



ST PAUL'S CASTLE HILL

VISION SERIES

OCTOBER 2024

LEADER'S NOTES

small groups

LIFE TOGETHER

“But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ - the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith.”

PHILIPPIANS 3:7-9

LEADER'S NOTES FOR THESE STUDIES

This Vision Series is a topical exploration of three themes - **'Prepare, Press On, and Plan'** - all designed to get the people of St Paul's to be thinking into 2025 and what we might do together as a church.

The studies therefore are not an in depth exploration of the Bible passages noted, but rather are designed to facilitate discussion on those three themes, out of those passages.

As a group leader, please feel free to take the group to other passages that you think would be relevant to the themes, or spend more time on one of the aspects of the study than others.

Use the discussion starter questions to open up the theme before you dive into the passage.

Some prayer points have been supplied at the end of each study which flow from the passage - please use these in addition to your normal prayer options in your group life.

STUDY ONE

PREPARE - HEARTS AND MINDS

DISCUSSION STARTERS

What are 1 or 2 things you think about when making plans for the future?

What sort of things prevent us from planning into the future?

READ ECCLESIASTES 3:1-14

Understanding Seasons

1. Ecclesiastes 3:1 states, "For everything there is a season." What specific seasons of life have you experienced, and how did you discern what God was doing in those times?

Ask the group to share their experiences.

2. How can understanding the concept of seasons help you navigate your current circumstances?

'Seasons' help us to recognise that what we are experiencing now is not permanent, which is helpful when things are hard, and sobering when things are going well. Recognising seasons also helps us to relate to others well - God might have brought us into a good season, so we can help others who aren't.

3. What season do you think St Paul's Castle Hill might be in at the moment, and why?

Ask the group to share their thoughts.

Appreciating God's Timing

4. In verses 2-8, the author lists various times for different activities. How does this passage challenge your perspective on timing in your life?

Life is not one mode all the time.

5. In what ways can you cultivate patience and trust in God's timing during this current season?

Recognise the season that you are in, and ask God to grant you what you need for this season.

Recognising God's Purpose

6. Verse 11 emphasises that God has made everything beautiful in its time. Reflect on a time when you struggled to see beauty or purpose in your circumstances. How did that perspective shift, and what role did your faith play in that transformation?

Ask the group to share their experiences.

Living with Eternity in Mind

7. Ecclesiastes 3:14 suggests that God's work endures forever. How does this understanding influence the way you approach your daily life and decisions?

What can we do that contributes to the work of God that lasts forever, and place appropriate value on that, and keep other things in perspective.

8. In what practical ways can you seek to align your personal actions with God's eternal purposes during this season?

Get the group to think through implications for their own lives.

9. How can you play your part in the next season that God has for St Paul's in bringing God's Light in Christ to all the world?

Ask the group to think about their role in St Paul's as we head into 2025 - you could ask them about the 'Every Member Connected' diagram that was launched at the Vision Nights this year, and which is within these studies. You can find the diagram on the back cover of these studies.

PRAYER POINTS

Give thanks for:

- God's sustaining of St Paul's throughout a difficult season
- God's provision of people to care for and disciple
- God's provision of resources and leadership for the future

Pray for:

- The many many many people around St Paul's who do not yet know Jesus, and our part in reaching them
- Wisdom in planning for the future with the resources God has placed in our hands
- God's hand over any and all planning for the next season, that it would only be about bringing glory to His name

STUDY TWO

PRESS ON - FOR THE PRIZE

DISCUSSION STARTERS

What are you aiming to do with your life?

If you were given the chance to look back over your life, what would 'success' look like?

READ PHILIPPIANS 3:7-16

Valuing the Prize

1. In Philippians 3:7-8, Paul speaks about counting everything as loss compared to knowing Christ. What does it mean for you to consider your personal ambitions and achievements as loss to know Christ and to make him known to others?

Ask the group to share. In Paul's case, he has achieved very high qualifications, that most would have regarded highly, and would have thought would have held him in good stead with God- but he realised they were nothing compared to Christ's righteousness given to him as a gift. None of our human achievements are worth much compared to Christ's surpassing glory, and his status bestowed on us as a gift, regardless of our human efforts.

2. How can this perspective shape your priorities and actions?

Explore the implications of the previous question in practical terms with your group members.

Pressing Forward

3. In verses 13–14, Paul emphasises forgetting what lies behind and straining toward what is ahead. What are some distractions or past failures that might hold you back from fully living for Christ in this world, and being a light to others for Christ?

Ask the group to share.

4. How can you practically apply Paul's encouragement to press forward in your life?

Get the group to think through application.

Living as a Witness

5. Philippians 3:15–16 calls believers to live in a way that reflects maturity in Christ. How can your daily actions and choices serve as a witness to those who do not yet know Christ?

Ask the group to share.

6. What specific steps can you take to demonstrate your commitment to the mission of reaching others?

Get the group to think through application.

The Role of Community

7. Reflecting on the collective mission, how does being part of a Christian community support you in pressing forward to live in the hope and joy of Christ, and to reach the lost?

Ask the group to think about how church can be an encouragement to Christian living if you engage with your brothers and sisters in Christ.

8. In what ways can we work together with other brothers and sisters in Christ to enhance our collective efforts in sharing the gospel and encouraging one another in this mission?

Think through some practical strategies - how can you engage with things that are already planned for 2025 to reach the lost? There's nothing like engaging others' with Christ to know that you are alive in Him and walking right in the centre of his desires for this world.

PRAYER POINTS

Give thanks for:

- Life and hope and joy in Christ!
- The surpassing value of what we have in Christ as compared with any earthly achievements we might want to hold up
- The right status with God that has been secured for us by Christ's gracious sacrifice in our place

Pray for:

- A right perspective on the things of this world and the things to come
- Eyes to see the lost around us, and boldness and kindness enough to speak of life in Christ to them
- A movement of God's Spirit on the people of St Paul's to be a genuine light in the darkness and shelter in the storm in Christ

STUDY THREE

PLAN - UNDER GOD'S WILL

DISCUSSION STARTERS

How do you go about planning for the future, whether it is a small event, or a larger timeframe?

Share a time when your best laid plans were de-railed, and what you might have learned from this experience.

READ JAMES 4:7-17

Submitting to God

1. James 4:7 begins with the call to submit to God. What does it mean to truly submit your plans and desires to God in your life?

It means His will, not mine - his priorities, not mine - it means listening to His word and submitting to it, more than my own feelings or desires. Explore with your group how we tend to priorities 'what I feel like doing', instead of submitting to God wants us to be doing, regardless of whether that aligns with our (usually world) feelings or not - turning up to church or small group is a great example.

2. How does this correspond with 'fleeing from the devil', and what is the promise here when we do?

The last thing the devil wants any Christian doing is living a godly life, experiencing the joy and freedom of salvation in relationship with others. When we submit to God, we actually resist the devil - and the promise is that he will flee.

3. What should submitting to God and fleeing from the devil look like in your life, and in our life together as the people of St Paul's?

Get the group to think through application.

The Role of Humility

4. In verses 10-11, James emphasizes the importance of humility before God and others. How can humility influence your prayer life and the way you seek God's guidance?

Prayer is the essence of humility, because in it we recognise there is one greater than us, and that we are not the centre of the universe, and we are not in control. Humility leads to prayer, and prayer helps us to be humble.

5. Can you share an experience where humility led to a clearer understanding of God's will for you?

Ask the group to share.

Planning with Prayer

6. Verses 13-15 highlight the tendency to make plans without considering God's will. How can you make prayer the foundation of your planning process?

Get the group to think through application.

7. What practical steps can we as a church take to ensure that our goals and aspirations align with God's purposes?

Get the group to think through application on a church wide level.

Recognising the Gift of Today

8. James 4:14 reminds us that life is a mist, here for a little while. How does this perspective affect your priorities and your dependence on God?

Life is short, eternity is long, God is in control, each day is a gift not to be taken for granted.

9. In what ways can you cultivate a greater sense of urgency and intentionality in your spiritual life and in reaching out to others?

Get the group to think through application.

PRAYER POINTS

Give thanks for:

- Our God who knows all our tomorrows and has us in his hands
- God's trustworthiness in our lived uncertainty of each next moment
- The promise that the evil one is defeated and will flee from us if we resist him

Pray for:

- A right perspective on the fleeting nature of our life, and wisdom to use it wisely for God's glory
- Humility in making our plans, individually and as a church, that we would submit to God's Word and his timing
- A prayerful dependant heart in all that we do

EVERY MEMBER CONNECTED

