

# MATURE

## Taking the Small Group Challenge



Welcome to our third set of weekly bible reading notes to accompany our MATURE series—and well done for getting this far. Our aim with these notes is to encourage one another to read God’s word, so you may want to commit with a friend to do these bible readings and to pray each day – and then ask each other how you’ve got on during the week.

*This week we’re going to look first at what we do in small groups: reading the bible together, praying together and encouraging one another, before spending some time in 1 Peter 2, thinking about how we can help one another be the people God has called us to be.*

These notes should hopefully be useful for individuals and for families with and without children. Each day, there is a bible passage to read – **read that first**, and **pray** – ask God to help you understand it. (If it is your habit to spend some time with the passage and make your own notes, then do that now.)

Once you’ve read the passage and thought about it – have a look at the accompanying notes. The notes cover some of the context of the passage, an explanation and an application. There are also some accompanying questions or suggestions for action. As God speaks to you through his word, you may wish to write down what he is calling you to do (and share it with someone!) However, don’t worry if sometimes you don’t receive an obvious

answer to prayer or clear instruction – just keep faithfully reading God’s word, and He will use it in your life, as the Holy Spirit works in you.

After you’ve looked at the bible passage is a good time to pray – pray for strength to do what you need to do – thank God for what you have learned about him – and bring your requests before him.

Then, you’ll see that there is an activity for families with children; the target age range of these activities is 4-11ish, so you may need to modify them. This activity draws on one or two of the verses you’ve been reading, and give you some suggestions for sharing them with the family – over the breakfast or tea table perhaps. There’s a starter activity to get people thinking, then reading the passage, some questions to answer, and then something to read – and a prayer so you don’t forget to pray (just a starting point – do pray for longer if you can). Should take about five minutes – but can easily expand if you want it to.

Don’t worry about communicating everything – particularly if you’ve got small children – communicating something of the good news of Jesus Christ every day is a great place to begin.

Enjoy – and let me know how you get on

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "James". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.





## Monday

### Deuteronomy 6:4-9 Reading the Bible together

#### Read: Deuteronomy 6:4-9

We begin this week with a passage from the Old Testament. Here in Deuteronomy, Moses is reminding the people of God's promises just before they enter the promised land.

In Deuteronomy 6, he has just told the people that they must be careful to fear God and keep his commandments (v1-3). Then in verses 4-5, he tells them to love God with their whole heart, soul and might. If these words are familiar to you, it is probably because they get quoted in the New Testament by Jesus and others as one half of the summary of the law (the other half is loving our neighbours as ourselves). We also use them in services some time.

Today I want us to notice how we love God with our heart, soul and strength. First, see that in verse 6, it means that we take God's word seriously—we listen to what he has to say to us. Loving God means taking what he says to us—his word, his commands, his challenges to heart. Taking it to heart means that we don't just hear what God has to say to us, we act upon it.

Then, in verses 7 to 9, notice how taking God's word seriously means teaching it to our children, by talking about it a lot (v7). It means having God's word before us, so that we might know it and understand it—that we might have daily familiarity with it (v8-9).

Of course, some of this we do for ourselves—some of this is what we you are doing right now—but notice that there is a communal element to this. We are to talk about God's word with others. The example here is teaching our children, and that is something we need to take seriously, but the application is wider; if we are going to take God's word to heart, then it will help us if we talk about the bible and what it says with other people.

It is here then that being part of a small group can help us.

*So today:*

*Give thanks that God has spoken to us, that we have free access to his word, and that we can talk freely about it with other.*

*Pray that we would take the opportunities we have to share God's word with others*

*Say sorry to God for the times when we haven't been interested in hearing what God has to say.*

#### Activity for Families with Children

**Starter:** write five random words on a piece of paper. Show them briefly to the family, and then turn them face down. Who can remember them? Turn the paper face up. Who knows what they are now?

#### Read Deuteronomy 6:5-7

What do we love God with?

What are the words God wants us to hear?

How are we to help one another remember God's words?

**Read:** God wants us to love him with all of ourselves. To know how to love God, we need to know what he has said in his word. We are encouraged to talk about it, and write it down so we remember it.

**Prayer:** Dear Lord God, we thank you for your word. Help us to hear it, understand it and share it with others. Amen.



## Weekend

### 1 Peter 2:9-12 Being God's People

#### Read 1 Peter 2:9-12

Over the last couple of days, we've seen what God has been doing in us through Christ, and what we are to do.

After explaining a little more about how people stumble over Christ and his message, Peter reminds us again of who we are, and what we are to do.

Look at the description of who we are in verses 9 and 10. Notice the emphasis on being chosen, royal and holy – that we belong to God – and on how through God's mercy we have changed from living in darkness to light, from being not a people, to being a people. Elsewhere in the bible, Paul talks about how we change from being dead to being alive (Ephesians 2:1-3), from being aliens and far off, to being near (Ephesians 2:11-13). All these images remind us of what a tremendous and marvellous and wonderful change Jesus brought about when he died on the cross for us and rose again. Give thanks to him for his glorious grace!

Then, in verses 11 and 12, we are reminded of who we are to be – we are to be salt and light in the world – living good lives that people will see we are what we are in verses 9 and 10 – and will come to know God through seeing us and hearing about Jesus.

And so as we bring this week thinking about Taking the Small Group challenge to a close, we are encouraged to remember who we are in Christ, to remember all the blessings that we have received because of Jesus' death for us on the cross, and we're encouraged to be God's people together.

*So today*

*Thank God that he has brought us from darkness to light, from death to life*

*Pray that the Holy Spirit will be at work within us enabling us to live lives that attract others*

*to Christ.*

#### Activity for Families with Children

**Starter:** turn the light off in the room where you are. Now – ask the light to switch itself on. Can it? No – we need to flick the switch. In this part of the bible, Peter tells us that God has brought us from darkness to light

#### Read 1 Peter 2:9-10

What are we?

What were we?

**Read:** Peter tells us that God has changed us – from being people who did not know Jesus, to being a people following Jesus. We couldn't make this change ourselves – we needed God to choose and call us.

Give thanks to God for calling us to be his people

**Prayer:** Dear Jesus, thank you for calling us to be your holy people.

Amen.



Friday

## 1 Peter 2:4-5 Building Blocks

### Read 1 Peter 2:4-5

Yesterday we saw how Peter challenged us to get rid of some things in our lives – and to focus on feeding on God’s word. Today, we are reminded of how God is always at work in our lives.

Look at verse 4. Jesus is the living stone. He was rejected by men – they crucified him, and refused to believe him – but God raised him from the dead, and Jesus is exalted in heaven, sat at God’s right hand.

Then verse 5. Jesus is the living stone – but we are living stones. The amazing thing here is that God is at work in us making us into the kind of people he wants us to be – we’re being built into a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices to God, because of what Christ has done, because Christ is at work within us now.

What does it mean to be a holy priesthood offering spiritual sacrifices? It means that we are set apart by God to do his will – to do the things that he wants us to do. This will include sharing the good news with others – but there are many other ways in which we can offer spiritual sacrifices, as we serve one another in the church, the body of Christ.

What is it that God wants us to do? Well there are certain things that we should all do – and we’re looking at them in this MATURE series – reading God’s word, spending time with other Christians, using our money and time wisely, loving one another and sharing the good news.

And of course, Peter wants us to remember that we don’t do all those to earn God’s favour –we do it because God has saved us in Jesus Christ, and is building us into the people he wants us to be.

*So today*

*Thank God for what he has done for us in Christ*

*Pray for wisdom to do the things that God*

*wants us to do in his church*

### Activity for Families with Children

**Starter:** get some lego or similar and build a little house together

In this part of the bible, Peter tells us that we are being built together into a holy people

### Read 1 Peter 2:5

What is going on with us?

What does God want us to do?

**Read:** Peter tells us that God is building us to be his holy people – and that he wants us to live as that holy people – doing the things God’s word tells us to do

What do we need to work on doing from God’s word?

**Prayer:** Dear Jesus, help us to remember that we are your holy people – and live as you holy people.

Amen.



Tuesday

## Colossians 1:21-23 Christ and His People

### Read: 2 Timothy 1:3-7

Today we are looking together at 2 Timothy, a letter which the apostle Paul wrote to his friend and fellow worker Timothy. It is a personal letter, written towards the end of Paul’s life. Today, it will help us think about how we can pray together in small group.

The prayer begins with *thanksgiving* in verse 3; and we see the reason for that thanksgiving in verse 5, the faith that Timothy has. This is at the heart of our prayers for one another—giving thanks for faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Notice that this thanksgiving section is very *personal*. Paul writes of remembering Timothy’s tears, and his desire to see him in verse 4, and Paul’s knowledge of Timothy’s faith extends to knowing his family, verse 5. These personal elements show us that this isn’t just a prayer Paul prays, this is a prayer *for Timothy*. They know each other well.

Then, we see Paul’s *request* in verse 6 and 7. Again, it is personal—Paul knows the particular issues that Timothy faces as a church leader. After all, it was Paul who laid hands on Timothy commissioning him for service. So Timothy is to make best use of the gifts that Paul knows he has. Timothy has particular challenges, and Paul highlights those in verse 7.

In a sense, there is nothing particularly special about this prayer—thanksgiving followed by a request. Of course, it is always helpful to be reminded of gospel priorities in our prayers for one another—faith, perseverance, using our gifts. But what makes it stand out to us is that it is a prayer based on intimacy, a prayer based on knowledge of a person and love for that person. And this is what helps us as we think about how we pray for one another in small groups; that we make our thanksgiving and requests specific, because we have got to know one another well.

*So today:*

*Give thanks for the privilege of prayer, and*

*that God hears and answers*

*Pray that we might share Paul’s priorities in prayer as we pray for each other.*

### Activity for Families with Children

**Starter:** get everyone to share something about someone they know well—a friend or relative. Maybe their favourite colour, or a short story, or a memory. Why do we know these things?

### Read 2 Timothy 1:3-5

What do Paul do first when he prays?

How do we know Paul and Timothy are friends?

What does Paul give thanks for?

**Read:** Paul’s prayer shows he cares about Timothy. He cares about his faith, and about him and his family. We can pray for and with those we care about, that they might get to know God, or get to know him better.

**Prayer:** Dear Lord Jesus, we thank you for friends and family. Help us to pray for them. Amen.



## Wednesday

### Ephesians 4:11-16 Encouraging one another

#### Read: Ephesians 4:11-16

Today we're looking at the third thing we do in small groups—encourage one another, and so we are looking at this passage from Ephesians which is all about how we grow into Christ together.

The passage begins in verses 11 and 12 with a list of gifts that God has given to the church. These are all gifts to do with teaching and sharing God's word, and we see their purpose in verse 12: to equip the saints—God's people—for ministry to build up the body of Christ—the church.

Then in verse 13, we see the purpose of all this ministry and building up—so that we can attain maturity in the faith. That maturity is then defined in two ways. First, it means not being vulnerable to false teaching (v14). Second, it means growing into Christ, growing to be more like Christ in our relationships (v15). Or course this is something we do, but also something which Christ is doing in us (v16).

What we need to particularly notice today is the emphasis on doing all this together. We build up the body together, we attain unity and knowledge together, we speak the truth in love together. So as we gather in church and in small groups, this is the work that we are undertaking; building one another up as we grow together into Christ.

I don't know about you, but I find this an awe-inspiring and exciting picture of what God has planned for us in Jesus Christ.

*So today:*

*Give thanks to God that we can grow up in Christ together*

*Pray that we would be those who encourage one another, who speak the truth in love, and who build each other up.*

#### Activity for Families with Children

**Starter:** talk about how people grow in height—you may have some marks on a doorframe you can refer to. Talk about what you can do to grow taller. Talk about the other ways in which we might grow - in knowledge etc.

#### Read Ephesians 4:15-16

What are we supposed to do as Christians?

Who makes it possible for us to grow up in love?

**Read:** Jesus wants us to grow up—not just in how tall or old we are, but also grow up together in knowing Jesus., Not only that, but he enables us to grow.

**Prayer:** Dear Lord God, we thank you that you want us to grow up to be like you together. Help us to grow by loving each other.

Amen.



## Thursday

### 1 Peter 2:1-3 Dietary Advice

#### Read 1 Peter 2:1-3

For the rest of this week, we'll be looking at what the apostle Peter has to say about being God's holy people together in 1 Peter 2.

In chapter 2, we pick things up in the middle – verse 1 begins with 'therefore' – Peter is saying – because of what Christ has done for you, because he has saved you and made you a holy people, you need to live differently. Therefore – because Jesus Christ has died for us, we need to live differently.

So what does that mean here? Look at verses 1 to 3. First, there are things that we need to get rid of. Read over that list again, slowly. Think about what each word means. Which of them do you still struggle with? Pray for God's help in getting rid of it.

Then, in verse 2, Peter says – instead of all that malice and so on - seek pure spiritual milk. Like a new born baby craving for milk – desiring it all the time (some of you will be all too familiar with this!) – desire the word of God that will help you grow up. To put this another way – seek God in his word.

We have tasted the goodness of the Lord in salvation (v3) – so let's go on and desire more and more of the Lord's goodness.

And just as we saw in the passage from Ephesians yesterday, this is something that we do together.

*So today*

*Ask God to help you with any things from v1 that you need to get rid of.*

*Pray that God will help you to desire to read his word.*

#### Activity for Families with Children

**Starter:** talk about the kind of things we spend our time doing. School other activities, eating, sleeping etc.

In this part of the bible, Peter tells us to want to be fed from God's word

#### Read 1 Peter 2:2-3

Why do we want to eat and drink spiritual milk?

What do we do to get this food?

**Read:** Peter tells us to eat well and grow up – just as we grow up physically by eating regularly, so we grow up spiritually by reading God's word regularly

Discuss as a family when you might be able to read God's word regularly together

**Prayer:** Dear Jesus, help us to be faithful in reading your word and praying. Amen.