

Using these Bible Studies

The studies are broken down into different sections that each focus on one of St James in the City's values. We think this is a helpful way to have time together that focuses on many different areas of our lives as Christians, and not simply in getting more 'head knowledge' about God.



Live:

The foundation for spiritual growth is an intimate connection with God and His family. The questions in the section will help you get to know the members of your group and help grow that sense of family which we are called into.



Grow:

In this section, the questions are designed to bring you to a deeper understanding of the Bible and to help you consider how the truths of the Bible can impact your life.



Serve:

Nothing is more fulfilling than using your God-given gifts to serve and help meet the needs of others in God's family. This section will help make that desire a reality. You will be encouraged and challenged to take steps to serve those inside and outside of the group.



Build:

The thought of sharing our faith can be scary and can feel awkward. Don't worry: this is a common feeling! However, God wants to use you to reach those around you for Christ. This section is designed to give you and your group practical, manageable steps for sharing Christ that can become a part of your everyday life.



Love:

You were made for God's pleasure. Even when we gather as a smaller group, it is great to have the opportunity to worship and to surrender your heart to God. This could come in a variety of forms such as prayer, singing, or simply sharing what God is doing in your lives. Contribute as much or as little as you feel able to.

Introduction

The heart can be described in many ways – loving, hateful, deceitful, pure, angry and obedient to name just a few. When we say, “we have a heart” for something, we mean we have a desire for something or someone; we might even “set our heart on something” and make it our focus and our desire.

The Bible talks about the heart in a number of places:

- Psalm 57:7 says: “My heart, O God, is steadfast, my heart is steadfast; I will sing and make music.”
- In Proverbs 4:22-24 we read: “Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.”
- Jesus declares that the pure in heart are blessed (Matthew 5:8) for “they will see God”.
- We are called to draw near to God “with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings” (Hebrew 10:22).

There are many, many more verses as well! In the Bible, our heart is often the root of our thinking, doing, and feeling. Our heart governs so much of our behaviour and this is why it is important: “A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of.” (Luke 6:45).

Ultimately, the way we Serve is determined by our heart. Our hearts go through many moods, and desires or focuses on many things, not always good. In these studies, we are going to look at some Bible characters and see what types of hearts they had. This will help us learn more about serving as an outflow of our hearts and love for God.

Study 1:

The disobedient heart (Jonah) – what place does obedience have in our serving?

Study 2:

The angry heart (Jonah) – we have a God of second chances who gives us a chance to serve him again and again.

Study 3:

The praying heart (Daniel) – where does prayer fit in to our service?

Study 4:

The missionary heart (Philip) – what does a heart for evangelism look like?

Study 5:

The courageous heart (Esther) – how can courage help us serve others?

Study 6:

The faithful heart (Ruth) – what does a faithful heart look like?

Study 7:

The new heart (Paul) – what happens when our hearts are renewed?

Study 1: The disobedient heart (Jonah)

Live

What is the most disobedient thing you have ever done? (NB you can't say 'running through a wheat field'!) Share stories in the group.

Love

Start your time together in prayer and worship. Thank God who he is and how he has blessed us.

Grow

Read Jonah 1 and 2 together.

- 1:1-3 – Why did Jonah run? Was he scared of what the people of Ninevah would do to him?
- 1:4 – God has a way of catching up on us; he sent a storm to stop Jonah. Have you experienced something like this – when God blocked your way when you were avoiding doing what he wanted?
- 1:5-6 - Do you feel sorry for the other passengers and sailors on the ship?
 - Sometimes our actions have consequences that affect other innocent people. Have you got an example of this from your own life?
- 1:7-17 – What do you think of Jonah's response to the sailors?
 - Was the repentance of the sailors real?
 - What image do we get of God from Chapter 1?
 - What image do we get of Jonah from Chapter 1?
- 2:1-10 - How might Jonah have felt when he was inside the whale?
 - What did Jonah do?
 - What did God do?
 - Was Jonah's repentance real?
 - What image do we get of God from Chapter 2?
 - What image do we get of Jonah from Chapter 2?

Live

Have you ever been in a situation of great despair that made you turn to God? Did you pray? What was the result?

Serve

Are there any areas in your life where you feel you are being called to serve, but are being disobedient?

Build

Are there any people in your life who you feel you are being called to share Jesus with, but are being disobedient?

Prayer

Close in prayer: pray for obedient hearts and for God to reveal over the coming week where you might be being disobedient.

Study 2: The angry heart (Jonah)

Live

Have you ever given someone a second chance? A third/fourth/fifth chance? How did it work out and how did you feel about it?

Love

Start your time together in prayer and worship. Thank God for the way he forgives us and gives us second chances. You could use *Second Chance* by Rend Collective (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W6RNJ6HDTpU>).

Grow

Read Jonah 3 and 4 together.

- 3:1-2 - What happened? Why did God give Jonah a second chance?
 - Have you ever felt that God was giving you a second chance?
- 3:3-5 – Why did Nineveh respond in this way?
- 3:6-9 – Do you think their repentance was genuine?
 - What do you think Jonah was doing in the middle of all this?
- What do we learn about God and Jonah from Chapter 3?
- 4:1 – What do you think about Jonah's reaction?
 - Do you understand it? Would that be how you reacted?
- 4:2-4 – Jonah angrily and inadvertently praises God!
 - So why was Jonah angry?
 - Was Jonah right to be angry?
 - Have you ever felt this way?
- 4:5-11 – This is like a “parable in action” with the leafy plant and the worm. What was it trying to teach Jonah?
 - When things don't go our way, do we behave like Jonah?
 - What do you think God might say to us?
- Why do you think the book ends as it does, with no idea about what happens to Jonah?

Build

Would Jonah's message help people turn to God today? Why/why not?

Serve

God sometimes needs to take a few goes to get through to us! Is there anything from last week that God is still saying to us? What do we need to keep listening to God to about how we serve and what is going on in our heart?

Prayer

Close in prayer: pray for God to remove bad attitudes/anger from your heart and for him to reveal areas that the Spirit might need to work on over the coming weeks. Keep each other accountable for your prayers!

Study 3: The praying heart (Daniel)

Live

What are your personal experiences of answered prayer?

Love

Start your time together in prayer and worship: share words and prayers of adoration.

Grow

Read Daniel 6:1-28 and Daniel 9:3-23 together.

- Why do you think Daniel was so successful in his work?
- Why did the other administrators plot against him?
- 6:6-8 - Notice how the administrators flatter the King so they could get what they wanted. Do we do this sometimes?
 - How does this look in our own lives?
- 6:10-13 - What was Daniel's response and why?
- 6:14-20 – What picture do you get of the King here? What about Daniel?
- 6:21-28 – Daniel showed his faithfulness to God; what was the outcome?
- What do we learn about God and Daniel from Chapter 6?
- 9:4-10 - How does Daniel start his prayer?
- What does Daniel rely on for God to act?
- Are prayers always answered as quickly as Daniel's?
- What do we learn about God and Daniel from Chapter 9?

Serve

Why was Daniel so successful at prayer? What lessons can we learn from Daniel?

How can we apply it to our own lives? How does prayer affect the way we serve?

What does prayer do for our hearts?

Build

What part does praying have in helping God's kingdom to grow? Is there anything we can learn from Daniel about prayer and God's kingdom growing?

Prayer

Discuss in pair how you pray regularly and what you could do/ask God for to make it more consistent.

Close in prayer. Ask for a praying heart that is consistent and faithful.

Study 4: The missionary heart (Philip)



Live

What is the furthest you have ever travelled in one go? How long did it take you?



Love

Start your time together in prayer and worship.



Grow

Read John 1:43-51 and Acts 8:1-8, 26-40 together.

- Philip seemed to be a natural evangelist from the moment he decided to follow Jesus. What do we need to have in order to share our faith?
- At this time, the early church was under great persecution after the death of its first martyr. What was Philip's reaction to the persecution?
 - Why did the crowd respond the way they did, despite persecution against the church?
- 8:26-27 - It doesn't seem very logical to go down a desert road where no one lived, but Philip obeys. What is our reaction when God tells us to do something, which doesn't seem to be right?
- 8:27-30 – Why did Philip approach the eunuch?
 - Would it have been easy for him to do this?
 - Are we this bold? If not, why not?
 - What was the result of Philip's obedience?
- 8:31-40 – If you were talking about this passage of scripture with a non-Christian, what would you say?
 - Can you explain the good news about Jesus in one minute? Try in pairs
- Read Acts 21:8 – what does this say about Philip?



Serve

How can we serve those who are from different backgrounds from us? What might it look like in St James? What part does obedience play?



Build

How can we reach out to those who are from different backgrounds from us? What might it look like in St James? What part does obedience play?

Prayer

Spend some time sharing and reflecting on your prayer life since the last session. Have we experienced any answered prayers? How did that make us feel?

Close in prayer. Pray that God would help us to be obedient, bold and intelligent in our witness and evangelism. Pray for help to spot opportunities and for the boldness to take them. Pray for genuine concern and love for others.

Study 5: The courageous heart (Esther)

Live

When was the last time you spoke to someone about Jesus? What happened?

Love

Start your time together in prayer and worship; perhaps try something new.

Grow

Read Esther 3:8-11, 4:1-17, 5:1-8, 7:1-6 and 9:1-4 together.

- 3:8-11 - How serious was the threat of this decree to the Jews?
- 4:1-17 - What was Mordecai's reaction to the decree?
 - What does Mordecai say to Esther?
 - What signs of hope are there?
- 5:1-8 - Do you think Esther may have been tempted to just save herself by keeping quiet?
 - How would you have felt in this situation?
 - How did Esther use wisdom and cunning? Is this something God's people should use?
- Are there situations where you should have spoken up and didn't?
 - How did you feel? Did it make you feel better or worse?
 - What might help you in a situation where you have to risk yourself/your image/your reputation?
- 7:1-10 – How does the king react?
 - Does this reaction shock you?
- What do we learn about God and Esther from this book?
- Do you know anyone who has stood up for what they believed in? Do you admire them for it?

Serve

What do you need courage for?

When might serving others be costly and require courage?

Build

Where does courage fit in to our evangelism?

Share examples of when we were courageous and when we weren't.

Prayer

Close in prayer: pray for courage when we have to stand up for what we believe in. Pray for the strength of personality to act as we should when faced with a tough situation.

Study 6: The faithful heart (Ruth)



Live

Can you remember moving house as a child? What were your feelings and how quickly did you feel at home again?



Love

Start your time together in prayer and worship and thank God for his faithfulness to us.



Grow

Read Ruth 1 and 4:13-22 together.

- 1:1-5 – How would you feel if these circumstances happened to you?
- 1:6-18 – Why did Naomi return home?
 - How does Naomi reflect God in this passage?
 - Why did Orpah go back home?
 - Why did Ruth stay?
- 1:19-22 – What are the emotions in this passage?
- What can we learn about God and Ruth from these passages?
- Do we get discouraged when things are hard for us?
 - Does God seem far away?
 - Do you feel that he has abandoned you sometimes? Has he?
 - What helps remind you of God's faithfulness in times like this?



Serve

Is there anyone in the group or in church that we know who is struggling in their walk with God at this time? How can you stand alongside them and walk with them through this time?

Who are you called to be faithful to? When is it easy and when is it hard?



Build

Who are the non-Christians God is calling us to be faithful to? What are we able to commit to with them?

Prayer

Close in prayer: pray for help to be faithful to God and to each other, even when our own feelings tell us otherwise.

Study 7: The new heart (Paul)

Live

If you could transform into any animal, which one would it be and why?

Love

Start your time together in prayer and worship and thank God that he makes us new and we are a new creation in Christ.

Grow

Read Acts 8:1-3, 9:1-31 together.

- How would you describe Paul's heart at the beginning of this reading?
- 9:1-9 - How do you think Paul felt when he heard the voice of Jesus after the light struck him down?
 - Do you think he knew who it was?
 - What did the soldiers who were with him think was happening?
 - Did Paul believe at the end of the encounter with Jesus?
- 9:10-22 – How did Paul respond next?
 - What showed that some change had happened in Paul?
 - How would you have felt if you were Ananias? How did he react?
- 9:23-31 – How did the community respond to Paul? Why?
 - How did the rest of the church respond to Paul, and why?
- How would you describe Paul's heart at the end?
- What do we learn about God and Paul from this passage?
- Where do our hearts need to be made new?

Serve

Our service comes out of this new heart that God gives us. What has God changed in you through your walk with him and how can that help you to serve others and the kingdom?

Are there any areas of church life that we want to help serve on off the back of this series?

Build

Is this passage encouraging or discouraging for our own evangelism? Why?

Prayer

Close in prayer: thank God that He can change people's hearts, like he did with Paul. Ask God to change our hearts for His glory.