

A photograph of a wheat field at sunset. The sky is filled with soft, orange and pink clouds, and the sun is low on the horizon, creating a warm, golden glow. The wheat stalks are silhouetted against the bright light, with some showing their characteristic long awns. A semi-transparent white rectangular box is overlaid on the lower half of the image, containing the text.

ELEMENTARY

*Book 5 - Understanding Christian
Life & Community*

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Life & Community*

*A discipleship resource prepared by
Mount Gambier Baptist Church*

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ABOUT THIS SERIES

“And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses, entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others”

Paul in a letter to a young pastor (2 Timothy 2:2)

We are shown in the gospels that Jesus calls us to a deliberate journey of spiritual formation once we have become aware of his reign and accepted his Lordship over our lives. It calls for a sense of active belief in him, and a lifetime of following him in an intentional arrangement called *discipleship*.

The *Elementary* series has been developed to assist those who are taking their first steps into this discipleship journey. It will help you to explore some key things that Christians need to know somewhat early in their discipleship journey. It's our prayer that these studies help you to really grow in your faith and understanding of what it takes to be a follower of Jesus.

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

Here's a few quick tips to help you get started:

1. You'll need a Bible - either in print or in an app.
2. You'll need a *disciple-maker!* You could do this study on your own, but we believe in the greater value in going through this material with other experienced Christians who have worked through these ideas themselves. (In keeping with the Bible verse quoted above).
3. You'll need some dedicated time. There will be parts of these studies that need to be thought through, processed and even revisited. Take all the time you need, and don't overwhelm yourself by going too fast through them.
4. It's highly likely that you'll end up telling somebody else about what you've learnt, so we invite you to use the spaces provided to help you articulate things in your own words.

1

A Brief Discussion About the Church

The first study of this module is very brief look at some scripture regarding the church. The church is a community of God's people, with a very unique way about it. It comes with rights as well as responsibilities. It comes with a mission.

This study will look at the first few parts of this - the nature of the community that we are, the things we are expected to do and the values and behaviours we are supposed to display. It is not exhaustive by any means, but instead a very broad overview of what the Bible tells us about this entity called the church. We hope it helps you understand the church and its purpose a little bit better!

Idea 1: Man made for community with God

Read: Genesis 1:26-28; Genesis 2:15-25

These are short snippets taken from the creation account, speaking of the time before sin came into the world. Talk about what you see here in terms of community - how God Himself seems to operate in it, and how He relates to man in this way.

Idea 2: God continually wanting to be involved with His people

**Read: Leviticus 26:11-13; 2 Corinthians 6:14-18
 Ezekiel 37:24-28; 1 Peter 2:4-12**

In context, The Old Testament verses are being spoken directly to the Jewish people. What do we see about God's intentions towards His people in these passages?

How might these verses also point to a future for God's people?

How do the New Testament writers refer to these passages?
What does the 'people of God' look like today?

And what seems to be expected of those who become part of that people today?

Idea 3: The idea of church in the words of Jesus

Read: Matthew 16:13-20; Matthew 18:15-20

These verses are the first and only times that Jesus uses the word we translate today as 'church.' The Greek word for church is Ecclesia, and it basically means 'the called out ones.' With those things in mind, and with your own experience behind you, what do you think Jesus had in mind for the coming together of those who followed him?

What is 'the rock' that Jesus speaks of that appears to be the foundation of this entity called the church?

What sort of rights and responsibilities does the church have from these verses?

What authority does the church seem to be given here?

Idea 4: The Church in Acts

Read: Acts 2:42-47

This brief description speaks of the church 'DNA' that seemed to be in place from its very beginnings. What sort of things do we see in this passage? Should all these things be in place today as well? Are there things we might be doing better than others?

Idea 5: Some images of the church in the Epistles

**Read: 1 Peter 2:4-12; Corinthians 3:16-17; 6:19-20; 12:12-27
Ephesians 2:18-22**

There are a number of metaphors listed in these passages to speak of characteristics of the church. When you consider each metaphor, take some time to discuss the way they could be displayed among a modern-day group of believers.

Do any of these ideas resonate with you personally more than others? Does any of what you've looked at in this study cause you to think about your own ideas about the church?

Does it affect your commitment or attitude towards it? Is there anything you need to do, study more, or change after taking this time of study?

Your own reflections:

You are now invited to summarise what you've learned in the space below, in particular considering how you might explain these things to another person if they asked you.

2

A Brief Discussion About 'Mission'

We will now briefly look at the theology of *Mission*. It's worth noting that *Mission* is first God's idea, and that Jesus came to show us how to put it into practice. Jesus came as a fulfilment of the law and he fulfilled all the work the Father gave him to do.

However, God's mission is not yet complete. God calls believers in Jesus to partner with him in his mission on the earth. We'll spend some time looking at the many different ways in which we are called by God to join with him as he does the work of *Mission*.

Idea 1: What is God's Mission?

**Read: Genesis 1:26-28; 3:14-15; Isaiah 9:1-7; 11:1-9
Ezekiel 36:24-28; Revelation 21:1-4**

What do these Scriptures tell us about God's Mission?

Can you describe God's Mission as outlined above in one sentence?

In what ways is God working toward his Mission?

Idea 2: What was Jesus' Mission?

Identify Jesus' mission in each of the readings.

Matthew 4:12-17

Matt 4:23

Matt 20:17-18

Matt 20:26-28

John 3:16-21

John 4:34-38

John 5:24-26

John 20:23

Luke 4:14-21

Acts 1:4-5

How does Jesus complement the *Mission identified* in the Old Testament and the *revelation*?

IDEA 3: How do Believers partner with God in Mission?

A. God requires us to Demonstrate the Gospel

**Read: Matthew 5:14-16; 25:31-40; Luke 12:32-34; 14:12-14
John 13:34-35, Romans 8:22-24**

This is a short selection of the many scriptures that insist that believers must live Godly lives. How is that tied to mission?

How does the Believers' demonstration of the Gospel differ from God's work in Mission?

B. Witness and Missional Conversations

Read: Acts 1:8, Colossians 4:2-6, 1 Peter 3:15-16

What is the difference between proclamation, witness and conversation?

In what ways can we “be wise” and “make the most of every opportunity”?

C. Proclamation

Read: Psalm 96; Acts 10:34-48; Acts 13:26-43; 1 Peter 2:9

These are all examples of “Preaching the Gospel.” Each of these messages are very different from each other. Why is that?

D. Evangelism

**Read: Matthew 10:1-8; Acts 8:4-8; Ephesians 4:11-13
2 Timothy 4:1-5**

Evangel literally translated means “bringer of good news.” How would you define an evangelists job description?

How can evangelists “prepare God’s people for works of service?” How do they fulfil that role in our local church expression?

Can you identify your own needs of preparation for the work of evangelism? Who would you approach to help you?

Your own reflections:

You are now invited to summarise what you've learned in the space below, in particular considering how you might explain these things to another person if they asked you.

3

A Brief Discussion About 'Discipleship'

When Jesus ministered on the earth as a man, he was often surrounded by crowds of all sorts of people. He had family and supporters, those who came for healing or to see the miracles, those who followed him and became disciples as well as those who came to find fault with him and who eventually conspired to have him executed.

Soon after Jesus began ministering he chose from among those who became his disciples, twelve men who became known as his apostles, the 'sent ones'. He spent extra time with these men, teaching and training them to continue his ministry after his death and resurrection. His final words to his apostles were, "Go and make *disciples* of all nations..."

From that time, every generation of Christian believers has borne the responsibility of baptising new disciples and teaching them to obey Jesus.

The very goal of the Elementary series has been to explain foundational beliefs and practices that identify us as Christians: a *Discipleship* course. This final study presents a four stage model of discipleship, and how we fit into it.

Idea 1: Seeker

All of us at one time felt called to seek out Jesus and faith. It can be useful to remember what that felt like so that we are sensitive to the people around us who are on the seeking journey or are waiting for an invitation to start a faith conversation.

Read: John 1:43-51; Mark 1:14-15; 1 Peter 3:15-16

Share memories from a time before you knew Jesus. What were some things that made you want to seek faith and spirituality?

In John 1:46, Nathanael expresses doubt but Philip says, "Come and see." What are some of the invitations you can make so that Seekers have opportunity to have an encounter with Jesus?

Jesus issued the invitation, "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news." Share different ways you can talk about the kingdom of God and the good news.

Peter tells us to be ready to answer questions about faith. What sort of life style provokes such questions? What are some of the major questions that you might encounter?

Idea 2: Convert

At some point faith is born in us and we become “born again believers.” It is often a joyous and exciting time. The first year of faith is also the most likely time we will share our faith with others.

**Read: Luke 5:1-11; Acts 2:32-42; Matthew 16:24-26
Ephesians 2:8-10**

Share your memories of deciding to follow Jesus. What helped you make that decision? Also, were you baptised at that time? Why or why not?

How would you describe the experience of receiving the gift of faith?

Have you identified the “good works” God has prepared for you to do?

IDEA 3: Disciple

The apostles began as Jesus' disciples. They spent around three years travelling with him, watching him minister and receiving his teaching. The following is a list of discipleship qualities. Spend time ticking those you feel comfortable with, then discuss the ones you need to spend more time on, or need to understand better.

- Spiritual arousal toward God
- Hunger for God: teachable, responsive, willing to grow
- Knowledge and desire for the Bible
- Evidence of Christ-like character
- Positive, intentional prayer life
- All of life approach to faith
- Regular participation in communal worship
- Willing to testify faith
- Sensitivity to the needs of others
- Generosity with time, money and service
- Deliberately abiding with Jesus
- A mindset that looks to Christ's return

Idea 4: Disciple-maker

Jesus commanded us to follow him and become a disciple, but he also commanded us to teach others and become disciple-makers. That doesn't mean we all do the same thing though. There are many different gifts given to the church in order to grow and strengthen the church.

Read: Matthew 28:18-20; Ephesians 4:11-12

Jesus requires us to teach one another to obey everything he has commanded us. What are some essential things Jesus has commanded us to do?

There are five preparing and equipping gifts:

Define each gift together. After you have defined each gift, reflect on your own abilities, and circle 1—5 to indicate your preparedness in each gift. (Eg: 1 = Need to learn basics; 2 = Need to gain more confidence; 3 = Prepared to serve in a group setting; 4 = Prepared to serve independently; 5 = Can lead and equip others in this gift)

Apostle Preparedness: 1 2 3 4 5

Prophet Preparedness: 1 2 3 4 5

Evangelist Preparedness: 1 2 3 4 5

Teacher Preparedness: 1 2 3 4 5

Pastor/Shepherd Preparedness: 1 2 3 4 5

Your own reflections:

You are now invited to summarise what you've learned in the space below, in particular considering how you might explain these things to another person if they asked you.

Where to from here?

CONGRATULATIONS! If you are at this page, then hopefully you have completed all five of our *Elementary* Study Booklets. If you've done this with another person and taken your time, it is likely that you will have been having a deliberate conversation about Christianity for several months by now.

It's our prayer that these have helped you understand the Christian faith better, and that you are now well on your way to living out your Christian faith in a healthy community of other believers. It is also the time where the *Elementary* journey ends...for now. Other studies will be written as time goes by, but your *next* vital step is to join a small and accountable group in the context of a local church in your neighbourhood, where your life as a follower of Jesus can continue to get stronger. See your pastor or disciple-maker for information on how that can work for you.

There are deeper places to go, and with these basics behind you, you are well positioned to flourish in a setting like that! Thanks for travelling with us in *Elementary*. We pray God's best for you as you continue to explore your life in Christ.

The Mount Gambier Baptist Team.

The Elementary Series

Book 1:

Understanding Jesus

Book 2:

Understanding Salvation

Book 3:

Understanding the Holy Spirit

Book 4:

Understanding the Father

Book 5:

Understanding Christian Life & Community

A discipleship resource from Mount Gambier Baptist Church PDF copies can be downloaded for free on our website: mountgambierbaptist.church/elementary