

MISSION ESSENTIALS

4 Bible studies to help your small group discover God's character and his purposes for the world

LEADER'S GUIDE



What's it all about?

Welcome to Mission Essentials! This set of four Bible studies has been designed to help your church discover God's grand saving plan for his world. In the first study we take a step back and consider the jaw-dropping nature of God's Lordship and glory. We will see that, ultimately, the mission of the church is to proclaim God's glory to the whole world. While God is glorious, he's also loving; in the second study we will be amazed by God's love for the nations which is demonstrated time and again throughout the Bible (and finally in the person of Jesus Christ). In the third and fourth studies we move from considering God's character and turn to think about what this means for us, his followers. The first characteristic of a disciple of Jesus, considered in the third study, is sharing his love with others. In the final study, we will be challenged with Jesus' example of sacrifice and will see that we too need to be ready to sacrifice our all for our Saviour.

We hope that these studies will encourage you and your small group to follow harder after Jesus - and to help you to find your place in God's grand saving plan for the whole world.

Virtual Small Groups

In our ever-changing world it is not always possible for small groups to physically meet together. Thankfully technology has enabled us to continue meeting to study God's Word even if we are far apart. *Mission Essentials* has been designed to facilitate your group to study God's Word whether they are physically together or not. If you would like to use this material via Zoom or other app, please download the Virtual Mission Essentials slides from the AIM website (eu.aimint.org/missionessentials). Please go through the virtual presentation and use the slides that help you - feel free delete the rest. We suggest that once you have started your Zoom meeting you share your screen with the group in which you have already set up the Virtual Mission Essentials presentation. Space has been left on the right-hand side of the presentation for the video feed of your Zoom participants. At the start of the study you might want to check with your group participants that they are all comfortable with using Zoom and are able to enlarge or shrink the participant photos to fit the available space.



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1. Characteristics of God: God's glory among all nations

God's glory as the ultimate end and purpose of mission

In this study we will focus on God's glory as the ultimate end and purpose of mission, and his glory which is to be known among all nations.



Getting started: When you hear the word 'glory', what do you instantly think about? Think of some of the ways British culture uses the word 'glory' (think about sports, the arts, and social media spheres).

LEADER'S NOTES: What is God's glory? John Piper defines God's glory as "the going public of his infinite worth...the radiance of his holiness." For a better understanding of God's glory, watch this short video: eu.aimint.org/johnpiper-glory. The way that we use the word 'glory' in modern British culture is probably quite far from the Biblical understanding. To start with, it's helpful to encourage the group to explore how they understand the meaning of the word glory and contrast it to the biblical understanding.



1. Read Revelation 1:12-17. These verses describe what happened when the apostle John saw the risen Jesus. What do you notice about what Jesus looked like? How did John respond? What do you think John thought and felt at that moment? Even though John was one of Jesus' best friends, he still reacted as he did. Why do you think this was?



I turned round to see the voice that was speaking to me. And when I turned I saw seven golden lampstands, and among the lampstands was someone like a son of man, dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash round his chest. The hair on his head was white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire. His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. In his right hand he held seven stars, and coming out of his mouth was a sharp, double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance. When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said: 'Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last.' **(Revelation 1:12-17)**

LEADER'S NOTES: John saw someone 'like a son of man'. This phrase links back to Daniel 7:13 and to the New Testament where Jesus called himself the 'son of man'. It's clear from the use of the phrase 'son of man' that Jesus had the general appearance of a man. Why then did John not recognise him? Was it because Jesus was dressed in a way that John wasn't used to? Perhaps a more likely reason is that John wasn't used to seeing Jesus glorified in this way (it had



'Son of man'

Throughout Ezekiel the phrase 'son of man' is used 93 times and means 'human being'. In Daniel 7:13-14, the phrase 'son of man' is used to describe the Messiah who is given 'dominion and glory and a kingdom'. When Jesus spoke about himself as the 'son of man' in the New Testament, he was making connections to both of these uses. He wanted to clearly identify as a human, whilst at the same time underlining his divine origin.

been many years since Jesus was on the earth). The reality of God's glory was so amazing and fear-inducing that even Jesus' best friend fell on his face. It's noticeable throughout the Bible that those who meet God face to face normally respond in this way. God's glory and splendour is mind-blowing!



2. Read 1 Chronicles 16:25-27 and 1 Timothy 6:15-16. How do these two verses describe God?



For great is the Lord and most worthy of praise; he is to be feared above all gods. For all the gods of the nations are idols, but the Lord made the heavens. Splendour and majesty are before him; strength and joy are in his dwelling-place. (1 Chronicles 16:25-27)

...which God will bring about in his own time – God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see. To him be honour and might for ever. Amen. (1 Timothy 6:15-16)

LEADER'S NOTES: The Greeks, Romans and the other nations that surrounded Israel had many Gods, one for each town, district and different area of life (e.g. rain, harvest, sea). In comparison, Israel was unique in believing in a supreme God who both created everything and maintained all things.¹ When God revealed himself to Moses in Exodus 3:14 as the 'great I AM,' he emphatically rejected other nations' notions of God and dramatically reworked Moses' understanding. The use of the words 'yhwh' and 'adonai'² help us to understand that God is timeless, unending, all powerful and utterly sovereign.



3. Read Psalm 47:7-8 and Psalm 46:10. What do you think the link is between God's glory and the nations and how should God's glory be demonstrated?



For God is the King of all the earth; sing to him a psalm of praise. God reigns over the nations; God is seated on his holy throne. (Psalm 47:7-8)

He says, 'Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.' (Psalm 46:10)

LEADER'S NOTES: God's splendour and majesty are so amazing and so much greater than his created world. This amazing glory is uncontainable; his glory demands that all peoples bow the knee to the Lord. God always planned for the whole world to know him, right from Adam onwards. It was 'too small a thing' just to save Israel (Isaiah 49:6). Israel was meant to be a light to the whole world, not to turn



Lord or LORD?

LORD is used to represent the Hebrew word 'yhwh' which comes from the root word 'hwy' meaning 'to be'. It was such a holy word that Jews would never pronounce it. It conveys the idea that God 'simply is' – he has no beginning and no end. This is the word that is used in 1 Chronicles 16.

'Lord' (not all in capitals) is used when translating the Hebrew word 'adonai'. It conveys the idea of "sovereign, strength, power."

inwards. For a fuller understanding of Israel as God's partner in mission see Michael Grisanti, *Israel's Mission to the Nations in Isaiah 40-55: An Update*³.



4. Read Philippians 2:10-11 and Revelation 7:9-10. What is the final outcome for the world? What happens when the whole world acknowledges Jesus as Lord?



...that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:10-11)

After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: 'Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.'

(Revelation 7:9-10)

LEADER'S NOTES: The final result for the world is that everyone, one day, will bow the knee before him, giving the Lord the glory that is rightfully his. In our next study we will look at God's character of love and forgiveness. It's because of this aspect of his character that he wants none to perish, and he wants to involve us, his children, in his cosmic rescue plan.



Making it real: *The Mwani are a people group of about 110,000 who live on the coast and on many small islands of Northern Mozambique. They follow 'folk' Islam; Islam is a veneer over their traditional beliefs that revolve around fear of the spirit world. There are about seventy followers of Christ spread across a number of small villages and towns. Over the last twenty-five years, God has inspired many churches to send their workers to work with a handful of mission agencies, including AIM, to seek to reach the Mwani with the gospel; but the going has been very tough. The Mwani are an example of a whole people group that do not yet know Jesus (we call them unreached people groups) but one day there will be Mwanis before the great white throne, and they too will declare "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" Does your church have work among an unreached people group? Why not pause now and pray for both the Mwani people and your church's work?*



To pray further for the Mwani, go to eu.aimint.org/mwani, where you can also watch a video about them.



Bringing it home: The Apostle John had an amazing vision of the risen Christ. The splendour of Jesus' glory made him fall at Jesus' feet in awe and surrender. Not many of us have seen a vision of God like John. As a result, we are often tempted to make God 'in our own image'. We project our understanding of our world

and ourselves onto God. “I am like this so therefore God is like this.” Discuss this idea in your group. Do we do that? What effect does it have on the way we see God and, as a result, how we live out our lives? Try to list some practical things we can do to get a better, God-shaped understanding of our glorious God. Encourage your group to keep each other accountable throughout the week for the things they have decided to do.

For resources to help your church think more about God’s heart to reach the lost, visit eu.aimint.org.

2. Characteristics of God: God is love (his heart for the nations)

God's purposes in redeeming a people for himself and his desire that none should be lost.

In our last study we focused on God's glory. We finished in Revelation 7, standing in heaven before the throne of the Lamb, surrounded by multitudes from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages. It's clear that God's ultimate plan is for all peoples to know him. In this study we will think more about God's purposes through the Bible and his love for humankind.



Getting started: People show love for one-another in many different ways. Try and list some of those ways. Now, list some of the ways that God demonstrates his love to us (try to list the big things and the small).



1. At the very start of the Bible God was in relationship with humankind through Adam and Eve. Sadly, they rebelled against him and the human story took a calamitous turn. How did God respond? He chose Abram. **Read Genesis 12:2-3.** (God reaffirms his choice of Abram several times, see: Genesis 18:18, 22:18, 26:4, 28:14) This is the first time God spoke to Abram. What do you notice? How was God's concern for the whole world revealed in God's call to Abram?



'I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.' (**Genesis 12:2-3**)

LEADER'S NOTES: God's call to Abram marks a significant intervention by God into human history. By calling Abram, God initiated his redemption plan for humankind. While God focuses upon Abram and his children, it's important for us to recognise that even at this early stage God was planning to use Abram and his descendants to bless the whole world.



2. The story of God's involvement with humankind quickly moves on and focuses upon the people of Israel (Abraham's descendents). Through Moses the Lord delivers them from slavery in Egypt and brings them into the promised land. **Read Exodus 19:4-6 and Isaiah 49:6.** What do you think God was seeking to do through Israel? Did he simply want a holy people that he could relate to? Was he seeking something more?



"You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession.



What's in a name?

In Genesis 17 God comes to Abram and makes a covenant with him. He promises to bless Abram and give him a son - at 99 years of age! As a daily reminder, the Lord changes Abram's name. 'Abram' means 'high or exulted father'. By simply changing one letter in the Hebrew, he would now be called 'Abraham', which means 'father of many', (Genesis 17:5). The Lord's salvation plan for the whole world started with one man. By changing Abram's name the Lord was giving life to his promise. Whenever Abraham was tempted to doubt the Lord's promise he just needed to say his own name.



Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” (Exodus 19:4-6)

...he says: ‘It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth.’ (Isaiah 49:6)

LEADER’S NOTES: From Genesis to Deuteronomy we see how God dealt with Israel. He wanted to show his grace to Israel as well as showing the world how holy he was. At the same time the Lord wanted to use Israel to show his goodness, glory and holiness to the world. He wanted Israel to be a light that would also bring the nations into relationship with him. Unfortunately, Israel thought that God had chosen them because they were special (Deuteronomy 7:6), rather than simply a product of God’s grace, and so their focus turned inwards rather than outwards.



3. As we read through the Old Testament, time and time again we see God’s clear desire that all peoples know his glory and are saved through him. **Read Psalm 64:9, Psalm 86:9 and Isaiah 2:2.** In the Old Testament there are over 50 examples like this. What should our personal response be?



All people will fear; they will proclaim the works of God and ponder what he has done. (Psalm 64:9)

All the nations you have made will come and worship before you, Lord; they will bring glory to your name. (Psalm 86:9)

In the last days the mountain of the Lord’s temple will be established as the highest of the mountains; it will be exalted above the hills, and all nations will stream to it. (Isaiah 2:2)

LEADER’S NOTES: The idea that God wants all peoples to know him is not a new idea that came in with Jesus. As we read the whole Bible we see that God’s concern for all peoples is central to the entire story. As we consider what the Lord has done for us by grace and as we consider his love and concern for all peoples throughout the Bible, it is right that we reaffirm the centrality of evangelism (sharing the good news) and mission (going, in order to share the good news cross-culturally) in all that we do.



4. Read Ezekiel 33:11, Jeremiah 31:3, Luke 19:10, 1 John 4:7-8 and 2 Peter 3:9. What moves the Lord? What do you think is on his heart?



Defining mission

It might surprise you but you won’t find the word missionary in the Bible. The idea that God sets apart people to ‘go’ from one part of the world to another to share the good news and plant churches is based upon Jesus’ ‘Great Commission’ in Matthew 28 and Mark 16. Throughout these Bible studies, when we say ‘mission’ we understand the word to mean ‘going, cross-culturally, from one part of the world to another to share the gospel and plant churches.’ While the Lord has given the local church a unique, Bible-mandated role to enable Christians to love and share the gospel in their local communities, he has also separately and distinctly tasked the local church to spread the good news about Jesus throughout the whole world.



Say to them, “As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign Lord, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die, people of Israel?”
(Ezekiel 33:11)

The Lord appeared to us in the past, saying: ‘I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with unfailing kindness.’ **(Jeremiah 31:3)**

For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost. **(Luke 19:10)**

Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. **(1 John 4:7-8)**

The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. **(2 Peter 3:9)**

LEADER’S NOTES: Through this study we have seen that God’s love for humankind stretches back to the very beginning of the Bible. He always yearned that all peoples would be in relationship with him. Throughout the story of the Bible, God tirelessly worked to make a way for people to come back to him (“I have drawn you with unfailing kindness.”) As ‘God is love’ we shouldn’t be surprised, though we often are, that he desires no one should perish but all should come to repentance.



Making it real: *The Arabs of North Africa are a very diverse people with a population of 91 million and very few churches. They are spread across North Africa. The governments of those countries are aggressively against the sharing of the gospel - persecuting any believers in Christ with prison and social exclusion. The Lord loves the Arabs of North Africa with ‘an everlasting love’ and desires that ‘everyone to come to repentance’. Cry out to the Lord for the Arabs of North Africa, that the Lord would have mercy on them, and that they would here the gospel and respond in faith.*



For more prayer information about the Arabs of North Africa go to eu.aimint.org/arabs.



Bringing it home: As you respond to this study, maybe you could discuss a few of these questions together, or think about some of them over the week to come?

- What has struck you from this study? Do you disagree with anything?
- What do you think about the idea that God is a God of love and desires everyone to come to repentance? In what ways does that challenge you?

- If it's true that he desires no-one to perish, then what implications does that have for us as his followers?
- Does this study change the way you think about your neighbours, your co-workers or friends and family who don't know him?
- When we watch the news and hear of events happening around the world, do you have a burden for those people that don't know Jesus? What is a godly response?

For resources to help your church think more about God's heart to reach the lost, visit eu.aimint.org.

3. Characteristics of a disciple (1): Sharing God's heart

Sharing God's heart (loving people), desiring and declaring his glory

In the first two studies we have focused upon God's character, exploring how he is glorious and loving. As his followers, we are called to follow in his steps (1 Peter 2:21). Who we are must flow out of who God is. In this study we will be focusing upon what it means for us to share God's heart.



Getting started: In British culture it has become common to talk about 'being passionate' about something. So, companies might be 'passionate about providing quality photocopying' or 'passionate about good food'. What does our culture mean when it says that? Do you think God is passionate about us?



1. Just as God is love, his followers are also called to love. **Read John 15:12, Mark 12:30 and Matthew 5:44.** Who should we love?



My command is this: love each other as I have loved you. (John 15:12)

Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. (Mark 12:30)

But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you (Matthew 5:44)

LEADER'S NOTES: Encourage the group to pause for a moment. Ask them to think about the different people in their lives. Do they have any 'enemies'? Is there anyone at work who seems to always be against them? Is there a neighbour who makes life difficult? Is there someone in church who instantly comes to mind – when you think of them do you start getting annoyed? Help the group to really consider their lives in the light of God's word. Depending upon what people share, it might be useful to have a time of repentance for group members ask God for forgiveness for not loving the people around them.



2. What does loving each other, our neighbours and our enemies mean? Can you think of any verses that help us understand what God wants us to do? What is included in loving others? Is anything excluded?



More than words?

Saint Francis of Assisi is often quoted as saying: "Preach the gospel at all times. When necessary, use words." But actually, he never said it!⁴ The idea that for Christians the important thing is to live a life of love – without needing to share the gospel – is increasingly a very common and powerful idea. In our post-Christian and post-modern culture, words are distrusted and can be used to hurt and hate.

For Paul, Silas, Stephen and thousands of others in the New Testament, it was their words that got them beaten, flogged and eventually murdered. Paul said in Romans 1:16 "I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes..." He knew that at some point people needed to *hear* the gospel. All the good works and good examples in the world can't save, without people hearing, understanding and then trusting in Jesus.

Francis of Assisi knew this. Arpin-Ricci, describing Francis, says, "He embraced the truth that the authority of the gospel he proclaimed with his mouth was given authority by the nature and character of the life he led."⁵

LEADER'S NOTES: You might want to look at some of these verses ahead of time: **Ephesians 4:2, Romans 12:9-16, 1 Corinthians 13:4-8, Luke 3:11, 1 Peter 4:8, Luke 6:31, 35** and **Philippians 2:3-4**. As group members mention different verses, people might be tempted to try to keep these commands in their own strength. To end this section, it might be helpful to read **1 Peter 4:7-11** together. Emphasise that we are stewards of God's grace and that we serve with the strength that God provides. None of us can fulfil the law of love in our own strength, we must abide in Christ (see **John 15:1-8**) to produce fruit.



3. In the first two studies we looked at God's glory and his desire to see all peoples come to be in relationship with him. **Read Matthew 28:18-20**. How do you think this fits with God's call to his followers to love those around him? How does loving people fit with Christ's call in Matthew 28:18-20 to go and make disciples of all nations?



Then Jesus came to them and said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.' (**Matthew 28:18-20**)

LEADER'S NOTES: It's important to reaffirm that as followers of Christ we are indeed clearly called to love the people around us. The challenge to do that effectively, through Christ's grace and power, is one of the great challenges that followers of Jesus face. There can be a great temptation to work for him in our own strength. At the same time, modern society is trying to make us accept that simply loving people is enough. This idea is considered more in the next question.



4. Read 2 Timothy 4:2, Romans 1:16 and Romans 10:14-15. In many ways UK culture has become 'post-Christian'. A few decades ago, our culture was generally accepting of the Christian message. That is changing. Living in a multi-cultural society, tolerance is highly valued. With this in mind, does Christ's call to take 'make disciples of all nations' make you feel uncomfortable? Perhaps you might agree with it intellectually but not put it into practice? How important is it to purposefully share the good news with people?



Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage – with great patience and careful instruction. (**2 Timothy 4:2**)

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile. (**Romans 1:16**)



Alleviating suffering

In Mark 12:31 Jesus makes it very clear that if we want to follow him we need to truly love the people around us. Anyone that wants to follow Jesus must care about all suffering – not just material suffering. Jesus says in Mark 8:36 "What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?" How can we care for someone practically yet fail to be concerned about their eternal suffering? While we must show our faith by caring for people in practical ways, if we neglect to care for their eternal souls, we are failing them in the most despicable way. Handing someone a cup of water must go together with telling them about Jesus!



Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria

In Acts 1:8, Jesus said the Holy Spirit would come on the disciples to empower them to be his witnesses in "Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth..." Those four locations make it clear that they would be witnesses everywhere. Jerusalem was the city where they were, Judea was the wider area, and Samaria a big town close by where the Samaritans, a people group who shared language and similar history with the Jews, lived. The 'ends of the earth' include all those other peoples and places that are far away in geography but also seem far away in culture, language and religion.



How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: 'How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!' (Romans 10:14-15)

LEADER'S NOTES: This area of discussion has the potential to go on for quite a while. There might be a difference between generations in how they answer this – younger generations might feel the reality and stress of letting people believe their own 'truth' more than older generations. Some people will feel the tension between loving people around them but feel if they share the good news they will be 'imposing' their views on others, which is seen as not loving. We must help people see that withholding the good news from people is the ultimate act of 'un-love'. As followers of Christ we have the answer to humankind's eternal illness – separation from God. Dwell upon these Scriptures to allow the Holy Spirit to gently challenge and illuminate our minds.



5. We have been thinking particularly about our UK context. We have seen that we are all called to love people, and that this flows out of who God is. With God's concern for all peoples, and his desire that all should come to repentance, what does that mean for the rest of the world? How should we respond to Christ's 'Great Commission' in **Mark 16:15-16**? From this verse, what is the state of those that do not believe?



He said to them, 'Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptised will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.' (**Mark 16:15-16**)

LEADER'S NOTES: Our response to God's glory and love in our own lives is our greatest motive. Because he first loved us (**1 John 4:19**) we love God, but we also love others. We must allow his word to speak to us – whilst we love people practically, we must highly value sharing the good news, both with people around us in the UK (Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria) but also working to take the good news to those many unreached people groups around the world (to the ends of the earth!). **Mark 16:15-16** makes it very clear that those that do not believe in Jesus stand condemned. Ignorance of the gospel is not a viable excuse. This idea is a difficult one for many people to accept but it is completely biblical. Again, we must come under the authority of Scripture rather than placing our culture as our ultimate authority.



Making it real: *The Acacia* people of Chad are a large Muslim people group of over six hundred thousand people living along the shore of Lake Chad. They are the traders and business people of Chad and have very few churches among them. Acacia parents send very few of their children to secular French-speaking schools, preferring to send them to Muslim Madrasas. It's a very arid, inhospitable region with very few gospel workers among them.*



The Acacia people stand condemned unless they hear and respond to the gospel. To pray, visit: eu.aimint.org/acacia.

**Name of the people group has been changed for security reasons.*



Bringing it home: How have you been challenged by today's study? Do you agree with the idea that our modern British culture is ashamed of the gospel? What does that mean for us? Are we embarrassed by the gospel? What do you think about the suggestion that as followers of Christ we must join God in his concern that all the peoples of the world come to repentance?

Ask if the group are up for a challenge. Give them paper and pens and ask them to write down the names of three friends, neighbours or work-colleagues. Explain that the challenge is to share something about their relationship with God with each of the people they have written down.

For resources to help your church think more about God's heart to reach the lost, visit eu.aimint.org.

4. Characteristics of a disciple (2): Sacrifice

Sacrifice as a vital characteristic of following Christ

In the past three studies we have looked at God's glory, his love and how our love for those around us and for the world flows out of that. We saw in 1 Peter 2:21 that as Christ's followers, we need to follow in his steps. In this study we will consider one of Christ's key teachings: sacrifice.



Getting started: Have you recently heard of any stories on social media, T.V. or news of real-life examples of people sacrificing themselves for someone else? How was it portrayed in the media? How did it make you feel?



1. Read 2 Philipians 2:6-8 and Mark 10:45. How did the Son of God, the author of life behave here on earth? What marked him out? What mindset are we called to have?



...who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death - even death on a cross! (Philippians 2:6-8)

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)

LEADER'S NOTES: You could also read **Isaiah 53:1-6**. Helping the group to dwell on these verses allows the Holy Spirit to speak to us. Don't rush over them. The world's ways are so opposite to God's ways; we need time to imbibe the truth. Christ was a man of suffering, service and sacrifice. We are called to imitate him and have the same mindset as Christ.



2. Read Matthew 16:24-25. What does it mean to deny ourselves? What does our culture highly value? What temptations do we face in our everyday lives that are opposite to denying ourselves and taking up our crosses?



Then Jesus said to his disciples, 'Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it.' (Matthew 16:24-25)



A grisly business

Public execution in Roman society was reserved for run-away slaves, prisoners of war, common criminals and army deserters. Roman citizens generally would never have been executed. In crucifixion a person was hung from a cross-pole resulting in all their weight resting on their chest - a very painful experience, especially as it could take two or three days to die. The point of the prolonged, terrible death was to serve as a graphic warning: 'if you do what this person did, you will die a terrible death!' For Rome, crucifixion was more than a means of execution, it was a tool to be used to maintain the civil order - clearly aimed at slaves and non-citizens. When Jesus said 'deny yourselves and take up your cross' it was no empty, throw-away comment. Jesus clearly knew that he would die by crucifixion (Matt 16:21) and he was well aware that his listeners already knew the terrible pain and suffering caused by crucifixion; crucifixion of slaves and non-Romans was a common occurrence. What's amazing is that the symbol of the cross has become so widely accepted as a cultural icon in the twenty-first century; it has lost its shocking reality.

LEADER'S NOTES: Help the group to think about the meaning of the word 'deny' in our own day to day lives. Ask this question: "Does denying ourselves mean that we should never have anything nice or enjoyable?" Is Jesus suggesting we live a lifestyle of abstinence and self-denial? No, all good things come from our heavenly Father (see **James 1:17**). Direct the conversation towards the understanding that denying ourselves is saying 'yes' to God and 'no' to ourselves. It means aligning our will with the Lord's will (**Luke 22:42**). What will this mean for us? How should we use our time, money, energy etc? Help the group to think about what our culture highly values (happiness, success, money, fame etc). These two ways of seeing the world are directly opposite each other. Help the group to consider the challenges we will face if we choose to deny ourselves



3. Read Matthew 16:26. What does this mean? How might we be aiming to 'gain the whole world' in our lives? How might we forfeit our souls?



What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? (Matthew 16:26)

LEADER'S NOTES: Ask the group to give examples of famous people or people they know that have gained the whole world. What have they needed to do to 'gain the whole world'? What effect has this search had upon their lives? Encourage the group to consider how we work to 'gain the whole world' in our own lives. What does it look like in our day to day lives? Try and help the group to go deeper as they consider their own lives – what we say doesn't always reflect the realities of our lives, particularly if people in the group have been Christians for many years (we often know the 'right' things to say!).



4. Read Matthew 16:27. Do we really believe that the Son of Man will return? If we truly believe that, how will it change the way we live life? What does this verse say about rewards? On what basis will we be rewarded?



For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what they have done. (Matthew 16:27)

LEADER'S NOTES: Most Christians will say that they believe that Jesus will return. Think about how you can encourage your group to really consider this question. If we knew we were going to die in a year's time, how would we live life? What would we change? Help the group to think about the



What is a UPG?

An Unreached People Group (UPG) is an ethnic group – a people that have their own language and culture - with no indigenous community of believing Christians. The fact that the people group have their own language and culture means that the gospel can't jump those barriers unless someone purposefully takes it to them. A UPG is classed as 'reached' when the local followers of Jesus number two percent of the population. At that point they are able to take the gospel to their own people.

There are 6,741 UPGs in the world!



See the stats

For a really helpful short video on the state of mission take a look at: eu.aimint.org/stats.

idea of rewards. Do we believe we will be rewarded differently in heaven depending upon how we live here on earth? Reassure the group that if they trust in Jesus through faith, their salvation is assured by grace. At the same time the Bible does seem to suggest that there will be rewards in heaven. See **Luke 6:23**, **2 Timothy 4:8** and **Revelation 22:12**. What difference will it make in our lives if we accept this?

“Roughly thirty-times as many missionaries go to reached people groups to work with Christians, as go to unreached people groups.”

R. W. Lewis



5. Read Matthew 28:18-20 and Romans 15:20. What can we learn from these verses? What has God called us to do?



Then Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.’ (Matthew 28:18-20)

It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on someone else’s foundation. (Romans 15:20)

LEADER’S NOTES: Go through these two verses and pull out what the Lord is commanding us to do. Help the group to see that if we want to follow Jesus Christ we must obey his commands to deny ourselves, take up our crosses and obey him. Open up the discussion – what does ‘going and making disciples of all nations’ mean? While we are all called to share the gospel with everyone around us, should Jesus’ followers be specially concerned about those peoples that have never had the chance to hear? What are we to teach all nations?



Making it real: *The Karimojong live in Karamoja, northeast Uganda. In the past they have been marginalised and ignored; until recently, they were defined by high levels of internal conflict and cattle raiding, leading to them being widely feared. The Karimojong is one of the poorest and most under-developed peoples in Uganda; they are also spiritually in desperate need to hear of the Father’s love. Even though many might identify as Christian, the reality is that there are few indigenous followers of Christ. Pray that the Karimojong would turn to Christ and rather than raiding for cattle would become fishers of men. Please pray! God is working among the Karimojong in exciting ways; pray the Lord brings his healing and light to the Karimojong.*



For more information to help you to pray for the Karimojong people, visit: eu.aimint.org/karimojong.



Bringing it home: Round the discussion off by asking the group what has struck them from today’s study. If people are comfortable, ask them to share what they feel challenged by.

God’s Word challenges us not just to read the Word, but to obey it (**Matthew 7:24-27**). Ask the group to discuss different ways that

they can respond (there are a few suggestions below).

Three ways to make a difference:

1. Matthew 9:37-38 says, “*The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.*” Our Father wants us to be involved in seeing every tongue, people and tribe come into his Kingdom. Use prayafrica.org, joshuaproject.net or eu.aimint.org/pray to get inspired to pray. Ask the Lord to show you which unreached people group he wants you to pray for. Commit to pray for them each day or once a week. Invite your church or small group to regularly pray for an unreached people group, too. Your prayers will make a difference!

2. Sending workers into the harvest field takes financial resources. Could you consider giving to enable someone else to take the good news to those that have never heard it? You can sign up to give at eu.aimint.org/give.

3. The Lord Jesus is calling his church around the world to take the good news to those that have never heard. Is he calling you? If you are exploring this, why not speak to the leadership of your church? The Lord might be calling you, but he wants to send you through your local church. Once you have spoken to your church leaders, AIM has Mission Advisors who would love to chat with you and your church to help you continue on in your journey. Go to eu.aimint.org/go for more information. A great way to understand God’s heart for the lost is to go and visit and pray. Perhaps your church would like to organise a vision and prayer trip to go and see God working in unreached people groups? If you would like to chat to an AIM Mission Advisor to find out more, then please contact Debbie at stc.eu@aimint.org.

For resources to help your church think more about God’s heart to reach the lost, visit eu.aimint.org.

Endnotes

1. Study light.org <https://www.studylight.org/commentary/1-chronicles/16-25.html>
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5. Arpin-Ricci, Jamie, 2012, Preach the Gospel at All Times? Huff Post, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/preach-the-gospel-at-all-times-st-francis_b_1627781?guccounter=1&guce_referrer=aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuZ-29vZ2xlLmNvbS8&guce_referrer_sig=AQAAALyr6U9G-bTbazWfrVSWXpyOJEkrTSG28R-6qCjGW7Dj20h-bVcf1-Kl92iOZj6m19Rg-Y8-XsyFHq4Yz5vw_CoklDMvCpXK6_kVelsx7GmAaU9jMGOZbLrXRfjX9CPmPhGcs-8R8AryPYakxD2lev4C7ibxSeeJK_HjBXSILLeKs, accessed on 19/3/20

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