



TOPIC:

service

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: SERVE HUMBLY

orientate

As we have seen, the heart of our relationship with God is defined by the word GRACE. But what are we supposed to be doing on earth? God has given us work to do and has uniquely equipped us to do it. At its most basic, that work comes down to one word, SERVE. But God is looking for a particular type of serving. There are a whole lot of selfish motivations that can drive serving. We see this in the workplace, or in politics, or in our own lives. But for Christians there is only one valid motivation – caring deeply about the needs of others. That’s what drove Jesus. Check it out ...

explore

PHILIPPIANS 2

2:1 Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, 2 then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. 3 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, 4 not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. 5 In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: 6 Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;

7 rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.

8 And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!

9 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, 10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,

in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

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 did Jesus do that showed his deep humility?

reflect

The contrasts are so stark in this Scripture. There are three distinct pictures. Jesus is with God and is God. He is creator and sustainer of the world. All of heaven bows to his power and beauty. All of heaven's resources are at his disposal. He is feted and adored. Then by choice he's on earth serving people as a penniless human (he had to rely on friends to provide for him). He is judged and criticised by the significant people and finally lays down his life – in shame tortured and crucified naked as a dangerous criminal. Then he's back with God and his authority is so great that the whole of heaven and earth is bowing before him. Get your head around that! But the story of Jesus exemplifies the upside-down nature of Christianity. The rulers are the servants. The greatest are the least. The strongest are the weakest. The most exalted are the humblest. The richest are the poorest. The hideous are the most beautiful.

Jesus knows all about this and calls us to see things the same way. So our life journey is a downward one. It's a journey into seeing the needs of others, laying down our lives for others, using our resources for others, considering others more important than ourselves. Not holding on to our own reputation or ambitions or resources or desires. We follow the sacrificial Jesus journey. It's a journey to incredible greatness in God's eyes. It's not that we ignore our own needs (2:4), but that serving the needs of others becomes an increasing priority for us.

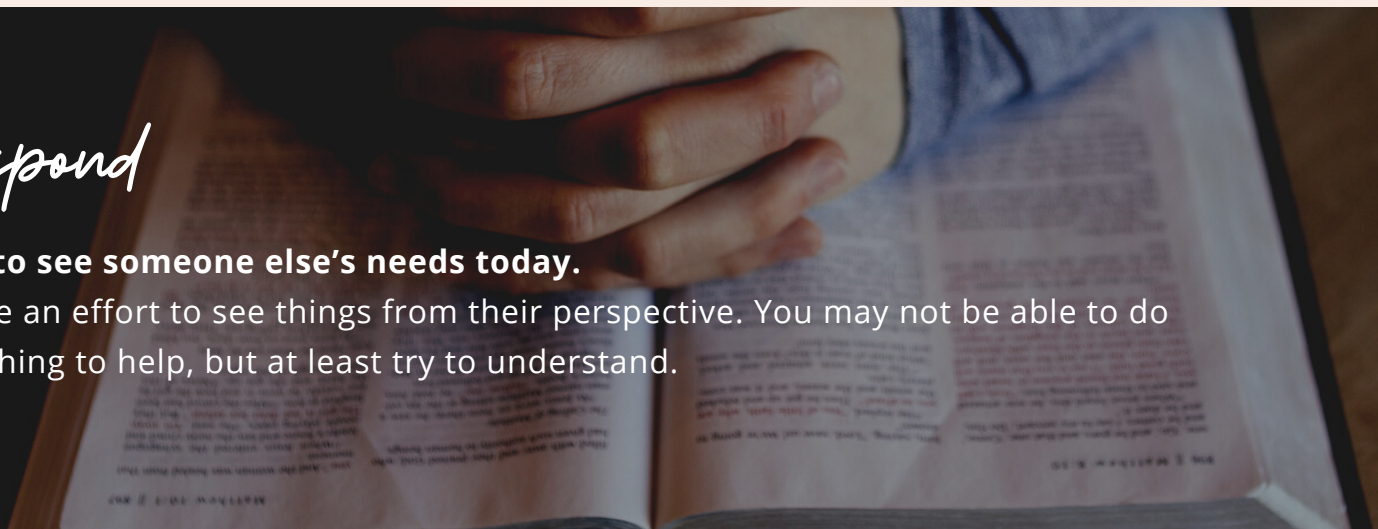
pray

This teaching goes against everything my old nature values and frankly I find it difficult. So I'm going to need a lot of help here. (I'm so glad that I have your Spirit in me.) But I follow you Jesus. You have lived this and I desperately want to do the same. Please change me.

respond

Try to see someone else's needs today.

Make an effort to see things from their perspective. You may not be able to do anything to help, but at least try to understand.



READING 2: WASH FEET

orientate

I'm not a very 'huggy' type of person. I can reciprocate a decent man hug when I need to, but I don't tend to initiate them. Not sure why. I'm just not into physical closeness with non-family members. I don't even like massages, so the idea of washing someone's feet makes me feel uncomfortable. But the reason people didn't like foot washing in Jesus' day had nothing to do with their concerns about touching people. They were a very 'huggy' culture (at least with members of the same sex). Their problem was that feet were regarded as disgusting and only the least important person in the room (usually a slave) would do the necessary washing of dusty and sweaty feet (that would be right next to food as they had no chairs). When the disciples gathered for their last meal with Jesus before his death, there was no slave present, so their feet just didn't get washed. No-one was keen to stoop to do such a job.

explore

John 13:1-17

1 It was just before the Passover Festival. Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.

2 The evening meal was in progress, and the devil had already prompted Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus. 3 Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; 4 so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. 5 After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.

6 He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?"

7 Jesus replied, "You do not realise now what I am doing, but later you will understand."

8 "No," said Peter, "you shall never wash my feet."

Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me."

9 "Then, Lord," Simon Peter replied, "not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!"

10 Jesus answered, "Those who have had a bath need only to wash their feet; their whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you." 11 For he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said not every one was clean.

12 When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. "Do you understand what I have done for you?" he asked them.

13 "You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. 14 Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. 15 I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. 16 Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. 17 Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them."

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 did Jesus wait for the meal to be served before he washed feet?

reflect

Yesterday we considered Jesus' humility displayed over the sweep of eternity. Today we're looking at one small event in which Jesus showed the same heart. He was not only the disciples' Teacher (their guru) but they were even beginning to realise that he was the Messiah (God's deliverer for Israel). So if anyone in that group should not have been doing the foot washing it was clearly Jesus. You can picture the awkwardness in the room. They had been waiting for someone to volunteer but no one had and so they were all sitting on their filthy feet. Then up gets Jesus and starts washing feet. Imagine going to a political rally and finding the Prime Minister cleaning the toilet after you...

Of course, they should not have been surprised. I bet Jesus was dying to do it from the moment they arrived at dinner. But he waited so that his actions would have maximum impact. He didn't have long left. He had to make the most of this teaching opportunity.

I would imagine as he tenderly washed each man's feet, he was whispering words of love and affirmation. This was the heart of Jesus. Soon he was going to go much further - laying down his life for them.

But this event reveals more than the beautiful servant heart of Jesus. He makes it very clear that this is our calling: "I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you." We're foot-washers. Clearly, washing feet is not a great need in our culture, but I think what Jesus is saying is that humble and often unrecognised service is our job, our role. There is great blessing for us as we humbly lay down our lives for the needs of others. This is our life in Jesus.

pray

Keep working on my heart Jesus. May you give me opportunity to put this into practice today. I want to show your love by serving someone.

respond

Just do it.



READING 3: PRIORITISE THE POOR

orientate

When Jesus started preaching in the back blocks of Israel at 30, he was an instant hit. He was a fresh face. He had some new things to say. He healed a lot of people. And he was a local boy. Not some city slicker looking for headlines, but a good, old-fashioned, country boy. Galilee often missed out on these sorts of shows. He was a bit of a celebrity. So when he came home to Nazareth, people were understandably excited. Here was the local boy making good. Naturally he got an invite to speak in their synagogue. But at the end of his sermon, they tried to throw him off a cliff. What on earth did he say? Read on.

explore

Luke 4:16-30

16 He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read, 17 and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him.

Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:

18 *"The Spirit of the Lord is on me,*

because he has anointed me

to proclaim good news to the poor.

*He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,*

to set the oppressed free,

19 *to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour."*

20 Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. 21 He began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."

22 All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips. "Isn't this Joseph's son?" they asked.

23 Jesus said to them, "Surely you will quote this proverb to me: 'Physician, heal yourself!' And you will tell me, 'Do here in your hometown what we have heard that you did in Capernaum.'"

24 "Truly I tell you," he continued, "no prophet is accepted in his hometown. 25 I assure you that there were many widows in Israel in Elijah's time, when the sky was shut for three and a half years and there was a severe famine throughout the land. 26 Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them, but to a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon. 27 And there were many in Israel with leprosy in the time of Elisha the prophet, yet not one of them was cleansed—only Naaman the Syrian."

28 All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard this. 29 They got up, drove him out of the town, and took him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built, in order to throw him off the cliff. 30 But he walked right through the crowd and went on his way.

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 made Jesus' home town so mad?

reflect

I've had some interesting reactions to sermons. A guy stormed out in the middle of my sermon one Sunday morning and on the Monday attacked his previous pastor with an axe. Fortunately, the pastor was not injured. I'm not sure what I said, but it obviously stirred something awful up. However, I've never had the whole church wanting to kill me after I preached. Not that I know of anyway. Not like Jesus here. The congregation reacted so violently because Jesus made two things very clear about his ministry.

First, he was going to prioritise the poor and needy and struggling. He hadn't come to tell religious people how to be more godly, but to set free the poor and imprisoned and blind and oppressed. These people were his target. He was mainly speaking figuratively – he had good news for the spiritually destitute. But these people were mostly found among the poor and disadvantaged so it applied both literally and figuratively. His old neighbours seemed to take that okay.

I guess they figured that they were included, being from the country and all. But what really got their goat was that Jesus went on to say that there would be no favourites. Not God's special Jewish people, not even his home towners. This good news was for everyone and the more desperate and distant you were, the better. Well they weren't putting up with that rubbish. "Off with his head."

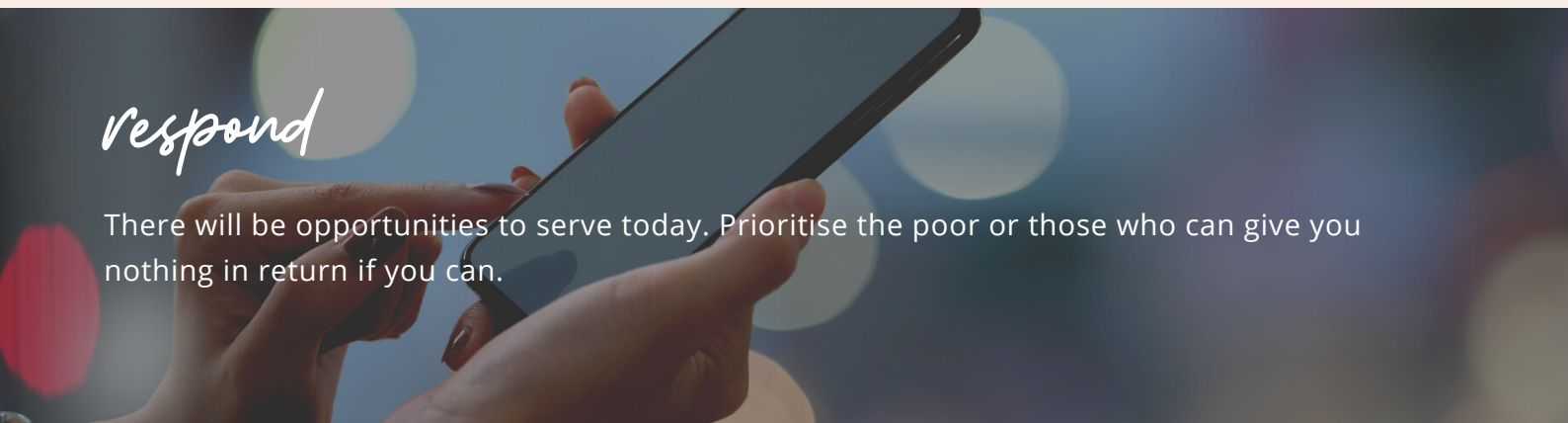
In the next reading, we will focus on God's call to serve our church family, but we mustn't forget Jesus' priority here. We are especially called to serve the poor, the prisoners, the blind, the oppressed, the refugee, whether that's physically or spiritually. We serve those that offer us nothing in return. Those that are desperate. Those that have little hope apart from God and his serving people.

pray

You have such a beautiful heart Lord Jesus and I've been the beneficiary of your care. You have no personal agenda but to serve your Father and serve us. My heart goes out to those who are struggling and desperate and imprisoned and rejected and racked with pain. Please give me the love and strength to serve those who need to see your care and can't help themselves.

respond

There will be opportunities to serve today. Prioritise the poor or those who can give you nothing in return if you can.



READING 4: USE YOUR GIFTS

orientate

A lot of serving is just seeing a need and meeting it. You don't need special abilities to clean up after dinner or sit with someone in pain or take blankets to homeless people or wash feet (how did that come up again?). It's just a matter of putting your own needs aside and choosing to serve others. But that's not the whole story. There are actually some things that you can do better than other people, and it would be such a waste if you didn't do them. These abilities have been specially given to you by God and he expects that you will use them to serve others. Maybe you will see one of your gifts in this reading.

explore

Romans 12:1-8

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. 2 Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

3 For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you.

4 For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, 5 so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. 6 We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; 7 if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; 8 if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.

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. Can you see anything that looks like one of your gifts?

reflect

Let me address a few of the misconceptions that Christians may have about their gifts.

1. "I don't have any gifts." That is plainly not true. This passage presumes that everyone has a contribution to make. Your gift may not be on this list, but you have at least one. If you need any help to discern how God has gifted you, ask your mentor or Christian friends.

2. "My gift is not important." Oh yes it is! The church needs every single gift if it is to function effectively. This reading emphasises the need to know and use your gift. If you slack off, the whole church suffers. Your gift is vital.

3. "I'm very gifted." It's true that some Christians can achieve more than others or have more noticeable gifts than others. But you have to be very careful if you think that somehow that reflects well on you. It just means that God has gifted you more (greater "measure of faith" 12:3 or "grace" 12:6) and therefore expects more of you. It certainly doesn't mean you're any better or more worthy. You're just different because of God's decision and design.

4. "Using my gifts comes naturally." It certainly is easier and usually more fulfilling when you're doing the things God has designed you to do. I've been gifted by God to teach and I love it. Give me a chance to communicate truth and I lap it up. But I don't love all the preparation required. That's plain hard work. It's still costly using my teaching gift. And it will be the same for you. That's why Paul is pushing the Romans here to serve with all they've got. Make sure you give it your best shot.

pray

Thanks for the gifts you have given me for others. They come from you Holy Spirit and I'm not taking any credit. But I do want to use them well in serving both Christians and not-yet Christians. May I serve people diligently and cheerfully.

respond

List a gift that you think God may have given you.
Talk this over when you meet with your mentor.

READING 5: GIVE GENEROUSLY

orientate

When Paul started his GoFundMe campaign for the distressed Christians in Jerusalem, the Corinthian church was one of the first to sign up. They were keen to serve others who were not as well off, and this was a great opportunity. So they pledged big bucks. But between the commitment and the collection, things shifted. Maybe there was a recession. Maybe they felt that they had got a little carried away. Maybe they had a problem with Paul as the distributor. Whatever the reason their generosity had cooled. Paul writes to them to remind them of the huge benefits of generous giving. Here is some of what he says.

explore

2 Corinthians 9:6-15

6 Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. 7 Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. 8 And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. 9 As it is written:

“They have freely scattered their gifts to the poor; their righteousness endures forever.”

10 Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness.

11 You will be enriched in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.

12 This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of the Lord’s people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God. 13 Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, others will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else. 14 And in their prayers for you their hearts will go out to you, because of the surpassing grace God has given you. 15 Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!

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 does Paul say are the benefits of generous giving?

reflect

I love chocolates so much that I occasionally treat myself to a whole box of expensive chocolates just for me. I savour each one and eat them slowly. I keep my favourite chocolates for last. I hide them from family members if necessary because I know that once they're gone, that's it. Some people think of money that way. You need to save and protect it because there's a very limited supply. This sounds very responsible, but with this mindset, it's very difficult to be generous. It's a big challenge to give away your hard-earned cash. Someone once said that our wallet is the last thing to be converted.

Paul paints a very different picture of money for the newly-stingy Corinthians. Money is actually seed to be planted. The more you plant, the greater your crop. When you get your head around this biblical concept, it will revolutionise your approach to money. God has given us resources. We are not to see these resources as our personal reward and therefore to hoard them or spend them on ourselves, but to invest them in the needs of others.

That's when the blessings of money really begin to flow. Paul says that the recipients get blessed (9:12), God gets blessed (9:13), and the giver gets blessed (9:10, 14). He even suggests that when God sees a really generous giver, he's likely to allocate them more resources (9:10-11). That makes sense. God loves to see his seed widely planted.

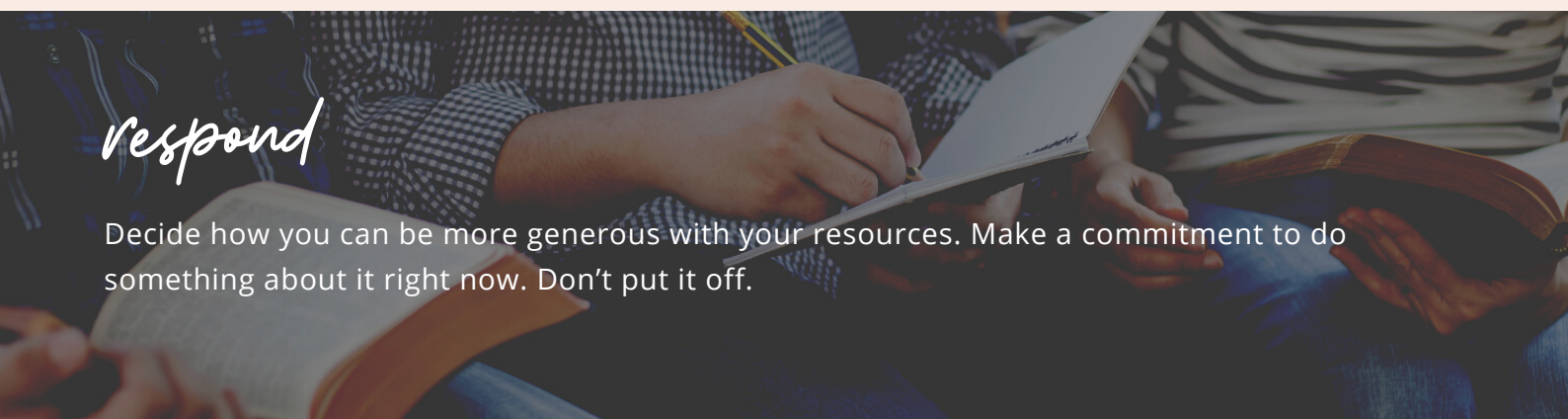
Paul is not promoting irresponsibility when it comes to our spending. That would be a poor use of the resources God entrusts to us. He's pushing for generosity. "God loves a cheerful giver." A Jesus follower gives generously to their church (10% is a benchmark that many use, but it depends on your circumstances), to missions, and to the disadvantaged in our world. God lets us sort out our giving personally. There are no hard and fast rules, no "compulsion" (9:7). But he has given you seed to plant and it's going to bring great blessing to God, others and even to you. So be generous.

pray

Forgive me Lord when I try to hoard or protect the resources that you have given me. I want to be responsible of course, but you are a generous and openhanded God and everything belongs to you and comes from you. Teach me generosity. Open my heart and hand to freely sow the seed you have given me to plant.

respond

Decide how you can be more generous with your resources. Make a commitment to do something about it right now. Don't put it off.



Discussion QUESTIONS

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

Reading 1: Serve Humbly (Philippians 2:1-11)

1. Any reflections or questions on Reading 1? What did you learn? Which verse was most significant?
2. What was death on a cross like? What is the insecurity in you that keeps you from Jesus humility?

Reading 2: Wash Feet (John 13:1-17)

3. Any reflections or questions on Reading 2? What did you learn? Which verse was most significant?
4. What would be similar to washing feet today? Who have you served in the last week?

Reading 3: Prioritise the Poor (Luke 4:16-30)

5. Any reflections or questions on Reading 3? What did you learn? Which verse was most significant?
6. Why did Jesus' old neighbours get so cranky? Who do you know that fits into Jesus' "poor"?

Reading 4: Use your Gifts (Romans 12:1-8)

7. Any reflections or questions on Reading 4? What did you learn? Which verse was most significant?
8. Can you think of any spiritual gifts that you might have? Explore this with your mentor.

Reading 5: Give Generously (2 Corinthians 9:6-15)

9. Any reflections or questions on Reading 5? What did you learn? Which verse was most significant?
10. What are the benefits of generous giving? How are you being generous?

11. Give yourself a rating out of 10 on your willingness to serve. What has God been saying in this reading?

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

