

WE ARE A CHURCH ON LOCAL AND GLOBAL MISSION

God of GOODNESS

MISSIONS SERIES

LEADERS NOTES

small
groups
LIFE TOGETHER

A NOTE TO LEADERS

We are always thankful for you and the incredibly important ministry you do! Small Groups are central and vital to who we are as a church and how we live out God's calling on each of our lives.

In Small Groups we have the opportunity to open and explore God's word together, to serve and care for each other in prayer and practice, and to live out gospel shaped community.

Doing all this together means that you understand your group and its members in a profound and personal way. Accordingly, we want you to see the below studies as a starting point not a finished product. Please feel encouraged to edit the questions, tailor them to your group and approach each week in the way you believe will serve your members. Each group will have a slightly different path to reaching the same main teaching point.

If at any point you would like support or prayer, please feel free to contact your Small Group Coach. Alternatively, if you need support from the staff team contact Pat Jones for pastoral support and Emma Wynn-Jones for Small Group coordination and administration, we will be happy to serve however we can.

THE HEART OF SMALL GROUPS

St Paul's Castle Hill has three Key Ministry areas:

- Discipleship and Training
- Care and Integration
- Mission and Evangelism

Our vision is that every Small Group would be engaged in these three areas.

Every Small Group is engaged in **discipleship** as we open and apply the Word each week, and in **care** as we pray together and look after the needs of others in our group and community.

Our hope is that every small group would also be engaged in **mission**, spurring one another on in local mission and connecting with one of our link missionaries.

We shared with you at our Recharge Supper in February, our desire to see every small group "adopt" one of our mission partners.

Unsure what that looks like?

Read the next page, or email Cathy Gravitis at cathy.gravitis@stpauls.church

We currently have 5 mission partners to choose from – local, regional, and international. Visit stpauls.church/missions to see some info and an introductory video on each of their ministries which might help you to decide which one might be a good fit for your small group

WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR MY GROUP TO ADOPT A MISSION PARTNER?

COMMITTED TO:

1. Ongoing Prayer Support

PREFERRABLE BUT NOT ESSENTIAL:

2. **Financial Support:** Beware, your faithful prayer support will often lead to financial support as prompted by the Holy Spirit!

3. **Ongoing Communication** with the link missionary
Eg. Emails, video calls, birthday cards and letters etc

OPTIONAL

4. **Practical support**

Eg Assist with family needs during home assignment, sending surprise care packages.

5. **Mission awareness trips.**

Why should our small group/DTeam adopt a missionary?

1. **It's good for you!**

- Feeds life and vitality into your relationship with God and the world. It encourages our faith and motivates us evangelistically to be a part of something greater than us – the building of God's Kingdom.
- Consider it another spiritual discipline. No spiritual discipline is easy. They require intentionality and sacrifice, but the spiritual dividends make it worth it.

2. **Essential for them!**

- Fights against the "out of mind, out of sight" phenomenon that often happens the longer our link missionary is away overseas or not visiting us at SPCH.
- Our mission partners are totally reliant on the prayers of God's people. Our prayers sustain them spiritually, physically, and emotionally as they often serve as "front-line soldiers" in hostile spiritual environments.
- Our prayers are key to the "unlocking" of the hearts of individuals to the truth of the gospel, by the power of the Holy Spirit (Eph 1:18)

HOW LONG IS THIS COMMITMENT FOR?

Flexible! Minimum – 12 months, with a leaning towards 2 + years so as adequate time is given to the building of a personal relationship with your link missionary.

TERM TWO SCHEDULE

Sunday Apr 19th - Anglicare Sunday

God of Goodness #1 - Local Mission

What's on this week?

Apr 19th - The Commons

Apr 21st - Taste and See Course

Apr 24th - Crossfire starts back

April 25th - ANZAC Day

Sunday Apr 26th - IJM Freedom Sunday

God of Goodness #2 - IJM

What's on this week?

Apr 28th - Taste and See Course

Apr 29th - Jesus Club

May 2nd - Recharge Breakfast

Sunday May 3rd - Compassion Sunday

God of Goodness #3 - Compassion

What's on this week?

May 5th - Taste and See Course

May 5th - BCA Connect Event

May 5th - Seniors Friendship Lunch

May 6th - Team Night

WHAT ELSE IS COMING UP IN MAY?

May 11th - Men's Night

May 17th - Newcomers Lunch

May 17th - The Commons

May 20th - Prayer Night

May 23rd - Big Play Out

May 26th - Prime Time

May 30th - Legacy Partners Breakfast

May 30th - Help at Home

May 31st - Jesus Club Church

SERIES INTRODUCTION

God is good. His goodness is seen in the special way he has revealed himself to us in Jesus, sending him as our Saviour. He is also good in his general revelation – his rain falls on the righteous and the unrighteous. Yet many in our world, because of their circumstances, geography, or birthplace, do not experience much of the joy of his blessings and mercies.

God's people have a responsibility and a calling to bring God's blessings to all people – both in the ordinary good of everyday life, and in the life-giving message of the gospel.

Over these three weeks, we will be encouraging every member of St Paul's to consider their place in carrying that grace into a world that needs Jesus.

In our first week, we'll focus on **local mission with a focus on Anglicare**, considering the opportunities to share God's grace with the community around us.

In our second week, **International Justice Mission (IJM)** will join us across our Sunday services, confronting us with the desperate reality of modern slavery. Together, we will consider our responsibility and our calling to bring hope into these dark places of our world.

In our third week, in response to **Compassion Sunday**, we will be reminded of the countless children living in poverty who need to encounter the goodness of God.

This three-week series is not just about awareness, but about engagement. God has graciously given us all things not for ourselves, but for the sake of the world. Our prayer is that His word would continue to transform our hearts, so that we would show the goodness of God as we serve others and share the fruit of the gospel.

GOD OF GOODNESS - STUDY #1

LOCAL MISSION

OUR SUBURBS NEED TO KNOW THE GOODNESS OF GOD

JAMES 2:14-26 & MICAH 6:6-8

Leader's Note: In a study that explores the relationship between faith and works, it's important to address any questions about how we are saved before the end- especially as you move into application. A simple line to return to is: "Works are not the basis of salvation, but the evidence of genuine saving faith."

All Leaders notes to help you guide these studies are in bold and italic to help you.

WELCOME

What stuck with you most from Sunday- either from our mission partners or from the passage we looked at?

If someone looked at your life, what evidence would they see that your faith in God is real?

There's no need to go too deep here. This question is simply to help people begin thinking about how their faith is expressed. The application section will explore this further.

EXPLORE

Brief Context:

James writes to a socially mixed Jewish Christian community scattered outside Israel, calling them to authentic faith. In today's passage, he confronts empty professions of faith, exposing the gap between what believers claim and how they live.

Read James 2:14–26

In this passage, James teaches that faith without deeds is dead. He shows this in five ways. As a group, discuss what each point means and how it shapes our understanding of the relationship between faith and deeds.

You could divide this up between the group, do it all together, or a combination of the two.

1. v15–17

Point:

Understanding:

Simply expressing hope without acting on it shows that the faith behind it is ineffective.

2. v18–19

Point:

Understanding:

Believing that God is God, on its own, is not the same as having faith in him. Saving faith is evidenced in a changed life.

3. v20–24

Point:

Understanding:

Abraham was willing to offer his son on the altar when he believed it was God's will. His faith was expressed in action—there was clear, practical evidence of his belief, and his faith was shown to be genuine.

4. v25

Point:

Understanding:

Rahab welcomed and protected the spies because she trusted in God. Her faith was expressed in action—there was clear, practical evidence of her belief, and her faith was shown to be genuine.

5. v26

Point:

Understanding:

Faith that is not expressed in action is not alive or genuine. Real faith is active and visible in everyday life.

Read Micah 6:6–8

1. What are people in verses 6–7 assuming God wants from them?

Verses 6–7 reflect the practices of the sacrificial system—offering possessions and even extreme offerings, including the idea of giving a firstborn. These are not foolish, but familiar to the audience and ultimately inadequate.

2. According to Micah 6:8, what does God actually require and how does this connect with what James is saying?

Micah calls us to act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with God. If our faith is in a God of justice and mercy, then the fruit of that faith will be a humble life marked by justice and mercy.

REFLECT

3. How does James 2 help us understand the difference between belief and faith?

Believing that God is real does not necessarily mean there is any relationship or devotion. To have faith in God is to trust him with your life and follow him in humble obedience.

4. James 2:24 may feel uncomfortable to read. How does this verse fit with salvation by grace? What role do works play?

This is an important opportunity to let people wrestle with how we are saved. Don't resolve the tension too quickly or interrupt good discussion. However, don't leave it unresolved either.

Some quotes that may help:

“Faith alone justifies, but a justifying faith is never alone.” — John Calvin

“We are saved by faith alone, but the faith that saves is never alone.” — Martin Luther

We are saved by Jesus – through his death and resurrection, our relationship with God is restored and we are made right with him. We respond by placing our faith in his saving work, this faith will be seen in our deeds. Works are not the basis of salvation, but the evidence of genuine saving faith.

5. What do you think God requires of you? How do “acting justly, loving mercy, and walking humbly with God” fit into that?

There are many ways to answer this. “To love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and to love your neighbour as yourself” provides a helpful foundation.

As we consider what this looks like in practice, we see the call to reflect God’s heart for justice and mercy – to serve those around us with humility and love, and to sacrifice for the good of others.

APPLY

6. “Faith without deeds is dead” is a confronting statement. What might your actions reveal about the state of your faith? Where does your faith need to shape how you live?

Help people reflect on where their faith is already shaping their actions. This can be encouraging, even though people may be hesitant to share. From there, gently move into areas of life that don’t yet reflect their faith.

Some areas to consider may include pursuing purity, how we use our resources, and—especially in light of this series—how we show practical love to those around us.

Encourage people not only to talk about how they support or enable others in acts of service (which is good), but also how they themselves are actively participating in serving others.

Note: As we consider how our faith shapes our everyday actions and our call to show God’s goodness to those around us, let’s finish with two questions exploring practical ways our faith can result in deeds:

7. James 2:15–16 gives the example of wishing someone well but doing nothing to meet their needs. Where do we see this in our own lives?

8. Acting justly, loving mercy, and walking humbly can feel quite abstract. What are some every day, practical ways we can live this out?

PRAY

Take time to share and pray together in response to the passage, for each other's needs, for your group's link missionary, the events below, and the weekly ministries at St Paul's.

Specific things to pray for this week:

Anglicare: With our current cost of living crisis, pray that Anglicare's community pantry vans would reach locations and people in need

Sports Chaplaincy: Pray that our chaplains to have open doors to build genuine, trustworthy relationships, providing comfort and reflecting Jesus in all situations.

WHAT'S ON THIS WEEK

Apr 19th – The Commons

Apr 21st – Taste and See Course

Apr 24th – Crossfire starts back

April 25th – ANZAC Day

GOD OF GOODNESS - STUDY #2

IJM FREEDOM SUNDAY

MODERN SLAVES NEED TO KNOW THE GOODNESS OF GOD

MATTHEW 25:31-46

WELCOME

What stuck with you most from Sunday- either from IJM or from the passage we looked at?

The content that IJM shares is incredibly important and can be quite heavy and unsettling. This week more than others, it may be beneficial to spend some time reflecting and processing what we have heard

EXPLORE

Brief Context:

This passage comes at the end of Jesus' teaching about his return and the final judgment. It forms part of his final block of teaching in Matthew's Gospel, spoken to his disciples shortly before his arrest and crucifixion

Read: Matthew 25:31-46

1. Separating sheep and goats was a normal task for a shepherd. In this passage, it is used to represent the Son of Man separating people at the final judgment.

For each group (the sheep and the goats), answer the following questions:

Who are they?

What actions are highlighted?

What judgment is given?

What is their response?

How does Jesus respond to them?

REFLECT

2. What does the response of both the sheep and the goats reveal about their thinking and assumptions?

Both the sheep and the goats reply, "Lord, when did we see you...?" This shows that neither group was aware they were serving or neglecting Jesus himself. The sheep display a natural obedience—their care for others flows from their faith, not from a desire for recognition or reward. The goats, however, reveal an unnoticed neglect. Their lack of action toward those in need exposes a faith that is not genuine.

3. Jesus identifies himself with those in need and uses this as a basis for his judgment. What does this show us about how seriously he takes the way his people treat the vulnerable?

For Jesus to identify himself with those in need shows the depth of his care for his people. He uses this as a measure of judgment because genuine faith in him will be expressed in a life that reflects his love—especially toward those in need.

4. Do we tend to treat this as just an illustration rather than a direct description of judgment? Why might we do that?

This passage uses imagery, but it functions as a description of final judgment rather than a simple illustration. Help the group sit with the weight of what Jesus is saying before trying to resolve it. Avoid getting stuck in debates about whether it is a parable—focus instead on what the passage clearly presents about judgment and how people are assessed.

As the discussion develops, gently guide the group to hold this alongside salvation by grace: the actions described are not the basis of salvation, but the evidence of genuine faith. The next question should help with that.

5. This is a confronting passage. How do we understand this description of judgment alongside salvation by grace through the work of Christ, as we spoke about last week?

Help the group hold together two clear truths: salvation is by grace through faith in Christ, and genuine faith is revealed in action. In this passage, Jesus is not describing how salvation is earned, but what marks those who belong to him. The actions listed are evidence of a real relationship with the King, not the basis for entering his kingdom.

APPLY

6. How might this passage be a comfort to you in times of need?
This passage shows how deeply Jesus cares for his people - he so closely identifies with those in need that their suffering matters personally to him.

7. The application of this passage is clear: practical love is not an optional extra for the Christian. How is your faith expressed in practical love for the vulnerable and those in need?

8. What are some ways, as individuals and as a group, you can practically live out your faith in this way?
Remember to include IJM and Compassion in this, while also encouraging people toward personal, practical ways they can serve others.

PRAY

Take time to share and pray together in response to the passage, for each other's needs, for your group's link missionary, the events below, and the weekly ministries at St Paul's.

Specific things to pray for this week:

International Justice Mission (IJM): Pray for an ongoing case in S Asia, where 150 people are trapped in slavery at a brick kiln working in brutal conditions. Pray that IJM and its partners will hear and help every victim.

Chris & Erin (CMS – SE Asia): Pray for them as they prepare for many changes; a new baby in July, return to SE Asia in Sept, and prepare to move to a new, rural location.

WHAT'S ON THIS WEEK

Apr 28th – Taste and See Course

Apr 29th – Jesus Club

May 2nd – Recharge Breakfast

GOD OF GOODNESS - STUDY #3

COMPASSION SUNDAY

CHILDREN LIVING IN POVERTY NEED TO KNOW THE GOODNESS OF GOD

1 JOHN 3:11-24 ; ISAIAH 61:1-9

WELCOME

What stuck with you most from Sunday- either from Compassion or from the passage we looked at?

It is likely that some in your group sponsor a Compassion child. It may be helpful to give them space to share their reflections on the Compassion program.

EXPLORE

Brief Context:

This passage comes from John's first letter, written to believers to reassure them of the truth of the gospel and what it looks like to belong to God. It sits within a section where John contrasts those who are God's children with those who are not.

Read: 1 John 3:11-15

1. In this passage, John contrasts hate and love. What do we learn about each, and what does their presence reveal about us?

Love is the message we have heard from the beginning. Love for one another is a sign that we have passed from death to life; where love is absent, we remain in death.

To hate is to be like Cain, who murdered his brother. Hate points to the absence of the life God gives.

Read: 1 John 3:16–18

2. John has just taught that love for one another is a sign that we have passed from death to life. He now helps us understand what that love looks like. How does this passage define love?

Love is defined by Jesus, specifically in his act of laying down his life. Love is sacrificial and generous, and as we see in verse 17, responsive to the needs of those we encounter.

Read: 1 John 3:19–24

3. What does it mean for our hearts to condemn us, and how does this affect our confidence before God?

Our hearts may hold onto guilt from past sins, even when God has forgiven us. We can continue to accuse ourselves when God has already declared us forgiven. This can undermine our confidence before God if we listen only to our feelings rather than his word.

4. What does John mean when he says “God is greater than our hearts,” and how is that meant to reassure us?

When our hearts condemn us, God’s verdict is greater and more trustworthy than our feelings. He knows us fully and has declared us forgiven in Christ. Our assurance rests not in how we feel, but in what God has said and done. This encourages us to bring our thoughts and feelings under the truth of God’s word.

5. How do belief in Jesus and love for others connect to having confidence before God?

Belief in Jesus and love for others are signs of God’s life at work in us. When our faith is expressed in love, it gives us assurance that we belong to him. This confidence does not come from our performance, but from seeing the evidence of Christ’s work in our lives.

REFLECT

6. Do you think it is fair to say that hating a brother or sister is like murder? Why or why not?

This aligns with Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount (see Matthew 5:21–22). Jesus is showing that outward actions flow from the heart. In this series we've focused on actions, but this is a reminder that Jesus' concern is deeper—he desires hearts that are transformed, from which new actions flow.

7. How does this passage's definition of love challenge and encourage you?

8. Setting your heart at rest in the presence of God, and having confidence before him, sounds deeply appealing. What do you think this means?

If we have full confidence in the work of Christ, we know that we are declared forgiven and made right with God. Accordingly, we can be in God's presence without guilt or shame hanging over us, we can be at rest in the presence of God because relationally we are at peace with Him.

9. Is this a reality in your life? Why or why not?

APPLY

10. The presence of love that reflects Christ laying down his life is presented in this passage as a way of recognising whether the love of God is in you. Where in your life do you see this kind of love? Where could it be more present?

11. Over this three-week series, we have had very practical landing points - calling us to have a faith that produces good deeds, to engage in showing the love of God to those in need, and now to show Christlike, sacrificial love.

Take 5–10 minutes on your own to reflect on this short series and write down:

1–2 encouragements

1–2 convictions

1–2 practical changes you want to make or habits you want to build

PRAY

Take time to share and pray together in response to the passage, for each other's needs, for your group's link missionary, the events below, and the weekly ministries at St Paul's.

Specific things to pray for this week:

Compassion: Pray that the Lord would grant Compassion's leaders wisdom in stewarding minimal resources for maximal impact for the poor and vulnerable in amidst the global financial crisis.

Tim and Lauren (ECM – Glasglow): Please pray for them as they seek wisdom on what to do with their daughter, Zoe's schooling. Timing based on her age, and which school to send her to.

WHAT'S ON THIS WEEK

May 5th - Taste and See Course

May 5th - BCA Connect Event

May 5th - Seniors Friendship Lunch

May 6th - Creative Team Night



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