



TOPIC:

*growth*

# *Christian* FOUNDATIONS



## INTRODUCTION

# Christian FOUNDATIONS

Christian Foundations is a series of studies that helps people discover (and rediscover) the FOUNDATIONS of believing in, living life with and serving Jesus.

Each module is centred around the rhythm of daily self-study and reflection on Scripture and weekly discussion with a Christian mentor (or mentoring group).

### The daily rhythm involves:

- A brief introduction to the Scripture reading
- The study of a Scripture passage
- Reflection and journaling on the passage
- A short devotion flowing from the passage
- A prayer to pray aloud
- An action to take in response to what you have learned

The modules can be completed in any number or order depending on your needs, but for someone completing all the modules a **suggested order is:**

1. Identity
2. Spirit
3. Growth
4. Service
5. Mission
6. Perseverance
7. Baptism

## INSTRUCTIONS

ORGANISE with a mentor or mentoring group when you will meet and which module you will do together each week.

STUDY daily one of the five Bible studies (Study 1-5), and write any reflections, questions and revelations. It will probably take you about 20 minutes to complete the reading and reflection. (If a daily study proves too difficult, you could decide to spread each module over two weeks.)

MEET weekly (or fortnightly) with your mentor (and other members if in a group). There is a guide for this discussion at the end of each module.

## ADVICE

Decide in advance exactly where and when you will spend the time each day reading and reflecting on the Scripture passage and input. With a regular time and place, it is much more likely that you will get the studies done.

Make sure you don't "move on" from each module until you have spoken and debriefed with your mentor or mentoring group about this important foundation of Christian living. Be completely honest with your mentor. If you don't understand something, are having doubts, or forget to do the studies, just tell them. This isn't a test you can get wrong. It is an investment into the rest of your life with God.

Write down your questions and reflections and bring this to your weekly meeting. It would also help to have a look at the discussion questions before you meet with your mentor. Pray that God will use these studies to grow you and release you into a more grace-centred, God-focused and joy-filled life in Christ.

## READING 1: SCRIPTURE IS IMPORTANT

### *orientate*

I have a doctorate in mentoring. That doesn't mean I'm any good at mentoring, it just means that I know a lot about it. But someone who was really good at mentoring was the Apostle Paul. We know that because he wrote two really helpful letters to a guy he was mentoring – Timothy. By the time he wrote his second letter to Timothy, Paul was on his last legs (in a Roman dungeon facing martyrdom). So in this letter he is passing on advice and responsibility to Timothy, his apprentice. This letter contains the last words we have from Paul. He's not pretending that his life has been easy, but he has remained rock solid in his commitment to God and is encouraging Timothy to do the same.

### *explore*

#### **2 Timothy 3:10-17**

10 You, however, know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance, 11 persecutions, sufferings—what kinds of things happened to me in Antioch, Iconium and Lystra, the persecutions I endured. Yet the Lord rescued me from all of them. 12 In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, 13 while evildoers and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.

14 But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, 15 and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. 16 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, 17 so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

### *journal*

1. What is God saying to me? Which verse is most significant?
2. What do I want to discuss/explore further?
3. What do I need to do?
4. Why was Scripture so important for Timothy?

## reflect

You may have had a long history learning about the Bible (like Timothy), or this may all be brand new to you. Whichever way, the Bible is going to become your guide for Christian growth. Reading the Bible will help you to understand God and to learn how God relates to his people and his broken creation. Scripture will be vital for your continuing spiritual growth, and its promises and advice will help you persevere when it gets tough.

It's incredible really. Not only has God revealed himself in human form (through Jesus), but he has breathed out a very special book that tells us all about God in language we can read and understand. The Bible is not just another book about God. It is actually God's book. He has especially inspired authors to write down his ideas. As Paul said, "It's all been God-breathed."

Yes people wrote it, but God's power breathed it and lives in it. The Bible is one of God's gifts to us.

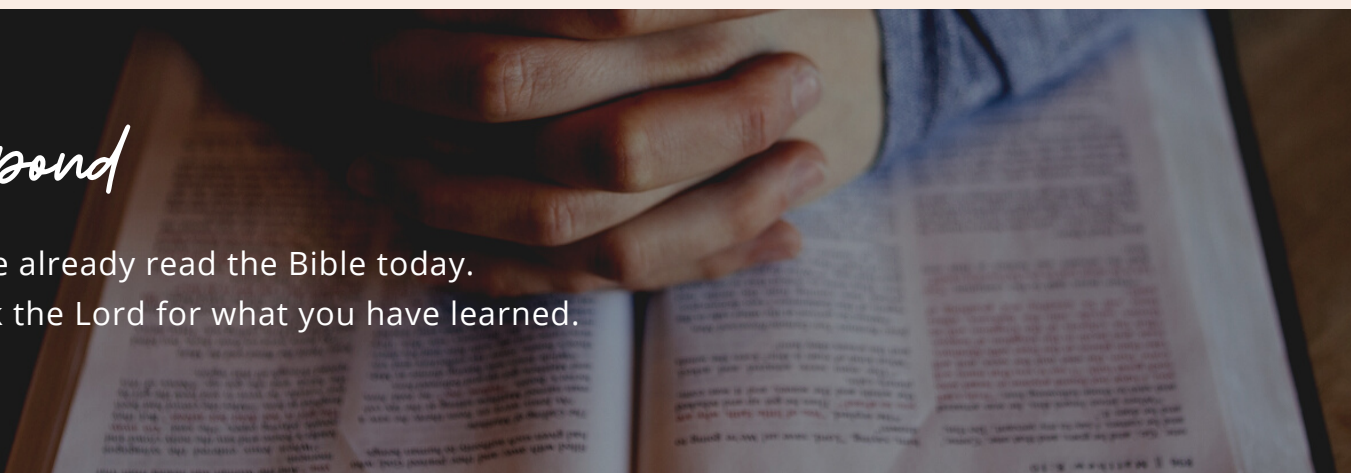
So if you want to get to know God personally, then reading Scripture is the place to start. Many Christians read a passage from the Bible every day. Some try to read right through the Bible in a year. Sometimes it's good to study a few verses very carefully. At other times, it's helpful to read big chunks to get a feel for the sweep of God's revelation. Ask your friends what they do. It's a big book (actually 66 smaller books that all fit together) so get stuck into it. You'll find it will teach you, challenge you, correct you and train you so that you're ready to do all that God wants (3:16-17).

## pray

Lord you graciously have made things clearer for us by giving us Scripture. I don't have to guess what you are like or believe what someone tells me about you. I can read all about it for myself. Your truth is in my hands and on my phone. Teach me and grow me as I read the Bible every day. May I never get tired of reading about you and listening to you. Please keep teaching and growing me.

## respond

You've already read the Bible today.  
Thank the Lord for what you have learned.





## READING 2: PRAYER IS IMPORTANT

### *orientate*

The Jewish spiritual leaders were good at praying. They had lots of set prayers that they had memorised and could repeat, and they were not shy about displaying their prayer life. It was pretty impressive seeing them on the street corner with their hands raised, praying aloud for hours on end. You couldn't help but admire their commitment and 'godliness.' The trouble was that God had no interest in their prayers. They were just babbling on and on to the sky. We certainly don't want to get this prayer thing wrong like them. Prayer is the lifeblood of our relationship with God. So how should we pray?

### *explore*

#### **Matthew 6:5-13**

5 "And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. 6 But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. 7 And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. 8 Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

9 "This, then, is how you should pray:

"Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name,  
10 your kingdom come,  
your will be done,  
on earth as it is in heaven.  
11 Give us today our daily bread.  
12 And forgive us our debts,  
as we also have forgiven our debtors.  
13 And lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from the evil one.'

### *journal*

1. What is God saying to me? Which verse is most significant?
2. What do I want to discuss/explore further?
3. What do I need to do?
4. How was Jesus' prayer different from the prayers of the hypocrites?

## reflect

So what makes prayer that God appreciates? Well it doesn't have to be lengthy or sound good. We don't have to tell God about all the details. He already knows. And it doesn't have to be public. I'm sure that God likes prayer meetings, but some of the best prayers are those cries from the heart when no-one is around to hear except God. So if you can't pray for long or can't pray aloud at this stage, that's fine. It actually might help. But what does God want? Two things from this passage.

First, he wants your prayer to be directed to him and filled with trust in him. Notice that the first half of Jesus' prayer is all about God and his power and plans. Ultimately prayer is not about our dreams and desires but about God's plans. We're looking for God to be honoured and God's will to be done. We want what he wants. We long for God to be pleased and obeyed. Our honour of him and trust in him comes first.

This doesn't mean that you say these exact words every time, but the attitude must be there. Prayer is not manipulating God to meet our needs but asking God to do what he sees as right.

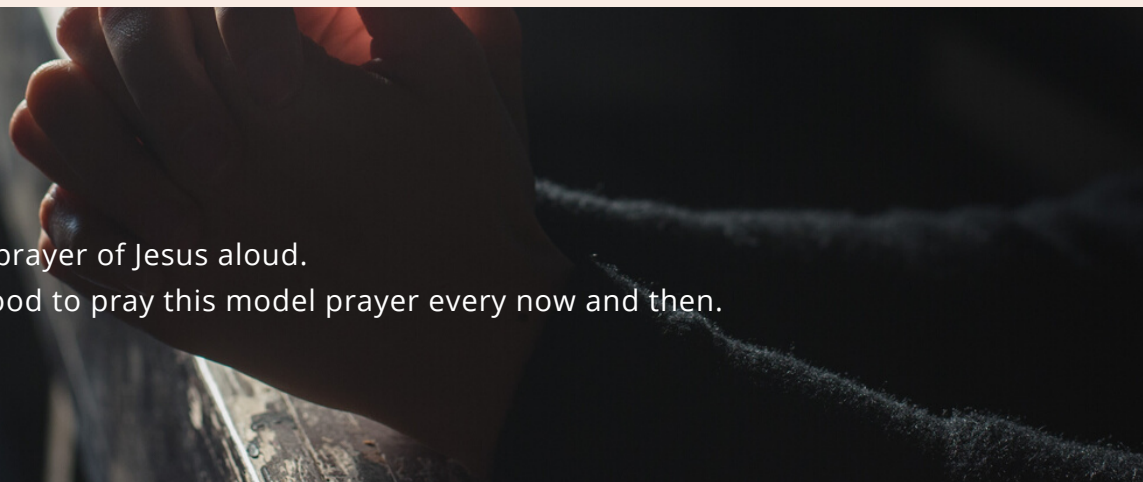
Second, he wants you to be authentic. Tell it like it is. You've got some issues today ("daily bread"), then tell him about them. Just be real. And you've made mistakes ("debts"). Don't bluff your way through but be honest. "Oh dear, I really blew it God. Please forgive me." You are under pressure from Satan ("temptation"). Tell God that you're not doing so well. Ask for help and a way out. He knows it's hard for you. The more authentic your prayer, the more God loves it.

## pray

Well I'm not great at praying Lord. I wish that I could put words together better or pray for longer or focus more or have more faith. But I do want your honour and will more than anything and I can be honest. So may your plans succeed, and may you be respected and worshipped. As for me, well I really do need your forgiveness and help. Thanks.

## respond

Try praying this model prayer of Jesus aloud. Do it a few times. It's good to pray this model prayer every now and then.



## READING 3: EFFORT IS IMPORTANT

### *orientate*

The thing I love most about being a Christian is that it comes as a completely free gift from Jesus. I can do nothing to earn it. God decided that he wanted me as his child and Jesus paid the price. I just had to receive God's gift. But growing as a Christian is not like that. I'm certainly not doing it by myself (I have God's Spirit to do the heavy lifting), but I have an essential contribution to make. Spiritual growth is like physical growth. In a way, physical growth happens naturally, but if you don't exercise or eat decent food or take time to rest, then your growth will be significantly stunted. Spiritual growth is the same. God's Spirit brings the changes in us, but we have to make an effort to put the right things in place. Let's look at the effort Paul put into his spiritual growth.

### *explore*

#### **Philippians 3:12-21**

12 Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. 13 Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, 14 I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

15 All of us, then, who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you. 16 Only let us live up to what we have already attained.

17 Join together in following my example, brothers and sisters, and just as you have us as a model, keep your eyes on those who live as we do. 18 For, as I have often told you before and now tell you again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. 19 Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is set on earthly things. 20 But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Saviour from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, 21 who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.

### *journal*

1. What is God saying to me? Which verse is most significant?
2. What do I want to discuss/explore further?
3. What do I need to do?
4. What help does Paul say that God's Spirit provides?

## reflect

When I was in my mid 20s and somewhat fit, I was challenged to a 1500m race by two of the year 11 school students I was teaching. I was always into having fun with the students, so I confidently accepted, not knowing that one of these students (a new guy called Daryl) would turn out to be the school long distance champion. When I got to the oval at lunch time, I realised that I had been set up. Half the school was there to watch me go down. After the third lap I was done, I had nothing left and Daryl was 100m ahead. But my stubborn brain kicked in and I started to sprint. I passed Daryl with 50m to go and crossed the finish line (in absolute exhaustion) to stony silence from the gathered throng.

Now I'm not telling this story to show the foolishness of my competitive spirit, but to illustrate the kind of effort Paul is talking about in this Scripture. He uses the terms, "pressing on" and "straining." These are words of immense effort. The kind of effort that enabled me to chase down Daryl.

Mediocrity does not produce Christian growth. Significant effort is required. Effort to trust God when the chips are down. Effort to love others when they treat you badly. Effort to keep serving when no-one cares. Effort to read your Bible and pray when God doesn't seem close. Effort to resist temptation when your old nature is crying out for satisfaction. Effort to focus on God and his future when the world demands your attention.

Of course, this comes as no surprise. Everything worthwhile in life takes a huge amount of effort. Just ask the young mum with three small children or the athlete training for the championship or the old guy fighting cancer. Those Christians who finish well (like Paul) know how to keep pressing on.

## pray

These studies are taking effort Lord and sometimes I just don't feel like it. But I am determined to grow in my relationship with you, so I am committing myself to a lifetime of effort. Of course, I will need your help, but I really do want to finish well. May I press on to receive and do all you have in store for me.

## respond

Think about what you would like God to say to you when you enter his presence forever. Listen to these words. It's really is worth a lifetime of effort.





## READING 4: FRIENDS ARE IMPORTANT

### *orientate*

I was in the middle of a challenging season of ministry – leading a rapidly growing church with a large staff team. I remember vividly waking up on a Monday morning after a busy Sunday, and I realised that I had absolutely no gas left in the tank. I was done. I was finished. I was burnt out. I didn't think that I would ever preach or lead again. I was sitting on the kids' trampoline feeling very despondent when a pastoral mate turned up and sat with me. He didn't say much, just spent hours listening to me. When the pastoral team leaders (my friends) heard about my exhaustion, they told me to take a complete break for a few weeks and they would handle everything. By God's grace, after two weeks of recuperation I had recovered and was ready to go again. It would have been so much harder without my friends. Let's see what happened to Jesus.

### *explore*

#### **Matthew 26:36-46**

36 Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, "Sit here while I go over there and pray." 37 He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. 38 Then he said to them, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me." 39 Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will."

40 Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. "Couldn't you men keep watch with me for one hour?" he asked Peter.

41 "Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak."

42 He went away a second time and prayed, "My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done." 43 When he came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy. 44 So he left them and went away once more and prayed the third time, saying the same thing. 45 Then he returned to the disciples and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and resting? Look, the hour has come, and the Son of Man is delivered into the hands of sinners. 46 Rise! Let us go! Here comes my betrayer!"

### *journal*

1. What is God saying to me? Which verse is most significant?
2. What do I want to discuss/explore further?
3. What do I need to do?
4. What should Jesus' friends have done?

## reflect

This is a sad story. Jesus was left alone without support at the very time he most needed his friends. It would get worse. Within a few hours, they would desert him completely. But the reason I chose this passage to study is not to expose the slackness of the disciples, but to show the longing of Jesus for the support of his friends. If anyone didn't need human support, it was Jesus. He was God. He was in control. He forged his own path. He knew how broken and ordinary his friends were. And yet in this dark hour, he is longing for them to share his pain and his prayer. Now that's surprising. If Jesus needed support from friends, then you certainly will. God has designed us to do life with others. We can never be lone rangers. In the good times, we need friends to encourage us and challenge us and pray for us and keep us accountable.

And in the tough times, we need friends to support us and believe in us and comfort us and stand with us. It is so much harder to live for God and grow with God without good friends, as this story testifies.

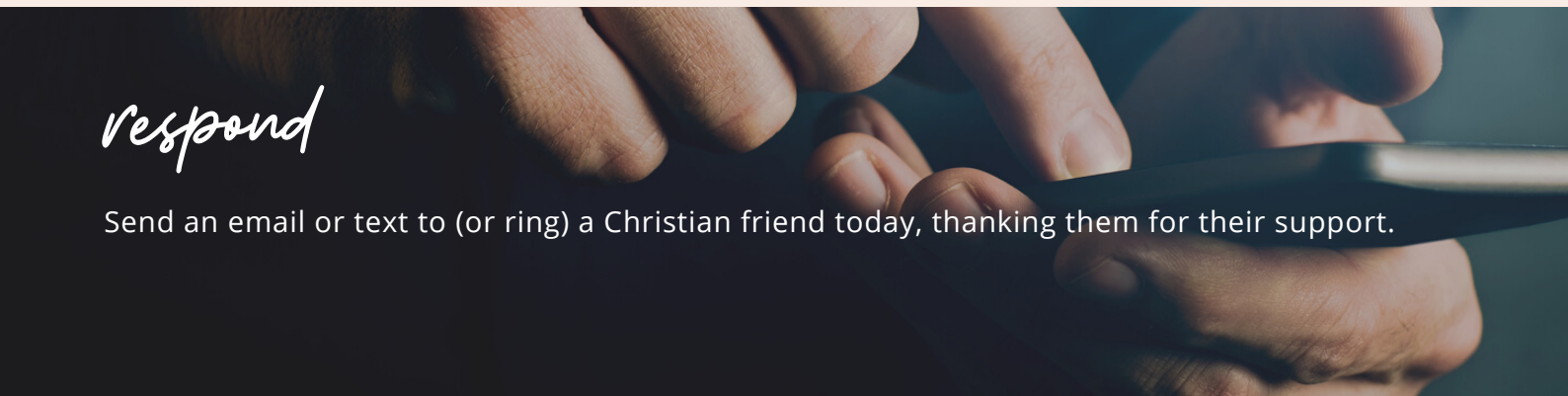
You may have lots of Christian friends or just one or two. You may spend a lot of time with your friends or just catch up every now and then. But if you are going to continue growing in your relationship with Jesus, there will be many times (as I experienced on the trampoline and continue to find) that friends will make it so much better and easier. That's how God designed us. Our friends have a key role in our spiritual growth.

## pray

Thanks for my Christian friends [name them] who care deeply about me. May they love me enough to challenge me when I need to change and to care for me when I need support. May I listen carefully to them. I can't do this by myself. May I also be a good friend to them.

## respond

Send an email or text to (or ring) a Christian friend today, thanking them for their support.



## READING 5: CHURCH IS IMPORTANT

### *orientate*

Hebrews was a letter written primarily to Jewish Christians, so it has lots of references to the Old Testament. This may make today's reading a little difficult to understand if you don't know much about the Old Testament. Sorry. But I have chosen a reading from Hebrews because the letter addresses people who have stopped growing in their faith and are beginning to give up. The writer of Hebrews has some really helpful things to say about the dangers of slacking off and the ways to keep growing. Here is a taste.

### *explore*

#### **Hebrews 10:19-25**

19 Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, 20 by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, 21 and since we have a great priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. 23 Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. 24 And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, 25 not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

### *journal*

1. What is God saying to me? Which verse is most significant?
2. What do I want to discuss/explore further?
3. What do I need to do?
4. How has involvement in your church family helped you so far?



## reflect

Church was very different back in the times the New Testament was written. To start with, people had no weekend, so meetings of the church were probably at night after work. The churches were small because they usually met in homes and what happened in a meeting of the church was very flexible. Our structured, well-resourced church services in a special building were a later development. When you picture a New Testament church service think more of a small group meeting during the week for a meal in a home with some flexible activities (like singing or prayer or preaching or prophetic words) around the meal.

But some Christians were abandoning these meetings. Maybe they didn't find them helpful. Maybe they felt that they could pursue Christian faith better by themselves. Maybe they were just too busy to go out at night. Maybe they weren't getting on with others in the church.

You've probably heard much the same reasons for Christians not going to church these days.

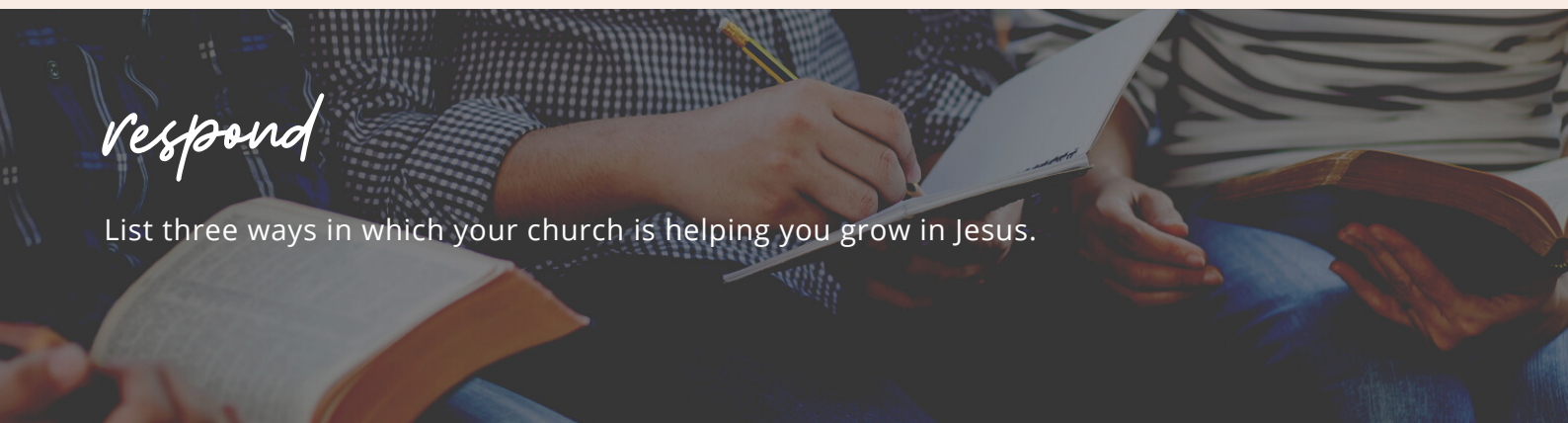
However, the New Testament never tolerates the idea of a Christian without a church family. It's together that Christians are forged into the likeness of Jesus. It's together that Christians impact their world. It's together that Christians are able to use their gifts collaboratively. If you want a picture of this - Christians are meant to be like a choir, they are not soloists. You may not always like the church services or get on well with every church member or agree with everything that goes on. But you are the church and apart from this group of God's people, you are destined for the spiritual scrapheap. So give your church your support and let your Christian family encourage you and forge you and challenge you. And you do the same for them. You need them and they need you. "Let us not give up meeting together."

## pray

Thanks for my church Lord. They're ordinary people like me, but you are working on and through us together and we desperately need each other. Help me to throw myself into loving and serving this special group of people in which you have planted me.

## respond

List three ways in which your church is helping you grow in Jesus.



# Discussion QUESTIONS

*Use these questions to discuss with a mentor or group what God has shown you in this study*

Reading 1: Scripture is Important (2 Timothy 3:10-17)

1. Any reflections or questions on Reading 1? What did you learn? Which verse was most significant?
2. How is Scripture helpful for us? Talk about some ways you can read the Bible each day.

Reading 2: Prayer is Important (Matthew 6:5-13)

3. Any reflections or questions on Reading 2? What did you learn? Which verse was most significant?
4. How often should we use this model prayer of Jesus? Which part of the prayer helped you most?

Reading 3: Effort is Important (Philippians 3:12-21)

5. Any reflections or questions on Reading 3? What did you learn? Which verse was most significant?
6. Has your Christian growth taken much effort so far? What sort of effort?

Reading 4: Friends are Important (Matthew 26:36-46)

7. Any reflections or questions on Reading 4? What did you learn? Which verse was most significant?
8. How have your Christian friends helped you so far? Did you thank any of them this week?

Reading 5: Church is Important (Hebrews 10:19-25)

9. Any reflections or questions on Reading 5? What did you learn? Which verse was most significant?
10. Why is church important? How has involvement in your church helped you so far?

11. Which reading on growth was most helpful? What do you have to work on?

12. How are you going spiritually and personally? What other things would you like to talk about?

