



preparing just for starters



HOW TO PREPARE AND USE
JUST FOR STARTERS

Welcome to *Preparing Just for Starters*

First things first—what is *Just for Starters*?

Just for Starters is a series of seven basic or foundational Bible studies first published in 1979. Since that time it has gone through several revisions, but the aim of the studies remains the same:

- To teach what the Bible says about seven important, foundational areas of Christian belief and lifestyle;
- And to begin to teach the new Christian how to read the Bible; how to make sense of a short passage and apply to their life.

Just for Starters is particularly aimed at new Christians, and over the years it has become a standard tool used all over the world in the personal follow-up of people who've been converted. As we talk about *Just for Starters* in this course we'll be assuming that in most cases this is how the studies will be used. However, *Just for Starters* is also excellent for those who've been church-goers for a while but might never have sorted out some basic things properly, or simply for Christians who want to get back to basics and refresh themselves on the fundamentals.

The aim of these talks and the accompanying workbook is, as the title says, to prepare you to **use** the *Just for Starters* studies. We won't be teaching you everything you need to know about personal follow-up. That's a much bigger topic, and involves more than learning how to use a set of Bible studies. In fact, Matthias Media has a training course called *Six steps to encouragement*, which is all about that subject. It trains Christians to minister personally to each other, to encourage each other—and the personal follow-up of new Christians is one aspect of this. More information about *Six steps to encouragement* can be found in the back of your *Preparing Just for Starters* workbook, along with contact details so you can get in touch with Matthias Media, or one of our international distributors.

Our aim in the training material you're now using is more focused: we want to help you prepare the *Just for Starters* studies so that you can work through them effectively with another person.

This course is designed to be self-contained. There are ten talks: three introductory talks including the one you are listening to now, and then one for each of the *Just for Starters* studies, and you can choose to work through this material at your own pace. You can listen to several talks in one sitting and complete the course more quickly—it's up to you. Between the two CDs and the workbook, you have everything you need, although you will probably want to purchase your own copy of the *Just for Starters* Bible studies to use when you meet with the person you are following up.

While the course is a stand-alone, self-paced course, if you have the opportunity to do it at the same time as some other people then it's a good idea to do so, and to meet up once or twice to talk over the studies and the various practicalities of doing *Just for Starters*.

Following this introduction, there is a short talk about personal follow-up, and how the *Just for Starters* studies can be used in this ministry.

Then there is a short talk introducing the *Just for Starters* studies themselves, explaining the underlying principles and pattern for the studies.

There are then seven short talks, one on each of the studies, which take you through them and prepare you to use them. The first two of these talks are longer than the others, partly because they are the more important studies evangelistically, partly because they are the more difficult studies, and partly because once you have gone through a couple of studies the pattern is more familiar and you will need less assistance to prepare the remaining studies.

An outline of the course contents can be found on pages 6 and 7 of your *Preparing Just for Starters* workbook. At this point you might like to stop the CD and, using the course outline provided, make some plans for when you will do the preparation for each study and listen to each talk.

About personal follow-up

An outline of this talk can be found on page 8 of the *Preparing Just for Starters* workbook.

In Ephesians 4, God's plan for each of us is that we "reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ". One of the main ways this is achieved, says Paul, is by Christians "speaking the truth in love" to each other.

And this is basically what personal follow-up is about. It's about forming a relationship with another Christian to help them grow to maturity in Christ by speaking the truth in love to them. The particular truth we need to speak to them is the truth about themselves, and about God, about his plans, about what it means to be a Christian and to grow to maturity as a Christian—and this truth is contained and summarized in God's own word, the Bible. It's by speaking and discussing and applying God's own word to people, in the context of our loving relationship with them, that God brings growth and maturity in people's lives.

1 Thessalonians chapters 1 to 3 sum all this up beautifully, and it's worth spending an afternoon reading through these chapters and reflecting on what they teach about personal ministry to other people. In particular, you see how Paul, and his companions Silvanus and Timothy, behaved as they brought God's Word to the Thessalonians: how they spoke truthfully and plainly, and how their actions matched their words. They were gentle with them, like a nursing mother; they shared not just the gospel with them but their lives; they were holy, righteous and blameless in their conduct; they encouraged and exhorted them like a father with his children. This is the nature of Christian relationships, and of follow-up.

Personal follow-up should be undertaken just like any other part of the Christian life: in godliness and holiness, holding fast to the truth, wholeheartedly engaging with others and all to the glory of God. Our aim must be to do what we can to help this new Christian brother or sister walk in the truth and grow to maturity, so that they might appear before God on the last day, pure and blameless.

About *Just for Starters*

An outline of this talk can be found on pages 9 and 10 of the *Preparing Just for Starters* workbook.

Just for Starters is a set of seven foundational Bible studies that has been used very effectively over the last 25 years to follow up new Christians. The studies themselves are very helpful in showing from the Bible what it means to be a Christian, and what a Christian lifestyle looks like.

However, as excellent as the content of *Just for Starters* is, the key to using the studies effectively in personal follow-up is the **personal relationship** in which they take place. I suppose it would be possible to be paired up with a new Christian, meet together seven times for an hour each time to work through *Just for Starters*, to wish them well when it's over, and then move on to the next person. It's even possible that the new Christian would derive some benefit from these meetings.

But all in all, this would be very poor outcome indeed, because it wouldn't include the enormous potential for growth and encouragement that can take place in a good follow-up relationship. The *Just for Starters* studies aren't a set of seven boxes you need to tick with a new Christian, something that you just do mechanically. They are best thought of as a handy framework around which a new Christian and a more mature Christian can build a relationship of encouragement that will hopefully last for years. You are not meeting just to share a set of studies, but to share your lives—to play tennis, share meals, help each other in practical ways, or just phone each other up for a chat.

Some people will meet and do the seven studies over seven one hour meetings—the studies have been designed so that you can do each one in an hour. But each study may take longer than an hour, depending on the person you're meeting with. In fact, you may find that you get together several times before you complete a single study. You may find after the first study that the person is not really a Christian after all and that you need to keep coming back to the basics of the gospel before going any further. Follow-up is not a program or production line but a relationship, and the relationship will ultimately determine the best way in which to establish people in Christ. The seven *Just for Starters* studies are an aid in that relationship.

All the same, they are a very handy aid. It's great to have a reason to meet regularly, and great to have a framework to guide the discussion. It means that, at the very least, you're going to meet with someone regularly for two months or more, during which time you can really get to know someone, and establish a

relationship that can continue after the studies are finished. Having a set of Bible studies to talk over can also avoid the trap of meeting to discuss only problems and issues, rather than meeting in order to progress towards maturity in Christ.

The studies are best done one-to-one, but you can do them with two or three others. As you add more people, of course, it gets harder to build the personal relationships and be as effective in follow-up. The danger of doing *Just for Starters* in a small group as opposed to one-to-one is that you will be efficient, but not effective.

Because the studies are done one-to-one, and because we are wanting to develop a loving Christian relationship in which we support the person and help them grow in godliness, they are best done with a person of the same sex. This is one of those areas in which we must not only do the right thing, but be *seen* to be doing the right thing.

Each of the studies is on a topic. One study, one topic, although the first two studies, ‘Saved by God’ and ‘Trusting in God’, do overlap somewhat. Each study is not only on a topic but based on one Bible passage, because remember we’re aiming to teach new Christians not only what the topic is about, but how to read and learn from the Bible. We’re aiming to teach them that the answers to these kinds of questions are found in the Bible. Now we could perhaps have covered more aspects of each topic by picking verses from all over the Bible, but if we did that then at the end of the studies people still wouldn’t know how to read a passage and make sense of it themselves. So what we have done is pick one passage for each topic and do a Bible study on the passage so that when people look at other passages they will know a good method for how to read and understand the Bible for themselves.

So there is a standard pattern to each study, regardless of the topic or passage. First we stop and think about the passage. We read the verses again, stop and think about what they mean, and ask ourselves if there are any words we’re not sure about. If there are words which new Christians are unlikely to be familiar with then an explanation of the word is found at the bottom of the page.

Next we find the verses in our Bibles so that we can see them in context.

The verses are quoted from the New International Version because it’s a fairly simple translation which many people can easily get hold of. It may cause some confusion if you use a different translation, so try to use the NIV for the studies if at all possible—you may even lend the other person one if necessary.

Now, looking up the verse up in its context, and reading the whole passage, is very important. It not only helps us understand the particular verses we're focusing on in the study, but it teaches a very important lesson. It teaches the new Christian that any particular verse in the Bible needs to be read in its context to be understood—and this will help them enormously in their Christian lives, not only in their own Bible reading, but in protecting them from people who don't do this—who quote verses out of context to prove this or that.

So don't skip this step. It's well worth doing.

Then we do our best to write out the passage in our own words. Some people find this a little difficult, but it's an excellent way to show whether someone has really understood the drift of a passage. In particular, it often demonstrates areas in which the new Christian has misunderstood the passage. You don't have to deal with that misunderstanding straight away—there should be ample opportunity to do so as the study proceeds. But it's very helpful to have in mind from the start.

Then come a series of questions. The numbered questions are fairly straightforward comprehension questions and can be answered directly from the passage. The 'think it through' questions require us to think beyond the details of the passage to what it means and implies, and how it applies to our lives.

This way of distinguishing the questions is very useful. The comprehension questions help people see that the words and sentences in the passage actually mean something and are saying something. It helps the new Christian to see that reading the Bible is not a mysterious or magical exercise. It's simply reading, like reading the newspaper or a recipe or a repair manual. And so while the Bible may be new to us, and may contain some words we aren't familiar with, what we do when we read the Bible is basically what we do when we read anything. We read words in sentences and paragraphs, and they say something to us that we can understand.

The 'think it through' questions then help us think through the implications of what the passage is saying. What does it mean for me, what changes do I need to make, how does it apply in my life and situation? The 'think it through' sections also help us discuss important issues not directly or completely addressed by the passage.

There can be a strong temptation for people who have been Christian for some time to jump straight to the 'think it through' questions, before doing the comprehension questions properly, and therefore read into the passage what we *think* the passage is saying, without first spending the time actually looking at the Bible itself. Sometimes the new Christian has less trouble with these studies than

the old Christian because the old Christian keeps answering questions that are not asked, and mis-answering the questions that are asked. In a large part, the purpose of the seven short talks that follow is to help you carefully prepare each study so that you don't fall into this trap. We need to make sure we have understood the passage and the questions so we can be clear, accurate and helpful when discussing them with our new Christian friend.

So there are numbered questions, and 'think it through' questions. Then come some cross-references—a list of other passages that you can consult if you have time. You may or may not spend much time in the studies looking at these, although they are a great way to think more deeply about the topic at hand. You might even like to spend an extra week looking at these passages before moving onto the next study.

Lastly, each *Just for Starters* study asks us to memorize the passage for that week. Some find it difficult or a chore, but it's a very worthwhile exercise. Helping a new Christian to learn seven short, important little Bible passages is a great foundation for them in their Christian lives. And they most certainly will not bother with the memorizing if you don't set a good example. So make sure you take the time to do the memorizing, and then check how each other are going.

Well that's a brief introduction to *Just for Starters*, and how each study works. As I mentioned earlier, the aim is not just to go through the questions and tick off right answers. The aim is to have encouraging conversations together over the Bible, where we share what are learning from the word of God, sharpening each other's thinking and building each other up. It's an opportunity to learn to ask questions, to learn how to discuss the Bible, to discuss problems and issues in life in a Christian way, from a biblical perspective. And so as we are going through the study we need to be focusing on making the most of the time spent and sometimes just letting the conversation take its course, even if that means we don't finish the study itself. You might often find that you only get halfway through, because so many questions and issues have been raised. That's fine. In fact, that's more than fine—it's excellent. Because it means that the word of God is having an effect. If you do only get halfway through, make sure you work out together where you're going to pick it up again next time.

Now I need to say just a few things about how this course works.

Page 10 of your *Preparing Just for Starters* workbook outlines the steps to take when preparing each study.

The first step is to pray—that God would give you a clear understanding of his word. If there is a particular person you are planning to meet with, pray for them also.

Secondly, using your workbook, work through the *Just for Starters* study yourself. Read and think about the passage, and answer the questions using the spaces provided in your workbook. In your workbook, you will also find some cross-references next to the numbered questions and some of the ‘think it through’ questions. Looking up these extra references is an optional step but will help deepen your understanding of the Bible’s teaching on the topic and will provide you with some useful cross references you may wish to use during the study. When you’re actually meeting with a new Christian, you should use these cross-references very sparingly. You don’t want to overwhelm and confuse the person with dozens of extra passages to look up. Most of the time the point will be clear enough from the main passage you are studying.

Thirdly, listen to the talk for that study, making notes as you do so on the blank pages provided in the workbook. This will take you through the study and deepen your understanding of the passages and issues discussed.

Fourthly, decide what *main points* should be communicated through the study. What are the main things you want to make sure come through? Largely this will be based on the passage, but it will also be influenced by what issues or problems the other person is having.

Fifthly, work out if there is anything else you really want to achieve at this meeting. For example, at your first meeting, you might not only want to communicate the main points of the first study, but also start to get to know the person. It’s worth thinking about these ‘additional goals’ in advance. Of course this is not something you do just once during this course, but is something you will need to think about each time you meet with a person to do the *Just for Starters* studies.

Lastly, prepare your discussion copy of the *Just for Starters* study. When you meet with someone it’s best not to use your *Preparing Just for Starters* workbook, but to have the same version of the studies that the other person is using. So if you are planning to meet with someone, check you have a copy of the studies for yourself.

On your discussion copy you should have:

- main points to communicate;
- any additional goals for the meeting;
- all answers to questions;
- cross-references where necessary;

- additional discussion questions, notes and comments that might help you communicate the main points;
- the important questions highlighted.

With this discussion copy written up, you're now ready to sit down with someone (such as a new Christian) and work through *Just for Starters* with them, encouraging them and building them up in their faith, and establishing a relationship that will go on well past the time spent doing the studies themselves.

We'd recommend that as soon as possible after doing this *Preparing Just for Starters* course, or even while you're doing it, you try to meet with some one and work through the *Just for Starters* studies with them. If you're a little nervous about the thought of meeting with a new Christian, or if you don't know any new Christians, just organize to meet with one of your Christian friends, and go through the studies with them

Well that's about all I need to tell you by way of introduction. What follows is the first of seven talks on the seven studies. Before you listen to the first one, turn to page 11 of your workbook, and pray, and work through study 1.

Study 1: Saved by God

You should by now have worked through study 1: 'Saved by God' for yourself in the *Preparing Just for Starters* workbook. For this talk, please have your workbook open to page 12. You'll probably find it helpful to take notes during the talk using the 'notes' pages provided in your workbook.

The passage for study 1:

But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! (Romans 5:8-9)

We do need to make sure we stop and think about this passage and in particular about any words we're not sure about—because the key to this study is the difference between the word *justified* and the word *saved*. Most Christians see no difference at all between these two words. And if you see no difference between these words, you will not understand Romans 5 verse 8-9, because the logic of the verses is all built on the difference between those two words. We'll speak more about this a little later.

Most Christians are familiar with words like 'justified', which is a fairly technical term, but to the new Christian it's a very strange word indeed. And so its meaning is printed at the bottom of the page, along with the words 'saved' and 'wrath'.

There are other words in the passage which are quite normal everyday words but which are used in a not-quite normal way. For instance we all know what 'blood' is, but what does it mean to be "justified by his blood"? The word 'love' is also common, but it can mean so many different things, so what sort of love exactly are we are talking about here? These are the types of issues we will need to be thinking about and working through during the study.

Before we start looking at the individual questions—the numbered ones and the *think it through*—let's take look in a more detail at Romans 5:8-9.

Firstly, why start with this passage and the topic 'Saved by God'?

Often people who have just become Christians are still somewhat confused about the gospel they have just believed. They may have only heard the gospel once or twice, and responded to it, but still not be all that clear about it. Or they may have been thinking about Christianity for years and even have believed it in some sort

of way for years, but still have no assurance of salvation. People may have been Christians for years but never taught the gospel properly, and aren't sure of eternal life, or of their sinfulness, or of where good works fit in.

Quite often, the person you're doing the studies with may not be Christian at all. They may know this and just be interested in Christianity and in doing the studies. They may have been to an evangelistic meeting, or come along to church and filled in a response card, indicated they have 'prayed the prayer' or responded to an appeal; but they really haven't understood the gospel. What the first, and indeed the second, studies do is go back over the gospel. They aren't written as evangelistic studies—they are designed to do with someone who has become a Christian—but very often people will get converted doing study 1 or 2. We need to be mindful of this and get to know the person so we know where they are at in their understanding of the gospel so we can best help them.

Romans 5, and verses 8 and 9 in particular, is a great passage for understanding the gospel. But it's a passage Christians often don't understand because they fail to see the difference between word *justified* and the word *saved*. So let's spend some time looking at the passage and see what it has to teach us about these important words.

Romans chapters 1 to 4 is largely about justification by faith alone. All mankind is under sin and subject to the judgement and wrath of God. But God has revealed in the gospel a way of righteousness, a way to be saved from God's wrath, through the sacrificial death of Jesus. Jesus' death turns aside God's anger and enables us to be justified or declared righteous. This righteousness is received by faith and this faith is spelt out in chapter 4. Chapter 5 begins with a conclusion: "Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ".

This justification through the death of Jesus Christ, which we receive by faith, leads us to having peace with God. That peace overflows in joy, as we read in verse 2 'we rejoice in the glory of God', and in verse 3, 'we rejoice in our sufferings', and verse 11, 'we rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ'. So as a result of our justification we have a peace with God, which gives us joy because of our future, the hope of sharing in his glory. And rather than being overwhelmed by the suffering and troubles of this world and living in despair and uncertainty, we rejoice that God is using even the suffering of this world to bring us to our future glory. And so rather than living in fear of God, rather than hating God and being in a state of conflict with him, we now rejoice in God. In summary, having had our past dealt with by the death of Jesus, our present and future are assured.

The basis of all this is Jesus death. It's Jesus' death which assures us of God's forgiveness, and of God's love for us.

Verse 8 is important because it explains the nature of God's love for us. Take a look at verse 8 and ask yourself, 'What is the most important word, logically in this verse?' That is, in the flow of thought in this passage which is the most significant word? You might like to pause the CD at this point and take a minute to look closely at the verse.

In terms of the flow of the passage, the most important word is "while". "While we were still sinners, Christ died for us". It's a small word, but a very important one because it tells us when Christ died for us. It was not when we were his friends, but when we were his enemies. And the fact that he did it while we were his enemies, while we were sinners in rebellion against him, really does demonstrate God's love for us. The context of verses 6 and 7 helps us understand this point, because it was "at just the right time, while we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us".

If 'while' is the most important word in verse 8, what's the most logically important word in verse 9?

On first glance the word 'since' strikes us as important and there is a 'since ... then' logic to the sentence. But there is another word which is even more important, and it's another time word—the word 'now'. The basic logic of the verses is a 'now ... then' logic. Since something is the case **now**, how much more will something else be the case **then**?

The case **now** is that we're justified because of Jesus' death for us in the past. If that is the case **now**, then we can be assured that in the future—we will be saved from God's wrath. Verse 10 spells this out: "For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!"

So understanding the time element is crucial to these verses. It was while we were still sinners that Christ died for the ungodly. Notice also that "sinners" in verse 8 is equal to "ungodly" in verse 6 and to "God's enemies" in verse 10, which explains the nature of sin as being set against God and at war with him. It was while were in this state of conflict that we were reconciled to God, made friends with God and at peace with him. And if this is what God did for us when we were enemies, then what will he do for us now we are at peace with him? We can be quite sure that he will save us on the Day of Wrath, the Day of Judgement.

Note how important it is to distinguish between justification and salvation in these verses. Justification is the declaration **now** that we are not guilty in God's sight, that we are at peace with God. Since we have been justified in the present, we know that we will be saved in the future from the wrath of God. The two things are different and one gives you assurance of the other.

So our salvation depends upon God. It depends upon his love for us, because of which he sent Jesus to die in our place. Our present state has not been established by what **we** have done, but by what **God** has done through the death of his Son, Jesus Christ. And so, secondly, it depends upon Jesus—because the way in which God's love has brought us into our present state of being justified is through Jesus; we have been justified by **his blood**, we have been reconciled through the death of his Son. It is not something we have done or contributed to; it is done for us by God through Christ. And so any other way in which we attempt to secure salvation is a denial of God and his way of providing salvation.

God's way to God is through the death of his one and only son, Jesus. And his death was sacrificial and substitutionary—that is, Jesus died in our place, on our behalf. As it says in our passage, “Christ died for the ungodly”; “Christ died for us”; it was “by his blood” and “through the death of his Son”. It is because Christ has taken our place as our substitute and has taken upon himself the punishment due to us that we are now able to be justified, declared not guilty, and right with God our judge. Being right with the judge, we know our salvation from the judgement to come is secure.

This substitution is right and proper, because God has not ignored sin. Jesus paid for our sin with his very life; the price wasn't cheap, sin wasn't ignored. God dealt with sin himself, in the person of the Son of God, the man Jesus Christ. That is, in the man Jesus Christ we see God dealing with our sin personally and at great cost to himself.

Well, having spent some time looking at the passage in its context, let's turn to the study itself.

Question 1 asks, “What did God show us?”

The passage tells us he showed us his love, he demonstrated his love.

Question 2, “What did Christ do for us?”

The simple answer is ‘he died for us’. There are many consequences of this, and much else we could say, but this question is just checking to see if people have understood what the passage is saying.

Question 3, “When did Christ die for us?”

In one sense the answer is ‘around AD30’, but the answer from the passage is ‘while we were still sinners.’ So this question asks people to notice the time element—when did he die? While we were still sinners.

The ‘think it through’ questions then help us to stop and think about what this means.

“What does it mean to be a ‘sinner?’” is not a comprehension question—you can’t answer that directly from verse 8. The context certainly helps, for we can see that “sinner” is used as an equivalent of “ungodly” and “God’s enemies”. Most non-Christians and even new Christians will think that a sinner is someone who is immoral or a lawbreaker, someone who breaks certain rules. Certainly those who are immoral and lawbreakers are sinners, but that is not a great definition of what it means to be a sinner. At its heart, sin is rebellion against God, placing yourself outside the law of God; it’s saying to God that he has no authority over you. It’s much more than just breaking the law. It’s rebellion against the lawmaker. And so there are many sinners who are quite moral and law abiding people but who ignore God and reject his authority over them.

The next question is, “How would you describe God’s love?” This is not a question with a right or wrong answer. It’s asking people to give their own description, their own perception of what God’s love is like. And their answer may therefore tell you more about them than about God. It’s a question designed to get people thinking about how amazing and remarkable and undeserved God’s love is.

“What does the phrase ‘Christ died for us’ mean?” This question takes us back to the passage, but it’s more than a comprehension question because we are being asked to explain what it means, and that’s not spelt out in the passage. The key idea here is of Christ as the substitute who has died “for us”, that is, in our place, on our behalf. To make this clear it might be a good idea to look at an extra passage or two such as 1 Peter 2:22-25 or 1 Peter 3:18. Other good verses are 2 Corinthians 5:21 and Mark 10:45.

“What did you do to deserve Jesus’ death for you?” Perhaps the best answer is no answer. The best we can write is the word ‘nothing’. This is an important point for people to grasp—that it was while we were weak and powerless, while we were enemies that Christ died for us.

Question 4 takes us back to a series of comprehension questions.

Some help is given in this question by using the words ‘sacrificial death’ in place of “his blood” and putting the word ‘now’ in bold type. “Jesus’ sacrificial death (“his blood”) means that we are **now** ...”.

Justified, or in other words, using the definition given at the bottom of page 3 of the studies, we are now declared to be right with God, found to be not guilty.

Question 5, “Since we are **now** right with God, what does our future hold?”
Salvation, rescue from God’s wrath.

To make sure we understand this point question 6 asks, “What will happen to us concerning God’s wrath?”

The passage tells us, we will be saved from God’s wrath, in other words we are no longer under the judgement of God and so we will not experience God’s wrath.

Question 7 is just about the most important one in the study: “How can we be sure that we shall be saved?”

How people answer this question will tell you an enormous amount about their understanding of Romans 5 8-9 and the gospel. People with a church background may have all sorts of ideas about how we can be sure, or why we cannot be sure. But while there are all sorts of answers people might give, we must remember that this is a comprehension question and the answer comes from the passage. And the passage tells us we can be sure that we will be saved because we have been justified. Because we are **now** justified, we will **then** be saved. We know we are now justified because of the death of Jesus—so another way of answering the question is ‘because of the death of Jesus’.

The ‘think it through’ questions continue with the simple question, “Are you right with God?” There can be no more fundamental question than this, and in preparing the studies people will need to be thinking through the answer to this very personal question. You need to be prepared for people to say, ‘no I don’t think I am right with God’; very often people will respond, ‘I’m not sure’. You might need to stop and talk further with them about the basis upon which we can be sure, namely the death of Jesus. If they haven’t entrusted themselves to Jesus, if they aren’t looking to Jesus as the one who has stood in their place, we need to ask them whether there is something stopping them from taking this step.

But if the person answers ‘Yes, I am right with God’, then the next three questions will help confirm that their confidence is in God alone, and not something else.

“On what basis can you be right with God?” Only because of the death of Jesus.

“On what basis can you be saved from God’s anger?” Being justified now is the basis on which I will be saved from God’s wrath in the future.

“How can I be sure that I will be saved?” Because of the death of Jesus and being justified. I can be sure of my future now, because of what Christ has done in the past.

So these three questions are really asking the same thing in three different ways—in fact the rest of the study is really asking much the same question. On first glance this seems incredibly repetitive, but we must remember that most people will have to have the gospel explained to them several times in several different ways before they really understand it for themselves and grasp hold of it. Many people will give a biblical answer to one question, because they have just been looking at the Bible, and then slip back into a their natural way of thinking when answering the next question. Going over the concepts in several different ways will check that they really have grasped the gospel and will often reveal where they are still struggling to understand or accept what the Bible is saying.

There are several other passages listed which you might like to use in the study if time allows. At the very least make sure you have looked these up yourself.

The final ‘think it through’ section asks four questions which tie the whole study together.

“How do you know that God loves you?” Romans 5:8-9 tells us that it’s not about feelings but facts. We know God loves us because he has demonstrated his love for us at a particular time and place in history, in the death of his son. We are not excluded from God’s love because we are bad—God loved us while we were his enemies.

The next question is a great diagnostic question which will really help us know whether the person has understood and accepted the gospel: “When you stand before God, why would God accept you?” The answer must be ‘because Jesus died in my place’—it’s not about what **we** have done but what **he** has done. If the person says, ‘because I’m really not that bad’ or ‘I really do try to be good’, they haven’t understood the gospel; they haven’t understood the nature of sin and the death of Jesus. If they answer this way then you will need to think about your next steps with the person. You might want to suggest looking at one of the other suggested passages so you can go over the gospel again with them. Or you may want to continue with study 2 which will pick up on some of these issues. But you will need to go forward in your relationship with the person knowing that they

haven't really grasped the gospel yet. They may well be committed to the gospel in their heart, but they haven't understood it in their head. Their head and heart may be out of sync at that point. Alternatively, they may understand what you are saying but disagree—that's another possibility.

“What have I learnt about God's offer of salvation?” This is another question where a thousand different answers are possible. ‘How greatly God must love me’; ‘That I do not need to do anything’. Any number of answers are possible.

Finally, “What response will I make to God's offer?” ‘Response’ is a key word in this question because there is nothing we can do to contribute to our salvation, we can only respond. But hopefully the answer is, ‘to accept God's offer, to believe him and entrust myself to his goodness’. And the next study will explore that response further.

Finally we memorize Romans 5:8-9. Having taken some time to look at the passage and think about the flow of thought, the job of memorizing the passage is made that much easier because the person has, hopefully, understood what the passage means. Of course it is important that you memorize the passage yourself, because if you don't the other person certainly won't.

Study 2: Trusting in God

You should by now have worked through study 2 yourself. For this talk, please have your workbook open to page 22.

The second *Just for Starters* Bible study is about trusting in God. The question we were left with at the end of study 1 was, “How will you respond to God’s offer?” and this study picks up on that issue and explores the nature of our response to God’s offer of salvation.

The passage we look at in study 2 is Ephesians 2:8-9 and the pattern of the study is the same as study 1. We stop and think about the passage, reading it carefully, thinking about what the verses mean, reading it in its context and so on. It’s the same pattern in each of the seven studies.

But let’s stop and think together about this particular passage.

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.

The passage talks about grace, and ‘grace’ is a word most people won’t understand. It’s a simple word but because it can mean so many things to so many people it can be a confusing word. Grace is something you say before meals. A dancer may move with grace. Someone may be a gracious host. Now this last use is getting closer to the biblical meaning of the word because it’s talking about generosity. A gracious host is a generous host, and certainly generosity and kindness are meanings of the word grace. It has that sense of going out of your way for the sake of another person. Perhaps the best definition of the kind of grace we are talking about in this passage is ‘undeserved favour’.

The passage tells us that “it is by grace you have been saved—through faith”. And if people have problems understanding ‘grace’, they almost certainly will not understand ‘faith’. At least with ‘grace’, most non-Christians know they aren’t so sure what it means, but with ‘faith’ everybody thinks they know what it means, but they consistently get it wrong. So ‘faith’ is a key word we are really going to have to wrestle with in this study. As the definition given in the study tells us, faith is about trust, reliance or dependence. Most people think of faith as some sort of spiritual feeling or perception, some sort of special ability someone has to believe in spiritual things. But in the Bible, faith is much more connected to concepts such as truth and sureness and dependability—and so faith is about trusting the trustworthy, relying on the reliable, depending on the dependable.

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.

‘Works’ often carries with it the meaning of works of the law, works of obedience to God.

‘Boasting’ has to do with pride. It’s connected to the confidence we have in ourselves.

Thinking about the context of the verses, we should note that Ephesians is about the great plan of God which is being brought into effect through Christ. We read about this plan in Ephesians chapter 1, verses 9 and 10—everything is being brought together under the rule of Christ. This plan was put into effect by the death and resurrection of Christ and is especially displayed in the gathering together of God’s people, whether they be Jew or Gentile. For us, the relationship between Jews and Gentiles is not much of an issue, but for Paul it was the burning issue of the day. There was no doubt that the Jews were God’s people and that the Messiah, the Christ, would come from them and to save them. But the great shock when the Christ came was that he came also for the Gentiles. We can see as far back as Abraham that God planned to bless all the nations, but the Jews tended to focus on the distinctiveness of the Jewish people as the people of God, and that salvation would only be for the Jews. But that wasn’t God’s plan. Rather than the Gentiles being second-class citizens in the kingdom of God, or having to become Jewish, the gospel message is that the Gentiles are full members of the kingdom of God and that indeed some Jews would be excluded from salvation.

This was a radical message for the Jews of the first century. When Jesus suggested it in Luke chapter 4, he was nearly stoned to death. It was unthinkable. And this is why such a big deal is made about the first Gentile convert in Acts chapters 10 and 11. It takes a whole series of visions and words from God before Peter even takes the gospel message to Cornelius and then he has to answer to the Jerusalem church about why he went the house of a Gentile and baptized Cornelius.

Ephesians chapter 2 is dealing with this issue. Verses 1 to 10 set out how we were all objects of God’s wrath because of our rebellion but have we all now come to God the same way, through the mercy of God shown to us in Christ Jesus. Verses 11 to 23 then tackle the Jew-Gentile question head on by showing that while the Gentiles were once separated from God and alienated from the Jewish people, now in Christ, Jews and Gentiles have been reconciled to each other and to God.

Jews and Gentiles are now equally part of God's household, being built together into a dwelling place in which God lives by his Spirit.

And so as you read Ephesians chapter 2, verses 1 to 10, notice that Paul begins by talking about "you"—"**you** were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which **you** used to live"—and then switches to using "we" and "us" in verse 3 — 'All of **us** also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of **our** sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, **we** were by nature objects of wrath". Now it could be that Paul is talking here about 'you Ephesians' and 'us, the apostles', 'you readers' as opposed to 'us writers'. But the second half of the chapter makes it clear that he is talking about 'you Gentile Christians' as opposed to 'us Jewish Christians'. So what he is saying is that **you** were like that, and we were **also** like that—we were all dead in sin. Rather than being so different, Jews and Gentiles were actually the same, united in disobedience, by nature objects of wrath.

Note what it says about our condition, since we are all in the same boat: 'we were **dead** in the transgressions and sins, in which we used to **live**'. While showing all the signs of physical life, we were actually spiritually dead in sin. We were dead 'when we followed the ways of this world'— that is, it was our choice, we chose to follow. But it was also a supernatural thing, for we chose to follow the "the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient". That is, we chose to follow the leading and temptation of the devil, "gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts". And so everyone is equally under the judgement and wrath of God. Everyone is spiritually dead as a doornail.

But then, verse 4, "because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions". Here is the gospel message that we saw last week from Romans 5. It's because of God's love for us. It's because God is merciful. It's because of the death of Jesus—although the slight difference here is that Ephesians emphasizes the resurrection, for God has made us alive with Christ. We were dead, spiritually, but we have now been made alive, spiritually, and when Christ returns we will receive new physical life as well. More than this, having been raised with Christ, we are presently seated with him in the heaven realms in Christ. Physically speaking, you're sitting somewhere listening to a CD—but spiritually you are already in the heavenly places because of Christ; you are already part of the age to come.

All of this is the work of God and a work of grace—it has been given to us as a generous free undeserved gift. "It is by grace you have been saved", verse 5. "It is by grace you have been saved", again in verse 8. The salvation that God has provided is an act of God's love and mercy, an act of grace.

Because in last week's study from Romans 5 we made a point of distinguishing our present state of justification from the future salvation we will receive, it's worth commenting briefly on the fact that here salvation is spoken of in the past tense—"you have been saved". In the New Testament the verb is used in the past, present and future. We have been saved, we are being saved and we will be saved. All these are true. As Romans 1 teaches us, the wrath of God is already being revealed and we have been and are being saved from that wrath. But there will come a day when the final judgement will come and we will need to be saved from that future judgement. So the New Testament can speak of salvation in the past, present and future. Romans 5 is focusing on the implication of our justification, and so it speaks of the assurance we have of our future salvation. Ephesians 2 is focusing on the fact that Jew and Gentile are equally under the judgement of God and have been equally saved by the death of Jesus in exactly the same way—so salvation is spoken of in the past tense. Ultimately it is the death of Jesus, in the past, which is central. And so whether the New Testament speaks of salvation as past, present or future, it's a sure thing because of that past event which guarantees it.

The key point here is that there is no salvation outside of Christ, and this salvation comes to Jew and to Gentile alike by grace, as the free gift of God to those who are undeserving, and all this is ultimately for the praise and glory of God.

Verses 8 and 9 sum this up. 'It is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not something which comes from you, it is the gift of God—not by your works and so there is no basis on which you can boast'. You cannot praise and glory in yourself, but rather you are to give praise and glory to God. You were not saved because you were good or moral or upright or intelligent or religious. You were saved because you were dead and because God in his love and mercy and rich kindness made you alive. Dead people can do nothing—and you were spiritually dead. We are saved by God because of his grace and mercy, not by our works.

Verse 10 reinforces this: "we are God's workmanship", we are the product of his work, "created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do". So we are created, or re-created, in Christ Jesus **in order** to do good works, not **because** we have done them. There is a point to good works, in fact we are created so that we might do good and bring glory to God. But good works can only ever be the **result** of salvation, not the **cause** of salvation. It's significant at this point that this passage speaks of salvation in the past tense because it leaves us in no doubt that we have been saved by God alone, so that we might do good works. This passage rules out doing good works in order to be saved or contributing to our salvation in any way.

So, this passage has much to say about our response to God, our response of trust and of good works. But verse 10 and the good works God has prepared for us to do is not the focus of this study, but of next week's study. The focus this week is on grace and subsequently on the place of faith. The problem of course is that so many people misunderstand faith and see it as something we do, some special experience we have, some necessary contribution to our salvation. So let's look a little closer at faith.

Verses 8 and 9 tell us "it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and **this** not from yourselves, it is the gift of God". One of the key questions in this passage is what does the "this" refer to. Does the "this" refer to 'this faith', or to 'this grace', or 'this salvation'? From our English translations it's impossible to say for sure but since the last thing mentioned is faith you would think that it's talking about faith—that 'this faith' through which you are saved, is the gift of God. However, in the Greek, the original language in which the New Testament is written, this can't be the case. So it's one of these unfortunate times when our English language falls a little short of being able to convey everything and we are helped by a little knowledge of the original Greek. The word 'this' is not the same gender as the word 'faith' and so can't be understood as saying that this faith is the gift of God. It refers to the salvation or the grace or the whole phrase, "by grace you have been saved".

Now, the whole drift of the argument is that this is all from God and we have nothing to boast in. In this sense it is right to say that we can't even boast in our faith. For the person who has been made alive with Christ, faith is the natural response to this grace. But this needs to be argued from the rest of the passage and other parts of Scripture. Verse 8 is not directly saying that faith is a gift of God.

However, it is certainly true that there is nothing more silly than boasting in faith and making this out to be something significant and praiseworthy. For our faith is always of less significance than the thing we have faith in. Or our trust is always of less significance than who or what we put our trust in. You can never just trust; you can only trust something. You can't just rely; you can only rely upon something or someone. Likewise you can't just have faith; you must put your faith in something or someone. And the important thing is what you put your faith in. Everyone has faith: faith that the chair you sit on won't collapse; faith that the brakes on your car won't fail; faith that the CD player you're listening to won't short-circuit and electrocute you;

In our relativistic, mystic, introspective age we think that it's important just to **have faith**, but we aren't so interested in asking what have you put your faith in and whether it will prove reliable. We think it's important to have a bit of faith or

even a pure faith or a particular kind of faith. But that's not what is important at all. The important thing to look at is **who** or **what** are we putting our faith **in**. So when we sit on a chair, what holds us up is not our faith in the chair, but the chair. If the chair is broken it won't hold us no matter how much faith we have, because our faith is misplaced. And if the chair is good, it will hold us up, regardless of how timidly we might sit down because of our lack of faith.

Many Christians are confused about faith and reduce it to the power of positive thinking. They think that if you're sick and you ask God to make you well, and you *really* believe—then you will get what you ask. Or if you're trying to find a car parking spot, and you pray and if you really, *really* believe, then one will appear for you. But it's up to God whether these things happen, not the quantity or quality of your faith. As Jesus said, even faith the size of a mustard seed can move a mountain—the point being that the quantity of faith is irrelevant. It's who you have your faith in that is the key issue. God can move mountains, even if your faith is as tiny as a mustard seed.

So what does it mean that you are saved by grace through faith? It simply means that we are saved by God and the means by which we accept this salvation is faith.

What this passage is saying is that God's generosity is the basis of our salvation. What we should do is rely upon the salvation that God has given us and not upon anything we do. There is no room for human pride in our salvation, because all we did was accept God's free offer.”

Question 1 asks us, “What has happened to us by grace?”

Answer: we have been saved.

‘Think it through’: “From what have you been saved?” The two verses we are looking at in particular don't tell us, but various answers from verse 1-10 might be: from the anger of God; from sin and death.

“How have you been saved?” The passage tells us that it is by God's grace, his gift—but we need to look at the wider context to discover that it's by being made alive with Christ and so it's also by his death and resurrection. People may also remember from last week's study that Jesus' death in our place leads to justification and therefore salvation.

Question 2 asks, “What does faith (or trust) have to do with salvation?” From the passage we learn that salvation is by grace through faith, so salvation is through faith. Or in other words, salvation is by grace through reliance upon the gift of salvation. But it should be clear that faith does not contribute to salvation—rather it is a response to salvation.

Thinking it through, “What is the appropriate response to God’s grace?” The appropriate response to God’s free gift is surely to accept the gift. And the acceptance of the gift has all sorts of implications because acceptance is about trust and involves much more than mere intellectual assent. It involves relying upon God as the sole means to salvation, and it means living life in response to salvation, that is in obedience to him. And study 3 will look at the response of godly living in more detail.

The next question explores our response of faith by asking, “What does it mean, ‘to trust God’ ?”

At the most basic level, it must mean we believe what God says, that we trust him when he tells us that through the death of Jesus we are now right with God. We should also note that trust is not a one-off exercise but an ongoing thing.

Question 3, “Is salvation our own work?”

The passage tells us clearly that the answer is ‘no’. Work and gift are two quite different things and Romans 4 explores this theme in detail. Salvation is a gift, not the result of work. Work results in wages, not a gift. Salvation comes to us not by our work, but as God’s free gift.

Question 4, “Salvation comes from God in what way?”

As a gift. Or, by grace.

“What works can we contribute to our salvation?”

None, it’s a gift.

“What credit can we take for our salvation?”

None, it’s a gift.

There is a repetitiveness to the answers here because it’s a point that needs to be laboured for most people. The reason why the gospel is so difficult to accept is because it requires us to do nothing but accept it. There is nothing for us to do, no room for human pride. Most people think you are saved by being good—this section hammers home that there is nothing we can contribute, no credit we can take. Salvation is a free gift of God.

Thinking all this through:

“How good do you have to be in order to be saved?” It’s irrelevant. Or to push it further, we could say, ‘not good at all’.

“Whom can you thank for your salvation?” God.

“Can you boast about your salvation?” No.

Again, this point is hammered in. You’ll find if the person has understood the gospel clearly this will be a quick and easy study with lots of one-word answers.

There are some other verses to consult. The Philippians 3:8-9 passage is a particularly good one to look up and examine in its context.

The next ‘think it through’ question asks, “What have you learnt about salvation as a result of this study?” That it is all of God and none of me. If people write that, then they have learnt a great deal. They have learnt that anyone can be saved, even them.

So, lastly, the personal question: “Have you responded to God by putting your trust in him?” The answer might be a simple yes and that’s great. If they answer ‘no’, or ‘I’m not sure’, then you might need to follow this question up with some more of your own to try to figure out why they haven’t accepted this free gift. What is it that’s stopping them? Have they misunderstood the nature of grace or of faith?

Finally, test each other to see if you’ve each memorized the verse.

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.

Study 3: Living God's way

By now you should have worked through study 3 in your workbook. For this talk, please have your workbook open to page 32.

Study 3 is called 'Living God's way', and is closely connected to studies 1 and 2. Study 1 looks at the gospel message in Romans chapter 5, verses 8 and 9—at the death of Jesus in our place so we might be justified and so saved from God's wrath. Study 2 looks again at this salvation—that it is given to us as the free gift of God, not because of anything we have done, and that our response is one of faith.

So we read in Ephesians chapter 2, verses 8 to 10,

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

Far from being saved **by** our good works, we are in fact God's workmanship. He has recreated us in Christ Jesus **so that** we might do good works.

Study 3 then picks up this significant implication of the gospel and looks at it in more detail. God has not only saved us from death and judgement, but saved us for a new life that is pleasing to him. God was not only at work in us to reconcile us to himself, but he is presently at work in us so that we might live this new rehabilitated life he has planned for us.

There are two errors we must guard against as we undertake this study.

One error is to think that because we have been saved by God's free gift, there is no need to turn from sin to obedience. After all if the gift is free and comes to us regardless of our sin—why not continue in sin? But the Bible won't let us think like this. It goes against the very nature of the gospel. The gospel is that Jesus is the Lord of all things; the one who restores and rules over God's creation; the one who **sets things right**. He is not simply a saviour—he did not come just to forgive, but to set things right, which includes people living once again in obedience to God. And so in many places in the New Testament (Romans 6 being a classic example), we are warned against a false and deceptive gospel that says we can continue in sin.

The other danger is to make repentance—for that is what this study is about, even though the word will not be used—it's to make repentance into some sort of necessary condition for our salvation. Some misunderstand, even deny, the grace

of God and try to make salvation dependent on a repentant life. Sometimes this involves a blatant error, such as the requirement to keep the Old Testament law—an error Paul strongly refutes in Galatians. But very often it involves a more subtle error, where we acknowledge salvation by grace, but somehow tie our assurance of this salvation to our works, making our works the necessary condition for maintaining this salvation.

Both these errors misunderstand the gospel and the place of a godly life.

Titus chapter 2 is a great passage to set us on the right path, and is the focus of this study.

The letter was written by the Apostle Paul to one of his companions, Titus, who has remained in Crete to help establish the local church there. One of the key concerns of the letter is the need for godly living. In chapter 1 Paul reminds Titus that those in Christian leadership must exhibit godly living, must be above reproach, both in the way they live and in their doctrine. In chapters 2 and 3 Paul then turns to how Titus is to teach the members of the church in Crete to live in a way that stacks up with the sound doctrine of the gospel they have believed. According to these chapters, good solid doctrine has a lot to do the way we live every day, and so Paul gives instructions for the way men and women, the young and the old, slaves and masters, are to behave.

So let's look at Titus, chapter 2, verses 11 to 13:

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Let's look at the words.

There are no particularly complicated ones in this passage. We met the word 'grace' in study 2, and it's defined again here, although it is used in a slightly different way here—for the grace of God has appeared. The generosity of God, his grace, has become visible. With the coming of Jesus Christ, this passage is saying, we see a visible demonstration and revelation of the true grace of God. (Titus 3, verse 4, is a good cross-reference for this point.)

We looked at the word 'saved' in study 1, and here the word salvation is used again—and again it refers to the idea of rescue.

We also need to think about what it means that the grace of God has “appeared to **all men**”. What do the words “all men” mean? Firstly, we should realize that it refers to all humanity, rather than all males—since we’ve already read earlier in chapter 2 how older and younger women are to live in response to this grace. So it must have appeared to them as well. But it also can’t mean that Jesus has appeared personally to every individual human everywhere, male or female—since as a matter of history that is simply not the case. What is being said is that in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, the grace of God has been shown to all people everywhere; there is no-one it doesn’t reach, whether you’re male or female or young or old or slave or free or Jew or Gentile.

The “worldly passions” spoken of in verse 12 are the desires or longings of the world—it’s not talking only about sexual desire, but any desire we have which is shaped and driven by the world rather than by God.

We also need to think about what Paul means by “this present age”. “This present age” is in contrast to another age, an age that is coming, which we wait for with eager expectation. “This present age” is the time in which we live now, a time where the grace of God has appeared to all, but in which Jesus has not yet returned in glory and triumph. In fact what the passage says is that we **wait** for the “glorious appearing of our great **God** and Saviour, Jesus Christ”. Interestingly, in Titus 3, verse 4, **God** is our saviour; in chapter 3, verse 6, **Jesus** is our saviour; here in Titus 2, verse 13, Jesus is very clearly identified as **both our God and our saviour**. It’s an astonishing truth, particularly given what follows in verse 14—that this great God and saviour gave himself for us—to redeem us and to purify us so that we might be his own possession, eager to do what is good.

So much for some of the words. Let’s look back over the passage and think more about what is being said here in the whole context of Titus chapter 2.

In verses 1 to 10, Paul gives instructions for living in accord with sound doctrine—older men are to be sober-minded and steadfast, older women reverent and teach what is good to the younger women, who are to love their husbands and children. Younger men are to be self-controlled. Titus, himself a younger man, is to be a model of good works, integrity and sound speech. Slaves are to be trustworthy and pleasing to their masters.

We should note that verse 11 begins with the word “for”, which shows us that Paul is about to give the reason for this behaviour that he’s described in verses 1 to 10. Why is it that this way of living accords with sound doctrine? Because that is what the grace of God teaches us to do. The very nature of the gospel of grace is that God has rescued us from our former way of life, with all its greed, evil desires and

hatred, so that we lead a new life. God didn't save us from our wickedness and sin so that we'd dive straight back in and wallow in it. He rescued us because he had a different plan for our lives—that we might live as he always intended humanity to live: in righteousness, in love, in godliness, in kindness to one another, in uprightness and truth, in honour and integrity. God rescued us not simply so that we could get a ticket out of hell and into heaven—but so that we might lead a new life. His whole purpose was to gather a people for himself, a bunch of purified people who would be his very own—his own people—people who were eager to do what is good, as verse 14 puts it.

Titus chapter 2, like Ephesians 2:8-10, is a wonderful passage for understanding the place of repentance in the Christian life. We turn around from our former way of living, and start to lead a new life—not to **earn** our salvation, but **because of** our salvation; not to try to persuade God to accept us, but **because** God has accepted us and purified us for this very purpose—that we might be part of a whole new community of people, the people of God, who are not just prepared to do good works, or willing to do them if it's part of the deal, but who are **eager** to do good works.

And that is our purpose and our goal as we live in this present age, awaiting the return of our Christ. That's what the grace of God teaches and directs and motivates us to do—to live a godly life as we look forward to the hope of glory.

So, question 1, “What has already appeared?”

The passage tells us the grace of God has appeared.

Question 2, “What has this brought?”

Salvation. Note again, that salvation here is viewed as having already arrived, as something which we already possess.

Question 3, “What (or who) is yet to appear?”

Our God and saviour Jesus Christ is yet to appear in glory.

Thinking this through we first need to ask, “What does it mean that the grace of God has brought salvation? How has this happened?” The answer to this won't come from this passage alone. This is a good opportunity to think back over studies 1 and 2, and see if the lessons of Romans 5 and Ephesians 2 have sunk in. Those passages showed us that salvation is a free gift from God. It is not something we can earn or work for; it is freely and graciously given to us by God on the basis that Jesus died for us. Jesus' death for us while we were still sinners makes possible our justification, the declaration that we are right with God. And since we can be justified in the present time through his blood, we can be sure of our salvation in

the future time, on the day of judgement. This first ‘think it through’ question is a good opportunity to go back over these key ideas.

“Can you be confident as you wait for Jesus to appear a second time?” Yes we can be confident because the death of Jesus demonstrates the love of God for us and makes possible our justification. Since we have already been declared not guilty we know that when Jesus returns it will be to bring our salvation to completion. And because this all depends on God, and not us, we can be confident as we wait for this day. We should therefore trust God and rely on him to do what he has promised for us.

The third ‘think it through’ question asks, “If Jesus is both saviour and God, what should be your attitude towards him?”

At one level, our attitude could only be incredible gratitude and thankfulness towards for all that he has done for us. But what Titus 2 makes very clear is that we cannot simply accept Jesus just as our saviour with a big thank you, without also accepting him as our God, our ruler and king. So our attitude to him can’t just be to say, “Thanks for saving me, now let me get on with my life as before.” No, if we accept him as our saviour we must also accept him as our Lord, our Master, as the one to whom we owe all allegiance, all honour, all obedience.

Question 4, “While we are waiting for the ‘blessed hope’, what should we say ‘No’ to?”

We should say no to ungodliness and worldly passions.

Question 5, “What positive things will we be doing instead?”

We will live self-controlled, upright and godly lives.

Question 6, “How are we taught or motivated to do this?”

By the grace of God that has appeared, bringing salvation.

Thinking this through:

“How would you answer someone who said: ‘Once you’ve been saved, it doesn’t matter very much how you live?’” I think we would have to say something like, “Well you haven’t really understood the gospel at all have you?” It matters a great deal how we live as God’s saved, purified people. The grace of God, the same grace which brings us salvation, teaches us that some attitudes and behaviour have to stop—we are to say a very loud ‘no’ to our old way of life, with all its worldliness and ungodliness. And at the same time, a hearty ‘yes’ to a new way of life pleasing to God, a godly life of self-control in which we behave rightly and honourably.

A great cross-reference for this question is 2 Corinthians 5:14-15 which says, “For Christ’s love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.”

Our salvation frees us from slavery to sin and a life lived for self-gratification. If that is what we are saved from, what are we saved for? We are saved for Christ, that we might live for him. So we are saved for freedom—the freedom to live for Christ and to do good.

The next think it through:

“Do good deeds and godly living come as a result of God’s grace or in order to earn it?” Clearly they come as a result. The very nature of grace, as we saw in the last study, is that it is free and undeserved—a gift that cannot be earned. So, we are saved **for** good works, not **by** good works.

“What is God’s role in your efforts to be godly?” As we saw in last week’s study and again here, we are God’s workmanship, his possession, the object of his love and mercy. It is God who has set us free from our slavery to sin, it is God who has created us in Christ Jesus to do good works, it is the grace of God which teaches us to live a new life of godliness.

Here is where it is helpful to talk about the work of God’s own presence, his Spirit, working within us as Christians to enable us, and to empower us, to live the holy lives he wants us to live. And that’s why the passage from Romans 8 has been printed out in the study at this point. It speaks of how all Christians have received God’s Spirit, which is also the Spirit of Christ, to dwell within them. And the Holy Spirit leads God’s children to put to death the old ways, the misdeeds of the body, and to lead a new life as God’s own children.

Other passages to look up and think about are Colossians chapter 3, verses 1 to 17, and Galatians chapter 5, verses 16 to 25. These are great passages to look over to crystallize and reinforce the main points of this study.

There are three final think it through questions:

“What worldly desires do you struggle with?” This is a very personal and practical question. It may be sexual desire, or greed and materialism, or a craving to be popular, or alcohol or substance abuse—each person will struggle with some issue and hopefully by this stage in your relationship with the person, they will feel able to share some of their struggles with you. And it’s very helpful if you also share

your struggles with them—to show them that the battle to say ‘No’ and to say ‘Yes’ is an ongoing one.

Sometimes, some of the struggles and difficulties may involve issues that you feel unqualified to deal with. That’s okay. Do what you can, and pray with them about it. You may need to seek advice from your minister about the problems (without breaking any confidences), or even help the person seek professional assistance if that’s necessary.

The next question gives you an opportunity to talk in practical terms about how changes might take place our lives: “How can you say ‘no’ to these worldly desires?” Of course prayer is a very practical and important way to make changes in our lives—and study 5 will help the person better understand what a great privilege we have in our access to God by prayer. We should pray that God will help us change. We should also keep reading the Bible so that we might know more about the grace of God shown to us in Christ and so be better taught to say ‘no’ to wrongdoing. But there may also be a number of other practical steps we can take to say ‘no’ to attitudes or behaviours that are not pleasing to God.

Finally, “Are self-control, uprightness and godliness valued in our society today?” This question will help to crystallize in people’s minds how different God’s values are from those of the world. God’s way of living is the best and right way to live—in fact, ultimately the most deeply satisfying and joyful way to live—but it doesn’t come easily or naturally to sinful humans, and most people will ridicule us for saying ‘No’ to the worldly passions they love to indulge in. The choice to live God’s way will take effort and perseverance, but it’s what God’s incredible grace in the Lord Jesus teaches us to do.

Study 4: Listening to God

You should by now have worked through Study 4 yourself in your workbook. For this talk, please have your workbook open to page 42.

Listening to God is fundamental to being a Christian. In fact, it's only as we listen to God that we hear his gracious offer of salvation through Christ, and gladly trust it and accept it. To trust God is to trust what he says, to trust his words; and to trust his word is to trust him.

The place where God's words are recorded for us, so that we can listen to them, and trust them and respond to them, is in the Bible. And so in this fourth study, we look at the Scriptures themselves, and their place in the Christian life.

As I've already mentioned in previous talks, one of the great things about *Just for Starters* is that it helps new Christians to start reading the Bible for themselves. It models a simple, straightforward method of Bible-reading that the new Christian will carry with them and build upon throughout their Christian lives. This is enormously helpful, because it's quite common among Christians just to pick verses from here and there, and apply them to their lives almost at random—rather than reading what the Scripture is actually saying in its context, and thus what God is actually saying to them. Listening to God from the Bible means being willing to read—and doing *Just for Starters* will go some way to showing a new Christian that reading the Bible is like reading most other things: you need to understand the words in the sentence and the sentence in its paragraph, and so on.

The passage we look at is the famous one from the end of 2 Timothy, chapter 3.

The immediate context begins at 2 Timothy chapter 3, verse 10:

You, however, know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance, persecutions, sufferings—what kinds of things happened to me in Antioch, Iconium and Lystra, the persecutions I endured. Yet the Lord rescued me from all of them. In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evil men and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful

for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

The passage is a challenge and charge to Timothy from Paul about how he is to go on in his Christian life and ministry; how he is not to be led astray by evil deceptive men but to go on following the godly example of Paul and those who have taught him, which we find out from earlier in Timothy included his mother and grandmother. But, not only from their example, but also from where they have taught him, namely the Scriptures—because the Scriptures are able to make you wise for salvation through Jesus Christ. This is the way you know about salvation—you know about the salvation that is available in Jesus through the Scriptures. And then there is the statement about Scripture in verses 15 and 16 that we focus on in this study.

So what difficult words do we find here? Firstly, the word ‘Scripture’ may be unfamiliar to some people, but it simply means the written words of God which we have in the Bible. There is the word ‘faith’, but we learnt about that in study 2 and there is a reminder of what this means at the bottom of the page. “God-breathed” is an unusual expression, but not so hard to understand when you think about it. When we speak we breathe outwards. Our words are spoken by means of our breath; we breathe out our words. And here Scripture is said to be breathed out by God. It is God’s own words, God speaking to us, and since it is God speaking to us it is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness. The aim of all this is that Christians might be equipped for every good work.

So then, question 1, “How much of Scripture is God-breathed?”

All of it. Now there is a great variety of types of writing in the Bible; there is law, there is narrative, there is poetry, parody, proverbs, parables—a great variety of styles is found and so we should not think that every sentence of Scripture is like one of the ten commandments. There are verses such as Proverbs chapter 26, verses 4 to 5: “Do not answer a fool according to his folly, or you will be like him yourself. Answer a fool according to his folly, or he will be wise in his own eyes.” This is paradoxical. Thought-provoking. It’s a proverb, and must be understood as what it is. If we try to read Proverbs 26:4-5 as if it was a law, like one of the ten commandments, we’d get very confused. Yet, despite the variety of its forms, all Scripture is God-breathed, all Scripture is reliable—but each part must be understood in context.

Since all Scripture is God breathed, its ultimate author is God. But the way in which it is breathed out by God varies, using many different authors and different methods—the ten commandments were written by his finger on stone; other parts,

such as this section of 2 Timothy we are looking at, are letters from one man to another. But while there are many human agents involved in different parts of the Bible, God is rightly seen as the author of the whole Bible. He breathes it out in all sorts of ways, but it's all his word.

So, “Who is the ultimate author of the Bible?”
God.

Thinking this through, “What does it mean that the Bible is God-breathed?” As we've already discussed, it means that God is the ultimate author, it is all the word of God to us, even though it comes to us through a whole range of different human authors.

“What, then, should be your attitude to the Bible?” If it's **God's** word then we should treat it with reverence, awe, acceptance, obedience. The point here is that the way we treat God's word should reflect the way we treat God. If we ignore his word, or neglect to read his word, we are really demonstrating our attitude to God. Now we are not talking here about the way we treat the paper the book is written on, although some Christian cultures do. In some parts of the world, it would be seen as gross ungodliness to fling your Bible into the back seat, or to put it on the floor. But that's not what we're talking about here—what we are talking about is our willingness to read, accept and obey the Bible, because it is God-breathed. These are God's words and we should **not** read them as if God were distant or disinterested in our reading of them—for God speaks to us personally and directly in his word that we might trust and obey what he says. As we read in Isaiah 66:2, “This is the one I esteem: he who is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word.” So, while we aim to study the Bible carefully and to work hard at understanding the text and to examine what it says thoughtfully, and to listen to what other people have said about the text we are looking at, while we do all this, fundamentally this is a word which studies us, it is a word whose authority we sit under, just as we sit under the authority of the one who has spoken this word.

So the next question says, “How can you listen to God?” There are all kinds of places people look to hear a word from God—in the quietness of their own mind, from spiritual leaders, astrology, in various signs. But what we have just learnt is that there is one sure and readily available place we can turn to listen to a word from God, that is the Bible. This is an enormous privilege, to have such easy access to the sure and certain words of God. And we should be seeking to share with our new Christian friend a sense of this great privilege we have, in the way we talk about the Scriptures and in our own example of reading them.

Question 3 asks, “What role do the Scriptures play in our salvation?” And you'll see from the passage that they make us **wise for salvation** through faith in Christ

Jesus. That is, the Scriptures declare to us the free gift of salvation that is available in Christ Jesus, so that we can trust in Christ, trust that he is able to save us. We cannot believe if we haven't heard, but the Scriptures declare this salvation to us that we might trust in Christ.

Question 4, "List four ways that Christians can use the Bible." The passage tells us that Scripture is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness.

The next 'think it through' questions explore these four uses and what they mean. The concepts overlap to some extent and we should be wary of drawing too hard and fast a distinction between these four uses, but there is some difference between them. You could describe the differences like this:

In **teaching** we are told what the truth is.

In **rebuking** we are told that we have left the truth, that we have gone wrong in some area.

In **correcting** us the Scriptures will tell us the way back to the right path, the way back to walking in the truth.

And in **training** us the Scriptures will help us and equip us to remain on the right track, to continue walking in the truth that we have been taught.

"How, then, should you use the Bible?" If the Bible is useful for these four things then we should use it in all these ways. The picture being presented is that the Scriptures are a comprehensive aid to the Christian life. They set us on the right path, warn us when we stray, show us the way back and help us continue on that way. They are the map, compass and directions for the Christian life, informing all aspects of our life. And so we should be reading them carefully and regularly if we are to remain in the truth. We are to be moulded and changed by the Scriptures so that the daily decisions we make are shaped by the truth. This of course ties back to what we learnt in study 3—that this salvation teaches us to say no to ungodliness and worldly passions and to live self-controlled upright and godly lives. The Scriptures are able to make us wise for salvation, the Scriptures are able to teach and train us to live a life pleasing to God. And the Scriptures are more than sufficient for this task, a point verse 17 makes quite clearly.

There are several other verses listed and a short sentence from Ephesians 6 is printed. This short passage emphasizes the connection between the word of God and the work of the Spirit. The word of God is the sword of God's Spirit, the

means by which the Spirit works in the life of the Christian to defend us from all falsehood and evil.

This connection with the Spirit is also made in the next cross-reference listed in 2 Peter 1:20-21—"Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit."

This passage is a great one for reinforcing that God is the ultimate author of Scripture.

The passages from Hebrews 4 and Psalm 19 are also well worth reading and thinking about.

The final 'think it through' questions make sure that the study is grounded in the day to day practicalities of Bible reading.

"How often do you read the Bible?" Of course we all need to consider this question as much as our new Christian friend. In one sense no matter how often it is, it can always be more, but the point here is to get us thinking about the place Bible reading has in the Christian life. The Bible is not a reference book we leave on the shelf until we have some question or problem. As we saw earlier, the Bible is the lifeblood of our daily struggle to trust God and turn from evil to doing good. As such we should be regularly reading and thinking about the Scriptures to ensure that we have not strayed from the path, and to train us to stick to the path.

There are of course all sorts of difficulties people have when they read the Bible and the next question gives you a chance to find out what problems the other person may be having. It is very common for people to become Christians and to dig up an old Bible they have on the shelf—only to find they have great difficulty understanding the old and strange language used. So something as simple as getting a good modern translation might solve all their problems. Many new Christians open the Bible to the first page and begin with Genesis, which usually goes fairly well until they hit a genealogy in chapter 5 and find some guy whose name they can't pronounce who lived to be 969 years old. So we may need to offer some advice on where to start, perhaps with one of the gospels and then to a letter like Colossians. We might need to help people come to terms with some of the words and concepts they come across. It might be a good idea to suggest to them that they use method we've been following in these studies as a guide—of stopping and thinking about the passage, what the words mean, what the sentences mean, thinking about the context, etc.

“What would be a good pattern of Bible reading for you to adopt?” This is something that is important to talk through in practical detail. Bible reading doesn’t just happen; we need to plan for it and it usually works best if we have a regular time we set aside for Bible reading. It might be over breakfast, or on the train as we travel to work—whenever it is, most people will find it’s best to build Bible reading into their daily routine. There is of course no legalism here—it’s not as if we must do a certain amount of Bible reading every day to be a legitimate Christian; that is not the case at all. But we do want people to get into good habits of regular reading and thinking, because just as a good diet and regular exercise will help us physically, a good diet of regular Bible reading will keep us wise for salvation.

We should, however be realistic. There is no point setting ourselves up for failure and disappointment. Some people will be able to set aside an hour a day or more and stick to it—most won’t. It’s better to start small and build up than begin with a bang, and fizzle out after a week. Actually doing ten minutes a day is better than aiming for an hour and never getting round to it. Different lifestyles and commitments might mean that some days we have more time for Bible reading than others—the details will vary. The habit of regular reading is what is important.

Finally, “What other steps can you take to make the Bible more a part of your life?” Your role as a helper to this person can come into its own—you could offer to meet with them to get them started, to help them write down a realistic plan and encourage them to stick with it; you could offer to answer questions they might have from their reading through the week.

As this passage we have been looking at tells us, the holy Scriptures are able to make us wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness. With such a valuable resource at our fingertips, we should ensure we are making good use of it in our daily lives.

Study 5: Talking to God

You should by now have worked through Study 5 yourself in your workbook. For this talk, please have your workbook open to page 52.

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

There are many excellent passages that teach us about prayer, and this one from Philippians chapter 4, verses 4-7 is one of the best. It comes towards the end of Philippians as one of a series of commands, exhortations and encouragement about a variety of subjects. And it's one of those passages that doesn't depend enormously on its context for its meaning.

It is helpful to note, however, that the letter was written to a church undergoing some degree of suffering, and written by an apostle who is at the time in prison. Suffering is part of our calling as Christians, we are told in chapter 1 verse 29, "For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him" And so suffering lies to some extent behind the letter and the passage we have here.

In terms of the meaning of words there aren't any really difficult ones. 'Petition' means simply to ask someone for something; in this context it doesn't mean gathering signatures like it often means in modern usage. The word 'peace' is also being used here slightly differently to how we often use it today, but we'll talk about that in just a few minutes.

Let's turn to Question 1, "What are we to be anxious about?"

Nothing. We are not to be anxious about anything, but notice that the alternative to anxiety is prayer. The world has all sorts of ways of trying to deal with anxiety and pressure and worries—it turns to alcohol, gambling, sport, shopping. But the Christian response is prayer. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.

So, "What are we to pray about?"

Everything. There is no limitation.

“To whom are we to present our requests?”
God—the one who is in control of everything.

The ‘think it through’ section gives people a chance to reflect on this. There may be a whole range of things the person is concerned about, and it may not even have occurred to them to raise these with God in prayer. They may think their problems are too big and difficult to solve; or perhaps that they’re too small to bring before God. Or they may think God is not interested in their concerns. This is a chance for people to think through the Bible’s teaching that we have free and unhindered access to talk to God about whatever concerns we have, large or small, and that it’s a perfectly right response to be praying to God about anything and everything.

Question 4 is another comprehension question, “In what way should we present our requests to God?”

The passage tells us, with thanksgiving.

The next three questions give people a chance to think through the many things we can thank God for, and most especially for the Lord Jesus Christ, his death on our behalf, the new life we now have in Christ, the Scriptures which are able to make us wise for salvation. There are countless things for which we can be thankful. And we will always have cause for thanksgiving to God, because we will always be able to thank him for the salvation he has provided in Christ, and the assurance that, no matter what our present difficulties, God knows how to take care us, even beyond the grave.

Question 5, “Does God promise to give us everything we ask for?”

Our response to suffering and the worries of the world is prayer. God’s response is to give us what we ask for. Is that what the passage says?

No—God is not promising in this verse to give us everything we ask for, and if you examine the rest of the Bible you’ll find the same thing. God does **not** promise to give us everything we ask of him in prayer. Well, what is promised in verse 7? Our first reaction is often to say “the peace of God”. Many Christians think that this passage is saying that in response to our prayers the peace of God will come upon us and that the feeling of anxiety will be replaced by a feeling of peace—but that is to misread the passage. Look again: What does the passage actually say? It says that our hearts and minds will be guarded in Christ Jesus, by the peace of God. That is, the peace of God will keep you Christian. The cause of anxiety may well remain, the problem may not disappear—but it won’t take you out of Christ.

Our problem is that we understand the word ‘peace’ to mean an absence of trouble. And in the context of anxiety and prayer we then think of peace as being

a feeling of calm and tranquility that will come over us. But the biblical idea of peace is much more relational and is about victory. For you can only have true peace when you have won the war. So in the second world war, was France at peace when it was defeated and occupied by Germany? No, it was only at peace when it was liberated and the victory over the occupying force was won.

The peace of God is the victory Christ has won for us on the cross. It is the gospel of peace whereby evil has been defeated and disarmed. And that peace will keep you, will guard you, in Christ Jesus. Knowing the victory that is ours in Christ Jesus and being kept in him by that victory, we may well have a greater sense of calm in times of trouble. And especially in times of persecution because you don't need to worry that they will drive you away from Christ, that they will be able to torture you out of being Christian. Just make your requests known to God, and God's victory, God's peace will keep you in Christ.

A very good example of this is in the garden of Gethsemane where Jesus tells his disciples to watch and pray that they will not enter into temptation—and they all fall asleep. Jesus keeps watching and praying and when the time of temptation comes in the form of Judas turning up with the soldiers to arrest Jesus, Jesus stands firm because he has watched and prayed, whereas the disciples all flee, they all fall into temptation. That is, prayer will actually strengthen you to go through the situation Christianly, but it may not remove the source of the problem. Jesus prayed that he might not have to die, and yet he did die. The perfect man praying perfectly to his Father, and the answer was 'no'.

So, thinking it through, "What will it mean to have 'the peace of God guarding our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus'?" It means the worries of this world will not tear me away from Christ. It means that we can be confident in God that our hearts and minds will stay with him, because of the peace he has won, the peace we now enjoy with him as our Lord.

"How can this help you when you are anxious or struggling as a Christian?" It gives us confidence in the face of difficulty, because it puts things in perspective. There are many things which will cause us trouble and difficulty and anxiety—but they are not of ultimate significance. And the thing which *is* of ultimate significance—our relationship with God—is being guarded for us by the victory Christ has won for us.

There are a number of other passages listed which talk about prayer, especially Hebrews 4:15-16. If time permits it's worth having a look at these extra passages with the person you are following-up.

The final ‘think it through’ questions then give you a chance to talk about some of the practicalities of prayer. Does the person feel free to talk to God about concerns and issues in their life, whether big or small? Does the person find the whole activity or praying difficult? For some people, prayer is the most natural of activities; some new Christians take to it like a duck to water. For others prayer is quite awkward and it seems like they are just talking to themselves.

Some new Christians might think they need to pray in very formal language or use special words—they might need to be assured that they can speak to God in everyday language. Some will find it hard to stay focused while praying or may not know what to pray for, and you might be able to suggest some practical solutions such as writing a short list of people and issues you want to pray for. Others might need to be more disciplined in setting aside time to pray on a regular basis. All these are worth talking about to make sure that the difficulties of prayer don’t distract people from the enormous comfort and privilege we have in being able to present our requests to God.

Study 6: Meeting with God's family

This session is all about church, and before you listen to this talk, remember that you should have worked through Study 6 for yourself in your workbook, and now be at page 62 so that you can take notes.

For many people, church is a problem. Some people have had bad experiences with church in the past; others disagree with what a particular church stands for. Many simply dislike the whole concept of organized religion. The vast majority of people today have had very limited contact with church, perhaps only through attending baptisms, weddings and funerals. And so when a person becomes interested in Christianity, it can be a very daunting prospect to actually go to church. If you're following up a new Christian, this is one area where you need to be particularly loving and caring. If they live in another area and cannot come to the church you normally attend, you may need to go to church with them for several weeks, or even longer, until they are established in a church and have become involved with other Christians in their local area. So we need to be aware of the practical help we might need to offer.

But we must also help people have a right understanding of what church is all about and help clear away the prejudices and antagonisms they might have. Indeed, because most people don't understand what church is about and have all sorts of misconceptions about it, you'll notice that the word is not even mentioned in this study. Instead we simply talk about 'meeting with God's people', which is what church really is.

The nature of church in the New Testament is of a gathering. Church is about people meeting together. There are non-Christian churches mentioned in the New Testament—such as the riotous assembly in Acts chapter 19. The word used to describe it is the everyday word for a gathering or a mob or an assembly. And that's the same word that we translate in English as 'church'. And so there are Christian assemblies or churches as well in the New Testament, such as in Acts 14:27 where Barnabas and Paul gathered together the church in Antioch, or more literally, gathered together the assembly.

This understanding of church as being an assembly or a gathering or a congregation, and not a building or denomination or even the concept of a 'worldwide church', is central to what the New Testament teaches on this subject. Because there is so much confusion about church, among Christians and non-Christians alike, you may well want to do some extra reading and thinking about this topic.

The passage for this study is Hebrews chapter 10, verses 24 and 25. One of the great things about this passage is that it gives us a very clear summary of what church is about. We are immediately focused in on the central issue of meeting together, and given information about what should characterize our meetings.

Let's have a brief look at this passage in the context of verses 19 to 25. The Christians being addressed are being encouraged to take hold of the great things they have received in the gospel and to act upon them. In verse 22 they are encouraged to draw near to God; in verse 23 they are encouraged to hold unswervingly to the hope that they profess; and in verses 24-25 they are encouraged to act lovingly in relationship with each other. All this is on the basis of the work of the great high priest, Jesus, who, as we read in chapter 10, verse 12, has offered up for all time a single perfect sacrifice for sin and by his blood has opened up the way to God (chapter 10, verse 19). Therefore we are to draw near to God with confidence, we are to be steadfast in our hope and we are to relate to our fellow Christian brothers and sisters in the light of Jesus' death and impending return.

So, verses 24-25:

And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

The day, with a capital D, refers of course to the return of the Lord Jesus Christ. We meet in church as people who are looking forward to the age that is to come. Through the death of Jesus we know the forgiveness that is ours, we know the salvation that is ours and we are looking forward to that day when we will receive all that God has promised.

How do we look forward to that day? Hebrews 10:24-25 tells us that it's by encouraging each other. So this is not only a Bible study about church; it's also about follow-up. Because that's what follow up is about—it's about encouraging the new Christian on to love and good works, meeting together with them so as to encourage them and all the more as we head toward that day when we are to stand before Christ pure and blameless and spotless.

Question 1 is a simple comprehension question. "What are we to consider?" The passage tells us that we are to consider how to spur one another on.

“What two things are we to spur one another on to do?”

Love; and good deeds. Love is of course central to the character of the Christian; it's the defining feature by which we are marked out as Christ's people. (“By this will all men know that you are my disciples”, said Jesus, “if you love one another.”) Good deeds, as we learnt in studies 2 and 3, are what God has saved us for, that we may walk in them.

Now the passage tells us that we should **consider** how are to do this—it's not something we just do automatically, it's something we need to think about. And so it's appropriate to have a ‘think it through’ section at this point to reflect on the question, “How can you spur others on to love and good deeds?” In other words, what do I need to do to encourage this brother, or that sister, on to doing the good things that God has prepared for them to do? It's very helpful to spend some time talking with your new Christian friend about how we can do this. We can do this by teaching the Bible to one another, by praying for one another, by admonishing, correcting and encouraging each other. By writing a letter; by speaking to a brother when you see them going off the rails; by encouraging them when you see them doing the right thing; by looking together at Jesus and following his example. There are all kinds of ways, but we shouldn't assume that they will all come naturally and automatically—rather we should think about how we can spur others on to love and good deeds.

“What part should the Bible and prayer play in this?” This takes us back through studies 4 and 5. The Bible teaches us and trains us in righteousness, it rebukes and corrects. The Bible must be fundamental because it spells out to us what love is, what the good is, what we are to do and why we are to do it. It is the word of God which teaches us about love and good deeds. And of course what better way to express our concern for one another than by prayer; prayer for each other's growth in godliness, prayer for unswerving hope and the full assurance of faith. It is a great comfort and encouragement to know other Christians are praying for you and it's a great way to express our concern for others and so spur them on.

Question 3 is another comprehension question, “What are we to keep doing?” or in other words, “What are we to do without giving up?”

The answer is straightforward—meeting together. We are not to give up meeting together. Instead, we are to **keep** meeting together. Christianity is all about relationships; it's not an individual or private affair. It's profoundly social because it brings us into relationship with God. And not only into relationship with God but with God's people. And you cannot maintain relationship with people that you never meet. So we mustn't give up meeting, or just drift away and fail to meet. The Bible is very realistic on this issue. It recognizes that it may not always be convenient, that it may not always be what we feel like doing. Sometimes we would rather be doing other things—sometimes we'd rather be sailing, as the

bumper sticker says. But we must make the effort to meet and not fall in to the trap of failing to meet together.

Question 4, “Why are we to meet together?”

The purpose of our meeting is to encourage one another. Most non-Christians meet together for other reasons, for competition, or because of what we get out of the group, because of the way others make us feel about ourselves. But our aim is to serve one another by encouraging. Notice what is said about church here, or rather what is **not** said—we are not meeting primarily in order to worship God, because your spiritual worship, as we read in Romans 12:1-2, is how you live your whole life. You don’t have to meet with other Christians to worship God. You worship God by living in holiness and godliness and righteousness. Worship is about the whole way we are living; church is about getting together because we’re in relationship with each other as God’s people, and so that we can encourage each other. Many churches provide very little opportunity for doing that. They have set themselves up as a way of ritualistically worshiping God—but that way of meeting together has misunderstood the gospel. Of course there are different ways we encourage one another and spur each other on to love and good deeds as we meet together. Our time together may be formal or informal, structured or unstructured. We should expect that different groups of Christians will do different things as they get together. But the focus must always be on spurring each other on to love and good deeds as a result of the great things God has done for us in the Lord Jesus Christ and will bring to completion at Christ’s return. The two topics of church and worship are important ones, worthy of some extra research.

The next ‘think it through’ section begins by reminding us that “it’s hard to spur others on without meeting with them”, and then asks, “When and where do you meet with God’s people?” This is a more personal question and helps you find out more about the various Christian meetings the person is involved with. This may be a larger Sunday meeting but will also include meeting one-to-one to do the *Just for Starters* studies. The person may meet to pray with another Christian or go to a Bible study group. There can be a variety of times and places and contexts, but we need to make sure that they have some opportunity to meet and express Christian relationships.

Of course, there are plenty of obstacles that prevent Christians, particularly new Christians, from meeting together and there is a chance to discuss these in the next ‘think it through’ question.

“Why do some people fail to meet with other Christians?” Firstly, we need to be aware of the many quite reasonable difficulties some people have getting to church. The wife of a non-Christian husband may not be free to leave the family on a Sunday morning and go to church. People from some ethnic backgrounds

may not be able to get to church because of the difficulties this would cause in their family situation. Sickness may prevent someone from meeting with other Christians. These are all issues which need to be discussed and the right solution will vary from situation to situation. Sometimes it's a simple case of not having transport and so some sort of practical help might be needed. But while the solutions might vary, the underlying need for Christians to meet for the purpose of mutual encouragement remains.

But there are much more common reasons why people fail to meet with other Christians.

For some it might be a lack of love and concern for others. Some people have other priorities—they think it is more important to play tennis or golf than encourage a fellow believer on in the faith. Now we can't push this too far because otherwise you'll do nothing but meet with Christians all the time. But when you never meet with anybody because you're always out playing tennis, golf or something else—then you know it's a question of priorities. Often it's laziness or lack of organization—people just don't get themselves out of bed in time.

On the other hand, newcomers can find it difficult to meet together, because church can be very strange and overwhelming; hymn books, sitting, standing, outlines, saying strange words, singing strange songs. People can come to meet and encourage, and be encouraged, but end up feeling like they have done nothing more than sit in a strange building.

There are lots of possible answers, lots of possible issues that may arise, and you need to be talking with the new Christian you are meeting with about these.

Question 5 is another comprehension question. "What special reason is there to encourage one another?"

The passage tells us the reason is "the coming of the day of the Lord"—when we are to be presented before him pure and spotless.

"How does 'the Day' affect your attitude to other Christians?" Firstly it shows the urgency of the task because the time is limited. But secondly it governs the direction to which we are heading. We are preparing to appear before God. That's the nature of the whole follow-up exercise, and indeed of church. Here is a person that has begun the Christian life; the finale of the Christian life is when Christ returns and we appear before him pure and spotless; our task now is to get from this beginning to this end. How do we get there? Ultimately it's because God gets us there, but the means he uses are the word of God, prayer and mutual encouragement. So our fellow Christians are a great blessing from God, for as we serve one another we prepare one another to be ready for that Day.

There are many other passages of Scripture we could look at. John 13:34-35 is quoted:

A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.

This passage points us again to love—the defining mark of the Christians by which we imitate Jesus our master. It points us to the way we should love, just as Jesus has loved us, that is, by serving us, even at great cost to himself. If you have a bit more time for discussion you may also want to look at 1 Corinthians 3:5-17.

The final ‘think it through’ questions are intended to get the new Christian to think outside themselves. So far we have been looking after them. But if we are to really look after someone and see them grow in Christlikeness of character then they must start looking out for other people—because to be like Christ is to be concerned about other people.

And so the question is, “Who are you encouraging towards godliness?” It may well be that they aren’t actively seeking to encourage anyone, in which case the last question in the study will give them an opportunity to think through who they can be seeking to serve and pray for over the coming weeks.

“Who is encouraging you towards godliness?” This can be a helpful question to find out who else is working with them. It can also help the person think through the sort of behaviour they should be emulating.

“What priority do you give to meeting with God’s people? What effect does this have on how you use your time?” This gives new Christians a chance to think about their own attitudes, time management and priorities. They may need to change their priorities. They may value the chance to meet with other Christians but may not have actually changed the way they allocate their time. Or they may be very faithfully meeting with other Christians already and you can encourage them to continue that habit.

Finally, “How has this study changed your thinking about other Christians? What can you do to encourage other Christians to be godly?” By asking the person to think of specific ways they can be encouraging other Christians to be godly, this question aims to help the person make practical steps in the right direction.

Very often church people are the problem the new Christian has—study 6 helps people to see that they have a responsibility to others to love them and care for them and build them up.

Study 7: Meeting the world

You should by now have worked through Study 7 yourself. For this talk, please have your workbook open to page 72.

The new Christian is usually very keen to evangelise. Having understood the free gift of salvation that God offers us, it's a natural response to want to share this great news with others. Indeed the very nature of the gospel points us to the fact that God's salvation should be offered to everyone. God in his generosity has reached out to us in our helpless state and given us good news, and God uses us to extend this offer of salvation to the whole world.

Study 7 is about meeting the world. The focus of the study is not on the 'how-to' of evangelism; it doesn't aim to teach a person a particular gospel outline or to equip them to answer questions. There are other training courses such as *Two ways to live* and *So Many Questions* which people can undertake to be equipped with these skills. It's a good idea for new Christians to do a course like *Two ways to live* fairly soon after completing the *Just for Starters* studies, because not only will it help them better understand the gospel they have come to accept, but the new Christian, eager to share this news with others, usually has a large number of non-Christian family and friends with whom they can share the good news about Jesus. So some training in the details of sharing the gospel with others is a good idea—but it's not the focus of this study.

What this study does is to put forward several important principles which should always shape our interaction with the world and the way we share the good news about Jesus. It's important to deal with these general attitudes and behaviours right at the outset of the Christian life because they are foundational to all our interaction with others and any further training in evangelism the new Christian might undertake.

The passage for this study is Colossians chapter 4, verses 5 and 6.

In the opening chapters of Colossians Paul has been contrasting the false and misleading model of spirituality that is being peddled to the Colossians with the true and heavenly-minded spirituality which is consistent with Jesus. His argument from chapter 2 is that true spirituality, being a truly spiritual person, is not about visions or religious observance or fancy worship or harsh treatment of the body. Rather, as he points out in chapter 3 verses 1-4, it's all about having a completely different mindset as a result of the fact that we have died with Christ and been raised with Christ so that our life is hidden with him at the right hand of God in heaven. As new people with a new life we have a new mindset and new lifestyle. So we are to put to death the old ways; sexual immorality, impurity, lust, greed,

anger, filthy language; and we are to put on new ways which are fitting for our new life; love, compassion, humility, patience, truthfulness, generosity, thankfulness. This is all summarized in chapter 3, verse 17, where Paul urges them, “and whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him”.

In chapter 3, verse 18 to chapter 4, verse 6, Paul gives some specific examples of how this new life finds expression in the relationship between husbands and wives, parents and children, slaves and masters, in prayer and our concern for the lost and in the way we relate to outsiders.

So, chapter 4 verses 5-6,

Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.

The passage addresses two main topics: how we act and how we speak. We all recognize the tremendous importance of our words and actions, and the significant problem it is when we say one thing and do another. There are several dangers. We can be talking about the great things God has done for us and the new life he has given us, while there is no evidence of that new life in our actions. Or we can be getting on with the new life but never speaking about the God who has given it to us. Some will have no trouble speaking about what God has done for them but in doing so can ride rather rough-shot over others, perhaps speaking the truth but doing so in arrogance and pride rather than humility and love. No, our speech and action should together express the fact we are God’s new creations and reflect the character of the God who has saved us.

Other than the word ‘grace’, which we met before in study 2, and which is defined again here, there are no difficult words in this passage. But there are a number of words which are used in an unusual way or need some thinking about. For example, who are the ‘outsiders’? And we all know what salt is but what does it mean for a conversation to be “seasoned with salt”? These are questions we’ll answer during the study.

Question 1 asks, “How should we behave towards outsiders?”

And the passage tell us we should be wise in the way we act.

Question 2 asks, “What should our attitude be as we relate to outsiders?”

We are to make the most of every opportunity, that is, our attitude should be one of urgency.

Thinking this through we first need to stop and think about what it means to be an 'outsider'. It may not have occurred to the new Christian that the gospel has created a division in humanity. That there are now those who know God and are his friends through the blood of his Son, and there are those who don't know God and remain his enemies. In this sense there are insiders and outsiders, those who are in the kingdom of God and those still outside it. Of course, the division is not fixed; the whole point of Paul's work and the reason for his instruction for wise dealing with outsiders is that people might come to know God and salvation in Jesus Christ; that they might become insiders with God.

"What does it mean to 'act wisely'?" Earlier in the letter, wisdom has played an important part in Paul's argument. In chapter 1, verse 9, Paul prays that the Colossians might be filled "with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding." And verse 10, he prays this "in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God". Spiritual wisdom is all about knowing God's will, and the result of this is a lifestyle pleasing to God. We have seen this previously in studies 3 and 4 in particular. As we learn of the grace of God shown to us in Jesus, we learn of the nature and character of the God who has saved us, and so we learn with the help of the Spirit to live a life of self-control and godliness. We learn about God through the Scriptures, and so as we read Scripture we are taught, rebuked, corrected and trained in righteousness, equipped for every good work.

'Acting wisely' is all about living life as people who have died to the ways of this world and risen to new life with Christ, a life which is "being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator" as we read in Colossians chapter 3, verse 10. And the way we relate to outsiders is as much affected by this new life as the way we relate to our new brothers and sisters. This new lifestyle is set in contrast to two alternatives. Firstly, to obviously pagan behaviour, sexual immorality, greed, anger and slander. But it is also set in contrast to the behaviour produced by false worldly wisdom, which Paul describes in chapter 2, verses 16-23. This is a very religious-looking lifestyle, which holds onto regulations about food and drink, special days and harsh treatment of the body. These, Paul says in 3:23, have the appearance of wisdom, but lack any value in restraining our evil desires. True wisdom rejects both immoral living and the false morality of strict living. Rather, wise living reflects the pattern of God our creator and saviour.

"How might living wisely lead to opportunities to talk about God?" The connection is fairly obvious but it is one we should keep coming back to. That is, as we live in this new and different way opportunities will continue to be thrown up to explain why we are acting the way we are. Why is it that we put in a full day's work rather than leave early? Why have we stopped telling lies or dirty

jokes? Why has our attitude to possessions, family and friends changed? The opportunities that come may not always be positive—some will choose to attack us because of these changes—but certainly opportunities will arise.

“What prevents you from taking opportunities to share the good news of Jesus with others?” People may have any number of answers to this question. Very often it is fear; fear of embarrassment, of rejection. We may not want to stand out from the crowd and be seen as different. We may not want to endanger our popularity or standing before others. But in keeping quiet, we keep the great news of salvation to ourselves and leave others in ignorance. You might need to be talking with your new Christian friend about the cause of their fears and what will help them overcome them. Some might need to learn to trust and fear God and care a little less about the opinions of others. Other people might benefit from some further training in a course such as *Two ways to live*, which will give them confidence to explain the gospel clearly. We’ll speak more about this later in the study.

There are of course some times when it is not right to take opportunities then and there. Workers are paid to work, not evangelise, and there will be times when it is quite inappropriate to get into a long conversation about the gospel. At other times, for instance when people are grieving at the death of a loved one, we need to be careful that we don’t speak the gospel in an insensitive way. Some new Christians keen to share the gospel might need to be warned about these dangers and learn to pick the right time and place to speak.

In question 3 we shift the focus from the lifestyle of the believer to the way we should speak. “As we talk to outsiders, what two things should mark our conversation?”

The passage tells us, grace and seasoning with salt are the two things that should mark our conversation.

“What will this help us do?”

It will help us know how to answer everyone.

Thinking this through:

“What things do you need to eliminate from your speech in order for it to be gracious and appropriate?” Individual answers will of course vary greatly, but there are some common areas that might need attention. There are the obvious problems such as coarse or foul language which is inappropriate for the Christian. But equally we must get rid of arrogance, gossip and slander, for these are all incompatible with grace. Further, we must give up our almost universal preoccupation with speaking about ourselves and focus instead on what is best for

the other person, for that is the nature of grace. This will involve a fair degree of listening and careful consideration to what is best for others. Note that this won't always mean that we say what the other person wants to hear. We need to speak the truth even if it means some degree of pain for the other person, but we will do so in love and being careful to have the best interests of the other person at heart.

Of course this doesn't mean that our speech becomes dull. On the contrary our speech is to be "seasoned with salt". So, "What does 'seasoned with salt' mean?" And, "How might you make your speech more salty?" While there is some debate over the meaning of the phrase, the basic idea is fairly straightforward. Seasoned speech, salty speech, is interesting speech—speech which is worth noticing for all the right reasons. A large part of salty speech involves being able to talk freely and openly about the God we serve. We should not keep 'God talk' out of our conversations, and should allow it to be as much part of our conversations with non-Christians as with our Christian friends. As we speak about how we spend our time, or our opinions on current affairs, we should talk about them as Christians, as people whose thinking and priorities are profoundly affected by the God who has made us and saved us.

Ephesians 4:29 is a very good cross-reference to this. "Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen."

The final two 'think it through' questions in this box explore our readiness to explain the gospel to people. Many people will of course feel somewhat unprepared to explain what they believe, and this is the perfect time to suggest they do a course such as *Two ways to live: know and share the gospel* which will help them get to know the gospel more thoroughly, and also help them to share it naturally and clearly in their own words.

At the same time we don't want people to think they need to have done a doctrinal thesis in theology before they are ready to explain what they believe. Certainly, anyone who has done the *Just for Starters* studies has learnt plenty about the gospel and should be able to explain why they trust in Christ. Every new Christian has a story they can tell others, a story of how God has rescued them and given them a new hope and joy.

There are a number of cross-references given, and the passage from 1 Corinthians should be noted in particular. It describes how our concern for people and their salvation is a reflection of Christ's concern for the lost; that as we seek the good of others and their salvation, we follow the example of Christ.

The final ‘think it through’ questions help us tie the material together.

“How concerned are you that others come to know God (as you have)?” For some people, concern for the salvation of others is a natural and spontaneous response to the gospel. They will already be speaking to others and will be enthusiastic to be better equipped to do so. For others, part of putting off the old self and putting on the new self will be getting rid of their individualistic mindset and putting on concern for the salvation of their family and friends. They will need to work a little harder at repenting of old attitudes and behaviours and replacing them with new Christlike ones. This question gives you a chance to talk more about these issues with your new Christian friend.

Finally, “Which specific people are you concerned for?” and, “What can you do and say that might lead to opportunities to share the gospel with them?” These questions give people a chance to stop and think about who they are in contact with and how they can best serve these people by telling them the good news about Jesus.

There are of course many things we can do. We can speak with people about the gospel, we can invite people to church or an evangelistic talk. We can make sure our lives are lived in wisdom and our speech is seasoned with salt.

The most simple but profound thing we can all do is pray for our non-Christian friends. Just as Paul encouraged the Colossians to pray for his work of evangelism, so also we can and should be praying not only for those people who are of special concern to us, but for the work of the gospel worldwide. In the end it is God who draws people to himself, and so we should be asking him for boldness and confidence to take hold of opportunities as he chooses to give them to us. You might like to spend a few minutes praying at the end of the study for the people mentioned here.

Well, once you’ve worked through the material on page 80 and prepared your discussion copy of study 7, you have completed *Preparing Just for Starters* and are ready to meet with a new Christian (if you haven’t begun already). We trust you have grown in your understanding of the *Just for Starters* studies, and are confident to use them. Once they have completed *Just for Starters* with a new Christian, people often ask, “What do I study next?” The Pathway Bible Guides series, published by Matthias Media, is ideal for the new Christian, as they are designed for people who are new to Bible study. The first in this range is *Following Jesus*, which looks at Luke chapters 9 to 12. These studies will introduce people to Jesus at the turning point of Luke’s gospel, and the turning point of history. With clear and incisive questions, *Following Jesus* will help people understand who Jesus is, what he came to do, and how we should live in response to that knowledge. *Leaders Notes* are also available for these studies, to aid you in your preparation.