

**N E X T
S T E P S**

**T E A C H I N G S E R I E S
A N D V I S I O N**

Term One 2023

Bobbin Head Anglican
Church
A North Turramurra Community Church

 **ST JAMES**
TURRAMURRA

OUR STRATEGY IN 2023 AND BEYOND

WHY WE EXIST

Our mission statement is - *By God's grace in Christ, St James exists to grow disciple-making disciples of Jesus in the upper north shore of Sydney, reaching out to the world with the gospel to the glory of God.*

This mission statement is not new or fancy, it's simply a re-statement of core Biblical truths. There are so many things we *could* be doing as a church, but this mission statement helps us clarify that we want to ensure all our energies are focused towards the end of *making disciples by God's grace, for God's glory.*

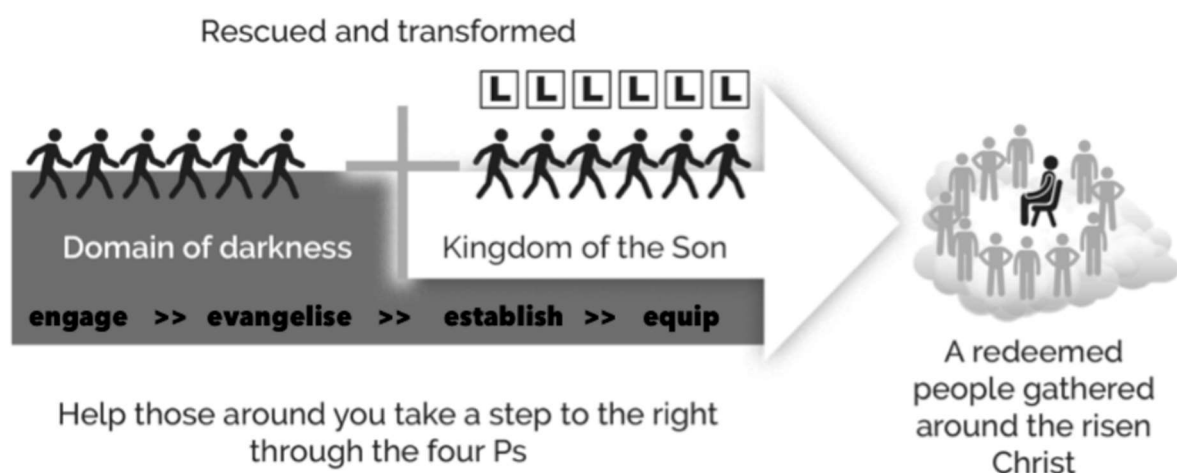
A DISCIPLE-MAKING FRAMEWORK

Over the last couple of years, the staff team have been greatly assisted by a framework for discipleship laid out by Colin Marshall and Tony Payne in their book, *The Vine Project*.

According to this framework, the pathway of discipleship consists of four phases –

1. *Engage* – For someone to meet Christ and enter his Kingdom, they must first meet and engage with a Christian who can share the gospel with them.
2. *Evangelise* – For someone to enter Christ's Kingdom, they must be born again by hearing the gospel and responding with repentance and faith.
3. *Establish* – For those who have responded to the gospel with repentance and faith, they begin the lifelong process of growing in the maturity of their faith – both in their knowledge of Jesus and their Godliness of life. We become lifelong learners of Christ.
4. *Equip* – As Christians mature in the faith they grow in their desire to help others along the discipleship 'pathway.' They desire to be equipped so that they might help others be *engaged, evangelized and established.*

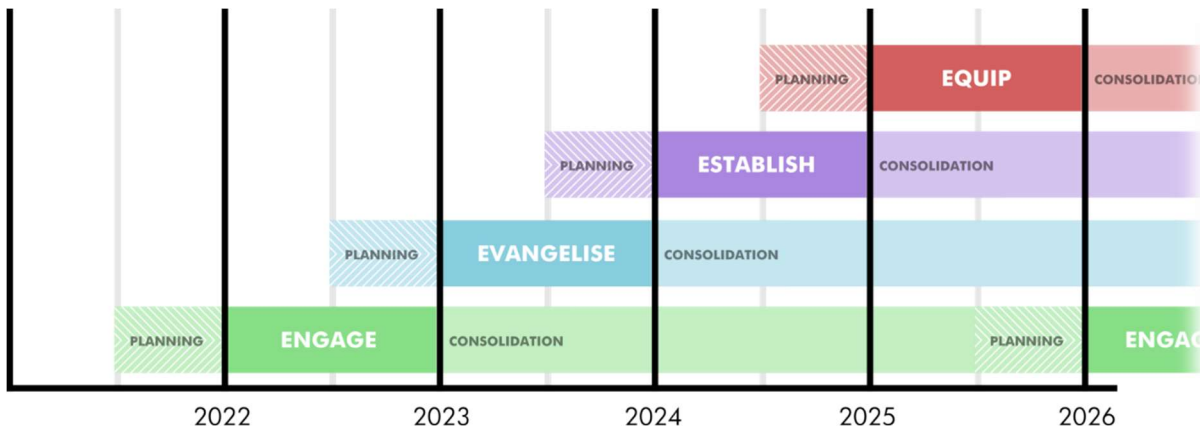
Allowing for the fact that these broad phases aren't always distinct from one another, the framework nonetheless is a helpful (and perhaps unspectacular) summation of the journey of discipleship as laid out in the Bible. In fact, the pathway could be summarized according to the diagram below –



Note: The 'four Ps' are another framework used by the authors to summarise the means by which people grow/ move along this pathway: *Proclamation* of God's Word; *Prayerful* dependence upon the Spirit; *People* as God's fellow workers; *Perseverance*, step by step.

OUR STRATEGY

With many competing demands in our busy lives and in the life of our church, we've been keen to set a focus area for the year to help us prioritise where to spend our time and energy. Given we are on about making disciple-making disciples, we want to focus on an 'E' each year.



During each focus year, we will prioritise initiatives that strengthen our congregation in the chosen area and hopefully setup new rhythms that can be consolidated over the next four years until the next cycle.

In 2022, we had somewhat of a focus on *Engage* –

- **Book Club** – Equipping us to become more relationally Engaged with those around us.
- **Merge Month** – Encouraging us to bring our friends and family into contact with our church family.
- **Mainly Music** – We took steps to establish an Engage-focused playgroup in 2023.
- **Engage Team?** – We hope to institute an Engage Team to carry this forward.

OUR FOCUS IN 2023: EVANGELISM

In light of the above, our hope is for us to focus on **Evangelism** in 2023. This of course will build upon the growing heart for the lost which we pray has been cultivated through the back half of 2022. The prayer is that friendships strengthened during 2022 will pave the way to invites in the first half of 2023.

Term One – Prayer, Planning and Promotion

To begin the ministry year in 2023, we will have a four-week teaching series called 'Next Steps.' We will teach on what the Bible says about *Engage, Evangelise, Establish & Equip*. In this context we will lay out the plan to focus on *evangelism* this year in the wake of our focus on *engage* last year. We will encourage people to begin praying and planning in light of this.

In advance of our use of it in Term Two, and so that people are familiar with it and have confidence in it, we will begin to distribute our primary evangelistic resource - *Uncovering the Life of Jesus*. At Easter we will hand out this resource as a gift out *en masse* to our guests and invite them to join us online during May to re-investigate the 'source texts' of the Christian faith, and consider for themselves who Jesus is (see more below).

Uncovering the Life of Jesus is an excellent resource by Rebecca Manley Pippert. It looks at 6 highlight passages from Luke's gospel, provides a guided walk through, and asks some thought-provoking questions of the passages. It has been used by the staff team evangelistically and its biggest strength is that it takes people straight to the person of Jesus and lets him do the talking.

Term Two – Uncovering the Life of Jesus

Uncovering the Life of Jesus will form the basis of our teaching series in Term Two. This will replace our usual habit of preaching through a gospel in Term One. We will also use *Uncovering the Life of Jesus* as the study material for our mid-week growth groups.

The hope is that this will both equip our members with a great evangelistic resource, and present our members with an opportunity to invite friends to join us as uncover the life of Jesus together.

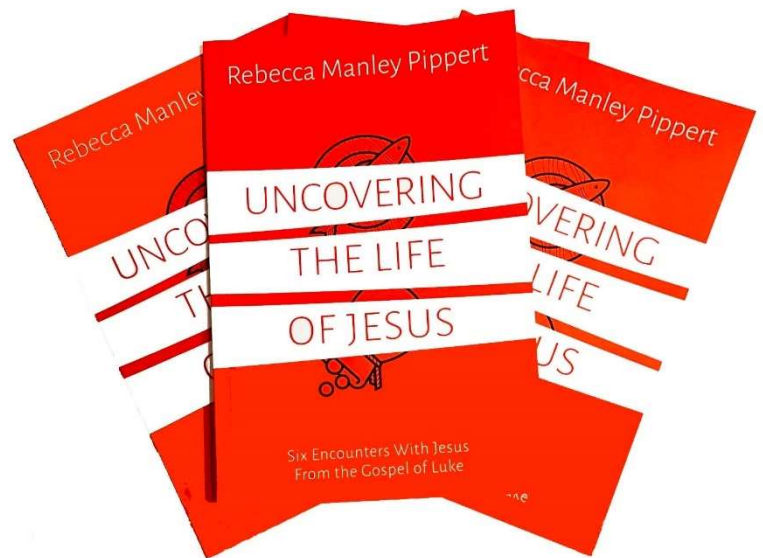
To complement all of this will be a mid-week online Book Club on *Uncovering the Life of Jesus*. We pray that the online format will be less threatening (and thus more appealing) to Easter guests and to those we may have invited. Apart from some light hearted fun, engagement with the week's passage and questions, the night will provide space for questions and reflection so that information gleaned might have space to move from the head to the heart. We'll encourage growth groups to tune in each week. Growth Group watch parties could provide the basis for inviting others. Certainly, the involvement of the growth groups on the livestream will add to the 'buzz' of the evening for guests tuning in online.

Term Three – In-Person Evangelistic Course

This will be the next step for those who've attended *Uncovering the Life of Jesus*. We will meet in person. It will be tailored to our context, with teaching in-person rather than via a screen. The thought was to try a different course to Christianity Explored. We would also continue Merge Month this term.

Term Four – Establishment of a Team

In addition to Christmas evangelistic opportunities. An evangelistic team will be created to plan and execute strategy in 2024.



THIS SERIES – NEXT STEPS

As mentioned above, the focus of the *Next Steps* series is to spend some time considering the pathway of discipleship so that both individually and collectively we might be better positioned to consider what our next step in discipleship might be, and also how we might help someone else take their next step.

The studies below are intentionally brief, and cover some very well-worn passages on discipleship. We pray that old truths become gloriously new as they sink deeper into our hearts this term.

The studies are best undertaken *after* the sermon, and are geared to provide space for groups to have the necessary time to prayerfully consider what *application* will look like each week.

Groups and group leaders shouldn't feel beholden to the questions, but to simply use the overview notes and questions as a guide to facilitate discussion on the week's passage and topic.

KEY DATES FOR THIS TERM

5 February

Next Steps Sermon Series Commences

6-9 February

Growth Group Leaders Meetings for each of the Congregations. Groups optional this week.

12 February

Our evangelistic strategy launched alongside our week on Evangelism

15 February

A prayer and praise night in the War Memorial Hall from 7:30-8:30pm to pray in the year and our approach to evangelism. Groups optional this week.

20-23 February

We anticipate that all groups will have started back up by this point.

STUDY ONE – ENGAGE

THIS WEEK

We consider the first 'E' in the discipleship 'pathway' – Engage. For someone to even hear the gospel, they first need to come into contact with someone who could share it with them. For many, for the gospel to even be considered plausible, they will need to see its genuine impact in the life of others.

God's people are the indispensable means by which God's gospel goes out into the world. We must engage with the world around us.

PASSAGE CONTEXT & OVERVIEW

Matthew 5:13-16 takes place right near the beginning of Jesus' famous block of teaching, *The Sermon on the Mount* (Matthew 5-7). Through this famous sermon, Jesus lays out his *manifesto* for Kingdom living. He calls his disciples to live out on earth, the values of the Kingdom of Heaven. When such a lifestyle is practiced, it will inevitably lead to distinctive lives. This distinctiveness is illustrated with the two vivid images of salt and light (5:13-16), and explains why Christians may be persecuted for their different living and believing (5:11-12).

You are salt of the earth. It's worth noting that here Jesus is speaking in the plural ("youse" as we might say). In the ancient world, salt was notable for its flavour and its preservative value. If salt was to become contaminated or diluted with other substances, its flavour and preservative value would become much diminished. In the same way, Christians are to remain distinctive in our Kingdom living (as spelled out by the Beatitudes – 5:3-10). We are to remain uncontaminated by the world around us. It is only then that the flavour of our lives will draw people to the gospel, and the fruit of our lives will have the effect of delaying and restraining the decaying effect of sin in the world around us. If, however, we lose our saltiness, if we become diluted or compromised with the world around us, there will be little in our lives to draw others to Christ and to preserve the world around us.

You are the light of the world. As the light of the world, *Jesus* is the one who illuminates the truth of God to a world shrouded in the darkness of sin (e.g. John 1:1-18; 2 Cor 4:6). God's plan has always been to redeem a new humanity for himself through his Son Jesus – to call us out of the dominion of darkness into the Kingdom of light (Col 1:13). These verses remind us that he does so through His people. As those who have been reconciled to God in Christ, we bear and shine *Jesus'* light into the world, that others might come to know the truth of Jesus.

Shining as lights must therefore consist of gospel proclamation, but it cannot be confined to proclamation either, for it is our 'good deeds' which will prompt people to 'glorify our Father in Heaven.' (5:16). John Stott thus writes,

Indeed, the primary meaning of 'works' must be practical, visible deeds of compassion. It is when people see these, Jesus said, that they will glorify God, for they embody the good news of his love which we proclaim. Without them our gospel loses its credibility and our God his honour.¹

The light illustrations reveal that our witness is to be *collective* and indeed constitutes part of our *purpose* as Christians. Our faith cannot be private/merely personal. Though growing opposition to the gospel and the comfort of Christian community might tempt us to withdraw, such a move denies Christ. Yet similarly we cannot be compromised in our engagement with the world either, we are to remain distinctly Christ-like as we live out the values of the Kingdom of Heaven.

¹ Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount* (Matthew 5-7), S. 62.

GETTING STARTED

1. Are there any environments in your life where you find it hard to identify as a Christian?

INTO THE TEXT – MATTHEW 5:13-16

Read Matthew 5:13-16

2. The 'salty' lifestyle has just been laid out in the Beatitudes (5:3-10). What are some of the things that might threaten to dilute our saltiness in the world?
3. Read the following passages. What is the significance of light imagery in the New Testament?
 - a. Matthew 4:16-17 - *the people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.* "From that time on Jesus began to preach, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near."
 - b. John 8:12 - *When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."*
 - c. 2 Corinthians 4:6 - *For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ.*
4. What does the image of a town or city on a hill reveal about *how* it is that we are to shine Christ's light?
5. What does the image of the lamp (5:15-16) reveal about what is to be our *purpose* as disciples of Christ?

T A K E A W A Y

6. What are some practical steps you can take this week to fulfill your purpose as a light and more intentionally engage with those around you who don't yet know Christ?
7. What are some ways your growth group might be able to shine *together* this year? Perhaps you might want to revisit some of the discussions that took place over *Merge Month* as we prayed for each other's friends and family and considered how we might merge the worlds of our friends and family with that of our Christian family.

STUDY TWO – EVANGELISE

THIS WEEK

This week we consider the second 'E' in the discipleship 'pathway' – Evangelise. For someone to enter the Kingdom of Heaven, for someone to be born again, they must hear God's good news concerning his Son Jesus, and respond with repentance and faith.

God's gospel is the indispensable means by which people are saved. We must believe it. We must speak it.

PASSAGE CONTEXT & OVERVIEW

In Romans 9-11, Paul explains the plight and purpose of the nation of Israel. He challenges the notion that God's promises to Israel had failed, by demonstrating that God's people have always been a *remnant chosen by grace* and not on the basis of religious performance or works of the law. Indeed, the reason why the Israel of Paul's day remained outside the true people of God, was because they continued in their attempt to establish a righteousness of their own, rather than through faith (9:30-10:4).

In Romans 10:5-8, Paul cites Deuteronomy 30:11-14 to show from the Old Testament that being right before God has always been a matter faith, not works. In **Romans 10:9-17** Paul spells out the implications of this and celebrates the good news that it is not through works that we are saved, but through believing and confessing the truth about Jesus. He reinforces this with quotes from the prophets Isaiah and Joel.

If therefore Christ has opened the way for nearby Jews, and the far-flung Gentiles, to be justified *through faith*, it naturally follows that this good news must be proclaimed in order to be heard and believed - there can be no salvation from God's wrath apart from faith, and there can be no faith without hearing, and there can be no hearing without the message of Christ being preached.

The news of the gospel is thus the indispensable means by which God brings people to faith. This is why Paul describes the gospel as the '*power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes*' (Romans 1:16). Indeed, Paul also writes in Ephesians 1:13, '*And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit.*' Peter similarly writes that it is through the Word of God that we are born again, '*For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.*' (1 Peter 1:23). Hearing the gospel is essential to our salvation, because it is the means by which God brings us to faith.

What is the message of this gospel? Paul gives a summary in 1 Corinthians 15:1-8 –

Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. ² By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. ³ For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴ that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, ⁵ and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve. ⁶ After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. ⁷ Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, ⁸ and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.

It is the news that Christ, the Son of God, died for our sins, rose again for our justification (Romans 4:25), that by believing, we might be saved from God's wrath. Evangelism is holding out Jesus to people.

As we see in Romans 9, hearing doesn't guarantee faith, but it is nonetheless the indispensable means by which God brings his people to faith. Knowing that God is decisive in bringing people to faith, we are therefore emboldened to *pray* and *proclaim*, knowing that he will be at work.

GETTING STARTED

1. Who was the person/people who were most instrumental in sharing the gospel with you?

INTO THE TEXT - ROMANS 10:9-17

Read Romans 10:9-17

2. In what ways has Paul's gospel upended Israel's understanding of how to be right before God (cf. 9:30-10:4)? How is this way of righteousness *just*?
3. What is it that Jesus saves us from (v 13)? (cf. Romans 5:9)
4. What actually is the 'word about Christ' (v 17) that people need to hear?
5. Though there can be no faith without hearing, does hearing guarantee faith?

TAKEAWAY

6. We can easily overcomplicate evangelism. From what we've considered this week, what should we prioritise in our evangelistic efforts?
7. Even when we fall short in evangelism, God's good news reminds us that we are saved not by our works, but by God's grace. Spend a moment thanking God for his love and mercy shown us through Jesus.

STUDY THREE – ESTABLISH

THIS WEEK

This week we consider the third 'E' in the discipleship 'pathway' – Establish. Once someone has responded to the gospel with repentance and faith, they begin the lifelong process of being established as a Christian – growing in maturity as they ongoingly learn of Christ and his ways.

God's Son is Lord and has redeemed us to be his own. We must go on learning Christ.

PASSAGE CONTEXT & OVERVIEW

Matthew's gospel begins by identifying Jesus as – 'the Messiah the son of David, the son of Abraham.' (Matt 1:1). This explanation of Jesus' identity recalls God's promises of old to Abraham and David respectively.

God had promised Abraham that through his offspring, God's blessing would come to the nations (Gen 12:2-3). As the son of Abraham, Jesus comes as the fulfillment to this promise. Through Jesus, God's blessing is restored to the nations, and we see that blessing playing out in **Matthew 28:16-20**, as we hear Jesus commanding his disciples to make disciples of *all nations*.

Yet as the Son of David, we also recall God's promise to place a descendent of David on the throne of God's Kingdom forever (2 Sam 7:11-16). Jesus thus arrives as the long-awaited Messiah, the God-anointed ruler over his people. Jesus reigns as Lord and thus proclaims that all *authority* in heaven and earth has been given to him (Matt 28:18). As the Lord who died, has risen again and reigns, Jesus has the authority to call us to be his disciples, and to make disciples, as he redeems a people for himself from all nations.

So, we thus see how the gospel of Matthew is book-ended with God's plan to bring his blessing to the *nations* through the *Kingdom* of His Son. It is this context that helps us understand why we even make disciples in the first place – Jesus is Lord, and God is at work in human history to glorify his beloved Son amongst the people He has redeemed. We have the privilege of being drawn into this Kingdom and partnering with our King in His work.

Being Jesus' disciples entails submitting to his Lordship in all things. We repudiate our sinful rebellion against Jesus, and submit to obey him. And growing as his disciples entails being taught from His Word to *obey everything he has commanded us* (Matt 28:20). Responding to Jesus with repentance, faith and obedience is a lifelong process – we never stop learning Christ and his ways.

2 Peter 1:3-11 captures this reality of ongoing growth in Godliness through the Word of God -

His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. ⁴ Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.

⁵ For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; ⁶ and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; ⁷ and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love. ⁸ For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹ But whoever does not have them is nearsighted and blind, forgetting that they have been cleansed from their past sins.

¹⁰ Therefore, my brothers and sisters, make every effort to confirm your calling and election. For if you do these things, you will never stumble, ¹¹ and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

GETTING STARTED

1. Think back to a time when you grew significantly in Christian maturity. Who were the people involved in your 'spiritual growth-spurt'?

INTO THE TEXT - MATTHEW 28:16-20

Read Matthew 28:16-20

2. On what basis does Jesus call us to be his disciples, and to be those who make disciples?
3. What is a disciple? Use the following passage to help you form your own definition.
 - a. Luke 6:40 - The student is not above the teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like their teacher.
 - b. Matthew 5:1-2 - Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them.
 - c. Luke 14:33 - In the same way, those of you who do not give up everything you have cannot be my disciples.
 - d. Mark 8:34-35 - Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it.
4. How is baptism a fitting symbol of what it is to become and be a disciple of Jesus?
5. How does someone *grow* as a disciple of Jesus?

TAKEAWAY

6. Share with the group one area where you'd like to grow in Christian maturity this year.
7. Have someone read 2 Peter 1:3-11, then spend time praying that God would make this passage a reality for you as a group.

STUDY FOUR – EQUIP

THIS WEEK

This week we consider the fourth 'E' in the discipleship 'pathway' – Equip. Once someone has responded to the gospel with repentance and faith, and have begun the lifelong process of growing in Christian maturity, the next step is to be equipped to help others move along the 'pathway' of discipleship. All God's people have a part to play in this disciple-making process.

God's people all have a part to play in helping others take their next steps as a disciple. We must be equipped.

PASSAGE CONTEXT & OVERVIEW

Ephesians 1-3 powerfully describes how God has brought all things to unity in Christ – he has reconciled sinners to God, and Jew to Gentile, all through His Son Jesus. Ephesians 4-6 spells out the implications our union with Christ must have for our life together as God's people. If we are *one* in Christ through the Spirit, then it follows that we would 'make every effort to keep the unity through the bond of peace.' (Eph 4:3). After all, 'there is *one* body and *one* Spirit, just as you were called to *one* hope when you were called; *one* Lord, *one* faith, *one* baptism; *one* God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.' (Eph 4:4).

With this in mind, Paul then goes on to remind the church in Ephesus that Christ has gifted the church with leaders, who serve not for their own benefit, but in order to *equip* God's people for works of service, *so that* the body of Christ may be built up in the *unity* and maturity of our faith as we grow in our knowledge of and likeness to Jesus.

Yet this happens as *each part* does its work (4:16). Everyone has a responsibility under Christ to serve one another (v 12) specifically through speaking the truth in love (v 15). The ministry of speaking God's Word is not confined to those with upfront or public ministries, but is to be exercised in a variety of ways, by all, for the up-building of all God's people.

Colossians, the sister letter to Ephesians, gives us a further sense of this one to another ministry to which we are called –

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. ¹⁶ Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. ¹⁷ And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. (Colossians 3:15-17)

GETTING STARTED

1. Whether in a professional context, a sporting environment, the home, or elsewhere, share a time of when you've seen growth in someone you'd been responsible for training/coaching/teaching/nurturing?

INTO THE TEXT – EPHESIANS 4:11-16

Read Ephesians 4:11-16

2. For what purpose does God gift various leaders to his church (e.g. apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers)?
3. Whose responsibility is it to build up the body of Christ?
4. What is the *goal* of all this 'body-building'?
5. By what means will this goal be realised?

TAKEAWAY

6. Share with the group (and pray), which of the following areas you'd like more equipping in so that you could help others take their next steps:
 - a. *Engage* – Bringing others into the orbit of God's people and the gospel
 - b. *Evangelise* – Sharing the gospel with others
 - c. *Establish* – Helping others grow in Christian maturity
7. Think of someone that you could help take their next steps in the following areas? Write down their names below, and share one (or some) of them with the group for prayer.
 - a. *Engage* – Who could you bring into contact with God's people?
 - b. *Evangelise* – Who could you begin sharing the gospel with?
 - c. *Establish* – Who could you help grow and deepen in their faith?