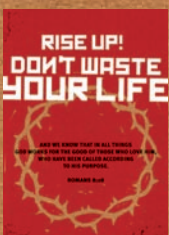
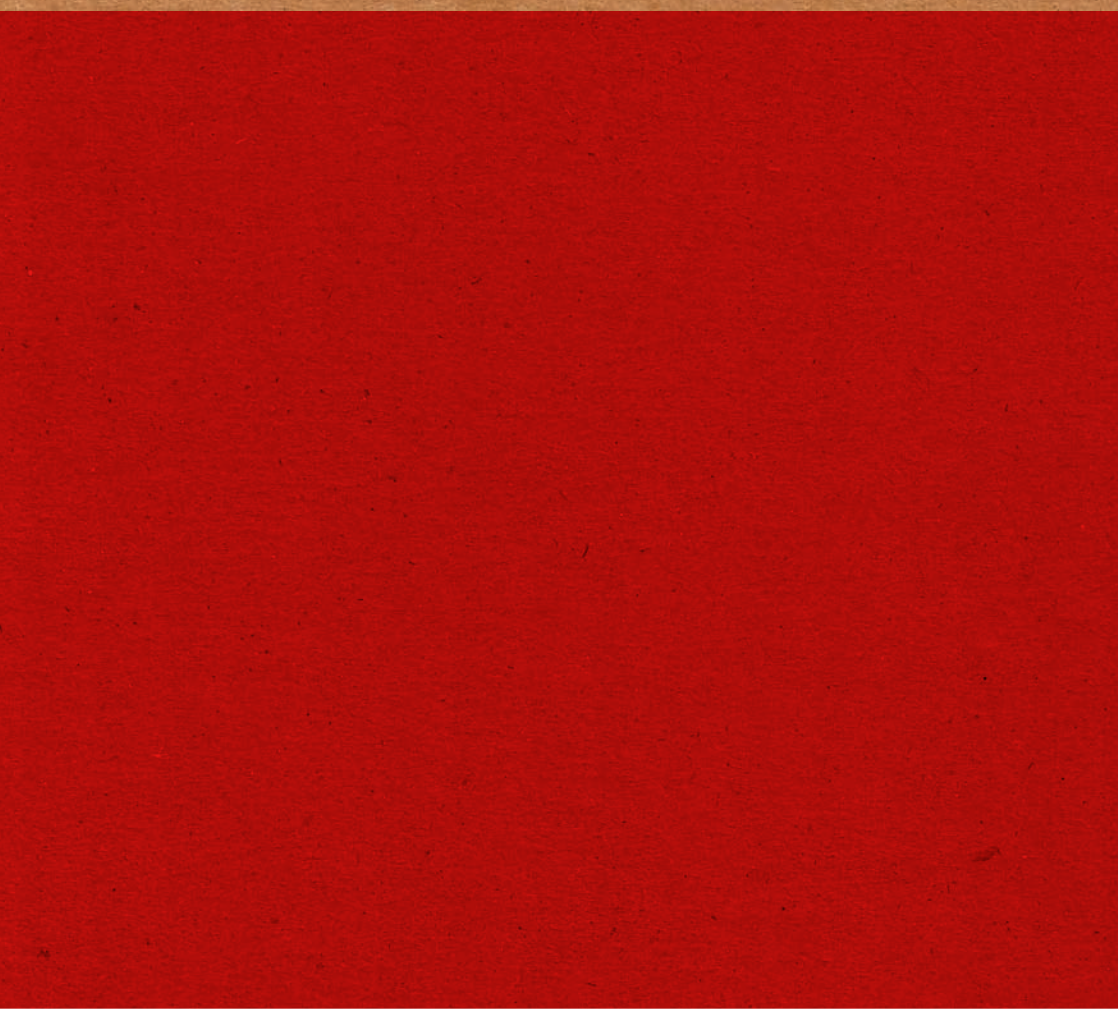


RISE UP!

6-SESSION INTERACTIVE STUDY GUIDE





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RISE UP!

BY BRETT HILLIARD, SENIOR PASTOR

“Would you like to have a greater confidence in God?”

If we were to take a poll of everyone at church and ask this one simple question, I’m pretty certain what the results would be. Most everyone would answer, “Yes!”

But sadly, many people muddle through life with lackluster faith, and secretly wonder why others seem to believe God more easily.

The path to confident faith is surely not just more desire. Nor is it true that some people are simply blessed with great faith, and others are not. God wants to grow all of our faith. He wants to make faith a natural reflex to the circumstances of your life.

The Word of God provides us with some great examples of people who struggled to have consistent belief in God.

- The apostles, those closest to Jesus during his public ministry, often struggled. When told they could extend forgiveness in all situations, the apostles cried out together, “Increase our faith!” (Luke 17.5)
- And who can forget Thomas who is sadly known for a nickname he gained in a moment when he was “doubting”? He boldly said he wouldn’t believe Jesus unless he put his finger into the mark of the nails on Jesus’ hands. Jesus allows him to do just that, and then tells Thomas, “Do not disbelieve, but believe” (John 20.27).

- Peter expressed fickle faith too. At one point, when many of His disciples turned away from Him, Jesus asked the twelve disciples, “Do you want to go away as well?” Peter, in his unavoidable honesty, said, “Lord, to whom shall we go?” (John 6:68). Peter exposes his own tender faith and seems to suggest that if he had a better option, he would certainly consider it. Peter definitely struggled to maintain a consistent and deep faith.
- And I relate well to the father of the boy who was healed from a lifelong demon-possession. Right before Jesus heals the boy, the father cries out, “I believe”. But then he tacks on a prayer that reflects the reality of all of our hearts, “Help my unbelief.” (Mark 9.24)

God wants to help us all in our unbelief. He wants to increase our belief, build our God-confidence, and raise us up to a higher level of instinctive faith.

But how?

Through many years of ministry, I have observed that there are some similar themes that seem to be true in people’s lives when they describe how their faith has grown. In countless conversations, people describe similar themes that lie beneath the ways in which God works. These six themes will serve as the chapters of this study guide, and will help us in our quest to discover how our faith can rise up to new levels.

There is an underlying truth to all of these principles however. **God doesn’t simply build your faith. He expects you to exert effort. He has designed growth principles so that growth occurs through effort.** Just as a plant grows with water and nutrients, your faith will grow too, but it requires attention.

This series is entitled, “Rise Up!”, to capture the spiritual principle that God wants to build your faith, but He asks that you take responsibility. He waits for you to take your faith seriously. Instead of passively waiting for God to increase your faith, God asks you to Rise Up! and do something about it. When your passive approach is replaced with intentionality, great faith is built.

So Rise Up!

May God use your efforts to know Him more to increase your confidence in Him.

Brett

RISE UP! CHECK YOUR ATTITUDE



**YOUR ATTITUDE SHOULD BE THE SAME AS
THAT OF CHRIST JESUS.
PHILIPPIANS 2:5**

SESSION 1 / RISE UP!

INTRODUCTION

Attitude is everything. In my home, even if my kids say the right thing, but have the wrong attitude, it is still grounds for discipline. Why? Because attitude reveals what is really going on deep inside. In a similar way, mere external changes don't translate into spiritual growth. All the church attendance and Bible study in the world won't make a difference at all if your heart isn't humble before God. A teachable attitude is the starting place for genuine growth in God.

WARM UP DISCUSSION

What are 3-4 words that describe your attitude this past week, both good and bad? Think of situations in work, home, and other settings.

In what circumstances (people, environments, times) are you especially challenged to have a good attitude?

What are some ways your overall attitude has changed in the past few years?



KEY STUDY

¹ If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, ² then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. ³ Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. ⁴ Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.

⁵ Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: ⁶ Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, ⁷ but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. ⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death — even death on a cross! ⁹ Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Philippians 2:1-11

1 What are the four motivations/truths from verse 1 that propel us to have godly attitudes?

- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____
- d. _____

2 According to verse 3, what are the two signs of a life that is NOT humble? What would these look like in real life circumstances?

- a. _____
- b. _____

- 3 In what ways does the life of Christ serve as a motivation for a selfless attitude?
- 4 Practically speaking, how might remembering Christ help you to display a more consistently good attitude?
- 5 What are the risks or potential dangers to “considering others more significant than yourselves”? Discuss if and when there would be “exceptions” to this principle.
- 6 According to this passage, what was the final result of Jesus’ obedience?
- 7 What promise do we have that parallels Christ’s experience?

Read the following passage from Luke 7:

¹ After he had finished all his sayings in the hearing of the people, he entered Capernaum. ² Now a centurion had a servant who was sick and at the point of death, who was highly valued by him. ³ When the centurion heard about Jesus, he sent to him elders of the Jews, asking him to come and heal his servant. ⁴ And when they came to Jesus, they pleaded with him earnestly, saying, “He is worthy to have you do this for him, ⁵ for he loves our nation, and he is the one who built us our synagogue.” ⁶ And Jesus went with them. When he was not far from the house, the centurion sent friends, saying to him, “Lord, do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy to have you come under my roof. ⁷ Therefore I did not presume to come to you. But say the word, and let my servant be healed. ⁸ For I too am a man set under authority, with soldiers under me: and I say to one, ‘Go,’ and he goes; and to another, ‘Come,’ and he comes; and to my servant, ‘Do this,’ and he does it.” ⁹ When Jesus heard these things, he marvelled at him, and turning to the crowd that followed him, said, “I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith.” ¹⁰ And when those who had been sent returned to the house, they found the servant well.



- 8 Describe the relationship between the centurion and his servant?
- 9 Notice the two uses of the word “worthy” in verses 4 and 6.
Who is described in each case?
- 10 What can we learn about the different uses of this word?
- 11 What is it about the centurion’s response that shows his great faith?
- 12 What is the relationship between “authority” (v.8) and “faith” (v.9)?
How can your faith be expressed and/or tested in your response to authority?

APPLICATION

Our attitude is often tested in environments where we are “under authority” (e.g. a boss at work, a parent’s expectations). What is one area in which you can improve your attitude? Be specific.

How does the attitude of Jesus motivate you to have a consistently thankful attitude?

When circumstances are genuinely bad, how will you counter the tendency to have a bad attitude?

MEMORY VERSE

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus.

Philippians 2.5 (NIV 1984)

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Scriptures to read and reflect on:

Hebrews 12:1-4

James 1:2

1 Corinthians 10:6-11 (cross reference Matthew 20:11 for similar use of the word “grumbling”)

Proverbs 3:5-6

Recommended Reading

The Purpose Driven Life by Rick Warren

Don’t Waste Your Life by John Piper

Confessions of a Christian Hedonist by John Piper

When the Game is Over, it all Goes Back in the Box by John Ortberg

Helpful websites

www.thegospelcoalition.org

www.allaboutworship.com.

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Brett Hilliard is originally from Texas in the US, and has lived in HK for 10 years. He's got four kids, two dogs, and one wife, all of whom bring him great joy.



SESSION 2 / RISE UP!

INTRODUCTION

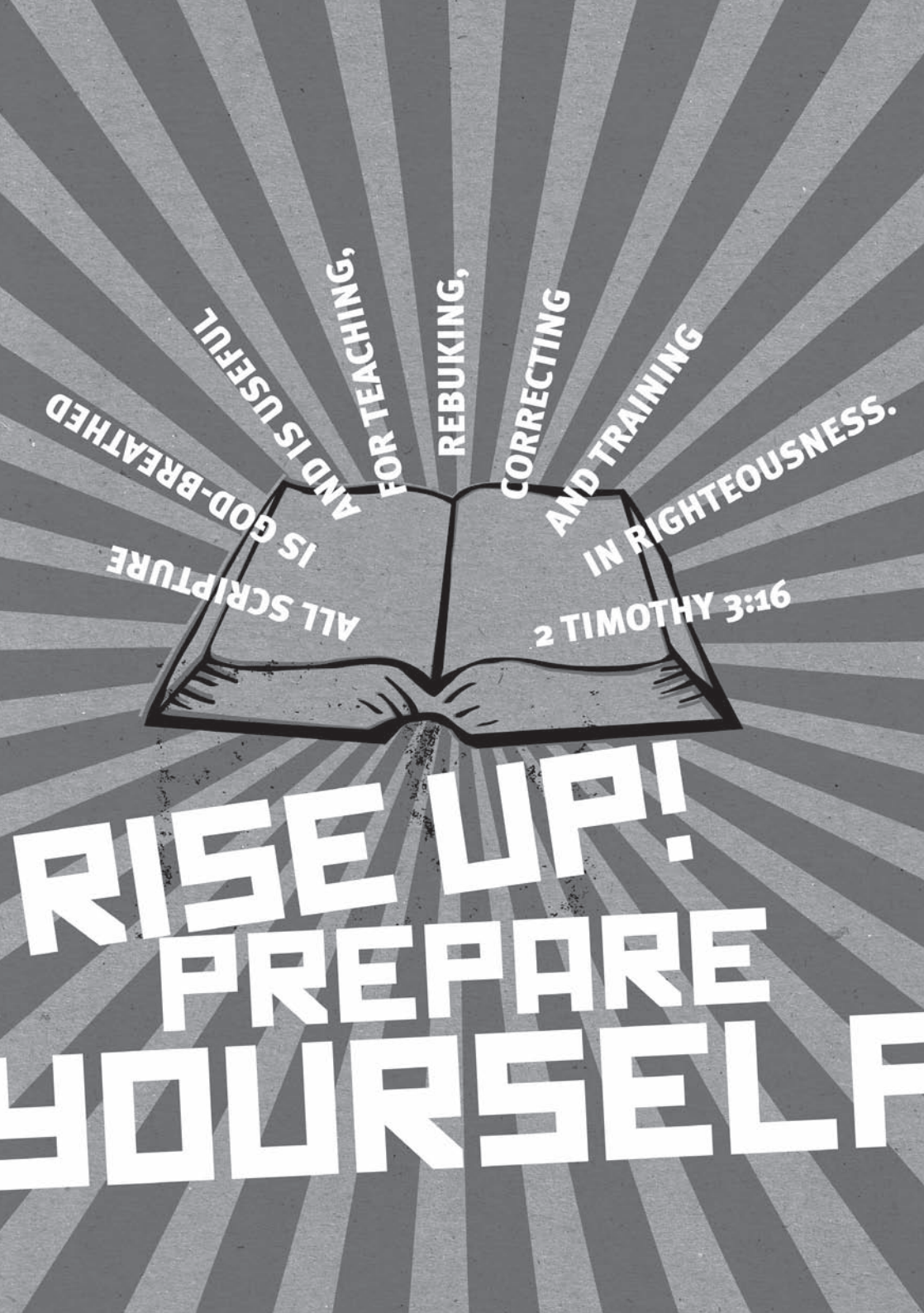
At Island ECC, we believe that the Bible is our ultimate authority on what we believe and how we live. We believe that the Bible is not just information, but revelation about God Himself. We also believe that the Bible is totally practical and relevant to our daily lives. This is why our pastors spend enormous amounts of time explaining the Bible and relate it to our daily living. We also want our care group studies to be relevant to our lives.

For most Christians, the teaching of God's Word comes from two main sources – sermons from Sunday services and our own personal study of the Bible. In either case, God's desire is that we are immersed in His Word in such a way that our hearts and behaviour are transformed.

WARM UP DISCUSSION

What is your favourite Bible verse? Why is it so meaningful to you?

Can you share an experience in which the Bible was so convincing to you that you felt God was answering your prayer or showing you the right direction to go?



KEY STUDY

Listen to what the Bible says about itself:

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

2 Timothy 3:16-17

1 What are the four functions of the Bible and what does each function mean?

Function	Meaning
a.	
b.	
c.	
d.	

2 Do you think that the above four functions are just “behaviour modifications”? Compare with what King David says in the Psalms,

Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.
Psalm 51:10

Principle of Inside-Out:

The Bible informs our hearts in such a way that a change of heart leads to a change of behaviour.

3 Have you heard of the following claim? Do you agree with the logic?

The most important thing is that I believe. God is in my heart and that's enough. It's a personal faith. I don't need to display high morals or prove any "good works".

Read the following teaching from James 2:14-19:

¹⁴ *What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them?* ¹⁵ *Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food.* ¹⁶ *If 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?* ¹⁷ *In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.*

¹⁸ *But someone will say, "You have faith; I have deeds."*

Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds.

¹⁹ *You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder.*

4 What does it mean by “the demons believe”? What is the difference between “the demons believe” and the Christian understanding of believing in God?

Teaching Point: The Greek word for “faith” (or the verb form “to believe”) is “pistis”. It has a double meaning. It can mean either “faith” or “faithfulness” or both. It is like the two sides of a coin. If a husband claims to love his wife but never shows it in word and action, we will doubt his claim. In a similar way, a genuine “faith” in God will naturally lead to our “faithfulness” to Him. As the introduction to this study series says, “God doesn’t simply build your faith. He expects you to exert effort. He has designed growth principles so that growth occurs through effort.”

5 What is the difference between “intellectual consent about Jesus” and “having faith in Jesus”?

Finally, let's see what Jesus has to say. After a long teaching, Jesus concludes his Sermon on the Mount (Matthew chapters 5-7) by telling the following parable:

The Wise and Foolish Builders

²⁴ "Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. ²⁵ The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock.

²⁶ But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. ²⁷ The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash."

Matthew 7:24-27

6 Why do you think Jesus concludes his long sermon with this parable? What is Jesus' intention?

7 What is the relationship between God's word and surviving the storm?

8 Can you share an incident in your life, in which your decision to apply God's word helped you to avoid a storm or navigate through a storm in an unexpected way?

APPLICATION

How does God speak to you today? Is there any assumption about the Christian life that you are being challenged about today?

Is there any particular area of your life that you feel God wants you to change by applying His word?

Do you have a habit/plan of studying God's word?

MEMORY VERSE

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness.

2 Timothy 3:16-17

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Daily Devotion/Quiet Time: Reading a small portion of the Bible daily has been a spiritual practice that many Christians find helpful. It is not difficult at all. Here is a suggestion of what you can do:

- Set aside 15-30 minutes each day
- Find a quiet place
- Read 1 chapter/session of the Bible, and ask yourself: What is the main idea of this passage? What does this passage teach me about God and myself? Is there anything that I need to do?
- Spend some time praying

A useful tool: Our Daily Bread (www.odb.org)

Read through the Bible in one year: You can use the One Year Bible (www.oneyearbibleonline.com), or download any one year reading plan.

Recommended Reading:

The Divine Mentor by Wayne Cordeiro

Living by the Book by Howard and William Hendricks

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Albert Ng dreams of travelling Europe with his wife Elisa and spending time studying in old universities (but without any homework assignments)! This will take a miracle to materialize, as they are both busy enjoying their two children at home.

RISE UP! CONFORM NO MORE

DO NOT CONFORM TO
THE PATTERN OF
THIS WORLD,
BUT
BE TRANSFORMED
BY THE RENEWING
OF YOUR MIND.

THEN YOU WILL BE
ABLE TO TEST
AND APPROVE
WHAT GOD'S
WILL IS –
HIS GOOD,
PLEASING AND
PERFECT WILL.

ROMANS 12:2

SESSION 3 / RISE UP!

INTRODUCTION

Charles Noble once said, “First we make our habits, then our habits make us.” We are the product of our habits. That is why forming the right kind of habits is so important to our personal well being.

But why is a habit so powerful? Because habits are those things we do on autopilot – things we do without even thinking, things we do subconsciously. Habits are behaviours that are wired into our neural pathways. This is why good habits take effort to develop, and bad habits are hard to break. Good habits develop in us good skills with good benefits, and vice versa. Just think of spending time exercising and practicing the piano.

What is true of our daily lives is also true about our spiritual life. Developing good spiritual habits is extremely important for us, and they shape us in ways that bring us long term or even eternal benefits.

In today's study, we will examine three habits that Jesus talks about. These three things are so basic to our faith that they are historically held to be axiomatic, meaning that we assume without proof. We will examine what goes into habit formation and how we can strive for good habits, those that are healthy, productive and spiritual.

WARM UP DISCUSSION

Share some of your good habits and bad habits.

Is there a good habit you are currently working on?



KEY STUDY

Giving to the Needy

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.*

Prayer

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.* ⁸ *Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.*

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.* ¹⁴ *For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.* ¹⁵ *But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.*

Fasting

¹⁶ *When you fast, do not look sombre as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full.* ¹⁷ *But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face,* ¹⁸ *so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.*

Matthew 6:1-18

- 1 What are the three spiritual practices (or habits) that Jesus mentioned in this passage?
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
 - c. _____

Notice how Jesus introduces each habit: Giving is introduced with “when you give” (18:2), prayer is introduced with “when you pray” (18:5) and fasting with “when you fast” (18:16).

- 2 Why do you think Jesus did not try to motivate His audience to engage in these habits but seems to assume that they were doing them?

The Habit of Generous Giving

Read the following Bible passages:

But remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth ... Deuteronomy 8:18

... remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: “It is more blessed to give than to receive.” Acts 20:35

“Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this,” says the LORD Almighty, “and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it.” Malachi 3:10

- 3 What does the word “tithe” mean (Malachi 3:10)?

- 4 What are the motivations for forming a habit of generous giving?

- 5 Why is giving more “blessed” than receiving?

The Habit of Praying to God

Read the following Bible passages:

Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know.

Jeremiah 33:3

Come near to God and he will come near to you. James 4:8

Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

- 6 What are the motivations for praying to God?
- 7 Why is praying important to us?
- 8 Share an experience in which your prayer was answered (or unanswered) and how it benefitted your life?
- 9 What is the best time for you to pray and what do you usually pray for?

Teaching point: Praying the ACTS way. Try to pray by using the following steps in your prayer. This will help you focus on God rather than giving God a long grocery list.

- Adoration** Spend time praising God, use some psalms to help you focus on how great God is.
- Confession** Confess to God whatever sins you are aware of and ask God to reveal to you those sins that you may not be aware of.
- Thanksgiving** Spend time thanking God for what you have, how He has guided you and helped you, or how He has answered your prayers.
- Supplication** Finally, present to God something that is close to your heart and where you need God to act. Pray not just for yourself, but also for others.

The Habit of Fasting

Read the following Bible passages:

Ezra 8:21-23 / Ezra the priest fasted for God's protection as he served in God's temple.

1 Kings 19:8 / The prophet Elijah fasted for 40 days before he heard God's voice again.

Luke 4:14 / Jesus fasted before He began His earthly ministry.

Acts 13:1-3 / The church leaders fasted before God sent out Paul and Barnabas on their missionary journey.

- 10 Why do you think that people fast before they make important decisions?
- 11 What is the benefit of fasting?
- 12 Share a fasting experience and how it affected you?

Teaching Point: Fasting is not a hunger strike. Neither is it "skipping a meal." If you want to start learning to fast, begin by picking a lunch or dinner. Spend 30 minutes or so in a quiet place. You can spend some time singing worship songs, reading the Bible, and praying. This is a sacred time between you and God. Don't expect a miracle! It takes time for you to "enjoy" fasting and learning how to come close to God.

APPLICATION

How are you doing in these foundational areas of spiritual habits? Which habit are you doing better? Which habit do you want to work on?

Do you think there is a relationship between habit formation and personal discipline? How? Think of a habit that you want to develop (or are developing) and consider finding an accountability partner or group to help you maintain discipline as you develop that habit.

What do you think is the underlying principle of this idiom: "One minute performance in public requires ten years practice in private"?

MEMORY VERSE

Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is — his good, pleasing and perfect will.

Romans 12:2

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Scriptures to read and reflect on:

Romans 12:1-2

1 Corinthians 6:19-20

Philippians 4:8-9

Colossians 3:1-11

James 1:22-25; 2:14-19

2 Peter 4:1-11

Recommended Reading

Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home by Richard J. Foster

The Hole in our Gospel: What Does God Expect of Us? by Richard Stearns

Fasting Journal: Your Personal 21-Day Guide to a Successful Fast by Jentezen Franklin

The Spirit of Discipline by Dallas Willard

Celebration of Discipline by Richard Foster

Helpful Website

www.excellenceingiving.com

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Sherman Chau and his family recently moved back to Hong Kong after serving for nine years in Hanoi, Vietnam. He likes swimming, movies and the occasional bowl of pho.



**LET US THEREFORE MAKE EVERY EFFORT
TO DO WHAT LEADS TO PEACE AND
TO MUTUAL EDIFICATION.**

ROMANS 14:19

RISE UP!

**GIVE PEACE
A CHANCE**

SESSION 4 / RISE UP!

INTRODUCTION

Relationships are woven into the fabric of life. They are all about us – in family, at work, with friends, at church, where we live, where we shop, where we eat, in the community that we live in, and in the society at large. These multiple relationships impact us to various degrees – ranging from deeply meaningful ones with lasting value, to causal and almost unnoticed ones. Relationships are powerful and influential and they can work for either good or bad. The world in which we live gives us all kinds of messages on what relationships look like, both healthy ones and unhealthy ones. Books, movies, blogs, songs, Facebook, etc. all give out images of how we relate or should relate to each other. God intends for our relationships to be positive and can use them to build-up our faith and character. In this session we will look at ways we can strengthen our relationships and keep them in line with God's established intentions.

WARM UP DISCUSSION

What movies, songs, TV shows, sayings, ads, blogs come to mind that influence our view of human relationships?

Share one special relationship you have that has been helpful at a crucial time in your life. Is there an occasion you can recall when God brought someone into your life to assist you in your maturity or faith?

What relationship has been the most influential in shaping your opinions, thoughts, and beliefs?

KEY STUDY

¹² Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. ¹³ Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. ¹⁴ And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

Colossians 3:12-14

- 9 The verses above are filled with valuable insights for us today on how to live out peaceful and fulfilling relationships with those around us. What words or aspects of this short passage speak most directly to you right now in your life?

Just prior to this passage, Paul exhorted readers to “put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.” Here he lists, in condensed form, solid ways to nurture and mature our new self in Christ. Paul is speaking directly to relationships within the fellowship of Christ's body but these can be applicable to any of our relationships. We will look at four divisions of this beneficial material: identity, virtues, forgiveness and love.

Colossians 3:12a speaks of the identity that forms the foundation of our various relationships and reminds us of three great facts about our identity in Christ: we are chosen by God, we are set apart by and for God (we are holy), and we are loved by God.

- 2 Which one of these three images means the most to you personally?
- 3 As those chosen and loved by God, we are still responsible to choose our behaviour. What are some ethical responsibilities that Christians have for relating to others?

In John 14:16, Jesus states “I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counsellor to be with you forever – the Spirit of truth.” The word counsellor in the Greek is “paraclete,” which means “one who stands alongside.” Integral to our new identity in Christ is the indwelling of the Spirit, who walks alongside us, available all the time.

- 4 How does the fact that God's Holy Spirit is with us change our identity?

Colossians 3:12b lists five virtues that broadly cover Christian behaviour. These are cast as clothing that we are to put on.

- 5 What are the five behaviours that Christians are to wear like clothing? Why must these be in the wardrobe of a fully devoted follower of Christ?
- 6 Share in the group which one of these attitudes/behaviours you have had the most difficulty wearing in your relationships.
- 7 Pick one of these garments and discuss specific ways that we can more consistently wear it?

The teaching of Colossians does not ask us to put on new clothes over the old ones. Instead, the old must be stripped off and tossed aside. Read Colossians 3:7-9. We need more than a few minor adjustments in order to follow Christ in our relationships.

- 8 When you came to Christ which of the following best describes what was needed for your new inner “house”? (1) interior design work to rejuvenate, (2) remodelling of some rooms in serious ways, (3) major renovations of the whole house, or (4) tearing it down to its foundation and starting over.

Teaching Point: Compassion refers to tenderness and heartfelt sympathy toward those who suffer; kindness combines the ideas of goodness and kindness with a gracious sensitivity to others; humility denotes a humble disposition and allows service to others without caring if it is noticed; gentleness is the opposite of arrogance and includes a willingness to make allowances and concessions for the sake of others, and patience is literally “longsuffering” and embodies self-restraint in the midst of ill treatment and a willingness to endure wrongs.

Colossians 3:13 indicates that these virtues lead to the two actions of bearing with and forgiving one another. Christians, like everyone, are far from perfect and new life is not automatic. It takes effort. We are to bear with those whose unpleasant ways or faults can be irritating, and we are also to forgive those whom we have grievances against. Paul intensifies the need for these by framing them in light of the fact of Christ’s personal forgiveness!

- 9 Why is it difficult to bear with some people? What does the story of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:25-37 teach about bearing with people?
- 10 Why are holding grievances against others detrimental to relationships and community?
- 11 Discuss this statement: *There is a difference between having a spirit/attitude of forgiveness and forgiving a specific wrongdoing.*

Teaching Point: The Greek word that is translated one another is a reciprocal pronoun, which means that both parties will experience the action being done. If the action is positive, such as love, support, and comfort, both parties benefit. In the case of negative actions, such as speaking evil and grumbling, both parties lose. Some of the passages in the New Testament that contain this word include Romans 12:10, 14:13, 14:19, 15:7, 15:14; 1 Corinthians 12:25; Galatians 5:13, 5:15, 6:2; Ephesians 4:2, 4:32, 5:21; Philippians 2:3; Colossians 3:9; Hebrews 3:13, 10:24; James 4:11, 5:9, 5:16; 1 Peter 3:8, 4:9; and 1 John 3:11, 4:7, 4:11.

Colossians 3:14 places love at the centre as the virtue that binds relationships into unity. As those who are loved by God (v.12), we are called to love others. This love leads to what in the original Greek is worded as “the bond of perfection.” Love maintains the balance of all other virtues as it brings these together to form perfection. Love also bonds all our relationships together in genuine community.

- 12 In what ways does love bind all the other Christian virtues together?
- 13 What do you think of this statement: *For there to be genuine love and unity in any relationship, there must be diversity?*

APPLICATION

How are you doing at “one-anothering” at home, at work, in society? Share one situation in which you could do better. (Consider asking one other group member to pray for you or even hold you accountable for putting your new self into action in this relationship.)

Write out a brief personal note of forgiveness to someone (not for actual sending but just to practice). What was it like doing this simple exercise?

MEMORY VERSE

Let us make every effort to do that which leads to peace and to mutual edification.

Romans 14:19

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Scripture to read and reflect on:

Luke 10:25-37

John 15:1-17

Ephesians 5:21-6:9

1 Corinthians 7:1-40

1 Corinthians 12:12-13:13

Titus 3:1-10

1 Peter 2:13-3:17

Recommended Reading

The DNA of Relationships by Gary Smalley

Life Together: The Classic Exploration of Faith in Community by Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Helpful Website

www.focusonthefamily.com

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Rick Bates welcomed being an “empty-nester” with Jane, only to find two of their adult children returning to begin a career in HK filling their small flat with a family of five – counting “Lucy,” their French bulldog puppy.



RISE UP! DON'T WASTE YOUR LIFE

**AND WE KNOW THAT IN ALL THINGS
GOD WORKS FOR THE GOOD OF THOSE WHO LOVE HIM,
WHO HAVE BEEN CALLED ACCORDING
TO HIS PURPOSE.**

ROMANS 8:28

SESSION 5 / RISE UP!

INTRODUCTION

We all want to make the most of our life. We do not want it to waste away. Unfortunately, unforeseen circumstances intrude on our lives. It happens all the time – over and over again, troublesome and difficult situations descend upon us. Our life and time are impacted by circumstances. In addition, our faith can also be impacted by unexpected or difficult circumstances. One foundational truth of scripture is that God is with us in such times working toward something good. God, who is always with us, uses all the situations we encounter, both positive and negative, to mature us.

In our society today, we are very familiar with all kinds of sports, games and contests... and the basics of all these can teach us a lot about how to deal with what life throws at us. If we view life from this standpoint, God would be our coach – the absolute best one we could imagine! And God has given us the play book for succeeding in life – for winning the game no matter what circumstances are thrown at us. In this session we will be looking at one key passage from God's playbook (the Bible). It gives excellent coaching. If we want to succeed at the game of life, we need to (1) keep a positive perspective, (2) practise discipline, (3) be proactive in doing what is helpful (play offense), and (4) defend against what is harmful (play defence).

WARM UP DISCUSSION

What is an example of a sport or game you have played that illustrates how we can learn from it about succeeding in life? How would God be a good coach from this perspective?

What is a personal example of an event or circumstance – good or bad – that took a lot of time to deal with? What was one of your feelings in the midst of this? What role did God or your faith play in this situation?



KEY STUDY

⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! ⁵ Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. ⁶ Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. ⁸ Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. ⁹ Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.

¹⁰ I rejoiced greatly in the Lord that at last you renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you were concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it. ¹¹ I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. ¹² I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want.

¹³ I can do all this through Christ who gives me strength.

Philippians 4:4-13

Paul, the apostle, wrote to a group of followers in Christ who were in Philippi and faced a lot of difficult circumstances and they, like us, tended to waste some of their lives on the non-essentials. What Paul wrote in this passage above, under the inspiration of God, has great insights for us in our lives in Hong Kong.

- 1 What statement or part of this passage has been especially helpful to you in the past?
- 2 What part of this seems more difficult to understand?

This passage can be studied from a variety of perspectives. For this session, we will look to the passage for insights into winning the game of life when difficult circumstances come upon us. We will see how there are four main helps we can apply to all circumstances: keeping a positive perspective, being on the offensive, disciplining ourselves with right actions and defending against problems.

Philippians 4:4-7 gives excellent counsel on how to keep a positive perspective.

Read these verses out loud.

- 3 What are the various things these verses indicate that we can do to help us keep a positive perspective in life regardless of what situation we encounter?
- 4 What do you recall from the first session on our attitude that relates to this?
- 5 What are a few of the things in the past that you have wasted some of your life being anxious about? Why does a follower of Christ not have to be anxious about personal needs?
- 6 Why does Paul state that thanksgiving should accompany our prayers and requests to God?
- 7 Can you share an example when you have faced a difficult situation or been anxious, and through prayer, you have felt a calm and peace “beyond all understanding”?

Teaching Point: The term “gentleness” is difficult to translate in its full meaning. Words like gentle, yielding, forbearing, and kind are some of the best English words. It involves yielding one’s personal rights in order to show consideration to others – and is shown in action! “Be anxious” can refer to being overly concerned about anything, but is used most often in contexts where there is some kind of persecution (see Matthew 10:18-19 and Luke 12:11-12). The term “guard” comes from the arena of conflict and is used on many occasions to refer to the action of a military garrison just inside a city (See 2 Corinthians 11:32). “The peace” of God here is for those who are already at peace with God through justification by faith in Christ. As one commentary puts it, “peace acts as a sentry to guard the believer’s heart (a biblical symbol for the personality) and the believer’s thoughts from all anxiety and despair.”



Philippians 4:8 provides keen insight into how we need to work in advance in intentional ways to have the right kind of character in place for when the unexpected happens. To succeed in life, we need to be on the offensive all the time – building good things into our minds, hearts, and souls. Read this verse out-loud.

- 8 What statement or part of this passage has been especially helpful to you in the past?
- 9 See how many examples there are of specific things that are true, good, etc. that you as a group can list on a sheet of paper in 3 minutes. How many did you list? Share one that works best for you personally?
- 10 Most of us waste part of our life on things that are just not good for us. What keeps you from thinking of good things and spending time putting the “right stuff” in?

Teaching Point: This list of virtues that Paul asks for the church to think about is not a distinctively Christian list and could be embraced by good-thinking people in both ancient and modern times. The emphasis seems to be on the breadth of these qualities by the repetitive use of the indefinite adjective “whatever.” The more distinctive Christian ethic will come in verse 9. The virtues listed include: “true” – valid, reliable, and honest; “noble” – worthy of respect; “right” – what is upright or just; “pure” – moral purity or the more restrictive idea of chaste; “lovely” – pleasing, agreeable, or amiable; and “admirable” – praiseworthy, attractive, ringing true to the highest standards.

Philippians 4:9 indicates that the discipline of right actions is essential for healthy life – and certainly for winning at any sport! Paul here reminds the reader that they are to “put into practice” biblical teaching. Read this verse out-loud.

- 11 Think of a person who has passed on great teachings to you. Can you share an example of something you learned from a godly person that you have been able to put into practice?
- 12 Think about any specific teachings from the Bible that you may be having difficulty putting into practice in your personal life, family, work, or friendship. Can you share some aspect of Christian living you would like prayer for in practising better?

Philippians 4:11-13 gives an excellent way to not let difficult circumstances harm our stability or character. Paul shares how he has been able to defend against constant demands and problems. Paul learned how to be content in all situations, good and bad. Read verses 11-12 out-loud.

- 13 What do you know about Paul's life that shows how he learned to be content? (See 2 Corinthian 11:23-28)
- 14 Do you have any insights into how to be content and not distracted in your life that you can share with the group?



Romans 5:3-5 adds a helpful teaching that can help us survive during difficult circumstances. Read this out-loud: "Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us."

- 15 We never ask for difficulties, yet they can be a primary way through which God strengthens our life. Discuss your insights into the process that Romans 5:3-5 indicates God has embedded in human life.
- 16 If you are in the midst of any kind of suffering, share this briefly with the group and let the group pray for you.
- 17 Verse 13 states: "I can do all this through Christ who gives me strength." How have you found this to be true in your life?

APPLICATION

How do you get the right kind of "stuff" into your character and keep bad stuff out? How does this relate to the kinds of movies we see, the books we read, the internet, what items we buy, family time, etc.?

What is in place in your life (both inside you and around you) to help when difficult circumstances descend?

MEMORY VERSE

We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

Romans 8:28

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Scriptures to read and reflect on:

Romans 8: 28-39

Psalm 121

Matthew 17:14-21

Jeremiah 15:15-21

2 Corinthians 1:3-10

2 Timothy 1:7-12

1 Peter 5:6-11

Recommended Reading

The Practice of the Presence of God by Brother Lawrence

Where Is God When It Hurts? by Philip Yancey

Helpful Website

Setting Captives Free

www.settingcaptivesfree.com

Purposeful Singleness

www.singleness.org

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Rick Bates welcomed being an "empty-nester" with Jane, only to find two of their adult children returning to begin a career in HK filling their small flat with a family of five – counting "Lucy," their French bulldog puppy.



SESSION 6 / RISE UP!

**FOR
EVEN THE
SON OF
MAN DID
NOT COME
TO BE
SERVED,
BUT TO
SERVE,
AND TO
GIVE
HIS LIFE
AS A
RANSOM
FOR MANY.**

**MARK
10:45**

**RISE UP!
SERVE
YOUR
GOD**

INTRODUCTION

Being a part of a biblical community (like where you are right now) involves work. Someone, maybe everyone, has to serve. Think about it. Someone has to work to organise everyone, send emails, prepare refreshments, open up a home, set up chairs and prepare a lesson. A lot of times, it's just a few people putting on an event for many.

There is something called the 20/80 rule that has been adapted to churches. This means that about 20% of people in a typical church do about 80% of the work. This isn't an "official" number, of course, but it is usually pretty accurate. There are some people who are able to serve sometimes and at other times are not able. Generally the number of committed volunteers for the church is well below 50%. This isn't to add guilt to anyone. But could we imagine what it would be like if 100% of the church were serving in some way? WOW!

In almost all aspects of life, we have to learn how to work as a team. It could be a committee, a company, a sports team, an orchestra, a choir, a family, etc. There are many instances where we need to use the gifts that God has given for the good of the team – to help serve each other. A church is no different. A church is a community that is full of people with God-given gifts and abilities that could be used to serve each other and the mission of the church.

WARM UP DISCUSSION

Have you volunteered recently (in any form, at church or elsewhere)? If so, what was that experience like for you?

What was your favourite volunteering experience? Least favourite?

Can you think of a time where you were using your gifts together with a group of people?



KEY STUDY

⁸ Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. ⁹ Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. 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.

1 Peter 4:8-11

- 1 Why would Peter open this passage by imploring us to love each other? What kind of love is this? See 2 Peter 1:5-7 and 1 Corinthians 13. Paul is writing this chapter in the same context of gifts and serving.
- 2 Notice the juxtaposition of hospitality and grumbling in verse 9. Is it possible to be hospitable and grumble at the same time? Have you ever been a grumpy host? See Luke 10:38-42
- 3 What gifts do you feel that God has given you? Do you use these gifts?
- 4 Looking at verse 11, what is the purpose in using our gifts? Do we ever step in front of God to get the glory?

Teaching Point: When hiring an employee, a good boss would have that young employee get exposure to every aspect of the company. So, during training, the new employee would serve in different areas that aren't necessarily in his job description, just so he can understand the company inside and out. This experience, in turn, will help that employee to know that nothing he is doing is "beneath him." As he moves up and becomes a boss himself, he would appreciate the job that he is hiring for.

We serve a God who is not asking us to do anything He wouldn't do himself. We read in Philippians 2:5-7:

⁵ In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: ⁶ Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; ⁷ rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.

Jesus did not boast of His equality with God and think of us any lower than Himself. He humbled Himself and "made himself nothing" and became a servant.

If our Creator, our Saviour and our God is willing to serve us, shouldn't we be just as willing to serve Him? Shouldn't we follow the example of Christ and serve each other and His church?

APPLICATION

What do you feel passionate about? What has God laid on your heart? Take these things and use them to guide you in serving His people.

Do you know your gifts? Take the Spiritual Gifts Assessment on our website: www.islandecc.hk/connect-grow/spiritual-gifts-assessment

MEMORY VERSE

For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

Mark 10:45



FOR FURTHER STUDY

Recommended Reading

Only You Can be You by Erik Rees

Change Agent (Engaging your passion to be the one who makes a difference) by Os Hillman

Stop Dating the Church by Joshua Harris

The best way to start serving is – to start serving!

Here are some examples of many ministry opportunities available for you:

- Usher, Offering Stewards (we need a lot of them)
- Barrister at the Coffee Bar
- Children's Ministries as a teacher or helper
- Youth Ministries as a volunteer

Go on a mission trip

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Tim LaTour has been on staff at Island ECC for over seven years and is proud to call Hong Kong home! He and his wife, Cindy, have three wonderful children who keep them busy at all times: Lillian, Violette and Nalin.

