

# God's mission



and the calling and  
growth of His church

## Introduction

“Yes!” was the energetic and unanimous answer in 2012 when we as churches asked the question: Should we do something about the poor condition of our churches and our witness in our communities?

At that moment, the living God in His infinite grace guided us with His own hand.

He showed us our horrible weakness and sin, but also His endless mercy and grace so that we can repent in the faith that He will guide us on this road of *Semper Reformanda*. Always reforming and realigning ourselves to His Word and work in the world.

This decision set us in motion to first study and understand our situation and prayerfully discern the road to take. When the results of this study was put before our churches in 2015 suggesting the way forward, the answer was once again unanimous: “Yes!”

All this resulted in this booklet you have in your hands. The purpose of this booklet is to bring all that has been done in the process right into the hearts and minds of every church member and every local church. There is no church out there somewhere that this booklet is for. The church is me and you. The process is for us. Our minds, our hearts and our hands as the body of Christ Himself and the temple of His Spirit in this world.

May you work and pray through this with an open heart willing to repent where needed and with the expectation of faith in the gospel that the risen Lord, Jesus Christ, will guide and shape you through His Word and Spirit.

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2015

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## **The *focus-time* format**

A magnifying glass is used to focus on the detail of something. This booklet and its format is like a magnifying glass. It helps a church to focus together on the topic of God's mission and the calling and growth of His church. The format we will use can be called the '*focus time*' format.

This *focus time* fits into six weeks. Every week we focus on a different topic. Every topic is explored in three ways: A sermon, daily devotions for home use and a group study.

The six topics we will explore are: The mission of God (Soli Deo Gloria), repentance, prayer, growth, equipping and aligning<sup>1</sup>.



The following table shows how the focus time is set up over six weeks:

WEEK 1: The mission of God	Sermon	Daily devotions for 6 days	1 Group study
WEEK 2: Repentance	Sermon	Daily devotions for 6 days	1 Group study
WEEK 3: Prayer	Sermon	Daily devotions for 6 days	1 Group study
WEEK 4: Growth	Sermon	Daily devotions for 6 days	1 Group study
WEEK 5: Equipping	Sermon	Daily devotions for 6 days	1 Group study
WEEK 6: Aligning	Sermon	Daily devotions for 6 days	1 Group study

If you know the format then you also already know the benefits of such a focus time for yourself and your church! If this is new to you, we want to encourage your church to introduce one focus time like this for your church every year to focus on any issue that is relevant to your situation.

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<sup>1</sup> These are the topics agreed upon by the GKSA Synod 2015.

## Tools for exploring

The tools used to explore the topics in the booklet will now be explained briefly:

### Sermon suggestions



For each topic parts of Scripture are suggested with preaching tips to guide the preacher in preparing a sermon on the topic. Any of these suggestions may be used. Any other text that the preacher may prefer addressing the topic may also be used.

### Daily devotions



Daily devotions on the topic of the week are provided for Monday to Saturday. These can be used on your own or as a household. Decide on a set time and work it into your schedule. This may even help to get you or your household back into the rhythm of daily devotions if this is not yet a regular practice for you<sup>2</sup>.

### Group studies



You may have existing groups in your church or none at all. If you have existing groups, ask them to follow these studies provided for the six weeks.

You may not have any groups or only very few groups. This focus time is ideal to establish new groups. Invite all your members to commit to meeting together in their wards under the guidance of their elder (or other leader) for the duration of the six weeks as part of the focus-time. It may be easier for them to commit for a shorter time and then they will hopefully enjoy it so much that they will continue to meet.

Enjoy your focus time and move through it with prayerful expectation that the Lord will use it in your life and church because His Word never returns empty!

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<sup>2</sup> After this focus time, you can continue using the devotions in the Almanac of the GKSA.

## WEEK 1: THE MISSION OF GOD

The expression '*Mission of God*' is used to talk about the big thing that God is busy with since before creation and will be busy with even after the recreation.

*Mission of God* refers to the greater and bigger purpose He is busy with throughout all the ages into which God the Father calls man to participate. It is the reason He created Adam and Eve, it's the reason Jesus Christ the Son saves lost sinners and calls them to be His disciples and it's the goal towards which the church is called to work with the Holy Spirit until the end. Adam, Abraham, Paul and you were all called for this one purpose. This ultimate goal is: ...The Glory of God!

This is actually nothing new. This was also the great focus and driving force of the reformers of the reformation: *Soli Deo Gloria*! Everything, even nature, exists only for the glory of God. The purpose and therefore mission (goal) of everything is God's glory. But it is exactly here that we struggle and fail horribly. Our sin has broken us and left us empty and hurting. Focusing on ourselves as the centre of our existence. The result is that we rather seek our own glory first and that we even resent God getting all the glory which belongs to Him forever.

This is where we must start...

Therefore, let us pray hard and work hard to once again get a clear focus on God's Mission for God's glory to understand with clarity where we fit in.



### Sermon suggestions

Here are some helpful texts and tips for preaching on the Mission of God:

- The cradle of mission: the Trinity!
  - Genesis 1:1 and v26,27; BC art 2; Joh 17:1-5; v 20-23; BC art 1 and 2.
  - The Triune God created everything with the mission to present His glory in nature and in man.
  - The mission of God is always filled with movement. Moving to love and glorify the other Persons of the Trinity, moving to create, moving to redeem and moving to recreate. Never sitting still, always active in a way that shows and enhances His glory.
  - Following Him in this purpose will ask the same active movement beyond ourselves.



- Salvation of man is not the main mission, God's glory is!
  - Ephesians 1:1-14
  - Here the role of each person of the Trinity in the salvation of man is explained but with special attention to verses 6,12,14 where each time the purpose of the work of each Person of the Trinity is God's glory.
  - Joh 17:1-5
  - Phil 2:9-11
  - Even the salvation of man is not the mission of God, God saves to demonstrate His glorious nature and reclaim the awe and praise that is rightfully His.
  
- Many missionaries on mission
  - Genesis 17:1-8 & Phil 2:9-11
  - Joh 17:18 & Joh 20:21
  - BC art 27
  - The church does not have a mission, God's mission has a church of the ages to serve His mission.
  
- Do they smell Christ, or you?
  - 2 Cor 2:14-17
  - The triumph belongs to God, we participate because of Christ and are used to spread this knowledge of Christ for God's benefit.
  
- The mission of God is eternal!
  - Rev 4
  - In Rev 4 all of creation, earthly and heavenly, is bent on proclaiming and serving the limitless glory of the eternal God.



### **Daily devotions**

Follow these daily devotions personally or as a household together.

- Monday - The original mission
  - Genesis 1:1 & v26,27
    - What was the original relationship between man and God?
    - How would man achieve this purpose?

It was never about you. Ever. God created man to be a representation of God in the way man interacted with creation. This contributed to God's glory like art contributes to the fame of the artist. Looking at man, God should have been the first the observer would think about. Today, the purpose of man is aimed at himself. Even his interaction with creation is

mostly for his own gain, pleasure or glory. Why is it so tough for people to not focus on themselves? Pray about this.

- Tuesday - Mission not aborted!?
  - Genesis 3 especially verse 6+7
    - With what lies did the snake lure Eve?
    - How is this directly in contrast to the purpose of man's creation?
    - What is remarkable about God's character and conduct in these events?

Even after man's fall, God pursues man because of His gracious nature and not because of man's merit. This act in itself demonstrates the gospel of God's grace in Jesus, promised as the seed of Eve that will demolish Satan. God persists with His mission and prepares for us to again join in glorifying Him. Even our devastating fall of unfaithfulness, causing such heartache and pain in our world today, would not stop God from drawing me and you into His presence and mission. Where can you feel Him pulling you? Adam, where are you? Pray about this

- Wednesday - The scope of the mission
  - Genesis 17:1-8; Gal 3:7-9; Phil 2:9-11
    - When God started with Abram, with how many people did He want to finish? (v2)
    - Was God only interested in the family offspring of Abram?
    - How broad was God aiming with His mission?
    - How is God aiming at you?

Being part of the mission of God is being part of the single greatest and longest running project on earth involving humans. It is not only over a long time, but also includes people from every nation on the earth. It is huge and actually just the right size to show off the might of God to all in heaven and on earth. The only requirement to be part of this is confessing sin and trusting in the saving grace of God to let us once again join in the same mission that God promised to start with Abraham. Are you part? Pray about this

- Thursday - The people of the mission: disciples
  - Mathew 4:18-25
    - What does disciple mean?
    - Why is it significant that Jesus called these people?
    - Why did Jesus go and do the things in v23-25 just after calling these people?

A disciple is like an apprentice. A person learns a trade from a master by watching him and practising what he sees. These men were not chosen to continue their religious studies as young Jewish boys. They became apprentices to their fathers in their fishing trade. Now Jesus invites these normal people to become apprentices in the biggest mission on earth. They simply trusted him and jumped at the opportunity to follow a Rabi. Then he takes them around, preaching about His kingdom and showing His kingship. They were watching and being trained. Are you following where Jesus calls you, watching and being trained? Pray about this

- Friday – The tools of the mission
  - Mathew 5:13-16
  - 2 Tim 3:10-4:5
    - What does Jesus mean with salt and light?
    - Why is it important that words and deeds match?
    - What is the essence of the gospel that people need to hear?

The tools of the mission are gospel words and gospel deeds. Words proclaiming the love of God in Christ, and deeds proclaiming the love of God in Christ. This is the reason that the whole disciple and his whole life are tools in the hands of the living Christ. Christ has especially grouped his disciples together in a local church to be this witness in how they gather around Christ, and follow Him into their communities. That is why his church is also called the body of Christ. Him active and present in your community. Are you a sharp tool? Is His body fit? Pray about this.

- Saturday – The unexpected places of the mission
  - John 4:1-26
    - What do you learn from the woman's question in vers 9?
    - What is important to understand about where God can be worshiped in Jesus's words in vers 21-24?

Samaria was off-limits for good Jews. Samaria was a province where people of mixed race and mixed religions lived. Many Jews travelled a longer road just to avoid the place. Jesus didn't. He entered where nobody else wanted to go. He also spoke in public to a Samaritan woman. This could cause him a lot of problems. But there he is able to reach into the heart of a woman that nobody else would have reached. An unthinkable person in an unthinkable place hears about unthinkable grace. Jesus shows her that anybody from anywhere can worship God in any unexpected place. Do not just avoid these places or people in your life... The mission of God may even be calling you there! Pray.



### Group study

This study is intended for groups in your church to do together during the week focusing on the Mission of God.

- Pray together for Gods guidance
- Conversation starter: How is it helpful to have a clear picture of your goal before your start something?
- Read 2 Corinthians 5:11-21
- Give an opportunity to those willing to share something that stood out for them in this text.
- Give an opportunity to those willing to ask a question about something in the text. First give everyone a chance and write down the questions.
- Discuss the questions together
- Share with each other what you think God is saying to you in the text for your life regarding God's mission.
- Pray together.

## WEEK 2: REPENT!

After the focus of last week on God's mission and glory, it may have become clear to you that you are actually on your own mission mostly for your own glory. You may need to repent of somethings but repenting is tricky. The human heart is so deceptive and self-righteous that it is very difficult for us to see our own sins, and very easy to see the sins of others! We do not even like to be told to repent. We are afraid of searching ourselves, seeing the dirt and looking up into the judging eyes of God. We are afraid of losing our lives. But here lies the beauty of the gospel. When we look up towards God in honest confession... we see the merciful eyes of God because of Christ's sufficient work on the cross and only then start to truly live a life far more fulfilling than we had. (HC LD 33)

Search your heart honestly, pray for clarity about your sin, bring your selfish sin to the light of the cross and discover the overwhelming joy of new life for God in the light of the gospel.



### Sermon suggestions

Here are some helpful texts and tips for preaching on repentance:

- Nothing to repent?
  - Psalm 139 with special focus on v23
  - Psalm 19 with special focus on v13-15
- Seeking life in sin, in rules or in Christ?
  - Luke 15 – The younger brother seeks life in sin, the elder in rules... but true life requires repentance to Christ.
- Conflict, Pride, Worldliness and the way back
  - James 4:1-10
  - HC LD 23 Q&A 60
  - Relationships in conflict flows from selfish pride. This is so horrible that even prayer can be infected by that. This selfish pride is not from God but from the relentless influence the world has on Christians. When Christians see themselves again as they are, belonging wholly to God, the road to humble repentance can begin, the grace of God can be clinged to and life lifted up to be restored before God.
- The story of the unhealthy church
  - The Ephesian church started healthy (Acts), were warned about the remedy (1 Tim) but eventually needed to repent (Rev).
  - Acts 20:28-32; 1 Tim 1:3-7; and Rev 2:1-7 with special focus on v5
- Broken enough yet?
  - Lamentations with special focus on 3:18-33 & 5:19-22

- The sermon can discuss the nature of sin as unfaithfulness to our purpose, our need for broken honesty and sadness about our sin and state, and the motive for our repentance as God's reign and being back in service of the Lord.



### Daily devotions

Follow these daily devotions personally or as a household together.

- Monday - Finding joy in the Word: Christ!
  - Psalm 1
    - Where does the author not seek his joy?
    - Where does he rather seek His joy?
    - What is the effect of this in his life?
    - Who is the Word of God (John 1)?

Knowing God deeply and growing in your knowledge of Him is joy-giving, life-enriching and fruit-bearing. Especially if it is not merely more facts, but heart touching joy-truths regarding His rich righteousness and grace in Christ for you. Are you growing in your knowledge of God and His purpose for creation and your life? What do you need to repent from in light of Psalm 1? Pray about this.

- Tuesday - Who is the boss?
  - 1 Peter 2:1-10
    - What conduct among believers is addressed in v1-3?
    - Why is the call in v 4,5 a remedy for this?
    - If you look at v9-10 what is the purpose of the church?
    - Is God then working for us, or are we supposed to be working for God?
    - What views of the church do you have to repent from?

Many people experience conflict in church. They are dissatisfied with church life and their relationships with other believers because they forgot what the church is for. If it is a place for 'getting' you will be dissatisfied with what you get. If it is place to be seen and admired, all you will see is conflict. If you see God as working for you, you will never discover the joy of working for God. Where are you stumbling in your church life and from what attitude should you repent? Pray about this.

- Wednesday - Automatic or personal faith?
  - Romans 10:1-17
    - Why is it important to note the way that God chose to save his people with?

- If God had a covenant with Israel, why are they not then automatically saved?
- What is then necessary for salvation?

Being baptised as a baby doesn't guarantee salvation. Not even memorizing a lot of Scripture and merely confessing your faith publically in 'n worship service. Repenting from your personal sin, trusting in the work of the Lord Jesus in such a way that it leads to a life bearing fruit – saves. This can be good news to you now, then rejoice! ...or something to make you think deeply about personal repentance and your lack of trusting faith in the Lord Jesus. Pray.

Further reading: Mathew 25:31-46; James 2:14-26; LD 23 Q&A 60; LD 31 Q&A 84

- Thursday - Are you sitting back?
  - Romans 12:1-8
    - On what grounds are you called to give yourselves as a sacrifice for the service of God? (v1)
    - How central is this act to your life? (v1c)
    - Think about vers 5&6 – would you say you have gifts to serve to rest of the body with?
    - If every member is involved with these ministries what should the elders and deacon then do? (Eph 4:12)

Everybody is needed to build the church for effective witness in the world. If you are not there in some way, your church is less effective than it could be in glorifying your loving God. The core of your life-sacrifice to God is absent. Only you can know if your excuses for merely consuming and not contributing to ministry are valid. Your minister, elders and deacon should also work toward this, and not merely try doing everything themselves. Seek your heart if you need to repent from something and pray about it now.

Further reading: 1 Cor 12; 1 Pet 4:10; BC (Belgic Confession) art 28; LD 21 Q&A 55

- Friday - Enemy love
  - Matthew 5:43-48
    - Who would you say are your enemies?
    - What will you be seen as, when you love them? (45)
    - Does God discriminate in sharing general grace?
    - Is it foolish to think they will change when we do not give them the love they lack?

We are quick to point out the wrong things in the people or situations we do not like. Collecting reasons why we can avoid or even fight them: They hurt us; They made their own wrong decisions; They treated us unfairly. How many reasons would God have to avoid you? Maybe this is your attitude to others. But God had a different attitude to you. Where can you better follow Him in this as His child? Pray about this.

- Saturday - Forgiveness of sins, not approval of sins.
  - Mathew 5:17-20
    - What is the full purpose of the law of God? (Rom 7:7-11; 10:4; HC LD 44 Q&A 144)
    - How strongly does Jesus seem to feel about this?
    - What was the mistake the Pharisees made with the law?

Everyone has to decide their own truth. It is not tolerant to judge others. This is how the world chose to deal with sin. Respecting sin as ways people find joy and comfort. Jesus deals with sin in another way. The righteous law shows us our ugliness and desperate need for true comfort like a mirror, causing us to run to the beauty of Christ's sacrifice (Rom 10:4). Keeping the law for salvation is not enough, following it's arrows to Christ is more than the Pharisee did. But... no law... no sin. No sin... no need for Christ. No Christ... no salvation. No salvation... no true peace. Christ brings forgiveness of sins, not approval of sins. What sin do you have to break with and run to Christ with for true fulfilment? Speak to God about this now.



### Group study

This study is intended for groups in your church to do together during the week focusing on repentance.

- Pray together for Gods guidance
- Conversation starter: Why do people in general not like advice from others?
- Read Psalm 19
- Give an opportunity to those willing to share something that stood out for them in this text.
- Give an opportunity to those willing to ask a question about something in the text. First give everyone a chance and write down the questions.
- Discuss the questions together
- Share with each other what you think God is saying to you in the text for your life regarding repentance.
- Pray together.



### WEEK 3: PRAYER

Conversation is necessary for any relationship to grow. Also for our relationship with God. A married couple not having meaningful conversation will have a weak and crumbling relationship. We hear God in His Word and to pray to God is to communicate back and to encounter God Himself, it is not merely asking God for things. We even see Jesus regularly drawing away from the crowds to spend time alone with His Father in prayer. Maybe this is the starting point for us in revitalising our prayer life. To intentionally spend time alone without cell phones, radios, music or other people. Praying out loud can help you to focus your attention. Keep a prayer list. Pray with others. As someone has once said: *"We must know the awe of praising His glory, the intimacy of finding His grace, and the struggle of asking His help, all of which can lead us to know the reality of His presence"*.



#### Sermon suggestions

Here are some helpful texts and tips for preaching on prayer:

- First things first!
  - Mathew 6:9-13
  - HC LD 45 Q&A 117
  - The Lord's prayer immediately sets the relationship right between creator and creature. Owner of the mission and worker in the mission.
  - This prayer seeks first the glory of the Father's name, not my glory. It seeks the kingdom of the Father, not my kingdom. It seeks the will of the Father, not my will.
  - This is not only a confession of faith but also of trust that those things are ultimately better than my own glory, kingdom or will. It is also a repentance from my glory, kingdom and will.
  - My bread, my forgiveness and even my protection from evil is to keep me in the service of His glory, kingdom and will. And for that goal God can be trusted to give what I ask for.
- Christ's gifts runs on prayer
  - Ephesians 6:10-20
  - HC LD 45 Q&A 116
  - The texts explains how the gifts of Christ's work is like armour for the Christian battle in the mission of God. The belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, readiness in the gospel of peace as shoes, faith as shield, salvation as helmet and the Word as sword. But vers 18 points out that these things should all be

done engulfed in constant prayer (The prayer command is in the participle to all the previous imperative verbs).

- Praying on these things as I use them: Truth, righteousness, peace, faith, salvation and the Word.



### Daily devotions

Follow these daily devotions personally or as a household together.

- Monday – Our Father, bread, forgives and protection
  - Luke 11:1-4
    - Why do you think Jesus taught us ‘our’ Father and not ‘my’ father?
    - How is bread, forgiveness and protection an ‘our’ issue?

Mostly we think of prayer as something between me and God - individual. Jesus teaches us that I am never isolated, even if I pray on my own. Also the answers to my prayer are not isolated. I am part of a faith community. *Together* seeking Him and His glory, and *together* receiving from Him to share and serve *together*. Are your prayers and faith life only an ‘I’ and ‘me’ or an ‘us’ and a ‘we’?

- Tuesday – After the prayer?
  - Luke 11:5-13
    - What three separate ‘stories’ does Jesus tell after His teaching on prayer content?

The small parable about the neighbour teaches that after praying... we should pray again! To not let pride stand in the way of us persevering in humbly asking in utter dependence. Then, after praying, we should proceed and tackle the issue. First asking around for solutions or advice, secondly to move around actively looking for what can be done and finally putting your hand to the problem and opening the doors that can be opened. Participate in the solution! But what if still nothing happens? Rest trustingly in your Father's goodness to not give you harmful things that looked like fantastic things to you.

- Wednesday – Prayer and worldliness
  - James 4:1-10
    - What would you say is the influence of worldliness on your prayer life?
    - What is the guaranteed way to not get your prayers answered?

God and the world are not on mission in the same direction. And you cannot pray in both directions! Having a divided heart between God and the world leads to selfish prayers.

Selfish prayers leads to unanswered prayer. This leads to me taking up the fight myself to get what I truly believe to be a blessing: the things of God and not God in Himself anymore. But when I humbly submit my whole being to God and resist the temptations to divide my heart, Satan will flee and my Lord will lift me up out of the confusion!

- Thursday – Asking AND thanking ensures peace
  - Phil 4:6-9
    - Why is it important the freely beg but also to name His blessings?
    - What does it mean that Christ will keep watch over your heart and mind?

There will always be reasons to be concerned. But there are always things to be thankful for. We do need the Lord desperately, but we also already have His blessing in many other ways. Naming both my needs and His blessings in my prayer helps me to realize He is already active in my life. He knows my needs and what is good for me. This puts the fire of anxiousness out. I can rest in the fact the grace of Christ is sufficient every time that my heart and mind wants to run away with me again. He hears me, He has already blessed me with many other things... and bigger than that, He has Redeemed me to be His own!

- Friday – Persistence in outreach prayer
  - Col 4:2-6
    - To what kind of prayer life does v2 call you?
    - How do you pray for evangelism? (v3)
    - How is attitude in your prayer carried into your life?

Praying is hard work. It is like climbing a high mountain. One foot before the other. That is why we are encouraged to continue watchfully... because it is so easy to give up. The other thing that will help is to pray with thanksgiving. Remembering with thanks before the Lord where He has already showed His hand in your life and answered previous prayers. This strengthens your heart for more prayer. But prayer is not selfish. We can even pray for opportunities to share the gospel clearly, by others and also by ourselves. But prayer also shapes the heart that I walk into my life with. Not just praying ...but then in faith using the opportunities that the Lord opens up for me.

- Saturday – Intimate focus of prayer
  - Mathew 6:5-8
    - What are the two traps we can fall into with prayer?
    - Why do you think prayer is foremost an intimate thing between you and God?

Even the most beautiful things can be messed up by our unsure hearts. With a heart not resting in the gospel, prayer can be abused to glorify yourself. You can even be praying hard for the glory of God while actually seeking your own glory in being seen and heard by others! Rather understand the intimacy of prayer. You may pray in public and with others as we see in other places in the Bible, but foremost it is my *heart* before God, not my image before men. The other trap for my heart is to try and persuade God with many words to give what I need, rather than sharing my heart plainly, trusting that He is good and His answers best. Here we discover your approach to prayer is important... with what heart and purpose are you entering into prayer?



### Group study

This study is intended for groups in your church to do together during the week focusing on prayer.

- Pray together for Gods guidance
- Conversation starter: Why is it difficult to have an active and disciplined prayer life?
- Choose and read any one of the texts mentioned above on prayer.
- Give an opportunity to those willing to share something that stood out for them in this text.
- Give an opportunity to those willing to ask a question about something in the text. First give everyone a chance and write down the questions.
- Discuss the questions together
- Share with each other what you think God is saying to you in the text for your life regarding prayer.
- Pray together.

## WEEK 4: GROWTH

Growing a body of Christ starts with growing the individual members of the body in Christ. It is not a system that has to grow. People need to grow rooted in Christ (Col 2:7). You need to grow. In what do we need to grow? Love coming from a pure heart, a good conscience and a sincere faith (1 Tim 1:5). Our minds, hearts, attitudes and deeds are to be shaped by the work of God's Word and Spirit as we are conformed to the image of Christ. This is what the command of Jesus to become His *disciples* (apprentices) is about. People following the way of Christ on God's mission. Listening to Him and testing in practical faith all they have learned. Along this road of individual growth and obedience to Christ in my life's choices and priorities, He uses me to also disciple others in following Him. This results in churches growing in depth, in health and with His blessing in numbers – all contributing to the Glory of God who are able to bring a dead selfish sinner like me to a life of service in Christ (Ephesians 2:1+10).



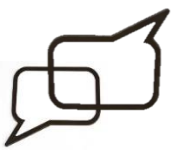
### Sermon suggestions

Here are some helpful texts and tips for preaching on growth:

- An apprentice of Jesus
  - Matthew 4:18-25
  - HC LD 1 Q&Q 1
  - In this scene in Matthew, Jesus meets his future followers where they are following apprenticeships with their fathers. Learning the trade of their fathers by working with them daily. The basic theme here is what you are preparing yourself for and what you occupy yourself with.
  - Jesus deliberately calls them to an apprenticeship with Him. The repeated imperative here is "Follow me". The intention of any rabbi is for those following him to become like him. Looking at him, listening to him and then living as he would. Growing and progressing in this daily.
  - This is what Jesus then does in v23-25. With His disciples now following Him, looking, listening and learning, He goes around preaching the gospel and showing His kingship over every domain of life. Loving and serving the people. This is what he eventually also teaches them to do as mentioned specifically in John 13:13-17.
- Rock in a pond
  - Acts 1:1-8
  - The Lord Jesus had instructed his disciples (apprentices/followers) to continually add to the number of disciples by helping others to also follow

Christ: Baptising them and teaching them to obediently follow the teachings of Christ (Mat 28:19,20).

- In Acts 1 is being described how the Spirit of God would empower them to spread the Kingdom of God in ever widening circles – like a rock in a pond.
  - First in Judea – close where you live and know the people
  - Then in Samaria – where you would not think to go
  - Unto the whole world – where you would not know how to go
- People following Jesus Christ and rooted in the gospel are like a rock in a pond. Meant to have an ever growing and widening influence. Being used by God to help others follow King Jesus and in this way helping the Kingdom of God to break through.



### Daily devotions

Follow these daily devotions personally or as a household together.

- Monday – Stay in Jesus!
  - John 15:1-8
    - What does it mean to ‘abide/stay’ in Jesus?
    - How does that help us grow and bear fruit?

Growing and bearing fruit only happens when we keep our focus and attention on Jesus and His completed work on the cross. The good news about who Jesus is and what He has done is like the life giving sap continually flowing through the branches. This ‘abiding’ makes it possible for us to grow and serve those around us with useful fruit. Are there other activities that you are busy with, hoping it would revitalise your heart and life? How can you refocus to practically abide in Christ?

- Tuesday – Do you know Gods destination for you?
  - Romans 8:28-30
    - Where is God aiming with you as His disciple?

Many things happen in our lives that we sometimes feel are obstacles to our progress. Setbacks, accidents or pain caused by others. But here we are reminded that God will reach His goal with us: He is continually shaping and moulding us into people who resemble Christ. This is where disciples of Christ are heading. And God promises to even use the painful things of life to get you there. What is the area where God may be working on you now? How does this change your attitude to suffering and life?

- Wednesday – Growing asks effort!
  - 2 Peter 1:3-11
    - What still needs to be ‘delivered’ for you to be able to grow? (v3-4)

People sometimes think that growing in faith and a changed life is an automatic process. This is not at all true – although God has already given every ingredient needed! We need to make every effort with what He has provided. Here we find a list of things in the disciples life and how they enrich each other. Working on the one causes the other to grow. Think about how each of these aspects of life in the list influence the other. Also see that all of this is still on the foundation: God’s unconditional love (agape) for all people – rooted in the gospel. Being busy with these things leads to you bearing more fruit and coming to know Jesus Christ even better.

- Thursday – Christ leads you to others
  - John 20:21 & Matt 28:18-20
    - Where will you end up if you follow Christ?
    - What does Christ promise you for this task?

We share in the same mission as Christ. When we eventually start to resemble Him having been freed of our selfish desires and self-absorbance ... we will be lovingly involved in the lives of others. Christ will lead you to become involved with people around you to play the same part in their lives that others have played in your faith and spiritual development. This may be people you already have relationships with, or a neighbour that you do not know that well yet. Being a disciple... you should end up making more disciples and help them to join the family of God. Pray that God will lead you and show you where you can become lovingly involved in the lives of others.

- Friday – Your role in the body of Christ
  - Ephesians 4:12-16
    - What is God’s purpose with your gifts?
    - What is needed for the body to grow?

You as a disciple of Jesus is not meant to work as a lone ranger. One person cannot alone touch a community or town. Even Jesus depended on the love, prayers and support of His disciples. Every disciple has received gifts and opportunities to enable others to serve Christ better. When every disciple in God’s family understand their unique contribution and delivers it - it is then that Christs body is healthy and will be built up. Is your local church suffering bad health or decline because you are not there, serving sacrificially? Are you losing out on the healthy input where others could serve you?

- Saturday – Tired and hurting?
  - Hebrews 11:32-12:3
    - Who is Jesus according to the 12:2?
    - How is this encouraging to you?

People disappoint you. Projects fail. People you have helped turn back to their old ways. Your work at your church is not recognised. You are working for your own growth and that of others... but it does not go as you hoped for. You are even met with open resistance or threatened. Well, then you are in good company. Faith in Jesus as his disciple is to persevere in situations that feel hopeless. Look beyond the suffering that may be part of your calling where you are and see Christ, His finished work and how He also looked beyond His suffering to the joy that would be His with His Father in the future. He will finish His good work in you that He has started. Remember this... lift your head, keep your eyes of Jesus, not men, and persevere. Joy is waiting!



#### **Group study**

This study is intended for groups in your church to do together during the week focusing on growth.

- Pray together for Gods guidance
- Conversation starter: Where in your life are you enjoying the fruit of hard word?
- Read Galatians 6:1-10.
- Give an opportunity to those willing to share something that stood out for them in this text.
- Give an opportunity to those willing to ask a question about something in the text. First give everyone a chance and write down the questions.
- Discuss the questions together
- Share with each other what you think God is saying to you in the text for your life regarding growth.
- Pray together.



## WEEK 5: EQUIP

A wonderful privilege for each and every disciple to serve in the mission of God! But who will support, encourage, serve, guide, lead, help, teach, assist, coach and equip the members of a church to follow and serve Christ with their lives in their communities? To enhance the participation of each member in the mission of God for His glory? For this purpose Christ has gifted every believer to serve and support each other. He furthermore called some to serve their church specifically as *elders (included are ministers/pastors)* and *deacons*. With different roles, the elders and deacons are given to a church to equip the believers there for the work of *their* service by which the body of Christ is built up. These people are not those elected to do the 'church work' on behalf of the rest. Elders and deacons work for the maturity of the disciples. Mature in their faith in Christ and mature in their service to Christ.



### Sermon suggestions

Here are some helpful texts and tips for preaching on equipping:

- Everybody has a gift
  - 1 Corinthians 12 (focus on v11 and v 27,28)
  - HC LD 21 Q&A 55
  - BC Art. 28
  - Each and every believer has received gifts and is important for the functioning and building of the body of Christ. When you obediently serve with your gifts, the Spirit of God Himself is active in the community of faith. God has planned to use you and has a place for you in the ministry and work of your church.
- Your gift is not yours
  - 1 Corinthians 12 v 7;
  - 1 Pet 4
  - You did not receive your gift from God for your own satisfaction, pride and glory, but to serve others with it.
  - If you are not actively seeking to serve with your gift, others are not getting what they need for their growth and service.
  - Only when gifts are freely spent as they were received does the rest of the body benefit and does God receive the glory.
- Your maturity in Christ – the aim of pastors, elders and deacons
  - Ephesians 4

- The body of Christ does not grow to maturity in faith and service because of the elders or the deacons. The disciples grow when they are joined to the head: Christ.
- Pastors preach the Word with every text pointing to Christ.
- Elders help the disciples to keep their eyes on Christ and mature in Him by way of the true teachings of the gospel (1 Tim 1:11).
- Deacons help the disciples to keep serving in Christ's body by way of applying their various gifts to the various needs of others (Acts 6).
- In this way the body will grow mature in Christ.



### **Daily devotions**

Follow these daily devotions personally or as a household together.

- Monday – What have you received?
  - 1 Corinthians 12:7 & 11

The Holy Spirit of God enables every disciple to be particularly good at some things. To be above the average ability of the general believer. The nature of these gifts also can vary vastly. Some may seem extraordinary like healing and other may seem very plain like encouragement. But all are of equal value and given as God's Spirit decides. There is not a final list of gifts in the Bible. What have you received? Can you think of things you are particularly good at that could serve your church? If you do not know... how can you start to find out?

- Tuesday – Unhappy about what you received?
  - 1 Corinthians 12:14-20

We tend to see the beauty in others but are very aware of our plainness. We may even covet the gifts of others, envious of them and how the Spirit of God uses them. This can cause you to miss the work and role that God has especially formed you for. Like music needing different sounds to make one beautiful harmony, you need to be different from others to be able to contribute to the whole. However plainly you may feel about yourself, see how your contribution to the whole brings a larger harmony.

- Wednesday – What do you need?
  - 1 Corinthians 12:21-25

Are you struggling in a particular area of your walk with God? A weakness that is hindering your service to God. Are you avoiding other Christians because of that? Maybe the answer

is not avoiding others in shame or pride, but to seek community with them and make use of their gifts. God has given us to each other to depend on each other. To activate the best in us. You should pray for God's help, but maybe He has already answered in the form of the gifts of other believers.

- Thursday – Your relationship with your elder(s)
  - 1 Tim 3:1-7

God gave you your particular elder(s) to coach and support you in your discipleship. Like any coach, they can hardly help and advise you if you do not have an open relationship with them. Is your elder aware of the things you may be struggling with? Are you asking them to pray with you? Do not have a lack of faith in God to use your elder as a helpful voice in your life. They are not perfect people and have room for growth, but God has chosen to pick them up as special tools in His hand. Call them and use them as part of God's work in your life.

- Friday – Your relationship with your deacon(s)
  - 1 Tim 3:4-13; Acts 6:1-7

Your church has appointed deacons to stimulate and serve the unity of love and ministry service in your church. They are to use and lead the gifts among the believers in such a way that no one feels left in the cold and that everyone may have access to the gifts they need: financial or otherwise. They are not working on behalf of you but are there to get you working. Are you following their lead and supporting their initiatives? Offering your help and making use of opportunities to serve? Pray about opportunities that the Lord may want to use you in.

- Saturday – The Word and Sacraments
  - 2 Tim 3:14-17 & Hebrews 4:12,13
  - 1 Cor 11:23-34

You may be eagerly looking for God's voice in your life... but are you listening when and where He is speaking? At a Bible study group, a worship service or daily personal Bible reading. Are you rejoicing in the gospel presented in baptism or the Lord's supper and humbly following with a trusting heart? Followers of Christ need a regular and healthy diet of God's gospel Word spoken to our hearts and minds. Do not neglect meeting together with other disciples regularly and making use of the service that God has provided for His body through gifted, called and appointed elders and deacons.



### Group study

This study is intended for groups in your church to do together during the week focusing on equipping.

- Pray together for Gods guidance
- Conversation starter: What is the relationship between a coach and the team?
- Read Ephesians 4:1-16
- Give an opportunity to those willing to share something that stood out for them in this text.
- Give an opportunity to those willing to ask a question about something in the text. First give everyone a chance and write down the questions.
- Discuss the questions together
- Share with each other what you think God is saying to you in the text for your life regarding equipping.
- Pray together.

## WEEK 6: ALIGN

The foundation has now been laid to help you clearly understand God's mission for the church. It is to glorify Himself in your community as you follow Christ obediently in the power of His Spirit. As in many areas of life and with many things, over time we develop habits and ways of doing things that are not helpfully supporting this mission any more. Things, plans and structures that may have worked in the past may not be as effective any more or effective in every context. It may even be an obstacle. The truth did not change but our country, cultures and communities are always changing and we need to continually reform (*semper reformanda*) and align our ministry structures and systems to serve our calling better. Aligning a church may mean that some changes could follow in your church. Mostly change makes us feel afraid and unsure. But let your only comfort be in Jesus Christ to lead your church faithfully rather than finding false comfort in familiar structures and habits.

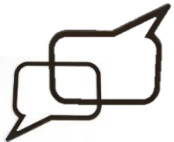


### Sermon suggestions

Here are some helpful texts and tips for preaching on aligning:

- Let us consider!
  - Hebrews 10:19-25
  - Careful attention should be given to the Greek syntax. Quotes below are from the ESV (English Standard Version) reflecting the Greek literally.
  - On the grounds of the gospel that was explained up to now in the letter (v19-21), three exhortations (encouraging commands) are given:
    - 'let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith' v22
    - 'let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering' v23
    - 'let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works' v25
  - Because of the gospel we can draw near to God without fear. In His presence we find our comfort, hope and calling. But we must cling to this new found belief as our solid foundation, trusting that God is faithful. And now, in His presence and clinging to the gospel... we are to consider the best ways to encourage others to do the same. To stir them up to love and good works.
  - This last exhortation encourages us to think creatively, consider and plan new possible ways, plans and structures for a church to encourage one another. God gives us this freedom while standing on the firm foundation of the gospel in His presence.
- Think!
  - Ephesians 5:10-20
  - Mark 12:30

- Being a person of faith does not mean you should blindly stumble forward without thinking and planning. In Mark 12 as part of the great commandment we are to love God also with all our 'mind'. We should apply our thoughts and ideas in a way that it serves God and His purposes. Thinking and planning is also a way of loving God with the gift of thought and wisdom.
- Ephesians expands on this and calls Christians to be wise, thoughtful and make the best use of the circumstances. Applying our minds of how to serve the Lord best in our circumstances.



### Daily devotions

Follow these daily devotions personally or as a household together.

- Monday – Beware!
  - Col 2:6-10

Sometimes things may sound and look right on the surface but beneath they are rotten. Like an apple with a worm inside. Everything seems in place. People can argue their case that they have and know the true right way. They can have well thought out theories that capture your attention, but without you being captured by Christ. Vers 8 deliberately uses the word 'captive' because rather than bringing the freedom and joy that flows from Christ, these human concoctions bring fear and bondage. Regardless of the ministry approach, structures or traditions of your church... do you feel captive in the system or captivated by Christ?

- Tuesday – Your *only* comfort?
  - Col 2:13-19
  - HC LD 1 Q&A 1

The problem among these Christians, as with us, was that they easily attached themselves to things other than Christ alone (*sola Christi*). They were tempted to find surety and comfort in old familiar traditions that at one time pointed to Christ. But these things became empty idols without Christ. They were even encouraged to do this by other people, seemingly godly, but who also did not cling to Christ alone for comfort. You will only be strengthened and growing when you are growing out of Christ Himself, rather than thoughtlessly depending on empty habits. Your only comfort in life and death is that you belong to only Christ!

- Wednesday – True Religion?
  - Romans 12:1,2

The mercies of God in Christ are the grounds for you to serve God sacrificially with your body and choices firstly. This is true religion, rather than religion being a set of rules, rituals or traditions that could somehow be done without your heart. Thinking in this new way about yourself will help you to clearly understand what God's will for your life is. What things that are part of your church do not point you or others to Christ? Are you practising true religion, or religious rituals?

- Thursday – Handling different approaches to Christian life and ministry
  - Romans 14:1-12

Depending on their maturity in Christ, people are at different places in their sense of freedom in Christ. Some feel that, because of Christ, they have a lot of freedom from do's and don'ts. Others feel that they are unfaithful when they allow themselves the same freedom. The problem now arises that our sinful hearts want to look down on the immature or want to judge the mature. Where are you in this? And how does this hinder your ability to still love and serve all your brothers and sisters. Only God knows the heart and we are called to leave the judging to God and continue serving each other.

- Friday – Living in love and peace
  - Romans 14:13-23

What is the Kingdom of God finally about? Whatever we do, we are already wrong when we have let go of the obedience peace and joy that the Spirit of God gives among us. Every person should search their own heart before God: "Are my practices pleasing to God and serving His mission?" Your efforts should be aimed at things enhancing peace and building people up in their faith in the sufficient work of Christ (v19).

- Saturday – What about the others?
  - Rom 15:1-13

Being disciples of Christ, we are called here to follow in His way in dealing with differences in ministry approach and practices. He humbly made Himself available for our growth and what would be beneficial to our faith – rather than just judging us for having no faith and even being His enemies (Ro 5:8.10). In this attitude we can be unified – seeking the benefit of the other and even praising God together. Accepting each other in this way will contribute

to God's glory (v7). Where and how can you contribute to this attitude in yourself and among others?



### Group study

This study is intended for groups in your church to do together during the week focusing on aligning.

- Pray together for God's guidance
- Conversation starter: What is the relationship between a skeleton and its flesh?
- Read Nehemiah 1
- Give an opportunity to those willing to share something that stood out for them in this text.
- Give an opportunity to those willing to ask a question about something in the text. First give everyone a chance and write down the questions.
- Discuss the questions together
- Share with each other what you think God is saying to you in the text for your life regarding aligning.
- Pray together.