

CONTINUUM

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something that keeps on going, leading to change over time

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Introduction

Being a follower of Jesus Christ is a lifelong journey. From the first century early church, to the fourth century monastic Desert Fathers, and everything in between to today, we are covered by a rich history of disciplines and practices that equip us to live fulfilling lives in Christ. What does this mean though? Simply speaking, how can we be more like Jesus Christ through proven practices of the past and present? How can we embody His faith, courage, peace, purpose, and clarity? The key is discipline in practices, and it is a *continuum* – an ongoing effort to develop spiritual change over time.

What makes continuum become life-changing spiritual growth? Comparing an athlete to someone without exercise, the key is habit. Spiritual growth requires the habit of practice. The question is not “are you ready?” but “are you willing?”

This six-part study will require your willingness to go beyond your norm, with intentional time and focus. The effort will be worth it. We believe you'll develop a deeper understanding of God through devotion and prayer, develop greater awareness of your struggle and combat, and last, enter service, generosity, and celebration to express outwardly what God has done in your heart.

No matter how long you've been a Jesus-follower, periodically refreshing your foundations is crucial. Do your best and allow grace as you re-enter the habit of spiritual discipline. More importantly, hinge on your group for encouragement and accountability. Our goal is to set you and your group up for life because after all, following Jesus is for life.

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.” Hebrew 12:1

How will this work?

This study is divided into six practices. The six practices are:



**Daily
Devotion**



**Prayerful
Alliance**



**Spiritual
Tenacity**



**Service
Bestowing**



**Generosity
Granting**



**Celebration
Unifying**

Each practice has three devotionals which need to be completed prior to your group meeting. You'll read scripture and reflect/answer questions. You'll go deeper during your group meetings as you share devotional material, pray together and are called to action (James 2:17).

Who do you want to be during this study?

Consider embodying these five personal qualities during this study:

Humble Allow God and others to minister and convict you

Teachable Allow others to give you insight

Intentional Step-up, do your part, further your group

Curious Ask questions, seek further from God and one another

Accountable Invite support and encouragement

Why? Because "Team work makes the dream work!" You may need to stretch your social skills and communication preferences. It may mean an unnatural word of encouragement, or using instant messaging. Bend and stretch to create the best possible environment for authentic friendships and spiritual growth. Be committed to complete all devotionals and be present at all group meetings.

Group covenant

We strive to create the best possible environment for authentic friendships and spiritual growth.

To create an environment of spiritual consistency, trust, and accountability, please read and commit to the group covenant.

Group goals

- To grow in relationship with God (Luke 10:27)
- To grow in love, support, and care for one another (Ephesians 4:32)
- To create accountability through confession of sin, received without judgment (James 5:16)
- To lovingly rebuke, forgive, and restore in love (James 5:15)
- To respond to the Gospel externally through the outpouring of spiritual gifting (1 Corinthians 12)
- To promote consistency and minimise division, be under the spiritual authority of Island ECC (Acts 2:42)

Personal goals

- Be committed – Attend regularly and on time. Inform if you cannot come
- Be present – Holistic presence means giving your full attention
- Be authentic – Be honest and transparent. It brings everyone closer
- Be confidential – What's shared in the group stays in the group.

Exceptions: (1) If permission is sought and granted to share a story beyond the group; (2) If someone is believed to be a threat to him/herself or to another

Name, Date and Signed



PRACTICE ONE

DAILY DEVOTION

Did you know...

The concept of The Daily Office began as far back as the Old Testament? At fixed hours of the day, Scripture would be read, Psalms sung, and prayers offered. Come the Roman Empire, bells rang at 6am, 9am, 12noon, 3pm and 6pm and Christians would pray with the bells. The early church fathers Tertullian (155-220 A.D) and Origen (185-253 A.D) also wrote in detail about the benefits of The Daily Office. The Desert Fathers, with the most famous being Antony (251-356 A.D) left their busy city lives to live in the desert in solitude or in monastic communities – distraction free to spend intentional and consistent daily time with God. Daily, intentional actions to focus on God, also known as daily devotion was serious business. What about you?



Day 1

Developing the desire for daily devotion

Completing a task to “check the boxes” is essentially behaviour modification and seldom lasts. What does last is full heart buy-in, from which the desire to commit naturally comes. Whilst this heart posture is desired, it does not always begin this way. You may need some grit and self-discipline to develop initial momentum.

Warm-up

- List your top ten daily tasks. Which of them are easy and which require effort?
- From your list, how many nurture your being in Christ? How much is doing vs. being?

Main study

Scripture reading: Daniel 6

- Who were the main characters in this passage? Describe them, their roles, responsibilities, and their mental models (Jealousy? Fear? Confidence?)
- What was Daniel’s “Daily Office”?

- Describe Daniel’s character and response during the lion’s den ordeal. How did this compare with the officials of the same fate?
- What was the impact of Daniel’s daily devotion on his faith and being?
- How could intentional daily devotion impact you?

Reflect: How willing are you to develop a daily devotional habit?



Day 2

Finding a devotional style that connects

There are fundamentals in maintaining the health of your faith – reading your Bible, consistent prayer, rest/Sabbath, and fellowship with other believers. Why? It's how God communes with you. Part of creating a successful devotional habit is to discover a style where God and you connect on the deepest level.

Warm-up

- Consider a time when you struggled with an unavoidable daily task. What was your eventual sentiment and motivation towards it?

Main study

Scripture reading: Ephesians 5:18-20

¹⁸ Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit, ¹⁹ speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, ²⁰ always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Scripture reading: Psalm 1:1-3

¹ Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers, ² but whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and who meditates on His law day and night. ³ That person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither – whatever they do prospers.

Scripture reading: Mark 1:35

Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where He prayed.

- What are you commanded not-to-do? What “wine” limits your discipline in practice and why?
- Which practices do you resonate with and why? How have they shaped you?
- Which part of the day and environment do you connect the best with God?
- How much of your current devotional style connects you with God? What needs to change?

Reflect: With no universal approach, what devotional style connects you with God on the deepest level?



Day 3

Creating a rhythm of habitual daily devotion

This is where the “rubber meets the road”. You’ve explored the heart, fruit, and your style of connecting with God. Will you create a habitual daily devotion from it?

Warm-up

- What is something you once hated, which you now enjoy regularly? What happened?

Main study

Scripture reading: Hebrews 5:11-14

¹¹We have much to say about this, but it is hard to make it clear to you because you no longer try to understand. ¹²In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God’s word all over again. You need milk, not solid food!

¹³Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. ¹⁴But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.

- On a scale of 1 (infant) to 10 (mature), where are you now?
- What “milk” or “solid food” are you consuming?
- What does your consumption say about your faith?
- To mature spiritually, what needs to develop?

Self-inventory (Rate yourself):

| | | | | |
|---|-----|-----------------------|-----------------------|------|
| How often do I engage in spiritual habits? | low | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | high |
| How deep/insightful is my engagement? | low | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | high |
| How much do I reflect on the revealed spiritual truths? | low | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | high |
| How much do I live-out the revealed spiritual truths? | low | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | high |

How did you score? Are you where you’d like to be?

Some tips on creating a new habit:

1. Clearly describe your new habit
2. Know the possible distractions to that habit
3. Start by scheduling these habits into your calendar
4. Incrementally adjust your new habit to find that sweet spot (frequency, amount, length)
5. Allow distractions to co-exist with your new habit, to build initial momentum
6. Show compassion to yourself, and press on

Action plan for my habitual daily devotion:

1. My new daily devotion is _____ (E.g. Read one chapter each morning)
2. I will do this _____ (E.g. On the train/bus to work)
3. Every _____ (E.g. morning/afternoon)

Make it easier by doing it with someone and use a recurring calendar invite!

Reflect: How much do you desire spiritual maturity?

Your next group meeting

You’ll be sharing key insights, and your action plan. By the end of the group meeting, you’ll establish accountability structures for the first two weeks of your habitual daily devotion.





PRACTICE TWO

Prayerful Alliance

Did you know...

Dr. Helen Roseveare, a missionary to Zaire, told the following story. “A mother at our mission station died after giving birth to a premature baby. We tried to improvise an incubator to keep the infant alive, but the only hot water bottle we had was beyond repair. So we asked the children to pray for the baby and for her sister. One of the girls responded. ‘Dear God, please send a hot water bottle today. Tomorrow will be too late because by then the baby will be dead. And dear Lord, send a doll for the sister so she won’t feel so lonely.’ That afternoon a large package arrived from England. The children watched eagerly as we opened it. Much to their surprise, under some clothing was a hot water bottle! Immediately the girl who had prayed so earnestly started to dig deeper, exclaiming, ‘If God sent that, I’m sure He also sent a doll!’ And she was right! The heavenly Father knew in advance of that child’s sincere requests, and five months earlier He had led a ladies’ group to include both of those specific articles.”

Source: bible.org/illustration/hot-water-bottle



Day 1

What is prayer and what does it reveal about us?

We process roughly six-thousand thoughts per day; some directed outwards, some remain inwards. We also pray to God subconsciously or intentionally. Whichever way you look at it, prayer is “talking to God” – it is an alliance, a joining of God and you. What causes us to pray in the first place? The answer appears deeper than mere conversation and more extensive than the “how”. Let’s explore.

Warm-up

- Who do you enjoy talking to the most? Why?

Main study

Scripture reading: John 14:5-11

⁵Thomas said to Him, “Lord, we don’t know where You are going, so how can we know the way?” ⁶Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.” ⁷If you really know Me, you will know My Father as well. From now on, you do know Him and have seen Him.” ⁸Philip said, “Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.” ⁹Jesus answered: “Don’t you know Me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen Me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father?’ ¹⁰Don’t you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in Me? The words I say to you I do not speak on My own authority. Rather, it is the Father, living in Me, who is doing His work. ¹¹Believe Me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me; or at least believe on the evidence of the works themselves.

- What did Thomas and Philip really want?

- Why was this important to them? Do you feel the same?
- Which words describe their attitude/yearning? Which words could describe your attitude/yearning?
- How can prayer help you know the Father?
- How can prayer satisfy your innermost desires?

Reflect: Does your prayer life reflect your heart’s desire to know the Father? If not, what does it reflect?



Day 2

The mechanics of prayer – why and how

Prayer can be confusing. With many traditions and legalistic spiritual practices representing religion as a whole, to the ignorant, connecting with God appears to be complex – obsessed with saying the right thing, in the right order, and at the right time. Connecting with your Father in heaven is different. It is personal. So, let's discover how.

Warm-up

- Compare a relationship that is cold and distant, to one that is warm and intimate. What makes them different to one another?

Main study

Scripture reading: Matthew 6:5-8

⁵ And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. ⁶ But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. ⁷ And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him.

- Describe your heart as your pray. What comforts you? What convicts you?
- How does this passage inspire us to change the way we pray?
- What assurance does the second half of verse 7 provide? How then, can you approach your Heavenly Father in prayer? What attitude can you bring Him?

Scripture reading: Matthew 6:9-13

⁹ This, then, is how you should pray: 'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name, ¹⁰ Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. ¹¹ Give us today our daily bread. ¹² And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. ¹³ And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.'

- There are seven themes present in this short prayer. They are inclusion, adoration, submission, providence, forgiveness, dependence, and deliverance. Can you spot them?
- How does Matthew 6:9-13 affect how and what you pray for?
- What's the difference between seeing prayer as an alliance instead of a duty?
- What is something or someone you can pray for right now?

Reflect: What new insight do you learn from The Lord's Prayer? Does it change you or the way you pray?



Day 3

The dilemma of unanswered prayers

You'll have prayers that are not answered the way you like, or at all, despite being perfectly justifiable. They would have displayed God's glory, yet nothing happened. What happens next? How do you respond? What about your faith?

Warm-up

- What prayer request of yours remains unanswered? How do you feel about them?

Main study

Scripture reading: 2 Corinthians 12:7-10

⁷So to keep me from becoming proud, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger from Satan to torment me and keep me from becoming proud. ⁸ Three different times I begged the Lord to take it away. ⁹ Each time he said, "My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness." So now I am glad to boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ can work through me. ¹⁰ That's why I take pleasure in my weaknesses, and in the insults, hardships, persecutions, and troubles that I suffer for Christ. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

Paul's three seasons of prayer and petitioning went unanswered. To Paul, the removal of the thorn would likely have meant greater ministry success, or so he thought. Yet God's response was final and to most, appeared illogical.

- What was significant about Paul's response?
- How do you think Paul processed this undesirable result?

- How could Paul's response, and posture of faith aide us?
- Most importantly, what can we learn about the alliance of God and you?

Reflect: How do you feel about God when your prayers are unanswered? Who then is God, irrespective of your prayers?

Your next group meeting

You'll be spending extended time in prayer during your group meeting. Come with a free heart, ready to engage with God in a partnership of conversation.

Before you finish, how are your daily devotional habits coming along? Remember, habits take time to form, so press on!





PRACTICE THREE

Spiritual Tenacity

Did you know...

Charles Spurgeon once wrote “The trumpet still plays the notes of war. You cannot sit down and put the victory wreath on your head. You do not have a crown. You still must wear the helmet and carry the sword. You must watch, pray, and fight. Expect your last battle to be the most difficult, for the enemy’s fiercest charge is reserved for the end of the day.” Our lives as Christians don’t come without a fight. We face an unseen enemy out to destroy us, and our walk with Christ – known as spiritual warfare. We must not be fearful of it, nor must we be completely ignorant of its existence. Instead, we take a measured and active approach, knowing that with Jesus, we come from victory and not for it. Let’s begin.



Day 1

Let's take a reality check

Is it bad luck or mere coincidence? Why do bad things seem to happen when a spiritual event is coming up? Why am I most attacked around my greatest weaknesses? Scripture is very clear about the presence of the devil and its workings in our world. Let's take a reality check to understand more.

Warm-up

- What is something you should pay attention to, but choose to ignore? Why?

Main study

Scripture reading: Job 1:6 - 2:10

With God's permission, Job loses everything he has at the hands of Satan. Whilst easy to debate God's permission, this passage instead reveals Satan's desire to shake our faith.

- What were Satan's tactics?
- What new discoveries do you have about Satan?
- Describe Job's response. What do you admire about him?

Scripture reading: Ephesians 6:12

For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

- In your own words, what then are we wrestling against? Explain using an analogy
- What could the works of these "rulers" and "authorities" look like in your life?
- What do they look like in the greater world?

Reflect: Consider the greatest trials of your faith. Where was the enemy? Where was God?



Day 2

Building our barracks

Dotted all over Hong Kong's mountainous regions are WWII barracks formerly used by local and British forces propelling the advancing Japanese. Not only used as defence stations, they also offensively downed enemy aircraft. Our faith also needs to develop this two-fold muscle to defend and offend against Satan.

Warm-up

- What is one area of your life that requires greater focus? What needs to happen to get there?

Main study

Scripture reading: Ephesians 6:10-18

¹⁰ Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. ¹¹ Put on the full armour of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. ¹² For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. ¹³ Therefore put on the full armour of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. ¹⁴ Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, ¹⁵ and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. ¹⁶ In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. ¹⁷ Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. ¹⁸ And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people.

- What is the significance of writing with a "battle" analogy?

- Of the armour, which of them are defensive? What is their purpose?
- Which of them are offensive? What is their purpose?
- From the armour, which spiritual truths are needed in your walk?
- What practical ways can you enforce your armour?

Reflect: Consider the greatest trials of your faith. How did you use your armour of God (or not)?



Day 3

Destroying strongholds

Knowing our position in relation to Jesus Christ sets us up for spiritual victory. Jesus' death on the cross and resurrection from the dead had set an eternal victory over the devil, and we as Jesus-followers are included in this everlasting victory parade. What does this mean for us? It means we are empowered with Jesus' devil-destroying spiritual authority, over the dark and demonic things in our lives that "steal, kill and destroy" (John 10:10) the truth of the Gospel message of Jesus Christ. From that place, we are to be bold, confident and courageous against sinful thoughts and actions.

To those who don't follow Jesus, the word "sin" often receives bad press. It makes God a "cosmic killjoy" who zaps the fun out of life. But what is sin? Ultimately, it's rebellion against God and His perfect and righteous ways, which leads to consequences and death (Romans 6:23). Sin devastates us and our relationships.

Warm-up

- What sin do you struggle with? What happens during and after you engage in it?

Main study

Scripture reading: 2 Corinthians 10:3-5

³ For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. ⁴ The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. ⁵ We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

- Regarding verse 3, how does the world wage war? What "wars" are you facing now?
- What weapons are you to use? (Go back to Day 2) How will you use them?
- In your own words, what is a stronghold?

Dealing with strongholds

A stronghold is like a spiritual chokehold; an enemy influence so deeply embedded that it becomes almost impossible to remove (like an addiction or a certain mindset). A key component of defeating strongholds is to allow the truth of the Gospel message to permeate. That means, to bring to surface brutal flaws, addictions, behaviours – sin in a nutshell. If we do not allow Jesus into the areas we're safeguarding (or denying), then that stronghold will remain there. Only when it is exposed to the light of Jesus, then the spiritual chains can be broken, and we can experience freedom.

Destroying strongholds - Part 1

There are six important steps to defeat enemy strongholds. On your own, you will complete Part 1. Part 2 will happen in your next group meeting.

Part 1: Honesty

- Pray: Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal sins of concern
- Reflect: Be brutally honest – name the sin for what it is, beyond the action. For example, don't refer to it as a moment of exhaustion; call it an attraction to pornography. Don't call it prayerful concern; call it gossip
- Write down these carefully and prayerfully revealed sins
- Mark the ones which are deep and long-standing (strongholds), and those hard to eliminate

Part 2 will be done in the safety of your next group meeting.

Reflect: What strongholds exist in your life? (Prepare for group meeting)

Your next group meeting

You'll share about your strongholds, pray for and receive prayer for their demolishing. Consider stepping out in courage to share vulnerably. Only when darkness is exposed to the light, will its power over you diminish (John 1:5, 8:12).





PRACTICE FOUR

Service Bestowing

Did you know...

The year was 1934. Albert McMakin was a young farmhand. Excited about his faith, he shared it by inviting his friend to an evangelistic meeting. After failed attempts to persuade his friend to come, his friend finally agreed on the condition that he could drive Albert's truck to the event. Staying in the truck, his friend listened to the preacher's words from afar but soon became interested. Jesus touched his friend's heart that night. That friend's name was Billy Graham. The continued service of Albert to his friend proved far greater than he could ever imagine. With God, our service to him can be just as abounding.



Day 1

Lip service or real service?

Lip service is usually the reluctant fulfilling of an obligation, e.g. honouring a family tradition. Prolonged lip service, especially for Christ, is bad for us mentally, and for our faith as it becomes legalistic and works-based. Christ desires our real, heart service that comes from the overflow of his love and not from our storehouses of hesitation and dread.

Warm-up

- What volunteer/service activities do you enjoy doing? What happens to you emotionally and mentally afterwards?

Main study

Scripture reading: Colossians 3:23-24

²³Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, ²⁴ since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.

- How do these verses change the way you work and serve others?
- What type of inheritance could the author be referring to?

- From your own experience, what is this reward?

- How does the author change your mental model of service with this verse?

Reflect: Where is your heart in relation to service for Christ?



Day 2

Service as a directive, not exception

Service is an integral part of our spiritual growth as Jesus-followers. It isn't an exception but a clear directive. A large majority of infrastructure, health and educational services in our city were established by faithful Christians in its developmental years. Ho Kai was a Christian businessman who partnered with Au Tak to form Kai Tak, whose land would eventually be acquired by the government to become Kai Tak Airport. Ho Kai's sister, Ho Miu Ling was one of the founders of the Nethersole hospital. Henrietta Hall Shuck, the first female American missionary to Hong Kong started a school for girls in the early 1800s. The Henrietta Secondary School in North Point is named in memory of her. With many more stories of the church and service, you also share in that same legacy as you serve the same God as them. Get ready to mobilise!

Warm-up

- Recall a time of service where you proactively stepped up. What did you do?
How did you feel?

Main study

Scripture reading: James 2:14-17

¹⁴What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? ¹⁵Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. ¹⁶If one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? ¹⁷In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

- This passage appears to claim that faith alone is not enough. How does this fit with your perception of Christianity? What are the gaps?
- Whose deeds are you representing when serving others? Yours or Jesus'? How so?
- How does James challenge your heart with this passage?

Reflect: What is your inner motivation when you serve?



Day 3

Matching your service to expand the Kingdom

A reason why you experience frustration and dissonance in servitude is the mismatching of opportunity to your spiritual gifts. When you are matched to a service where your gifts fit complementarily, you'll serve more wholeheartedly, with greater creativity and energy; everyone wins. The litmus test is this: Do you feel negatively drained or positively energised after your service? Your answer speaks more than you realise!

Warm-up

- Which service opportunities negatively drain you? What happens?

Main study

Scripture reading: 1 Peter 4:10-11

¹⁰ Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms. ¹¹ If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To Him be | the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.

- Verse 10 talks about gifts "you have received". How does this challenge your ownership of your talents, gifts and skills?
- Consider this phrase: "Your job is to steward your gifts". What does this mean to you?

- How will you use your gifts to serve others?

Spiritual gifts refresher

Did you know that your spiritual gifts may change from season to season? When you try new areas of service, you may "activate" a spiritual gift that was lying dormant. For example, you might have the gift of administration one season, and the gift of teaching the next as you explore teaching biblical topics. Therefore, it is beneficial to keep exploring and to stay informed of your strongest giftings, so that you are serving optimally to expand God's Kingdom.

Complete the Island ECC Spiritual Gifts Inventory at:
islandecc.hk/spiritual-gifts-assessment
 (desktop only)

Reflect: What are your spiritual gifts? How are you using them?

Your next group meeting

You'll be sharing your Spiritual Gift Inventory results. Have it completed before your next group meeting.





PRACTICE FIVE

Generosity Granting

Did you know...

Just before the pandemic, Island ECC led a mission trip to Bacolod, Philippines. They visited a family of nine that lived in a shack. This family generated income by raising pigs and washing clothes for other people – it was barely enough. Their father had suffered a stroke, became physically impaired and could not work. With no electricity, they used oil lamps at night. A month later, their house burnt down from an oil lamp accident. With no money to rebuild, they lived in their local church. The Island ECC mission team were notified of this, and soon raised enough funds to rebuild their house with electricity, and, one year's supply added in. The team also raised funds for their enrolment into a “business-in-a-box” venture to earn sustainable income. Without God's providence and timing, this family would not have experienced God's generosity through our church.



Day 1

The “ship” of giving

Generosity goes beyond money; it begins with your heart. At the core of it are two “ships” which reside over your resources – stewardship and “owner-ship” (something you fully own whose usage you determine). These juggernauts determine how tightly you control your resources and the intensity of expectation you have from them. Beginning here, let’s examine your heart towards your “stuff” and whether it manages you, or you manage it.

Warm-up

- What is something (not someone) you highly cherish? Why?

Main study

Scripture reading: Mark 10:17-23

¹⁷ As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him. “Good teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” ¹⁸ “Why do you call me good?” Jesus answered. “No one is good—except God alone. ¹⁹ You know the commandments: ‘You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, you shall not defraud, honour your father and mother.’” ²⁰ “Teacher,” he declared, “all these I have kept since I was a boy.” ²¹ Jesus looked at him and loved him. “One thing you lack,” he said. “Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.” ²² At this the man’s face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth. ²³ Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, “How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!”

- What is the difference between stewardship and owner-ship?

- Was the young man a steward or owner of his wealth? Where are you similar/dissimilar?
- Was Jesus’ demand reasonable or not? Why?
- How does your “stuff” control you? Which “ship” are you captain over?

Reflect: What do you seek from material safety?



Day 2

The act of giving

You'll be presented with opportunities to give to others, or to Kingdom-led initiatives. Giving isn't confined to finances; it also involves your time, effort, emotions, and talent. Whilst you're to be wise and shrewd to whom you're giving, it ultimately is a trust in God. Will you trust God to provide what you've just given away? Will you allow God to refill that deficiency?

Warm-up

- What is something that took considerable pain to give away? Why?

Main study

Scripture reading: Mark 12:41-44

⁴¹ Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts.

⁴² But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a few cents.

⁴³ Calling His disciples to Him, Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. ⁴⁴ They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on."

- What would you do if you were the poor widow? Have you been in a similar situation?
- What was the attitude of the widow? What is similar/dissimilar between her and you?

- What is something that would take sacrifice to give away?
- Who would benefit from your giving?

Reflect: If you gave like the widow, what would you give?



Day 3

The secrecy of giving

Beyond the importance of what you're giving is equally how you're giving. Some people want their name chiselled on a plaque in front of a poor village, whilst others simply want their name on a tax-deductible receipt. Jesus makes it crystal clear to us by providing us a heart-check during our giving. Let's explore more.

Warm-up

- How important is recognition to you? How do you feel recognised?

Main study

Scripture reading: 2 Corinthians 9:7

Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

- What considerations do you have before becoming a "cheerful giver"?
- What expectations do you have from God as a "cheerful giver"?
- What is important about being a "cheerful giver"?

Scripture reading: Matthew 6:1-4

¹ Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. ² "So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honoured by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. ³ But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, ⁴ so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

- What is God's core message for you in this passage?
- What is God trying to build in you?
- What is God trying to prevent in you?

God does not need anything from you, but when you give with a cheerful heart, you're expressing gratitude for what He has already given you, by giving to others. This is worship.

Reflect: How does giving in secret impact your stance on recognition? Which other areas of life does this impact?

Your next group meeting

Bring a story of when you've given. What happened? Who received? How did you feel?





PRACTICE SIX

Celebration Unifying

Did you know...

The Passover has been observed and celebrated by Jews for over 3,000 years since the Ancient Israelites left Egyptian captivity. This annual celebration occurs at the Passover dinner, called the *Seder*. The Seder uses a procession book called the *Haggadah*, which guides the flow of the dinner and the *Seder plate* with different foods symbolising each part of the Passover story. The participants will eat *Matzah*, unleavened bread resembling the “hurried and unleavened” bread the Israelites took on their exodus, and *Afikoman*, matzah which is eaten at the end of the Passover meal. They will also drink *Wine* to represent the divine redemption of the Exodus story when God brought out, delivered, redeemed, and took “you to Me as a people”. The Passover meal is perhaps the longest standing celebration in all humanity.



Day 1

Come on and celebrate

There is a classic worship song called “Come on and celebrate”. The lyrics speak of celebrating “his gift of love” and “the Son of God who loved us and gave us life”. Celebrating Christ should undergird our ability to celebrate the other victories and joys of life – but that isn’t always possible. Do you celebrate?

Warm-up

- Do you enjoy celebrating? Why or why not?

Main study

Scripture reading: Psalm 95:1-7a

¹ Come, let us sing for joy to the Lord; let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation. ² Let us come before Him with thanksgiving and extol Him with music and song. ³ For the Lord is the great God, the great King above all gods. ⁴ In His hand are the depths of the earth, and the mountain peaks belong to Him. ⁵ The sea is His, for He made it, and His hands formed the dry land. ⁶ Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the Lord our Maker; ⁷ for He is our God and we are the people of His pasture, the flock under His care.

- Which “celebrating” words did you notice? How often do you embody these words?

- What was the author’s reason for celebrating? What does the author’s attitude tell us?
- Where do you stand regarding the author’s attitude? How come?
- What prevents you from celebrating?

Reflect: Your ability to celebrate reflects the condition of your heart. How are you, really?



Day 2

The source of celebration

For simplicity's sake, there are five main types of Psalms – praise, thanksgiving, lament, royalty and wisdom/instructional. Through multiple authors, the Psalms help us discover the source of everlasting celebration and joy, even in the darkest of times. Look no further than the Psalms.

Warm-up

- Where do you seek your joy? How does it satisfy?

Main study

Scripture reading: Psalm 66

(Immersively read this Psalm twice.)

- What strikes you as you read this?
- From the Psalm, what is the character of God?

- From the Psalm, what could our response to God be?
- How could the character of God speak to the celebrations in your life?

Reflect: How much do you trust God's character over your life?



Day 3

Now, let's celebrate

Some people celebrate over cake, some over a big banquet, whilst others prefer a low-key event. We all celebrate differently and there is no fixed formula. The important thing is we celebrate through the unique ways that God moves us towards joy. Celebration should never be forced; it should be natural and enjoyable.

Warm-up

- When have you genuinely celebrated? What was the celebration about? What happened? Who was there?

Main study

Scripture reading: 2 Samuel 6:12-15, 20-22

¹²Then King David was told, “The Lord has blessed Obed-edom’s household and everything he has because of the Ark of God.” So David went there and brought the Ark of God from the house of Obed-edom to the City of David with a great celebration. ¹³After the men who were carrying the Ark of the Lord had gone six steps, David sacrificed a bull and a fattened calf. ¹⁴And David danced before the Lord with all his might, wearing a priestly garment. ¹⁵So David and all the people of Israel brought up the Ark of the Lord with shouts of joy and the blowing of rams’ horns.

²⁰When David returned home to bless his own family, Michal, the daughter of Saul, came out to meet him. She said in disgust, “How distinguished the king of Israel looked today, shamelessly exposing himself to the servant girls like any vulgar person might do!” ²¹David retorted to Michal, “I was dancing before the Lord, who chose me above your father and all his family! He appointed me as the leader of Israel, the people of the Lord, so I celebrate before the Lord. ²²Yes, and I am willing to look even more foolish than this, even to be humiliated in my own eyes!

- Imagine yourself as an onlooker. What would you think of King David?
- How can you celebrate as King David did?
- How can you bring godly celebration to your Care Group?
- How can you celebrate one another authentically?

Reflect: How can celebration bring your group closer?

Your next group meeting

You’ll be celebrating each other in a group setting. Bring your list of celebration events (For example, birthdays, baptisms, first-ever testimony), tips on how to celebrate, and suggestions of where to celebrate for future group celebrations. Also, be prepared to bring a snack.



Notes

Closing word

Thank you for walking with your group through Continuum. We firmly believe that consistency in the six practices will lead to fulfilment in Christ, and ultimately, a stronger bond within your group for much deeper, nourishing relationships.

But it isn't just a solo effort, it's a group effort. It isn't just your leader's responsibility, it's yours too.

We urge you to establish a daily devotion programme you can do with one another, to keep daily rhythms of prayer, and to keep a check on your heart.

Leader Guide for Group Meetings

Thank you leaders for doing what you do. You keep the church going. Never doubt the importance of your leadership and the impact it makes.

This leader guide is just for you and is intentionally placed at the back. Why? Because having a dedicated space to run your meeting without everybody knowing your next move is helpful.

The group meeting questions are suggestions only; please feel free to create your own. Please continue to do pre-meal, worship, closing prayer and dessert (apple pie is best).

Leader Guide

Practice One: Daily Devotion

Warm-up (15 minutes)

- Have one member share a five-minute testimony of their faith journey
- What is something you once hated, which you now enjoy regularly? What happened?

Group covenant (10 minutes)

- Read out and explain the group covenant (front of booklet) – applicable to both leaders and members. Sign together as one unified Care Group.

Main study (30 minutes)

Scripture reading: Psalm 90:12-17

¹² Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom. ¹³ Relent, Lord! How long will it be? Have compassion on your servants. ¹⁴ Satisfy us in the morning with Your unfailing love, that we may sing for joy and be glad all our days. ¹⁵ Make us glad for as many days as You have afflicted us, for as many years as we have seen trouble. ¹⁶ May Your deeds be shown to Your servants, Your splendour to their children. ¹⁷ May the favour of the Lord our God rest on us; establish the work of our hands for us – yes, establish the work of our hands.

- What does it mean to “number our days”?
- How does it make you wiser?
- Why do you need to depend on God for wisdom?
- How important then, is daily devotion to obtaining wisdom?
- Where do you need to mobilise?

Share your action plan (45 minutes)

- Members to share their action plan for habitual daily devotion (Practice One: Day 3)
- Optional
 - Write down each member’s action plan
 - Create accountability groups (2-3 per group) for two weeks – a catalyst for habit

Closing (5 minutes)

Close with prayer.

Leader Guide

Practice Two: Prayerful Alliance

Warm-up (15 minutes)

- Have one member share a five-minute testimony of their faith journey
- Who do you enjoy talking to the most? Why?

Main study (30 minutes)

Scripture reading: 1 John 5:13-15

¹³ I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life. ¹⁴ This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. ¹⁵ And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of Him.

- On what single condition does this passage apply?
- How does this challenge your version of faith and God?
- How is this “one-sided” passage an alliance between God and you?

Extended prayer time (45 minutes)

You’ll be leading your group in an extended prayer time, beyond the normal closing prayer. There will be two exercises – group and personal prayer.

Set the tone/atmosphere (10 minutes)

Read and meditate on a Psalm before opening. Suitable ones include Psalms 8, 19, 34, 121 and/or 138). Allow people to soak in the Psalm.

Group prayer (15 minutes)

As a leader, pre-decide on several topics you want your group to possibly pray for. These can include the group’s future itself, the country, or global events. Present these options and collectively, select one or two. Allow people to pray spontaneously but to manage, leaders to open and close the group prayer.

Personal prayer (20 minutes)

In smaller groups of three to four, have members share their most pertinent prayer requests. Limit sharing to five minutes each. Then as a smaller group, pray for one another. There are several ways to do this – each person prays for the person on their left, or prays for whatever is on their heart.

Nearing the end of the personal prayer time, signal a countdown “two minutes before we regather”. Afterwards, you can play a worship song, or gently bring everyone back in.

Debrief and closing (10 minutes)

Ask “What did God say to you today?” to be answered **by one sentence**. Close with prayer.

Tell your members that the Spiritual Tenacity Day 3 – “Destroying Strongholds” devotion must be completed before the next group meeting.

Leader Guide

Practice Three: Spiritual Tenacity

This page will be referenced by leaders and members. All are to have completed Spiritual offensive Day 3 – “Destroying Strongholds” prior to this meeting.

This group meeting will initially begin as a large group. Midway, it will separate into male and female only groups of 3-4 members for greater privacy.

Warm-up (5 minutes)

- Have one member share a five-minute testimony of their faith journey

Main study (10 minutes)

Scripture reading: 1 John 4:4

You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world.

- Who is “the one who is in you”? Why does this matter?
- How does having the power of Christ in you allow you to demolish strongholds?

Divide into male and female only groups of 3-4. If meeting online, you may need another device in another room for privacy. After settling into your groups, you can begin.

Part 2 - Destroying strongholds (60 minutes total)

With your list of sins in hand, and the power of Christ established, you’ll need courage to openly share. **Everyone must come to the agreement that this is a safe and confidential space. Do not begin until everyone agrees.**

1 John 1:9 says “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

You are to complete this section with your voice, so that your small group can bear witness to the breaking of strongholds, and the power of Christ in your life. Everyone will be doing the same. Don’t yell, but speak loud enough for everyone to hear and intercede with you.

Each person will complete this process:

1. Share and confess (10 minutes each)

Taking turns, share your list of sins/strongholds and its impacts. If you’re tempted to share half-way, trust in God, and share the whole way. Don’t allow the fear of rejection and shame steal from you any longer. Bring to light all darkness. You can do it!

2. Repent, renounce and reclaim (5 minutes each)

After sharing, you will read aloud this prayer with the sins you’ve identified.

Dear Heavenly Father, I come to you humbly, in the name of Jesus Christ. I recognise the power You have given me by the blood of Jesus Christ to demolish all spiritual strongholds in my life.

I confess that I have given a foothold to sin. I repent and renounce the stronghold(s) of ___ LIST OF SINS _____ in the name of Jesus Christ.

I declare that I am no longer bound by these strongholds, and cancel all claims, untruths and lies from the devil that I have believed in. I claim the truth of 2 Corinthians 5:21 that I am the righteousness of God by the authority of the name of Jesus Christ.

Through your power, I reclaim all ground I had surrendered to the enemy. Please restore my trust in Your Holy Spirit, and renew my obedience and life to Jesus Christ.

In Jesus name I pray, Amen.

Accountability (5 minutes)

After you've all prayed, setup accountability structures to keep each other in check. It takes continual renewing, active habit and accountability to eradicate strongholds. Keep going! A sample structure could be check-in phone calls, or group chat updates once-a-week.

Freedom

This freedom is a marathon, and you may experience hiccups along the way. Don't be disheartened. Share, confess, repent, renounce, and reclaim. Declare your God-given resolve to never allow that stronghold to take root again.

Hebrews 12:1-3 says: "Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before Him He endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider Him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart."

Debrief and closing (20 minutes)

Open the space to allow people to share about their victories. Close with prayer.

Leader Guide

Practice Four: Service Bestowing

Warm-up (15 minutes)

- Have one member share a five-minute testimony of their faith journey

Main study (15 minutes)

Scripture reading: Romans 12:6-8

⁶ We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; ⁷ if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; ⁸ if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.

- What is crucial about recognising each other's gifts?
- How does this fit into the bigger picture of the Kingdom? (1 Corinthians 12:12-27)

Share your spiritual gifts (30-45 minutes)

- From the Spiritual Gifts Inventory (or similar), have each member share their top three gifts and any surprises/insights from the assessment
- Leaders, note these down

Using your God-given gifts (30 minutes)

We encourage you to be extremely intentional to create opportunities for your members to serve. This will mean on-the-spot planning and garnering commitment. Be tenacious in discussing the three areas and to lock service opportunities down.

Area 1: Personal service

- Open question: How much of your service aligns to your gifting? What changes are needed?
- Action: Push for that member to explore new service opportunities

Area 2: Group service – serving your group with your gifts

- It is healthy to serve one another. Organise group responsibilities according to each person's profile. This will generate greater involvement and ownership of your group
- Responsibilities include "Social coordinator", "Logistics coordinator", "Church contact"
- Action: Assign group service roles effective from an agreed date onwards

Area 3: Kingdom service – serving the greater church

- The early church served those beyond their circles (Acts 6:1-7). As a group, we can serve the larger church. Get everyone's calendar out and start exploring dates/service times. Be intentional about this – start with one Sunday and then discuss ongoing frequency
- Action: Commit to a church service date immediately: iecc.hk/groupserve

Debrief and closing (5 minutes)

Something strange happens when you serve others with your gifting – you develop joy and energy. Leaders, we invite you to push yourselves and your members into this exploratory space. Close with prayer.

Leader Guide

Practice Five: Generosity Granting

Warm-up (5 minutes)

- Have one member share a five-minute testimony of their faith journey

Share your giving story (30 minutes)

- Have members share a story of when they've given. What happened? Who received? How did they feel?

Main study (30-45 minutes)

Scripture reading: Matthew 16:24-26

²⁴ Then Jesus said to His disciples, "Whoever wants to be My disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow Me. ²⁵ For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for Me will find it. ²⁶ What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul?

- How do you feel about verse 24? Is this too extreme or appropriate?
- What would a self-denying, cross-following you look like?
- How does verse 25 point to the gospel message? What about you?
- Referring to verse 26, can you identify examples of that in society? How does that make you feel?

Make a pledge to give (15 minutes)

Leaders, we encourage you to be intentional to create an opportunity for financial giving. We're not talking about time, talent, emotion, or effort. Why? Oftentimes, financial giving will stretch us in ways where time and talent do not. It requires a "tangible" sacrifice. God will convict us where it hurts our wallets. We exercise generosity to break idolatry.

Leaders, take charge on this discussion. The giving pledge will be broken into two parts; with Part 1 discussed this group meeting and Part 2 in the next meeting. This has been split to make it less threatening – to allow people to process and to appreciate this as an opportunity, and not an order.

Generosity Part 1: What is a cause we want to invest in?

- Ask: What are we passionate about?
- Gather agreement on social causes/ministry types your group will donate to
- Tell your group you will present 2-3 organisations and collect a love offering next meeting

Debrief and closing (5 minutes)

Tell members you're going to collect a love offering and celebrate as a group, next meeting. Close with prayer.

Leader Guide

Practice Six: Celebration Unifying

In this meeting, you're going to do two things. Collect the love offering for the chosen organisation, and celebrate your group with worship, sharing, intentional celebration, and food – have a party! To distribute the stockpile of snacks for the meeting, allocate ahead of time for half the group to bring salty snacks, and half to bring sweet snacks. You may need to facilitate this through a roll call.

Generosity Part 2: Leader to present a list of organisations, and collect love offering

- Present the list of 2-3 organisations you want your group to consider supporting
- Decide on the organisation and place a collection box/envelop to the side
- Members can place their offering in anytime during the meeting
- Leader to pass on the offering to the organisation

Celebration

Warm-up (5 minutes)

- Have one member share a five-minute testimony of their faith journey

Share (15 minutes)

- Have members share about ways your group can celebrate and what to celebrate.
Leaders note for future events – crowdsourcing celebrations are ingenious!

The “hotseat of celebration” (60-90 minutes)

This celebration will involve affirming one another as individuals from God, through your group members. You'll be using the hotseat method where one person “sits in the middle” and everyone shares a celebration of that person. Be sure to affirm that this is a safe place and there is no fear of humiliation, rejection, or embarrassment. Also, start snacking!

How will this look like?

- Explain that everyone will experience the “hotseat of celebration”
- Select one person to kickstart the hotseat. All they are to do is to sit and receive love
- All those not in the hotseat will share **one short celebration statement** of them.
For example, “I celebrate you because...”
- Once everyone has shared, a leader will pray a blessing over that person
- Rotate until everyone has been celebrated
- Be sure to enjoy snacks during the process!

Debrief and closing (10 minutes)

Members to briefly share how it felt to be celebrated in a godly community. Be sure they are affirmed of God's love through the group's affirmations. Close with prayer.

Appendix

Sample ice-breaker questions

Simple

- What is your “elevator pitch” of yourself?
- What did you want to be growing up?
- What is your biggest pet peeve?
- What was your best/worst surprise?
- Share the story behind the earliest photo in your camera roll

A little deeper

- Who do you admire and why?
- Who has been a spiritual hero in your life?
- What is something important a mentor/older person taught you?
- What is a billboard message you would want the world to see?
- Describe yourself as you believe people see you as

Very deep

- What is a hard-learned lesson from your life?
- What have you been praying for the longest?
- What is an answered prayer?
- Finish this sentence. “In order for a small group to feel safe, I need...”
- Describe a time you showed deep Christlike love/compassion to someone else?

Additional group leading resources

For a digital copy of “A Handy Guide to Leading and Running a Care Group”, please email us at caregroup@islandecc.hk.

Notes

Notes

Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.

Galatians 6:9-10

