who produces the fruit, not us. And he does it by convicting us of the truth of Jesus in the Bible. The first step in growth is knowing Jesus better. For the more we know him, the more we'll love him - the Spirit transforms our hearts. The deeper your love of Jesus, the easier it is to say 'no' to sin and 'yes' to righteousness. There is a place for wisdom in removing temptation, but it all begins with a heart that longs for Jesus to rule over your life.

- *"This is a Spirit-filled church!"*

The Spirit-filled church is the one that bangs on relentlessly about Jesus!

- *"God loves you just the way you are!"*

God will love you wherever you are at in life, but His Spirit is working to transform you into the image of Jesus.

DURING THE WEEK

Spend some time praying specifically:

- for people you know who don't yet trust Jesus. That the Holy Spirit would be at work in their hearts, bringing them to repentance and faith - Romans 10:9-10.
- for people in your Growth Group, that the Holy Spirit will grow them. Use Paul's prayer in Colossians 1:9-14.

EIGHT: Our God Who ... *Gathers*

Study 8: This study focuses on **“the church”**: what it is, its relationship to Jesus, and what it looks like for us to enjoy life together **“gathered”** under Him.

Each of the passages in this study include various other themes and topics which could lead to helpful but lengthy tangents (marriage, miracles, Jesus’ second coming, etc.). If your group has questions relating to other themes in these passages, it’d be great to follow them up afterwards.

Scripture: Ephesians 5:21-33, Acts 2:42-47, Revelation 19:6-9, Revelation 21:1-4

Getting started:

What are some different ways you have heard the term “church” used? See how many you can list!

When you come across the English word “church” in the Bible, it’s translating a Greek word “*ekklesia*” which simply means: “gathering”.

Reading the Bible:

- 1) Read Ephesians 1:22-23, 2:4-7, 3:20-21, & 4:4-6. What is “*THE* church”?

The church is the body of Christ. All believers, united by the Holy Spirit, seated in the heavenly realms. The church is all God’s people gathered to Jesus for eternity. It’s a reality we enjoy in the present.

2) Read Ephesians 5:21-33. Paul describes the relationship between Jesus and the church as a marriage. In this marriage:

a) What is Jesus' role? How does he do this?

Head, saviour, gave up his life for her, made the church holy, feeds and cares for the church.

Through his life, death and resurrection. Through the work of the Holy Spirit and His word in the Bible.

b) What is the church's role? How do we do this?

Submit to Christ, the all-loving husband. Let Jesus be our Lord and Saviour, by trusting (obeying) his word in the Bible.

3) Read Revelation 19:6-9 and 21:1-4. What are these passages describing? And how do they further fill out our understanding of Christ and the church?

The return of Jesus is when he will gather his bride to be with him for all eternity = this is the goal of everything God is doing in this world, this is where everything is headed. It's to this end that Jesus is loving his bride in the present.

The image of marriage shows the intimacy and one-ness of the relationship. The holy city (20:2) is the bride, the church – it's people!

4) Read Acts 2:36-47 which records the events of Pentecost, 10 days after Jesus' ascension into heaven. God gathered *many* people to Christ for the first time. What four things did "the church" devote themselves to?

5) What might it look like to devote ourselves to the same things in our lives together?

Implications:

How might you respond to someone who says the following:

- *"I don't need to go to church to be a Christian."*
- *"I prefer doing church online from the comfort of my home."*
- *"My faith is a personal one between God and I."*
- *"I come to this church because I like the way things are done - the songs, the prayers - it just makes me feel more comfortable."*

DURING THE WEEK

Read Ephesians 4:1-16 as you reflect on what it means for you to have been gathered to Christ, a member of his body, the church.

NINE: Our God Who ... Completes

Study 9: This study considers what it means to live in light of Jesus' promise that he will personally return as God brings all things to "**Completion**".

Scripture: Colossians 1:15-20, 2 Peter 3:8-18

Getting started: Discuss together the variety of different responses people have (both Christians and non-Christians) to the statement "Jesus will return".

Reading the Bible:

- 1) What do the following passages reveal about God's eternal plans?
 - a) Romans 8:28-30
God's plan is that Christ be the firstborn (supreme) among many brothers and sisters.
 - b) Ephesians 1:9-10
Everything united under Christ.
 - c) Colossians 1:15-20
Everything reconciled to Christ. Note - reconciled here means something like 'put in order'. Some things will be reconciled in judgement, others in salvation.

2) Read 2 Peter 3:8-18

a) What is the day of the Lord? Why has it not yet come?

The day of the Lord is the day when Jesus returns. It's the day when all of God's plans will come to fulfilment. It hasn't come yet because God is mercifully giving people time to get ready - repentance.

b) When will God complete all things? What will it be like?

Peter explains that the day of Jesus' return will come like a thief. No one knows when it will be, except the Father (cf. Matthew 24:36). Graphic description of what it will be like: It's a picture of judgement.

c) In v. 11 Peter asks: "Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be?" Highlight in the passage below all Peter's answers to this question:

2 Peter 3:11-18 [New International Version]

You ought to live holy and godly lives ¹² as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. ¹³ But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells.

¹⁴ So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him. ¹⁵ Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him. ¹⁶ He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction.

¹⁷ Therefore, dear friends, since you have been forewarned, be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of the lawless and fall from your secure position. ¹⁸ But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen.

d) Work through each of your highlighted answers, discussing how we might do these things better.

Implications:

How might you respond to someone who says the following:

- *"It doesn't matter how I live my life, we're all going to end up in the same place anyway."*
- *"He hasn't come back in 2000 years, what are the odds of it happening in my lifetime!"*
- *"God's going to destroy the world, so it doesn't matter whether or not we care for it."*
- *"We spend too much time talking about Jesus and not enough time caring for those in need."*

DURING THE WEEK

Read Revelation 21-22 as you reflect on the completion of all things.