

Following Jesus.

A Four-Week Course helping disciples to
read the Bible, pray, belong, and proclaim.



st bart's

Leaders Tips

Why Following Jesus?

When we come to understand and see who Jesus is - our King, Saviour and Lord, he calls to us to follow him. Not in isolation, not just for a few hours on Sunday, but with every aspect of our lives.

Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.” (Mark 8:34)

But amongst our busy lives of family, friends, work and weekends, what does it practically look like to follow Jesus? What helps us to follow Jesus with every aspect of our lives, for the rest of our lives?

Following Jesus has been prepared to go through the basic foundation blocks of beginning and growing as a follower of Jesus through reading the Bible, praying, belonging and proclaiming. It considers what the Bible has to say about what each aspect is, why it is important and where to start. There are also next step actions and suggestions for further reading.

Whether you are just beginning, returning or wanting to reconsider how to shape your life after Christ, we pray that this course would be useful in your lifelong journey as a passionate follower of Jesus.

Invite

Following Jesus is a designed a follow up course for *Introducing Jesus*, for those who are beginning as disciples of Jesus. It is arranged to help equip disciples to read the Bible, pray, belong to a church and proclaim the Gospel.

You might know someone who has questions about any of these areas or wants to grow as a disciple. Pray for them and invite them. You might like to suggest four coffee dates, lunch together or maybe dinner at your house to explore what it looks like to follow Jesus.

Pray

At all stages (before inviting, preparing to meet, after the conversations) bring everything to God. You might like to pray specifically for that opportunities to talk about what it looks like to follow Jesus, that they would grow in love and understanding of the Gospel, and that you too would be spurred on to focus on Jesus and not the outcome of the conversations.

Let someone else know what time you are meeting, so they can also be praying for you.

Where to meet?

You can meet anywhere! Over a coffee, for lunch, at a park or over dinner.

Set the expectation that the discussion is just for **one hour**, and try to organise **four consecutive catch-ups**. This helps maintain momentum in your conversations.

Preparation

Read through all four weeks of material beforehand. This way you'll know if particular questions are addressed more thoroughly in upcoming weeks. Continue to pray.

There is a Leaders Guide with suggested responses to shape the flow of the conversation.

Each week the material is structured in the same format:

- Video link to prompt thinking about the topic. This could be sent before you meet, or watched together (length varies between 2-6 minutes). The main points are also included if internet access is limited.
- What?
- Why?
- Where to start?
- Next steps (application)

How to begin?

It is natural to start with small talk about the day and week, but keep it brief. Recap that over 4 sessions together you'll look at what it looks like to follow Jesus. Each week will cover a different topic. There won't be any personal questions, but they are welcome to ask questions at any time.

Readings are taken from both the Old Testament and New Testament, so you'll need a Bible. Ask if the participant also has their own Bible. You might like to consider buying a Bible for them if they have never owned one, or only have one in a difficult translation. We recommend using the *New International Version*.

Then begin by going through the content.

How to end?



Next steps this week are the practical application of the topic that has been discussed. Allow enough time to talk about how they might approach this step or if they have any questions or apprehensions.



Meet up with a trusted Christian is to there to encourage questions, prompt seeking a supportive Christian friend and for accountability. You might be the best person to do this the next time you meet, or they might have another Christian in their lives that they could long term share their questions and Christian journey with.

Ask the person you are meeting with if you can end in a short prayer. This might feel strange in a public place, but is a great witness to the importance of bringing everything before God.

A simple example: *Dear God, thank you for this time together and for the gift of your word. Please help us to hear, read, mark, learn and apply your word for the rest of our lives. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

Tough questions

Expect tough questions. You don't need to have an immediate answer for every question, but engage with any question and follow up resources that might address the particular topic. Feel free to contact any of the ministry team at St Bart's with your questions too.

A couple of helpful resources:

- Questions Christians Ask: short readable books that clearly explain what the Bible has to say on hell, doubt and assurance, the Holy Spirit, human identity, the church, Jesus' death, trusting the Bible, homosexuality, our death, miracles, free gift of forgiveness and the end of the world. <https://www.thegoodbook.com.au/christian-living/questions-christians-ask/>
- The Reason for God, Timothy Keller: chapters on truth and other religions, suffering, injustice, hell, science, the Bible and reasons for faith.
- The Doubter's Guide to Jesus, John Dickson: Reviews the different historical portraits of Jesus - teacher, healer, Israel, Christ, judge, friend, temple, saviour, Adam, Caesar, God and servant.
- Searching Issues, Nicky Gumbel: Chapters on suffering, other religions, sex before marriage, the New Age, homosexuality, science and the trinity.

The Bible ... so what is it?

Handy paper weight? Unread book? A gift from a distant relative? Or could it answer some of our biggest questions about life?

What has been your experience of the Bible?



Watch: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ak06MSETeo4>

Quick facts & background (covered in the video)

- One of the most influential books in human history.
- Explores the big questions of why we exist, death, life and human struggle.
- Library of 66 books, written by 40 different authors over 2000 years, in mostly Hebrew or Greek.
- Different genres: historical narrative, songs, letters, biographies (i.e., gospels), law, parables, and poetry.
- Contains the Old & New Testament.
- Old Testament centres on the story of Ancient Israel, how God worked through those people for all humanity.
- New Testament introduces our long awaited leader and Saviour - Jesus.

What is the Bible?



Read: 2 Timothy 3:14-16

- 1. While there are many human authors, who inspired the Bible?** The Bible is God-breathed, all of the Bible comes from God.
- 2. What authority then should the Bible have for Christians?** If from God, it has ultimate authority to direct and shape our life.
- 3. What is the Bible useful for? How does it relate to Jesus?** The Bible is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training. The Bible points us to Jesus, reveals who he is, so that we can be saved.

Why Read the Bible?



Read: 1 John 1:1-4

- 4. A popular claim is that the Bible is a myth that has evolved over time. Is that what is described here? Why not?** It appears that the writers are telling of news they have witnessed, rather than a story heard and passed on.
- 5. Who is the “Word of Life”?** Jesus Christ, the Son of God.
- 6. In what physical ways did people who wrote this letter know about the “Word of Life”?** They heard, saw with their eyes and touched with their hands. This is an account of eye witnesses. They write about a real person they met, not just a myth.
- 7. Why were these words written?** They were written so that we might have a relationship with God. This is possible through knowing his son Jesus, who is revealed in the Bible.

The Bible is about God, and God revealed in Jesus Christ. It reveals God's unfolding plan across history with real people. Written so that we might believe, the Bible reveals God's character and how we might know and follow him.

How do I read the Bible?

The Bible is more like a library than a single book, so before you start it is good to understand what genre you are reading. A Study Bible is a helpful resource that offers additional information about the book, author, theme and possible meaning of difficult passages.

How to read the Bible

Here is one method you might find helpful to read the Bible:

- 1. Pray & Read:** Pray that God will show you more about who he is and what he has done. Select a book and read from the start. Read as little or as much as you like. Don't be afraid to read it through a few times or even listen to an audio version.
- 2. Observe:** What does the passage say? Who is involved, what is the context, are there repeated words or phrases?
- 3. Interpret:** What does the passage mean? Are there words with particular meanings? What is it saying about Jesus? What is it saying about his mission to the world? What is the main point?
- 4. Apply:** How does this apply to you? How does it challenge, shape or encourage you, and the whole church, to follow Jesus?
- 5. Pray:** Pray about what you have read and that the Holy Spirit would help you to follow God.

How to navigate what to read

Bible reading plans are useful in mapping out how to read through the Bible. They have different approaches, reading through both the Old Testament and New Testament concurrently, or reading chronologically or thematically. Two useful plans to start with are:

- *Bible in One Year* (book, app, website)

This is a great introduction to reading the Bible and makes it easy to track your progress. Each day consists of three readings (Old Testament, New Testament, and a Psalm), with a short reflection for each.

<https://www.bibleinoneyear.org>

- *Read Scripture* (App)

Read through the whole biblical narrative, with engaging videos covering major themes and book introductions.

<https://www.readscripture.org>

Where to start?

Find a Bible: The Bible is written to be understood, so find a Bible in a readable translation. The New International Version (NIV) is a great option or New International Readers Version (NIRV) for children. Either download a free Bible app or buy a copy. [If the person you are meeting with doesn't own their own Study Bible, giving them one can be of great encouragement. This shows the value of the Word and your genuine desire for them to read it.](#)

Start with a Gospel (Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John): The Gospels are narrative accounts of the life of Jesus. They are a form of ancient biography. They are a great place to start because they provide eye witness accounts to what Jesus said and did.

Read and discuss with a friend: Make a time to weekly or fortnightly catchup with a friend to discuss what you are reading or read together. This is a helpful way to ask questions and grow in your understanding of God.

Next steps this week



Select Luke Chapter 1 or John Chapter 1.
Read through it applying the method.
Write down all your questions.



Meet up with a trusted Christian to discuss.

Going deeper

Select a Bible reading plan. Two great apps are *Bible in One Year* and *Read Scripture*.

Prayer ... so what is it?

Is it the same as wishing? Or only for the 'holy' people? Or is it just reserved for times of fear and tragedy?

What do you think about prayer?



Watch: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6LG_3pX88fM

What is prayer? (covered in the video)

- Is prayer a stale tradition, ritual, good luck charm, religious checklist? Or just a way to avoid lightning bolts?
- At its essence, prayer is simply talking to God.
- We can draw near to the creator of the earth. God has made himself available and wants us to talk to him - to trust him, to thank him, cry out in our fear, ask for forgiveness or question where our next meal is from. This is a relationship with our Lord.
- Could any posture or well chosen word impress the author of time and space?

Start with prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you know all things and yet invite us into a personal relationship with you. Help us today to learn about the incredible privilege and joy of praying to you. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

What is prayer?



Read: Matthew 6:5-8

- 1. Who do we pray to? What does that relationship look like?** We pray to God our Father, the creator of heaven and earth. “The only person who dares wake up a King at 3am for a glass of water is a child. We have that kind of access.” - Tim Keller
- 2. Is Jesus impressed by public performances? How does he want us to approach God?** With sincerity, not for the approval of others but because we want to know him.
- 3. Is prayer just a special combination of words? Should we be scared of not saying the right things to God?** Jesus is not interested in us *babbling like the pagans*. God knows what we need. God hears us not because of the words we say, but because we want to seek him.
- 4. How does the Lord’s Prayer offer a pattern to approach God? Read through line by line.**

Praise for who God is, Our Father in Heaven.

Petition that God’s Kingdom would come into our world.

Provision for our daily needs.

Forgiveness for our sin and brokenness.

Protection from the enemy.

 **Read: Galatians 4:4-7**

- 5. How do we know we can approach God?** Because of Jesus, we are beloved, forgiven, and redeemed sons & daughters of God. Faith in Jesus repairs our relationship with God forever.
- 6. How is this different to a transaction?** Prayer is based on a relationship with God as our Father. That means it is deeper, more intimate and extends further than our immediate desires.

Why do you need to pray?

 **Read: Psalm 145:13-21**

- 7. What aspect of the world is God not in control of?** There is nothing outside of God's control. His Kingdom and rule will last forever.
- 8. How does God respond to those who call to him?** God is near to those who reach out to him. The God of the Universe loves, cares, satisfies, helps, protects and saves all who love him.
- 9. What aspect of your life do you not need God?** God does not force us to pray, but offers us every reason to come to him in Jesus.

 **Read: John 17:20-23**

- 10. How are our prayers and life used by God?** Our dependence on God, expressed through our prayers, show the world the love made real and tangible in Jesus.
- 11. How are we involved in people coming to believe in Jesus?** We are messengers that Jesus has been sent by God. It is amazing to realise that Jesus invites us and uses us in his mission. He doesn't let us do this alone, but is with us always and prays for us.

How can I pray?

From hiding away in a room to praying in the car on your way to work, prayer can come in many different forms.

Developing a habit of prayer is fruitful in knowing God deeper, and growing an awareness for how he is at work in the world, in you and through you. Like any new skill, discipline and structure is a helpful start. Thankfully, God doesn't leave us alone but equips us with the Holy Spirit.

The **ACTS** approach is one method that is helpful to guide prayers:

A - Adoration: Praise God for who he is and what he has done in Jesus. Reading a Psalm, listening to worship music or thinking about his character might be a helpful way to start.

Read Psalm 103

C - Confession: Say sorry for the ways you have turned away from God, ask him to reveal to you areas in your life that need to change and ask for the Holy Spirit to help you change.

Read 1 John 1:8-10

T - Thanksgiving: Thank God for the things he has given you, whether simple or big, e.g.. family, friends, work or study, help from someone, answered prayer, challenges, health.

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

S - Supplication: Ask God for what you need. You can pray specifically for others, your community, the places you spend your time, the church and the world.

Read Philippians 4:6-7

Where to start?

Start now: Gracious God, thank you that you want to know us, and that through Jesus we can come to you as your children. Help us not to see pray as a transaction, but be amazed at how generous you have been to us in Christ. Help us to be honest with you, listen to you and see our need for your presence in every aspect of our lives. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Set aside a time daily to pray: Regular rhythms help us grow in our knowledge and love of God. Find the quietest time in the day, maybe early morning, to pray to God. Make this regular, setting aside even just 10 minutes to pray each day.

Pray with others: Praying for and with others is a helpful way to be reminded how God is at work. Come along to one of our "All Church Prayer Nights", held each term, to see the variety of creative ways we can pray together.

Next steps this week



Pray the Lord's prayer every day at the same time. Think after each line what it means and tells us how we can approach God.



Meet up with a trusted Christian to ask them any questions you have about the Lord's prayer.

Going deeper

Use the ACTS model to guide your prayers. Set aside a time each day to pray to God.

Church ... why bother?

If I can listen to a sermon online, play my favourite worship playlist, and text my Christian friends, do I need to belong to a church?

What has been your experience with church?



Watch: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UA0dbBgosJA>

What is the church? (covered in the video)

- Not a special building that grants access to God or houses God.
- Aim is not to get people into the building.
- The church is God's people, the body of Jesus, engaging with the world.
- The people of God point to Jesus. Connected by the Holy Spirit, bringing people of all backgrounds to know God.
- Church buildings are practical places to gather together, but the church (body of Jesus) is so much bigger than that!

Start with prayer: Gracious God, thank you that you have called us to be your people. Please help us to understand what that looks like to be part of your church where Jesus is our cornerstone and please remove any barriers that are preventing us from belonging. In Jesus' name, Amen.

What is the church?



Read: Ephesians 2:11-13, 17-22

- 1. How is the church more than a human institution?** The church is God's people and God's household. As citizens of God's Kingdom, this is much bigger than any human organisation!
- 2. Who does God call to be his people?** People who were far away from God (like you and me), but have been brought into his household through the blood of Christ.
- 3. What is the church founded on? What holds it together?** The cornerstone of the church is Jesus Christ. He alone holds it together, with the Holy Spirit dwelling in each of us.
- 4. How does the church have access to God?** Not through any fancy building or clothes, but through Jesus' death and resurrection we are brought near to God. So close, in fact, that he gives each of us the Holy Spirit to live in us.



Read: 1 Corinthians 12:12-27

- 5. How is the church a body? Whose body is it?** The church is the body of Jesus Christ, united by one spirit, but made of many different parts.
- 6. Which parts are required for the body to function well?** All parts play an important role and are needed. Differences between us are not an accident, but arranged by God.

Why should you belong to a church?

 Read: Colossians 1:15-20, 28

- 7. What has Jesus redeemed? How is he more than our personal saviour?** Jesus has redeemed all things, everything on heaven and on earth. This is much bigger than just being our personal saviour, but shows he is the Lord over all.
- 8. Is there any area of your life that you believe is off limits to Jesus?** If Jesus is Lord over all, there is nothing he is not interested in or can not redeem, renew or use. This includes our friendships, Sunday mornings, weekday meetings or school pickups.

 Read: Acts 2:42-47

- 9. What activities did the early Church devote themselves to?** They devoted themselves to the teaching given by the apostles (our New Testament), living lives together (fellowship), sharing bread (Lord's Supper) and to prayer.
- 10. What was the outcome?** God was praised, with great joy and authenticity needs were met, and daily people were saved.
- 11. How are the priorities of being a learning, loving, worshipping, and telling church relevant today?** God continues to use his gathered people to mature believers and make disciples. This crosses generations, cultures and history.

Where to start?

Attend a service regularly: Connect and commit to coming to a service regularly. Together we learn, worship, pray & share our lives.

Serve: Joining a team to serve the Church is a practical way to use our gifts and time as part of the body of Christ. Ask someone about the different opportunities to serve the Church.

Join a Small Group: Small Groups are an amazing opportunity to explore the Bible, pray for and support one another, deepen friendships, and help each other grow in our trust in Jesus.

Pray: Churches are broken, messy people coming together because of Jesus. Pray that there would be mercy, grace and forgiveness where there has been past hurt or when things are not perfect.

Partner Financially: Investing your resources deepens engagement and enables the mission of the church. The finances of the church is dependent on the sacrificial generosity of members.

Next steps



Consider and pray about what next step you can take to belong more deeply to Christ's church.



Meet up with a trusted Christian to discuss your next step and ask them to keep you accountable and pray together.

Talking about God... that sounds scary!

Is telling others about Jesus only the job of ministers and super extraverted people? Or does God use everyday people to tell of the amazing good news of Jesus?

What has been your experience of telling others about Jesus?



Watch: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TVKbvE-HQel>

Where could God use me in my ordinary life? (covered in the video)

- Like Anne, we are placed in lots of different places - in families, with friends, in workplaces, in places we exercise or relax.
- Serving God is more than Sunday mornings - he involves our whole life, and every aspect of it.
- God has strategically placed us where we are, with a particular mix of people. He wants us to be used there.
- We don't live ordinary lives, but with Jesus we have the opportunity to show unnatural forgiveness, grace, mercy. We are used by God to answer people's deep and big questions.

Start with prayer: Loving God, thank you that you made yourself known to us in Jesus. Through your Holy Spirit, please help us as we tell others about you. In Jesus' name, Amen.

What are we actually proclaiming?



Read: 1 Corinthians 15:1-5

1. **What is the Gospel?** That in accordance with God's plan made known in the Old Testament, the good news is that Christ died for our sins, he was buried and was raised again on the third day.



Read: Revelation 21:1-7

2. **What does the future with Jesus look like?** Jesus came not only to save us individually, but redeem and restore the whole world - 'the new earth'. Future with Jesus has no more pain, death or suffering, but new life with God.
3. **How does the identity and actions of Jesus affect everyone, not just individuals?** Jesus is the creator and redeemer of the world, the Beginning and the End, therefore he has the power to completely restore our whole world. This is more than just personal transformation, but good news for everyone!

Why should we tell others about Jesus?

 Read: Romans 3:22-24

4. **Through our own efforts, can we meet God's standards? Are people naturally good?** It doesn't matter how good or nice we might appear, or others appear - no one measures up to God's standards. All have sinned and fallen short.
5. **Whose efforts are enough? What is the price to believe in him?** Jesus Christ perfectly met God's standards. His record is offered for free for anyone who believes in Him. This is not just a clean slate, but restored and renewed relationship with the God of the whole world.

 Read: Romans 10:9-15

6. **What is the result of people believing in their heart and confessing that Jesus is Lord?** They will be saved. This salvation is available for anyone who trusts in Jesus.
7. **What needs to happen for people to hear about Jesus?** To hear about Jesus, they need someone to tell them about Jesus.
8. **Think about the people you know on your front lines who don't trust in Jesus. Who in their lives knows and loves God, and shares with them that hope?** Likely the places and people you spend time with each week will be full of people who don't know God. You might be among the few people they know who follow Jesus.



Read: Matthew 28:16-20

- 9. When Jesus finished his work on earth, what was his plan for people to know him?** Jesus sends out the disciples with his authority to make disciples. Using his disciples (which includes us) is God's Plan A for people from all around the world to know and follow him.

- 10. Who goes with us?** Jesus promises that he is with us. We are equipped with the Holy Spirit within us. We are sent by Jesus, to proclaim Jesus, with Jesus alongside us.

How do I share about Jesus?

Sharing about Jesus isn't a diagram you need to remember (although these might be helpful) or a once off activity. Proclaiming the Gospel involves our whole lives, both our words and actions. Often it will involve people we spend the most time with: our friends, team mates, neighbours, craft group, family or colleagues.

1. Lives Reflecting Jesus (Galatians 5:22-25)

We show who we love and what we value by how we live. In each place we spend time, we have an opportunity to point to Jesus through how we navigate challenges, uphold truth and justice, handle disappoint, show patience and grace, and how we love those who are both kind and difficult.

2. Using Words (1 Peter 3:15-16)

We should always be expecting Gospel conversations with our friends, family or colleagues. We might not feel prepared in the moment, but it is important that we can explain who Jesus is and why he matters. You can start by writing down how Jesus makes a difference in your life as a way to collect your thoughts, or practice explaining your favourite story or parable of Jesus.

3. Generous Community (1 Thessalonians 1:4-5)

If we want people to see what a difference Jesus makes, we should generously invite people into our lives. This might look like inviting a friend over for a family dinner, intentionally asking deeper questions, listening to their perspective and looking for opportunities to share about Jesus, and how following him changes how you act and live.

Where to start?

Pray for people: It is the Holy Spirit who changes hearts to believe in God's Gospel. Pray that the people you know would come to accept Jesus as their Lord, and for Gospel opportunities for you to share your hope through word and action.

Introduce your Christian friends and non-Christian friends:

Invite a few friends together who haven't met before. This is a simple way to show what following Jesus can look like.

Introducing Jesus: If you know someone who has questions about Christianity, be they curious or skeptical, encourage them to consider who Jesus is. *Introducing Jesus* is a four-week course introducing Jesus' life, message, death and invitation that you (or someone else) could do over coffee or lunch.

Next steps



Think of one person in your life that does not know Jesus. Pray each day that the Holy Spirit would enable them to hear and accept the Gospel. Pray for opportunities to share your life and reasons for your hope with them.

Going deeper

Join a workshop on how to run an *Introducing Jesus* course. This is a simple, accessible course that points people to Jesus' life, message, death and invitation.