

the eleventh step

allow God to give us his passion for the lost, and be willing and able to share the gospel at all times

chasing after the wind

The book of Ecclesiastes tells the story of one man's search for fulfilment and meaning in life. The author (possibly King Solomon) sampled the delights of 'wine, women and song' on a scale that would make the most self-indulgent pop-star look like an enthusiastic amateur. He did it all, and he did it big-time...but he concluded that it was all *meaningless* - just a "*chasing after the wind*" (Ecclesiastes 1:14). He instigated great building and agricultural programmes, he amassed vast wealth...and yet he still despaired of life. All his efforts failed to produce joy, fulfilment or even peace of mind.

If only this king had the opportunity to lead someone to Christ, he wouldn't have bothered with the other stuff!

Leading another person to Christ - being God's chosen instrument to bring *his* salvation - can be one of the most profoundly satisfying experiences this world has to offer. It is to make an *eternal* difference, to play a part in destiny...to act as midwife in the 'new birth'. Perhaps the only thing which rivals this for pure satisfaction, is to take that new child of God through to spiritual maturity.

getting passionate

Both the *desire* to lead others to Christ, and the *appreciation* of the privilege, flow through our relationship with God. As we draw close to our heavenly Father, we will naturally come to reflect his nature...and we will find *his* priorities becoming *our* priorities. In that sense, allowing God to 'give us his passion for the lost' is merely a matter of staying on the path of discipleship.

Passion for those who are lost - those whose sin continues to separate them from God - was, of course, the motivation for the cross. There is nothing higher on God's agenda than that his Son's sacrifice should bring life to those for whom he died...and as Christians, *our* agenda will grow increasingly to look like *his*.

Before people can be lead to Christ, though, they have to hear the gospel message - as Romans 10:14 says...*And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard?*" Sometimes, Christians can find it a little difficult to share that message. There are various reasons why that may happen, but none why it need happen to *us*. Nevertheless, we should be aware of anything that *could* hinder us, in this most important and fulfilling aspect of our faith. So, we'll begin with a look at a few problems Christians may sometimes encounter in sharing the gospel: Once we've got those out of the way, we can start thinking about how we can effectively share our faith...*and* enjoy doing it!

potential difficulties

Some of the more common things that can cause Christians to be hesitant about sharing their faith:

1. **Insufficient understanding** Christians can sometimes lack an understanding of some or all of the following:

- a) *The importance of sharing the gospel*
- b) *The urgency of sharing the gospel*
- c) *The privilege with which they are entrusted*
- d) *The rewards of accepting the privilege*

2. **Fear** Sometimes, fear and other concerns can prevent Christians from sharing their faith, specifically:

- a) *Fear of rejection*
- b) *Lack of self-confidence*
- c) *Self-consciousness*

3. **Lack of method** The gospel can be shared spontaneously by those who have a gift for such things. Lesser mortals (such as myself) need to have at least an outline of how they will deliver the message - either for a pre-planned occasion...or as preparation for the inevitable *spontaneous opportunities*.

analysing those problems

We don't need to worry about *insufficient understanding*. We already know how important (and urgent) it is, to share the gospel message. We know, too, that God has entrusted fragile humanity with the amazing privilege of sharing in his work...and that the blessings of serving him are out of all proportion to the work involved. Yet we may still need to overcome other obstacles on our list, so let's take a closer look at them...

Fear of rejection

It seems that most of humanity suffers from this, in one form or another...to one degree or another. Nobody likes to be rejected, though perhaps we should note that Jesus himself knew in advance that many would reject *him*, but he came all the same.

Fear of rejection is based in *pre-supposition*. It pre-supposes the likelihood (or, at least, the possibility) of rejection, it presupposes that rejection is personal, and also *that rejection actually matters*.

It is not surprising that many people see rejection in this light - whether or not they know Jesus. When it comes to sharing the gospel, though, we need have no fear of rejection - *because we aren't really the ones who might be rejected!*

When we share the truth about Christ, we are acting as his ambassadors. It is *his* message of salvation to *his* creation, and we're just delivering it. Even in the days when kings would behead ambassadors if they didn't like the message, it was never personal...though it probably *felt* personal to the unfortunate emissaries! But, even if we should suffer a little persecution for Christ, the bible tells us we are blessed. It says 'rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven' (Matthew 5:12). Any rejection is going to be primarily directed at the message (and the sender) and if a little of that rubs off on us, we are only - in

small measure - sharing the suffering of our saviour.

Generally, though, rejection won't be particularly personal, and really shouldn't matter anyway - at least in terms of maintaining a relationship with the person with whom we have been sharing the gospel. It is in the nature of Christ that he *perseveres* with people, and sometimes, we will need to do the same. Of course, it *does* matter if the *gospel* is rejected - and we'll be looking at what our part is in minimising such occurrences when we examine 'method'.

Lack of self-confidence

Some Christians worry that they can't convey the gospel message very clearly, or even interestingly. That's pre-supposition, too! It pre-supposes that it is done in our own strength, and that the result depends on how articulate or gifted we are as ambassadors for Christ. Well, it isn't and it doesn't. A decisive delivery of the gospel is a function of our submission to the Holy Spirit, and the listener's willingness to hear from God. No amount of self-confidence will help at all - we need *God confidence!* We need to know and love him, share his passion and do his will...we need to understand that all we are asked to bring is our willingness and application, and to speak the truth in love. Obviously, we should use a little common sense in *how* we present the message, but it is our reliance on God - our 'God confidence' - that makes the difference. From that foundation, we can *confidently* expect *his* power to work through us - and that is far more persuasive than any human argument!

Self-consciousness

Related to both *fear of rejection* and *lack of self-confidence*, self-consciousness may also make sharing the gospel a little uncomfortable. Self-consciousness is that feeling of being exposed, out on a limb...on display. Also like those other difficulties, self-consciousness is perfectly understandable - bearing in mind that we are discussing (with another person) our most important and intimate relationship. Yet - if we concentrate on how much that relationship means to us, and how much it would mean to whoever we are talking to - we should quickly overcome any feelings of self-consciousness.

In truth, we can overcome *any* of these potential difficulties with a little application. We just refuse to be distracted by these natural feelings, and so allow God to work *unimpeded* through us, as he touches the lives of others.

relational evangelism

The *method* we use to share the gospel can also make a contribution to both our enjoyment of the experience, and its effectiveness. The *best* method, of course, is the one that works...the one that successfully leads another person to Jesus. People may come to Christ through hearing the message in church, through evangelistic events, or perhaps through attending church-based courses. We can be part of any of those (as our gifting and calling dictates) yet it is *relational evangelism* - that one-to-one sharing of the gospel - which we are most concerned with here. There are a couple of reasons why: It remains the most effective way of leading people to Christ, and *every* Christian can (and should) enjoy the experience of introducing other individuals to Jesus. *Every* Christian, by definition, includes even the most shy - even the most naturally timid - among us. It is the privilege and responsibility of us all, and so it follows that every personality type can be blessed in sharing the gospel. We only need identify the method that (1) God can use (2) is right for us, and (3) has the desired effect. We're going to be considering a model that is powerful and effective, which also happens to be one that just about any personality type should feel comfortable in using...*the testimonial witness*.

testimony

Testimonial witnessing really just means talking about *our own* experiences of God. As a basis for sharing the gospel it has several advantages: It doesn't require a deep understanding of theology; it is easy for a listener to relate to; every Christian has a testimony, and natural shyness should not be a problem...in fact, it can be a positive blessing - as we shall see later. As we have already noted, this kind of relational evangelism can be a very effective and - with the right preparation - it will be one in which any Christian can find richly rewarding service.

A testimony, of course, is not the gospel message itself - but it leads naturally to the gospel being delivered. We could think of testimony as the vehicle we use to carry the gospel to others. The gospel - Christ's sacrifice for the forgiveness of our sins - is something all Christians know about, and we need not go into here...but before ever we witness to others, we should be clear in our minds how we hope to present the gospel to them. As we are using testimony as our 'vehicle', we should aim to include the gospel *simply* and *conversationally*.

In relational evangelism, we are not preaching a sermon or delivering a lecture...we're talking to a friend. Ideally, our approach should be very straightforward - just the briefest outline of who Jesus is, what he has done, and why we needed him to do it. Of course, it helps if we can answer any questions our friend might have, and a little preparation may be useful. There are books available on those 'frequently asked questions' people often bring up, and we can also prepare by asking ourselves what we found challenging when we heard the gospel.

It can also be useful to consider what we know about the person to whom we'll be talking. Some plans for evangelism major on developing a *style* that suits our nature...such as an intellectual style, or a confrontational style. But often, it can be more productive to deliver the gospel in a style that appeals to the listener - rather in the one we feel most comfortable with.

Testimonial witnessing itself is simple, because it is *our story*. We can think about our testimony as having three sections - "what it was like", "what happened" and "what it's like now". If the person we are sharing with knows us well, they may already be familiar with most of our story. There may be times when it is appropriate just to talk about "what happened", before we outline the gospel. But let's have a brief look at all the elements of "our story"....

1. "What it was like"

This is just some background on our lives before we met Jesus, and perhaps those we speak to will find they 'identify' with aspects of this section. They might have encountered similar situations or difficulties, they may recognise their own personality traits or patterns of behaviour emerging from our story. The importance of "what it was like" is that it establishes us as normal people with normal life experiences, and others can relate to that.

2. "What happened"

Our encounter with Jesus! We explain - in simple terms - how we met Christ, and how we responded to him. At this point, we can introduce a basic outline of the gospel message of belief, repentance and salvation.

Some people can tell of remarkable events when they met Jesus - like Paul, they've had a 'Damascus Road experience'. Many more - just as Christ's original disciples - will have responded to a gentler invitation to follow. God deals with us individually, and our testimonies are *uniquely* ours. Whatever the circumstances of our conversion, though, our testimony is primarily about *what it means to us* - and it is important to convey this when we describe the manner in which God revealed himself.

Perhaps as a comment on human nature, some Christians who have been brought gently into the kingdom of God rather wish they'd had a more dramatic conversion. On the other hand, some of the 'Damascus Road' persuasion would have preferred to be counted among those who are 'blessed because they have believed and *not* seen'. What really matters, of course, is that 'our names are written in heaven'...that, and the fact that God can and will use *any* type of testimony to bring others to his Son.

3. "What it's like now"

Aside from the eternal perspective, what difference does Jesus make on a daily basis? What's changed, and how do we think, act and feel differently? We can talk about the fulfilling and exciting aspects of our faith, but let's remember to mention any struggles we've had, too. It's not helpful to leave someone thinking "I could never be like you", just because they've not seen the full picture. Christianity is not always easy...but it *is* always infinitely better.

What happens next? That depends on the person to whom we're talking. They may want to hear some more about Christianity - now or later. They may want to become part of God's family straight away, or they may not...but even if they seem unreceptive, we should continue to pray for them - because prayer can change any situation, and soften the hardest heart. Prayer, of course, should always underpin our witnessing - both before and after sharing the gospel. This brings us to a more detailed consideration of our preparations, an essential ingredient of successful witnessing.

preparing for action

We can divide our preparation into two parts - *spiritual* and *practical*. The good news about practical preparation is that there's not much to it. The good news about the spiritual side is that we've already done it! Our programme has already taken us way beyond the point where effective witness can begin. The commitments we have made - our on-going pursuit of life in Christ - not only mean we are ideally placed to share the gospel, but they *invite* God's blessing on *all* our service to him. The only additional spiritual preparation we need for witnessing is *prayer* - prayer for guidance, for opportunities, for boldness and for the Spirit of God to work mightily through us. When we have decided to share the gospel with a particular individual, we can pray for them in detail.

The *practical* preparations for testimonial witnessing are quite straightforward. In addition to thinking about the kind of person we'll be dealing with, and the sort of questions they might bring up, we will need a rough idea of what we are going to say. Yet our *main* preparation will be to build a rapport with the other person. Relational evangelism means sharing the gospel within the framework of a *relationship*. There are many different ways to build relationships...there are *good* ways, such as taking a genuine interest in what interests others, and there are *bad* ways - such as flattery and 'people-pleasing'. But then, there is the *best* way...

winning the right to be heard

Taking an interest, or perhaps being 'culturally relevant', may be useful tools when building a relationship. Moreover, if we acknowledge a person's value, if we affirm them and don't just dismiss their lifestyle, our own views may be given a sympathetic hearing. This kind of approach is valuable, and is commonly practised in social and even business situations. Yet, when it comes to 'winning the right to be heard', Christians enjoy a unique advantage...*love*.

The love of God - specifically, the love of God *in action* - will almost always give us the right to be heard. When we demonstrate God's love to another human being - when we *model* Christianity for them - we are not likely to struggle for the opportunity to witness. We won't be anxiously awaiting the right moment to share our testimony, or trying to overcome our natural shyness before we can speak. The reason? *They'll probably ask us!* They will want to know 'why' - why we care about them, why we put ourselves out for them...why we *love* them.

The most powerful thing we can do in preparing someone to hear the gospel is to create a sense of wonderment - through loving them. Loving them just how they are; loving them whatever their response...and loving them in practice, not just in theory. Nothing excites a person's curiosity more than love. When we love like that, there is no fear in sharing the gospel - nor any difficulty in 'choosing the moment'. We have already built a meaningful relationship, and our testimony is likely to emerge in natural conversation, rather than in a contrived way. With this type of witnessing, shyness can actually be a blessing - a shy person will probably want to demonstrate even more 'love in action' before sharing their faith.

We've already had a close look at 'love in action' in previous sessions. It is really just about having God's love for others, and taking opportunities to demonstrate it in practical ways. The key is *prayer* - if we continue to pray for an individual, we *will* experience Christ's love for them. All we are doing, in essence, is taking 'God's passion for the lost' and focussing it on a particular person. Perhaps we could think of this concept as a 'spiritual law' - *whoever we sincerely pray for, we will sincerely love*. Opportunities will come to express this love in action, because, 1) we'll be praying for opportunities and, 2) we'll be looking for them. Through service or support, through small kindnesses or greater sacrifice, we will show them genuine love, and - almost inevitably - they will want to know why...and our testimony and the gospel will explain everything!

keeping it simple

In Acts 26, we can see a detailed testimonial witness - Paul telling his story to King Agrippa. Being ready to share the gospel 'at all times' means that we should be able to offer such an account of our faith. Yet, because it is likely we will do it most often *relationally* - we won't often need to go into our backgrounds to the extent that Paul did. In truth, the testimonial witness can be a remarkably simple affair, especially when it is done in an existing relationship. In John 1:40-42, for example, Andrew just says to Simon (Peter) "*We have found the Messiah*", and then "he brought him to Jesus". Then, in John 4, we have the account of the Samaritan woman, who tells her neighbours "*Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Christ?*" (Verse 29) Relational evangelism really just comes down to this: *We introduce one of our friends to another of our friends...*and if we are ever tempted to think that we don't know Jesus well enough to tell others about him - that he hasn't been our friend long enough - we can always read John 4 and remind ourselves how long the Samaritan woman had known him!

Leading other people to Jesus is eternally significant and deeply fulfilling. It is a hugely rewarding experience. True, we are commanded to 'make disciples' (Matthew 28:19), but even if we weren't - and even if there were no rewards - the love of others would compel us to share the gospel. There is much more, of course, to making disciples than sharing the gospel or leading someone to Christ...but the path of discipleship begins with that first step. It is not coincidental that everything we have been considering in this session is about how to help others do *our* first step, to come into exactly that relationship we committed to at the start of our programme. Let's remind ourselves of how we can do that effectively and enjoyably...

Putting it all together

1. Motive

Our motivation for sharing the gospel - for leading others to Christ - is simply...love! Love of God, and love of those who he has created. It is both our privilege and our duty to share in our Heavenly Father's work - assisting others to come into an everlasting relationship with him. If it is an awesome responsibility, it is also one of the most fulfilling and rewarding experiences we can have in this world. Being the 'midwife' in the new birth may be about obedience, but it is also about sharing the Father's joy.

The eternal implications of this 'labour of love' are such that we should be able to overcome any reservations we may have, perhaps as a result of self-consciousness or fear of rejection. Those of us who are not naturally 'outgoing' should benefit from being aware of this eternal perspective, but also from our consideration of the basis for such fears - which may now seem more imaginary than substantial. The gospel can be confidently presented by any Christian - even the most shy and retiring: God would not deny any of his children that blessing, merely because they were of a particular personality type. It is therefore probably no coincidence that the most effective means of witnessing is one that can be used by all of us! Which bring us to...

2. Means

There are many means by which Christians can share the gospel, but the one that we can all succeed in is relational evangelism - just 'introducing one of our friends to another of our friends'. Most often, we can do this in the context of our testimony, which is really only a brief account of our relationship with God. A full testimony would take the form of 'what it was like before we met Jesus', 'what happened', and 'what it is like now'...though, for people who know us well, we may concentrate on just our encounter with Christ.

The testimony is a vehicle for carrying the gospel message - it is not the message itself. The gospel explains everything - who we are, who God is, what he has done for us and what our response should be. Our testimony is an account of how God has intervened to save us personally, and how that has affected our lives. The message and the testimony fit perfectly together, and should make a single harmonious and powerful presentation.

A little preparation is helpful. In addition to thinking about the manner of our approach (this might vary according to the type of person we'll be speaking to), we may also like to consider beforehand what questions might arise. Having an outline plan of what we will say is a very good idea, but consistently praying for the person is an even better one! Prayer is the key to successful evangelism. Through prayer, God can prepare our hearts and the hearts of those who will hear us. Prayer will further motivate us, because 'who we sincerely pray for, we will sincerely love'. But it is also prayer that will give us the openings for witnessing in

the first place...

3. ...and opportunity!

There may be times when witnessing just seems the right thing to do, and we will present the gospel 'off the cuff'. Mostly though, we will probably be in an existing relationship with someone for a little while before we tell them the good news. It may be a relationship we've always had...but equally, it could be one we've built up more recently. The right reason for building a relationship like that must always be love - pure and simple. Sharing the gospel is the highest expression of that love - it is the most valuable thing we can give to another human being - but it should always flow naturally through love.

Love creates opportunities to share: It draws us close to people and it makes our views count in their eyes. When love is expressed in action, it wins for us the right to be heard - it causes wonderment and awe, it excites curiosity. When we share our faith in love, there should be no awkwardness, no self-consciousness. It is the natural progression of a meaningful relationship, and it is as likely to occur at **their** instigation as it is at **ours** - because those we love will want to know what makes us the people we are. Through love, our testimony and the gospel message can just emerge in discussion, rather than being forced into a contrived conversation.

A relationship with Father God is what we are all designed for...it is the most natural thing on earth. The second most natural thing on earth is to share that fact with those who don't yet know it...those we love - those **he** loves. Relational evangelism is just the natural way of doing that natural thing. It is richly rewarding, it is 'user friendly'...but it is also powerfully effective!

As those who know Christ, we will already have some measure of God's passion for the lost. To make that passion count, we will want to move it from the general to the particular - to specific individuals who need to meet Jesus. Perhaps certain people come to mind straight away, but - in any event - there will be those for whom we will one day become 'ambassadors for Christ'. Let's make sure that we are in a position to be effective for Jesus when that time comes - through prayer and through love. This way, sharing the gospel not only blesses others, it becomes a source of great joy and fulfilment to ourselves.

A prayer of commitment

Father God,

I thank you that you have given me a role of eternal significance in the lives of others, by choosing me to represent you to those I know. I am grateful for your trust, and mindful of the enormous responsibility. I pray that I may be effective in this work, recognising that my ability to witness decisively is dependent on maintaining and strengthening my relationship with you. I ask for your love of those I know, and for practical situations in which to show that love. I commit myself to praying for each person you draw me alongside, and to give freely of myself to each as they have need. I ask that you create opportunities, that you open hearts and minds, and that you speak through me to them. Let the light of Christ shine through me, showing the way to those whose lives are touched by mine.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

The eleventh step:

Allow God to give us his passion for the lost, and be willing and able to share the gospel at all times

- is really *all* about love in action, because love in action is both *what* the step is, and *how* we do it. Approached in the way described, there is nothing to fear, nothing to stop us enjoying the experience time after time. One could almost suspect that God *intended* it to be one of the most pleasurable activities we can ever participate in!

comments and questions for the group meeting

the journal...continued

Morning Prayer

Before doing anything else, a short time of prayer containing the following elements: Thanks to God for who He is, what Jesus has done, and for His love and provision (including the new day). Commit the day to Him, asking for His protection and presence.

Through the day

Involve God in your daily life, seeking His guidance in situations as they arise, and endeavour to respond to people as you believe Jesus would.

In the evening

Set aside a little time, every evening, to pray, complete your journal and consider the readings. Prayer should include thanksgiving, repentance, prayer for others and for yourself - particularly that God's perfect will should be completely fulfilled in your life. Pray for each member of your group (by name). Matters arising through the day, personal situations or difficulties should also be brought before God. Invite the Holy Spirit to guide you in your prayers, and be open to His leading.

Day One

The Main Event

What event during the day stands out in your mind, and why?

What do you think/feel about that 'event'?

Were you able to involve God in what was happening?

How did your relationship with God affect your reaction to this event?

Did you respond as you think Jesus would have, in a similar situation?

Is there anything, on reflection, you might have done differently?

You and God

Have you spoken to God at times through the day?

Have you been aware of His presence with you?

In what way has being a Christian made a difference to your day?

Bible Reading - Romans 10:14-15

What do you think/feel when you read these words?

Something to think about... *Leading another person to Christ - being God's chosen instrument to bring his salvation - can be one of the most profoundly satisfying experiences this world has to offer. It is to make an eternal difference, to play a part in destiny...to act as midwife in the 'new birth'.*

Day Two

The Main Event

What event during the day stands out in your mind, and why?

What do you think/feel about that 'event'?

Were you able to involve God in what was happening?

How did your relationship with God affect your reaction to this event?

Did you respond as you think Jesus would have, in a similar situation?

Is there anything, on reflection, you might have done differently?

You and God

Have you spoken to God at times through the day?

Have you been aware of His presence with you?

In what way has being a Christian made a difference to your day?

Bible Reading - Acts 8:26-38

What do you think/feel when you read these words?

Something to think about... *There are many means by which Christians can share the gospel, but the one that we can all succeed in is relational evangelism - just 'introducing one of our friends to another of our friends'.*

Day Three

The Main Event

What event during the day stands out in your mind, and why?

What do you think/feel about that 'event'?

Were you able to involve God in what was happening?

How did your relationship with God affect your reaction to this event?

Did you respond as you think Jesus would have, in a similar situation?

Is there anything, on reflection, you might have done differently?

You and God

Have you spoken to God at times through the day?

Have you been aware of His presence with you?

In what way has being a Christian made a difference to your day?

Bible reading - 2 Timothy 4:1-5

What do you think/feel when you read these words?

Something to think about... *Love creates opportunities to share: It draws us close to people and it makes our views count in their eyes. When love is expressed in action, it wins for us the right to be heard.*

Day Four

The Main Event

What event during the day stands out in your mind, and why?

What do you think/feel about that 'event'?

Were you able to involve God in what was happening?

How did your relationship with God affect your reaction to this event?

Did you respond as you think Jesus would have, in a similar situation?

Is there anything, on reflection, you might have done differently?

You and God

Have you spoken to God at times through the day?

Have you been aware of His presence with you?

In what way has being a Christian made a difference to your day?

Bible reading - Acts 26:4-23

What do you think/feel when you read these words?

Something to think about... *A relationship with Father God is what we are all designed for...it is the most natural thing on earth. The second most natural thing on earth is to share that fact with those who don't yet know it.*

Day Five

The Main Event

What event during the day stands out in your mind, and why?

What do you think/feel about that 'event'?

Were you able to involve God in what was happening?

How did your relationship with God affect your reaction to this event?

Did you respond as you think Jesus would have, in a similar situation?

Is there anything, on reflection, you might have done differently?

You and God

Have you spoken to God at times through the day?

Have you been aware of His presence with you?

In what way has being a Christian made a difference to your day?

Bible reading - Matthew 28:19-20

What do you think/feel when you read these words?

Something to think about... *Prayer is the key to successful evangelism. Through prayer, God can prepare our hearts and the hearts of those who will hear us.*

Day Six - the weekly review

In your relationship with God, what has been the highlight of the week?

What have you found most challenging or difficult?

Have you been aware of God's care for you this week?

Has God intervened in your life - answers to prayer etc.?

Have you been able to pray consistently throughout the week?

Can you think of any areas in your relationship with God that could be improved and, if so, how are you going to tackle them?

In times of trouble or temptation, how easy is it for you to seek the help of

a) God

b) other Christians?

What has been the most encouraging aspect of this past week?

It's self-assessment time....again!

Do you remember the "1 - 10's"? As the programme is drawing to a close, it would be a good time to review our progress. Of course - having come this far - we will know that these questions are *not* a definitive guide to how we are doing as Christians. For one thing, they don't cover anything like all the aspects of our relationship with God and - for another - they deal more with *perceptions* than hard facts. But a mixture of perceptions and a few hard facts can be useful - it can tell us quite a bit about how we *feel* we are doing. We should be greatly encouraged by our progress, whether it can be clearly demonstrated or merely sensed. The other benefit of a review is that - if it does highlight an area in which we feel we haven't come as far as we would like - we can just revisit the relevant part of our programme.

Keep in mind, though, that we're talking about **progress** on the path of discipleship. Christians, *especially* ones who are really moving forward with God, are often quite self-critical. The reason? *The closer we draw to God, the more aware we will be of any little*

distance that still lies between us. "Saints" can always see their shortcomings more clearly than "sinners", because they are standing in the light of God. The comparison is between where we are now and where we **were**...not where we are heading to!

As we're looking at change, the questions are now geared to that perception of progress - so rather than the "1-10" format, it's a simple 'yes' or 'no'.

1. You and God

- a) Are you *more* aware of God's presence in your life?
- b) Are you *more* aware of God's actions in your life?

2. Are you more active in...

- a) Prayer?
- b) Worship?
- c) Bible study?
- d) Evangelism?

3. Service.

- a) Is God using your life *increasingly* for His purposes?
- b) Are you more active in church life?
- c) ...in supporting other Christians?
- d) ...in your community?

4. You and others

- a) Is it easier to resist temptations?
- b) Are you more able to love others as Christ loves you?
- c) Do you find it easier to forgive other people?

5. The 'fruit of the Spirit'. (Galatians 5:22-23) Are the following attributes more apparent in your life?

- a) Love?
- b) Joy?
- c) Peace?
- d) Patience?
- e) Kindness?
- f) Goodness?
- g) Faithfulness?
- h) Gentleness?
- i) Self-control?

6. Trust.

Do you feel you are more fully trusting in God at this time?

7. Response.

Do you feel you are more fully responding to God?

8. Understanding.

Do you now have a better understanding of what it means to follow Christ?

PREPARATION FOR THE TWELFTH SESSION

Please prepare for the twelfth session by *prayerfully* reading the next chapter, noting down any comments or questions that you'd like to bring up in the group