

ELEMENTARY

Book 1 - Understanding Jesus

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*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

The Scarlet Thread Begins

We believe that Jesus was part of God's divine plan as early as the first generation of mankind. Our first two studies will look in greater detail into that plan.

The *Scarlet Thread* is an idea made famous by a sermon that was preached by Dr W.A. Criswell on New Year's Eve 1961. This was inspired by an Old Testament story that speaks of a woman named Rahab who was saved from calamity through the means of a scarlet rope on her window. In his sermon, Dr Criswell explained that there is an apparent theme of a '*scarlet thread*' throughout the entire Bible – a promise of being saved through faith in the sacrifice made by another.

In the New Testament, this '*scarlet thread*' reaches its end with Christ. In the Old Testament, the '*scarlet thread*' helps us anticipate him.

In this study, we're going to explore the early part of the Old Testament, looking for glimpses of this '*scarlet thread*.' This part of the Bible contains around 1500 years of ancient Jewish literature; and we believe it ultimately lays out the plan for Jesus. It shows us glimpses of his person, his work and his identity; and it will show us that God's plan for mankind was a very deliberate and intentional thing.

Idea 1: The 'Creation Mandate'

A: Made for Good

Read: Genesis 1:26-31; 2:1-9; 2:15-25

What things stand out about the way God makes man and the job He has in mind for this creation

What is God's overall disposition during this time? What is God's relationship with man like?

How do you think Eden would have looked? How do you think life was in that location? Some suggest the tree and the whole 'garden' idea is only symbolic. What do you think?

What does 'naked but feeling no shame' look or feel like?

When God says to 'multiply,' and when He concerns Himself with finding Adam a 'helpmeet,' what do you think God's intention for interpersonal relationships was supposed to be like?

B: Damaged by Evil

Read: Genesis 3

We are introduced to a new character in the story at this point – the Serpent. Who or what is that supposed to be?

What do you make of the interaction the serpent has with the woman? How does he interact with the instructions that man was already under?

What do you think the 'eating of the fruit' signifies in this passage?

How do the man and woman respond:

- a. to the temptation?

- b. to each other after the fact?

- c. within themselves?

- d. to God?

How does life after eating the fruit compare to before? What damage has been done? What consequences came from it?

C: Restoration Begins

Re-read: Genesis 3:14-15 and 3:21

Genesis 3:14-15 is considered by many people to be the first of what are known as 'Messianic Promises.' With this in mind, what do you think is being said in these verses?

What is meant by the 'seed of the woman?' Consider the physical possibility of that for a moment. What might this be a pointer to?

How will the descendants of the woman and the serpent interact with each other?

Some people talk about 'original sin' and 'the fall' in relation to these chapters. What do you understand by those terms?

Does original sin apply to every person? How might it affect us? What can we do about it?

God had a plan of restoration from the beginning. In this study we see the first glimpse of that plan. In the next study we will see how God includes other people from the Old Testament and return to the theme of the scarlet thread - being saved by faith through the sacrifice of another.

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

The Scarlet Thread Continues

In Study 1 we introduced the idea of the '*Scarlet Thread*' - the promise of being saved through faith in the sacrifice made by another - which runs throughout the Old Testament and helps us anticipate Jesus. This next study looks at the way God included other people in preparation for Jesus' coming - some 2000 years of anticipation being built!

There are many stories in the Old Testament which portray the *Scarlet Thread*, but the passages chosen in this study have been selected to give the main outline of God's plan of reconciliation - restoring people from being separated from Him to being in relationship with Him again; and restoring them from being bound by original sin to being freed to live in goodness and righteousness with God.

Idea 2: A New People to get things started

A: Abraham

Read: Genesis 12:1-2

In pondering the nation of Israel even as we know it now, what do you make of God's words here of blessing and greatness?

And what is God expecting in return? How might all the families of the earth being blessed play out? Is this all to do with Abram and his descendants; or is this an indicator of God doing something specific and greater through them?

What traces of the 'scarlet cord' might be evident here?

B: Egypt, Wilderness and the Law of God

Read: Exodus 12:1-14; 20:1-17

Reflections on Exodus 12:1-14

What was the immediate purpose of the prescribed sacrifice in this passage?

There are elements and images in this passage which are very clearly disturbing. Given that it's God giving these instructions, what is the point you think He is wanting to make?

Finally, given this would be an ongoing event in the Jewish calendar, what do you think future generations of Jews would be expected to take from this story?

Reflections on Exodus 20:1-17

When you look at the list, do you think these were reasonable requests; or is it possible that God set man up to fail?

How well do you think the generations since that time have done with these ten things?

What do you think God has to say about that?

What should man expect from God in response to our treatment of these commandments?

Idea 3: From this people comes a Messiah

A: He will be human and divine

Read: Isaiah 9:1- 7

What are some of the things does this passage indicate this glorious person will do?

What characteristics will he have?

What elements of this prophecy indicate the distinct human and divine sides of this person?

B: He will come to serve and suffer

Read: Isaiah 53:1-12

What is the nature of the 'servant' being laid out in this passage?

What sort of treatment is the 'servant' subject to?

What sort of misconceptions will be made about the 'servant?'

What sort of things will the 'servant' achieve?

How do these things match up with your knowledge of Jesus' ministry?

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

Introducing Jesus

Now that we've established that Jesus was indeed part of a very long plan - as long as humanity itself - it's now time to begin exploring who this person was, with a comprehensive look through the New Testament.

If you were to walk down the street and interview a hundred people about their impressions of Jesus, you are likely to get a very wide range of answers - one might suggest more than even a generation ago. There are viewpoints from both religious and secular sources which deliberately downplay some of the key aspects of the person called Jesus Christ. Some of them even present compelling cases about why they hold the views that they do.

So, it is very important today for Christians to be able to clearly articulate who Jesus is; and be able to defend the key things that we believe. For that reason, we'll take some valuable time exploring Jesus the person in this next study.

Idea 1: Jesus was Fully Human

A: Jesus Had a Real Physical Journey from Birth to adulthood

Read: Luke 2:1-7; 2:21-24; 2:39-40; 2:51-52

What things stand out as you read the story of Jesus' birth? (Location, circumstances, etc?)

Luke gives us information of the development and growth of Jesus, presumably from his own discussions with Mary. How did Jesus change and mature in these verses?

B: Jesus displayed Human Attributes – frailties & limitations

Read: Luke 4:1-4; 8:22-25; John 11:30-37; Matthew 26:36-39

What physical limitations, weaknesses and emotions does Jesus experience in these verses?

Do you think these experiences enhanced or detracted from his ministry?

C: Jesus Died a Physical Death

Read: Mark 15:33-47

Every Gospel writer has points about Jesus which they specifically want to make; yet all the Gospel writers write about this same event. In light of this, what point do you think they ALL want their readers to understand from this passage?

After all this discussion, is there any doubt that Jesus was a human being?

Idea 2: Jesus was Fully God

A: Jesus said this himself

Reading: John 8:52-59; 10:22-33; 12:44-50; 14:1-11

In what ways does Jesus link himself with God?

What 'God-like' authority does he claim to have? What 'God-like' things can he do?

How does Jesus describe his relationship with the Father? What phrases indicate this?

Jesus used the phrase I AM in a significant way and the crowd began picking up stones? How does this prove that Jesus was making claims of being God?

B: Jesus Demonstrated This

Read: Mark 2:1-12; John 11:38-44; Mark 4:35-41

What are the ways shown here that Jesus had authority that mere humans did not?

What is the response of those around him in these instances?

Are these things enough to prove being God, or is there a lesser reasonable explanation for this?

C: The New Testament Writers defend this idea

**Read: John 1:1-5; Romans 9:1-5; Hebrews; Philippians 2:5-11;
Colossians 2:9**

How clear are these verses about Jesus being God Himself?

In what ways is this understanding applied in the passages that have been read out?

Idea 3: Jesus, as fully God and fully man, came to earth primarily to be a King

A: The Davidic Line and Promise

Read: 2 Samuel 7:11-16; 1 Kings 9:4-5; Isaiah 9:7; Micah 5:2

What ideas come about when you think of kings in a human sense?

How might a Kingdom with God driving the agenda be different?

B: Jesus' Own Claim to be King

Read: Matthew 4:17; 19:28; Luke 17:20; John 18:36

If Jesus comes as a king, how might Christians be expected to interact with him?

Now that this discussion taken place, what new things have you learnt? Have your beliefs or convictions been challenged or changed in any way as a result of this study? If so, make yourself a note here to help remember that or look into it further.

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.

4

The Work of Jesus (Part 1)

So far, we have explored some of the Old Testament verses which point us to the coming Christ; and we have looked at Jesus the person – his full humanity and full deity. Hopefully you've been able to come to some understanding of that complex idea!

In this study, we are going to discuss some of the work of Christ. There is a number of ways that we could go about this. We will start with some elements of his earthly ministry, where he operated in human terms in some very specific ways: He is considered a priest, a prophet and a king, and these three ideas will lead us to one big conclusion.

Idea 1. Jesus is the “Messiah”

The term ‘Messiah’ basically means ‘Anointed One’ and can pertain to all three of the major offices that were prevalent in Israel – prophet, priest and king. All of them were appointed to their roles after being anointed both in the Spirit by God, and with oil. This part of the study shows that Jesus was anointed to be all three.

A: Jesus was both prophet & priest

**Read: Deuteronomy 18:15-22; Matthew 21:45-46;
Hebrews 3:1-6; 5:1-6**

When you think of these two specific roles, what do you think the job description of each them might be?

In what ways do you think Jesus lived up to those things?

How might these roles play into the overall ministry of Jesus?

B. Jesus as the anointed one

Read: John 4:19-30; Acts 1:6; 10:37-38; Hebrews 1:8-9

Israel in the first century was in a place of fervent expectation of somebody who would be an 'Anointed One' to end them all! The understanding of the coming Messiah was somebody who would usher in an end of all suffering at the hands of outside oppressors. He would be anointed by God, but the Jewish expectation of him seemed to be more of a human ruler than anything divine. With all that in mind, let's reflect a little on this...

What sort of things does the Samaritan woman expect from the coming Messiah?

What sort of things do the disciples seem to be expecting?

How do the other verses contrast or complement those views?

Idea 2. The Cross and what it achieved

A: The timing of the crucifixion

Read: Matthew 26: 1-5; 17-20; 26-29; 47-56; John 1:29-34

What significant Jewish Day is being spoken of here? How does Jesus treat this day as he deals with his followers?

Casting your memory back to the first study and the same Jewish festival in Exodus; and considering the testimony of John the Baptist, how might these 2 events be related?

B. The Plan of God

**Read: Genesis 3:14-15; Ephesians 1:3-5; Revelation 13:8;
Matthew 16:21; 17:22; 20:17-19; 20:25-27**

When we consider the timing of the cross, how long had it been in the mind of God?

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.

5

The Work of Jesus (Part 2)

We started this topic by looking at some elements of Jesus' earthly ministry, where he operated in human terms in some very specific ways: He is considered a priest, a prophet and a king and these three ideas lead us to one big conclusion about the plan of God.

In this study we will move past those things and simply explore the death and resurrection of Jesus, and discuss some of the things that the Bible tells us were accomplished out of these moments in history. You'll also notice that some of the things we've already looked at will now start to have significant meanings.

Idea 1: The Cross of Christ

A: What significant things took place?

At this time we are going to look at a few commonly used words in the New Testament that speak of sin being addressed on the cross.

Read: Galatians 3:13; 1 Timothy 2:6; Revelation 5:9; 1 John 4:10; Romans 5:9

You will have seen a number of interesting words used here to describe what Jesus accomplished on the cross. Make a note of those as you read along in this study:

From the discussion in the group as well as your own study, make some notes on what those things actually mean.

After working out their meanings, how should these things be applied by a Christian?

How does a knowledge of these things influence your personal interaction with Jesus?

Idea 2: The Resurrection

In study 3, we saw that Jesus died a physical human death. The account that was read out in that setting showed evidence of an actual investigation by Pilate which points out that Jesus was found by people who should know to be dead on the cross. The Bible accounts are designed to give us no other conclusion! All four Gospel writers write in unison about a resurrection 3 days later. This is significant, and needs to be fleshed out a bit!!

A. It really happened!

Read: Matthew 28:1-10; Mark 16:1-8; Luke 24:1-12; John 20:1-18

Each of the four accounts of the resurrection vary slightly but fit together in ways that give us extra details of the one event. How do we explain the differences?

What sort of doubts do we have to deal with when it comes to believing in Jesus' resurrection?

B. The Resurrection really matters!

Read: 1 Corinthians 15:1-8; 12-26

What is the significance of Jesus rising in a completely physical state? (It wasn't just a spiritual or 'ghostlike' appearance but he could be physically touched and could eat food and things like that.)

The ancient Roman world in the first century often held religious views that denied any form of life after death that involved a physical body. 1 Corinthians was being written into a society where this was prominent, and it affected the way life was lived as a result. Why would Paul want to correct that thinking in the Corinthian Church?

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.

6

The Message of Jesus

Today, we'll look at some elements of the Message of Jesus. In the first section, we'll examine some of the meaty 'ethical' ideas that came out in his teaching. These surely have value because they show us a really good way to live. It's no wonder that people in the world around us admire what he had to say, because he prescribed some really good things!

But those nice things didn't get Jesus crucified! The way he prescribed had a greater reason than simply getting along with each other on earth today. All through this series, we've seen that there has always been a greater agenda.

There was a more central message that all these 'nice or ethical' things would serve to demonstrate. His main message was a revolutionary one, which called for deep personal change in a number of ways – and it seemed that these would be ways some would not be willing to do!

Idea 1. Some Well-known but Peripheral Messages of Jesus In the world today

Jesus is well-known for speaking about some subjects. These well known subjects are often emphasised by those who have little experience with the church or the overall teaching of scripture. In and of themselves they are good to explore but often the more serious part of them is overlooked.

A: Love

Read: John 3:16-21; 15:9-17; Mark 12:28-34

B: Service

Read: Mark 9:33-37; 10:35-45

C: Mercy & forgiveness

Read: Matthew 18:21-35; Luke 10:25-37

D: No judgement

Read: Matthew 7:1

What elements of these things do you hear people outside the church speak about? What parts of the story seems to mean the most to them?

What do you think these verses really say about the person and character of Jesus?

E: God as a Father

Read: Matthew 5:48; 23:9; 6:9; 10:19-20

This idea will get a lot more attention later in the Elementary journey, but here's something to reflect a little bit now: How does Jesus teach us to relate to God as Father?

Idea 2: The Central Message of Jesus

"You cannot know anything about Jesus, anything, if you miss the kingdom of God...You are zero on Jesus if you don't understand this term. I'm sorry to say it that strongly, but this is the great failure of evangelical Christianity. We have had Jesus without the kingdom of God, and therefore have literally done Jesus in."

Gordon Fee, author and theologian

What do you think the Kingdom of God is? Why is it important?

A: Some Old Testament verses about the Kingdom of God

Read: Psalm 145; Zephaniah 3:14-17; Isaiah 52:7-10

What do these verses tell us about the nature of God's Kingdom? Is it a physical location? What characteristics does it have?

Given all the ground we've previously covered, how do you think this points to the ministry of Jesus?

B: Some of Jesus' message about the Kingdom of God

Read: Mark 1:14-15; Matthew 11:1-6; 13:44-45

What do these passages tell us about Kingdom that Jesus teaches about?

How close is the Kingdom? What does 'near' mean?

How are the miracles of Jesus evidence that the Kingdom was indeed 'near?'

How might the earlier 'peripheral' teachings of Jesus complement his teaching about the Kingdom of God?

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.

Now for some reflection on the whole topic of Jesus...

Take some time to look over all 6 summary notes pages in this study. When you are ready, take some time to write down a summary of the person, work and identity of Jesus that you might share with another person if you were given a few minutes to do so. While this is a massive topic, try to stay within the space provided here in this booklet, as a way of limiting your reflection to a few significant things.

Where to from here?

You have done really well to get through this booklet! Well done in your commitment, and it's our prayer that you have really grown in your understanding of Jesus and what you might be getting into when you follow him!

We recommend that your next step is to understand the saving work that Jesus does in our lives, so *Book 2: Understanding Salvation* is your next step. Keep on going - if Jesus is the person that this study claims he is, then the journey of discipleship ahead is really going to be worth it!

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

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