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X	A	B	U	N	D	A	Z	C	E	E	E	C	K	V

Growth Groups Material
 (6 studies on the Bible)
 July-August 2023

WORDS FOR LIFE

Teaching Schedule

Date (Thu-Sun)	Sermon Theme
20-23 Jul	Words for Life
27-30 Jul	How does God speak today?
3-6 Aug	Why trust the Bible?
10-13 Aug	What is the Bible like?
17-20 Aug	What is the Bible for?
23-27 Aug	What do we do with the Bible?

Booklet Contents

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	Theme	
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Study 2	Loving the Bible	p.12
Study 3	Understanding the Bible (and its history)	p.16
	- live event: Tuesday 1 August	
Study 4	Handling the Bible	p.18
Study 5	Meditating the Bible	p.28
Study 6	Sharing the Bible	p.33

Additional Resources

We've put together some additional resources that might help you as you make your way through this series:

<https://jannalianglican.org.au/wordsforlife>



Introduction

Every year at Jannali Anglican Church we work our way through what we call a 'Doctrine for Life' series. The aim is to take an important theological topic, teach what the Bible says about it and then explore its implications in a practical and meaningful way for our lives. But did you notice the assumption I just made? In fact, it's the same assumption underlying all our ministry and approach to the Christian life. That is, we go to the Bible to learn God's truth! You might be thinking, of course we do! That's great if you think like that! Nevertheless, it's important to examine why and how the Bible speaks to us as God's Word! Why do we believe that? And what exactly do we believe about the Bible when we say it's God's Word?

Outside the church (and sadly, now, inside the church in some places) the notion that the Bible is authoritative, reliable, and relevant is under attack. To be honest, most of our non-Christian peers would find it strange that we consider a 2,000 old book to be God's powerful and living communication to the world! Perhaps in our own lives, too, we're beginning to exhibit that same lack of interest in the Bible? We might come to church and listen to sermons, but do we love God's word? Do we read it for ourselves? Some of us will. Others might have been struggling in this area for a while.

So, as you contemplate all the above, you'll begin to see why our focus this term is on the Bible itself: **Words for Life**. As is usually the case with our Doctrine for Life series' these studies aren't perfectly aligned with the sermon series. They tackle the same issue from different angles, are a bit more practical, and hopefully will complement the preaching well!

Our aim and prayer are that as you listen in church, and use this material, you will grow in understanding about the Bible, grow in your confidence to trust it as God's Word to us, deepen in your love for it, and become more enthused to read and share the bible yourself!

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Study 1 | Trusting the Bible

What is this study about? The aim for this study is to be reminded that the Bible holds *itself* out as God's divine word to us, and therefore has authority! We'll see that Jesus believes in the authority of the Old Testament Scriptures, and establishes his apostles as the authoritative authors of the New Testament. The article excerpt will help us consider the practicalities of the authority of the Bible – particularly when it clashes with other sources of guidance that we might be inclined to follow

Introduction

1. The divine authority of the Bible as God's word seems to be an 'outdated' idea to many people these days. Think of your friends, work colleagues or others you know that aren't believers. What do you think their objections to the authority of the bible might be?
2. What other things do people tend to rely on for guidance when it comes to deciding what's right and wrong, or in making choices?

What the Bible says about itself...

3. Read 2 Timothy 3:14-17 and 2 Peter 1:19-21. What does the Bible itself say about its own origins?

What Jesus thinks about the Bible...

4. Read the following verses. How would you describe Jesus' attitude to the Old Testament?
 - a. Matt 4:1-10
 - b. Matt 5:17-19
 - c. Matt 19:4-5
5. Read the following verses. How would you describe Jesus' relationship to the New Testament?
 - a. John 14:25-27
 - b. John 16:12-15

Trusting the authority of the Bible today

6. Read the account of Paul's mission to the Bereans (in the Macedonian town of Berea) in Acts 17:10-12.
 - a. How do the Bereans demonstrate their trust in the Scriptures
 - b. In what ways could we practice the 'Berean' approach in our own lives?

7. Read the following article excerpt and consider the following questions:
- a. What are the 4 'competing authorities' that people tend to rely on in seeking religious truth?
 - b. Can you think of examples from your own life, where you, or others, have put your trust in an authority other than the Bible?
 - c. Is the author against the use of 'non-biblical' sources of guidance? How are they to be used?

**Phillip Jensen & Tony Payne, 'Four ways to live?', article excerpt from
*The Briefing***

Most of the issues facing evangelicals today resolve into a debate about authority, and in particular the authority of the Bible. In each area of controversy, the issue is 'Where do we go for the answer on this question? What is the truth by which we must live?' We all believe in the authority of the Bible, or say we do...why then do we disagree?

While nearly all Christians uphold the authority of the Scriptures, in reality there are other authorities that compete with the Bible for supremacy, other sources of truth about God and our world. Most commonly, there are four claimants to religious authority: Bible, Experience, Institution, Reason

Put simply, these four competing authorities represent four Christianities.

There are those who seek to understand their life in terms of the Bible, and treat the Bible as the final and comprehensive authority in all matters of faith and life.

Others wish to be led more by their experience of God. They see their Christian lives in terms of following the movings and promptings of the Spirit.

A third group regard the teachings of the institution or tradition to which they belong as authoritative for their life. If their church or priest or bishop or pastor offers direction for their behaviour or understanding, they will adopt it readily and fall into line.

The fourth group base their understanding of God and what he requires of us on human reason. They will accept and practise whatever can be demonstrated as sensible, rational, and intelligent and discard the primitive or irrational.

Four views of God

Each of these views springs from an understanding of what God is like. The first view is based on a God who speaks. God reveals himself to mankind through speech, through his word, and can only be known through his word. The second view assumes that God moves and acts in our lives and can be experienced directly today. The third is built on a God of order, who has called out a people to be his own—a people who are to live in unity. The fourth group has as its God one is reasonable, rational, and true.

We should find ourselves giving some assent to each of these understandings of God. Our God is all of these things. Nobody adopts any of these views to the extreme. Everybody's theological position has a measure of Bible, Experience, Institution and Reason mixed in.

Drawing the line

Should there be lines drawn between these different viewpoints? Some say no. They argue that the Church (the institution) has given us the Bible; or that the Spirit we experience today is the same Spirit who wrote the Bible; or that the Bible will always be rational (being the product of a rational God). However, we must not be fooled. The end result of these arguments is that the Bible's sphere of influence is radically diminished. When it is subordinated to or diluted among the other areas, the Bible ceases to speak with its own voice. It becomes a rubber stamp for our own views and prejudices.

There comes a point where one has to choose between these four competing authorities. What will we do when our experience doesn't tally with the Scriptures? Or when our reason disagrees with our church's teaching? Or when the Bible seems irrational or unreasonable? It is at this point that we reveal our true colours. We draw a line and take our stand.

Sola Scriptura

The authority of the Bible will never be maintained unless it is maintained alone. While recognising the subsidiary roles of experience, institution and reason in our understanding and application of the Scriptures, it is still crucial that we establish again the supreme authority of the Bible for our lives. There can be no alternative or additional authority. It is the only reliable source of truth, the only reliable guide to knowing God. The other claimants are better regarded as lampposts—helpful for illumination, but not for leaning on.

The Bible is sufficient for making God's mind known to us, for telling us all that we need to know to live in godly obedience to him—in all ages, in all cultures, until the Lord returns. God has not left anything out that is of any significance for us as Christians. We don't have to search elsewhere for the answer to our dilemmas. If the Bible doesn't give an

answer, then there is no dilemma—we can do as we see fit, for the issue is unimportant. If we are taught things by spiritual experiences, church traditions or rational reflections (beyond the realm of Scripture) they are unimportant for Christian living. These things must not be laid on the consciences of other Christians. If the Bible doesn't teach it, it is not normative or significant for the Christian.

We must be on our guard against groups and individuals who follow additional authorities to the Bible. It is an oft-repeated pattern. Some additional authority teaches them some 'truth'. They then find this truth in the Bible, reading their new idea back into the text. Before long, this 'new truth' has become an 'old truth' that Christians need to rediscover if they are to live a life pleasing to God.

Subtly, but inexorably, the Bible's emphasis on godly living and ministry is placed to one side. The area of the Bible's authority has been left far behind. The Bible is not simply authoritative. The Bible alone is authoritative.

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Study 2 | Loving the Bible

What is this study about? The aim for this study is to target our heart! We may understand, agree with, and even live under the authority of the Bible. However, a fully mature recipient of God's Word comes to treasure and love it! We'll see some Psalmists that model this heartfelt delight in God's Word. Then we'll try to grow our own love for God's word by remembering all that it offers us!

Introduction

1. What's a good way of identifying what you love?

Reading exercise

2. Read the following book excerpt and consider the following questions:
 - a. Do you see any of yourself, and your own personal relationship with the bible in this passage?
 - b. Do you agree with the authors assessment at the end, namely, that *unless we love the Bible and find delight in it, our view of the Bible is too low?*

Christopher Ash, *Bible Delight: Heartbeat of the Word of God*

If someone asks you or me, 'Do you love the Bible?' we might reply - if we are Christians - 'Well, I know that I ought to love it. But to be honest I am not sure that I do. My Bible reading is more a matter of duty than delight. I wish it were a delight, but all too often it is a chore.' [...] If you are not a Christian believer, that may sound a stupid question. 'Of course not,' you may respond. Perhaps you love the Bible as literature.

But I am not talking about loving the Bible as literature. I am talking about loving the Bible for its substance. If you want to know why Christians love the Bible, you cannot do better than to start with Psalm 119.

It is especially for you if, like me, you have a high view of the Bible. We are persuaded that the Bible is trustworthy. We believe it is the word of God himself. Perhaps we are happy to speak of it as 'inspired', even 'infallible' or 'inerrant'. And yet even for us, until and unless we love the Bible and find it a delight, our view of the Bible is too low.

Bible Delight in the Psalms

3. Read Psalm 19:7-11 and then Psalm 119:89-96.
4. How would you describe the attitude of these two Psalmists towards God's Word?

Application

5. As a result of what we've read so far, we might long to love and delight in the Bible, like the Psalmist. Along with praying for this development in our hearts, how can we grow in love for the Bible? What do you think?
6. One way we can begin to grow in love for God's word is to be reminded again of all that it can do for us, and in us. Look up the following verses and identify what God's word can do for/in us.

Verse	Benefit
Deuteronomy 32:46-47	
Psalms 19:7-11	
Psalms 119:50	
John 8:32	
John 20:31	
Romans 10:17	
Romans 15:4	
Eph 6:11, 17	
1 Thessalonians 2:13	
2 Tim 3:14-17	
James 1:21	
1 Peter 1:23	
1 John 5:13	

7. Pray that we would develop a deep love for, and delight in, the Bible!

Study 3 | Understanding the Bible (and its history)

Combined Event: Tuesday 1 August, 7.30pm

James Sneddon will present on the topic of Understanding the Bible and its history. Questions about the handing down of the biblical texts through history, how the Bible books were chosen, and more, will be addressed. There will also be an opportunity for questions. This event is open to all growth groups, and anyone else in our church community.

Other groups not meeting on Tuesday nights will be able to watch a recording of the presentation in their group time, after 1 August, if they wish. Alternatively, if scheduling allows, James will be happy to visit groups during the week to deliver the presentation.

Note: the link to access the recorded presentation will be published on the series webpage (see QR code and URL on page 2)

Space for notes:

Study 3 | Understanding the Bible (and its history)

Space for notes

Study 4 | Handling the Bible

What is this study about? If we're to love and trust the Bible, we want to be able to handle it well. Mishandling the Bible can lead to all kinds of problems! We don't want to be guilty of twisting the words of the Bible to say things that God doesn't intend to communicate.

It's right, then, for us to grow in our Bible reading skills so that we don't err in our interpretation. This study is different to others insofar as it invites you to develop bible reading skills. For many of you, the bible reading 'tools' will appear obvious (something that you utilise in your reading already). For others, they may be completely new.

Introduction

1. Think about your current view on interpreting the Bible. Mark on the spectrum below what your current view is.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
←					→				
Different people will read the same thing completely differently and that's ok!					There is only one true meaning of every sentence in the Bible				

2. Read the following passages? How do they convey to us the importance of interpreting the bible carefully?
 - a. 2 Tim 2:15

b. Acts 20:29-31

c. 2 Peter 3:16

Reading exercise

3. Read the following book excerpt. What point is the author trying to make? Do you agree?

Nigel Beynon & Andrew Sach, *Dig Deeper: Tools to Unearth the Bible's Treasure*

'It's all a matter of interpretation'

Most conversations I've had with non-Christians about the Bible end up there sooner or later. It's all a matter of interpretation. Sure, you say it means that Jesus is God and that sex outside marriage is wrong and that heaven is only for Christians, but maybe for me it means that Jesus was just a good teacher and sex with anyone is OK as long as you both want it and heaven is for everybody. It's all just a matter of interpretation.

Actually, we've all been conditioned to think like that. It's part of the whole philosophical movement called 'post-modernism', and over the last few decades it has infiltrated the TV shows that we watch and the classrooms that we sit in. Postmodernism teaches that when I come to a piece of literature such as the Bible, what matters is not what it means,

but what it means for me. And that might be different from what it means for you. And that's OK.

[...]

Many of the world's leading cults - Mormonism, Jehovah's Witnesses, Christian Science - claim to place the Bible at the centre of their religion. They just interpret it 'differently'. But even mainstream Christians can end up in a real mess because they think that the Bible is saying or promising something that it isn't. I (Andrew) think of a Christian I knew at university who was young but dying of cancer. Some well-meaning Christians told her mum that she would be healed if only they had 'enough faith'. It was a desperately cruel error; they added the agonizing guilt of 'maybe I haven't believed enough' to the grief of losing a daughter. But they had verses in the Bible - tragically misunderstood verses- to back it up. The truth is that without some care in your interpretation, you can make the Bible say almost anything.

Skills for interpreting the Bible well: the bible toolkit

4. As competent Bible readers it's important for us to develop a 'toolkit' of methods to employ when we are trying to understand what the bible is saying. As a group, work through the following tools and look up some of the examples.

The authors purpose tool

Biblical authors all wrote with particular purposes in mind. Discerning these purposes helps us understand the 'why' of their content and, therefore how their message applies to us.

Sometimes there are explicit purpose statements in the passage or book itself (e.g., Luke 1:1-4, John 20:30-31, 1 John 5:13). If there is no specific purpose statement, we must play detective: look for the identity of author and readers, their situations, problems being addressed, or repeated themes.

Exercise – employing the authors purpose tool

- Look up Gal 1:6-9, 4:21 & 5:2. How do these verses help us understand the situation Paul is addressing? How would this help us discern what Paul's purpose is in writing his letter to the Galatians?
- Read John 20:30-31. How does John want us to use the knowledge we've gleaned from the rest of his gospel account?

The context tool

All communication is connected to what comes before and after it. When reading the Bible, we want to consider the broader context of what we read, including (moving from immediate context to large context): the rest of the sentence, the paragraph, book section, book, whole biblical storyline.

Exercise – employing the context tool

- Look up Exodus 20:1-19. How would verse 2 shape your understanding of verses 3-19. How would the events of Exodus chapters 1-19 shape your understanding of the laws given in verses 3-19

- Read James 2:24. Out of context, this verse seems at odds with things we read elsewhere in the Bible about how we are saved. Now read the entire unit from verse 14. How would the context help us understand the point James is getting at?

The structure tool

How has the author broken down his material into sections? How do these sections fit together? This doesn't simply mean looking at chapter or paragraph divisions, or headings in the Bible (although they may be helpful). In narrative, look for changes in scenes through transitions of place, time, or repeated patterns. Other genres may have changes in dialogue or speaker. Letters may have different parts to an argument signified by questions or linking words.

We ought to ask why has the author structured their passage in such a way? Maybe it is to repeat the same theme multiple times or to contrast opposing ideas. At the very least, identifying the structure can help us towards identifying the main point being made

Exercise – employing the structure tool

- Consider Genesis 1. What structural patterns do you notice? How does this help us see what's important in this chapter?
- Read Mark 2:18-3:6. What is common to the three scenes Mark has clumped together? How would this help us understand the point Mark intends to convey?

The repetition tool

Does the author repeat words or ideas to make their point? Repeated words or ideas often convey the main stuff the author wants to get across, but care is still needed. Repetition might occur across a few verses in close succession, or across a larger passage/book.

Exercise – employing the repetition tool

- Read John 6:47-51. What word or idea is repeated? How does this help us understand what is important here?

- Consider Daniel 3. What string of words get repeated several times. Why might the author be doing this?

The linking words tool

What important words convey the logic of the author's argument? Significant linking words appear most frequently in New Testament letters and character speeches, but they might be found anywhere. Below are some types to look out for.

- *Therefore* (looking back). What comes before gives the reason. *Consequently, for this reason, thus.*
- *For* (looking forward). What comes after gives the reason. *Because, since, so.*
- *So that* (looking forward). Gives the purpose of what came before.
- *If* (one idea is conditional on the other being true)
- Some words contrast ideas. *However, instead, rather.*

Exercise – employing the linking words tool

- Consider Phil 2:5-11. What linking words or phrases do you notice?
- Consider Romans 5:12-21. What linking words or phrases do you notice?

The copycat tool

The Bible acknowledges that sometimes it describes people and events, intending that they serve as an example to us, either positive or negative – see 1 Cor 10:6 and Heb 11. Is the author holding up one of the characters as someone we should imitate, or whose likeness we should avoid? Care is needed here.

How can we tell if an example is intended? Ask ourselves, "Does the example align with other biblical teaching?" Another approach to using this tool is to ask, 'Who am I meant to identify with in this passage?'

Exercise – employing the copycat tool

- Consider Genesis 37:1-11 and the rest of the Joseph story (hopefully fresh in your mind after Term 2). Based on the example of Joseph – should we be inferring that the dreams we have will come true?
- Consider the response of the crowds to Peter's sermon in Acts 2:36-42. How are they a good example for us to follow?

The genre tool

There are many genres in the Bible - e.g., song, historical narrative, genealogy, law, speeches, letters. Identifying the genre is important to how we interpret a passage.

Some genres aren't meant to be taken too literally. They can use unusual imagery or numbers to convey a broader point. But they are still communicating reality in some way. Other genres clearly convey real events, even if they are miraculous.

Exercise – employing the genre tool

- Consider Mark 4:35-41. Do these words have the character of imagery or prophetic vision, or are they intended to convey real events.
- Consider Revelation 7:1-8. What makes it hard to take these verses (esp. verses 4-8) literally?

The quotations/allusions tool

When the author quotes (explicit) or alludes (not explicit) to another part of the Bible, we should turn there to see what ideas he is picking upon.

How do you identify allusions? The more specific the item/event, the more likely it is that two references in the Bible to the same thing, are related. E.g. "sheep" are everywhere. But a "lamb of God who takes away sin" (John 1:29) is quite specific. It takes wide biblical knowledge to identify all allusions, so it comes with time and experience.

Exercise – employing the quotations/allusions tool

- Consider Matthew 2:3-6. How do we know this is a quotation? What does Matthew intend for us to learn from this quotation?
- Consider Matthew 4:2 (c.f. Deut 8:2). What allusion might Matthew be intending here?

Reflection

5. As you may sense, use of the bible 'toolkit' is a simply a matter of reading carefully. Share amongst your group any other tips you have for reading the bible carefully.

Applying the Bible well

6. Biblical interpretation counts for little if we don't seek to apply what we've learnt to our own lives. As our situation is often very different to the original audience, what we do with what we've read is often different too!

Some people find questions like those below, helpful in applying the Bible:

- Is there a command to obey?
- Is there a reason for thanksgiving, worship, or praise?
- Is there a promise to claim?
- Is there an example to follow?
- Is there a sin to avoid or confess?
- Do I need to change my mind about something (e.g., the way I understand God, Jesus, myself, others)

Others are helped as they consider how they might respond to what they've learnt in different spheres of their life:

- At home
- At church

- At work
- In particular relationships (e.g., with family members, friends, or work colleagues)
- Use of money
- Recreational pursuits

Conclude

7. Which of the bible reading 'tools' did you find most interesting or helpful?

8. Pray that God would equip us to be competent Bible learners, and that he would guard us from misinterpretation!

Study 5 | Meditating the Bible

What is this study about? The aim of this study is to be reminded, rediscover, or perhaps for some, realise for the first time, that personal, heartfelt intake of the Bible lies at the heart of our relationship with God. Our method for doing this is to consider the biblical theme of *meditation*.

Introduction

1. Read the book excerpt below, describing a lesson learnt by the author. What point do you think they are getting at? Do you have a similar experience? Are there any questions you have emerging from this reading?

Allan Chapple, *True Devotion: In Search of Authentic Spirituality*

When I was converted, I was given quite a good grounding in the basics of the Christian life. This included a strong emphasis on the importance of the daily 'Quiet Time', which had two ingredients: Bible-reading and prayer. I was given material that helped me to start reading the Bible systematically and thoughtfully. I was also given a clear framework that taught me how to pray. But I had the impression that the two activities were not closely connected. So, I often found that after I had read and analysed the Bible passage for that day, I closed the Bible and then started working out what to pray about.

It was only many years later that I found out that somewhere along the way a third component of the Quiet Time had been lost [...] This missing link is the practice of meditation.

2. What do you think of when you hear the word 'meditate' or 'meditation'?

Psalm 1

3. Read Psalm 1. This Psalm contrasts two 'lifestyles' or 'types of people' who draw influence from different sources. What are the two alternatives presented?
4. What is the essential activity for the 'happy' or 'blessed' life in this Psalm.

What is meditation?

5. In the Hebrew poetry, we often see the same idea repeated twice in a row (this is called parallelism). Read the following verses and try to ascertain what word is intended to be synonymous with meditate:
 - a. Psalm 63:6, 77:3, 77:11-12, 119:15, 143:5
 - b. How does this exercise help us understand the practice of 'meditation'?

6. Read the following book excerpt. What stands out to you?

J.I. Packer, *Knowing God*

We have some idea, perhaps, what prayer is, but what is meditation? Well may we ask; for meditation is a lost art today, and Christian people suffer grievously from their ignorance of the practice.

Meditation is the activity of calling to mind, and thinking over, and dwelling on, and applying to oneself, the various things that one knows about the works and ways and purposes and promises of God. It is an activity of holy thought, consciously performed in the presence of God, under the eye of God, by the help of God, as a means of communion with God. Its purpose is to clear one's mental and spiritual vision of God, and to let his truth make its full and proper impact on one's mind and heart. It is a matter of talking to oneself about God and oneself; it is, indeed, often a matter of arguing with oneself, reasoning oneself out of moods of doubt and unbelief into a clear apprehension of God's power and grace.

Application

7. Have a go at defining biblical 'meditation' in your own words.

8. Can you describe what it would look like for someone to read the Bible but not meditate upon it?

9. Sometimes meditation is likened to 'preaching to ourselves'. How would personal meditation be like preaching a sermon? Who is the audience, who is the speaker, what is the aim?

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Study 6 | Sharing the Bible

What is this study about? The aim of this study is to be encouraged that we all have a role to play in speaking God's words to one another! After all that we've learnt in this series, it would be a shame if we didn't have a desire, and confidence to open God's word with one another. This study highlights several passages which contemplate the practice of Christians speaking God's word amongst one another, their assorted contexts, and the relationships in which this might happen.

Introduction

1. "Reading and discussing the Bible with people is the job of the pastor". What do you think about this statement. Do you agree/disagree? Why?
2. Read Ephesians 4:11-16. According to this passage what is the job of the minister/leader? What is the job of the church member?

The Bible on sharing the God's words with others

3. The Bible itself anticipates that God's people will speak God's words to one another. Read the following verses and complete the table.

	Location/context of sharing God's word OR the people involved	Purpose in sharing God's word
Deut 6:1-9		
Ps 78:1-8		
Col 3:12-17		
1 Cor 14:26		
Heb 3:12-13		
Heb 10:24-25		

Reflection

4. Consider what you've discovered in the exercise above. Which of the examples, if any, do you consider yourself to be currently doing? Could you tell the group what you are involved in.

5. Are there other examples that you are not involved in? Could you be?

Reading exercise

6. Read the following book excerpt
 - a. What excites the author?

 - b. What beliefs are challenged by their vision of church ministry?

7. In the first paragraph the author lays out a hypothetical Christian who is reading the bible with a range of other people in their life. They seem like a very busy person! Do you think a Christian reading the bible with multiple people in their life is an achievable goal? Why or why not? What is achievable for you?

8. Do you think the vision of this author is being realized in our church? What should/could we change?

Colin Marshall and Tony Payne, *The Trellis and the Vine*

If you want yet another way of expressing the same point, what we are really talking about is a Bible-reading movement-in families, in churches, in neighbourhoods, in workplaces, everywhere. Imagine if all Christians, as a normal part of their discipleship, were caught up in a web of regular Bible reading not only digging into the word privately, but reading it with their children before bed, with their spouse over breakfast, with a non-Christian colleague at work once a week over lunch, with a new Christian for follow-up once a fortnight for mutual encouragement, and with a mature Christian friend once a month for mutual encouragement. It would be a chaotic web of personal relationships, prayer and Bible reading more of a movement than a program-but at another level it would be profoundly simple and within reach of all. It's an exciting thought! And it is hardly a controversial or outrageous idea. Most pastors would love their congregation to be involved in this kind of everyday Bible ministry. Who could argue against it?

However, if we pause to reflect on the implications of this vision of vine work by every Christian, many of our most cherished assumptions about church, ministry, evangelism, and congregational life are called into question. For a start, it radically dissolves many of the traditional distinctions between 'clergy and 'laity'. Many of us minister in contexts where the unspoken (or even spoken!) assumption is that it is the pastor's job to build the church, and the members' job to receive that ministry and to support it through involvement in a range of jobs and roles-counting the money, organizing morning tea, ushering, serving on committees, and so on. The pastor (or pastoral staff team) is really the one who does the vine work and the rest of us do what we can to maintain the trellis, not least by giving money.

9. Finish by praying for a growing desire to practice bible sharing with others in our lives.

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