

## May 2025 – Children of God's Kingdom

Please note Bible stories and themes may occasionally differ from this overview.

During May we continue to think about **love**. As the previous month ended with exploring the importance of loving others, we begin May with how we can **love** God. We see Paul writing to the Ephesians about important practical lessons on how to live; of why the growing church community needs to focus on **peace**; and for individuals, how **self-control** and the armour of God will help us live according to God's will. We find out what Paul wrote to the Galatians about all the **Fruits of the Spirit**, and we introduce the Psalms (and Psalm 23), to see how the Spirit empowers everyone to live as citizens of the Kingdom of God by **love**.

### Session 1

#### 3/4 May

Session Aim: To explore Jesus' command to love God and love each other.

Bible Ref: Matthew 22:34-40

#### Today's fruit

The whole Bible reflects the story of God's **love** for his people. Jesus reminds us that the most important thing we can do is to **love** God and **love** others.

#### Love God, love others

The Pharisees, scholars and community leaders questioned Jesus: 'Which command in the law is the most important?' (v36). Jesus responds by saying they should love God and love their neighbour.

Today's passage follows on from the theme of last week: Love God, love others, with an emphasis on love God.

In these verses Jesus is responding to the Pharisees who are asking him what the greatest law is. In this moment Jesus teaches us and the crowds of people listening something profound – that loving God and loving our neighbour (others) are the two greatest commandments on which everything else must rest.

When Jesus is saying that we must love God, it refers to something much deeper than simply a feeling. It is a love that impacts every part of our lives, from the decisions we make, to how we act. When we understand, know and experience loving God in this way, it enables us to love others in a meaningful way too – seeing that each person is made in the image of God.

The last verse says: 'All the law and the writings of the prophets depend on these two commands' (v40).

Jesus would have known the first five books of the Bible, as they are the Jewish holy book, the Torah. They are the books of the law, the foundation where the Bible begins. Later in the Bible, there are 17 books of writings of the prophets. How important this commandment must then be!

#### Think about

Last week we talked about a phrase that we use in The Salvation Army. Can you remember what it is? Can you remember some of the ways we said we could love others? I wonder what it looks like for us to love God?

Jesus said that the two greatest rules to live by were to love God and love others. Why do you think these are important ways to live? What are some of the ways we can show love to God? Are they the same as when we show love to other people?

Look again at verse 37. It says that we should love God with all our heart, soul and mind. What does that mean? How can we do that? Is it easy or difficult to love God and others?

When you think about loving God with all of your heart, all of your soul and all of your mind, what does it make you think about? What could you say to God about it?

Are there people you know who love God with all their heart, soul and mind? How can you tell?

### Sunday 4 May: Candidates Sunday

This is a Salvation Army event which encourages people to focus on what God's calling is on their lives. For some, they will answer God's call to go on the journey of becoming Salvation Army officers and spend their lives dedicated to loving God and loving others.

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## Session 2

### 10/11 May

**Session Aim:** To explore the idea of unity and its importance in the world.  
**Bible Ref:** Ephesians 4:1-6,11-16

#### Today's fruit

The letters written to the early churches are often seen to give encouragement and instruction. We see the importance of **peace** for the new churches as they work together.

#### Loving God's family

Here we introduce the part of the Bible which is made up of a collection of letters. These books that we read as Scripture are actually letters that were written to the newly formed churches Paul was supporting. A large part of the New Testament is made up of letters (many written by Paul).

In this letter 'to the Ephesians', Paul is writing – from prison – to early Christians to support them as they establish themselves as followers of Jesus. These letters are full of wisdom, encouragement and challenge. In this letter, in particular chapter 4, we read about unity and maturity in the body of Christ.

The letter speaks of unity for the whole Church; the Ephesians are being instructed to become like a body – unified. It explains that everyone will have different gifts from God, but that to use them effectively they must also be unified as the Church, the body of Christ.

#### Think about

Have you ever written a card or a letter to someone? When might we send letters or cards to people? Did you know that there's a whole section of the Bible that is made up of letters?

Paul wrote a number of letters to help the first church communities as they began to figure out what being a Christian church meant. In his letters he would challenge them about things they were doing which weren't so good, and he also encouraged them for the things they were doing really well – and reminded them how good God was!

At the beginning of this passage (v2) he says that we should be completely humble, gentle, patient, and accept each other in love. What do you think it means to be humble? Can you describe a time when you might have to be gentle? Has anyone ever told you to be patient? How does this link with our fruit of peace?

Sometimes the Church is described in the Bible as a body. Have you heard that before? We can imagine the Church as a body, because our bodies are made up of lots of different parts. Can you name some different parts of a body?

Different parts of our bodies do different things. What can hands sometimes help us do? What can eyes be used for? Just like the body that does different things, the people who make up a church do different things too. Can you tell me what different jobs people do in our church?

If a body or a church has lots of different jobs happening all at once, it's important that there is something called unity. That means everything is working together. I wonder why it's important to have unity?

Our Fruit of the Spirit for today is **peace**. I wonder what you think of when you hear the word peace? Do you think peace is important when we are working together?

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## Session 3

### 17/18 May

**Session Aim:** To explore Paul's picture of the armour of God.  
**Bible Ref:** Ephesians 6:10-18

#### Today's fruit

Further along in the book of Ephesians we see more encouragement and instruction, but the emphasis is on the individual. It requires **self-control** and decision-making if we are to live life according to God's will.

#### Living for God

Paul encourages believers to be strong in God's power and to wear the full armour of God to stand firm against spiritual challenges and evil forces. The armour includes truth, righteousness, readiness from the gospel ('the Good News'), faith, salvation, and the word of God ('the sword of the Spirit'); prayer is emphasised as a vital tool for strength and support in the spiritual battle.

Paul is continuing to write this letter while in prison and would therefore have been constantly in the presence of Roman soldiers dressed in armour. It's unsurprising therefore that Paul draws the reader in with an image that would have been familiar to them too. God spoke to Paul through his surroundings and brought us teaching which has remained memorable for generations.

The aim here is to encourage reflection on each of the various pieces of 'God's full armour' and be able to relate it to real life for us now. It's not just a great and memorable picture; it also helps us to live in a way that brings us closer to God. Each part of the armour is important, from understanding what words such as salvation and righteousness mean, to why it makes a difference in our lives to live in righteousness or truth.

#### Think about

Who might wear armour? Why might they need to wear armour? What does armour do?

We might think about soldiers wearing armour if they are going into a battle. It's not there to make them look good or to make them all match; it's there to protect them. What do we have or wear now to help protect us and keep us safe? What protection might you need if you were climbing a mountain? What would keep you safe when you're on a bike or skateboard? What about when you travel in a car?

The first piece of armour Paul describes is the 'belt of truth'. What truth do we know about God from the Bible? What is true about who God is? Why is it important for us to remember the truth about God in our lives?

Another piece of armour is the breastplate of righteousness ('the protection of right living'). What might the word righteousness mean? One way of understanding what it means is 'doing what is right in the sight of God'. What do you think God likes to see his people doing? How do you think God likes us to treat others? Why is it important to remember these things every day?

Another item is the helmet of salvation. Where do you wear a helmet? It's close to your head, the place where all our thinking happens. Have you heard the word salvation before? What do you think it means? One way to understand it is that salvation is a gift we accept from God that means we are forgiven and can be close to him. If we wear a helmet of salvation, we are keeping close to our minds that God has saved us through Jesus. Is that a good thing for us to remember? How can that help us if we remember it every day?

Look at the rest of the passage and find all the other piece of the armour. Discuss what the words mean, and why they are important to remember.

## Session 4 24/25 May

**Session Aim: To explore the Fruit of the Spirit**  
**Bible Ref: Galatians 5:13-18,22-26**

### Today's fruit

Here we discover all the **Fruits of the Spirit** and think about why they are each important.

### Being fruitful

Galatians 5:22-26 describes the fruits of the Spirit as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. It encourages believers to live by the Spirit, avoiding selfish desires and embracing a life of humility and mutual support.

In today's Bible verses we hear about the fruits of the Spirit. Paul is writing to the Christian church in Galatia. In this letter Paul has previously challenged the readers about the wrong things they can fall into the trap of doing. Just before we get to the passage about the fruit of the Spirit, Paul is challenging the Galatians to remember to love God and others. He then follows that by warning them not to not give in and do whatever they want. There's a whole list of things to avoid which can ultimately harm us or take our attention away from God and his intention for our lives.

In this passage he outlines the wonderful things that, by the outworking of the Holy Spirit in our lives, we can see and share: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

### Think about

Have you ever been given some good advice? What are some pieces of good advice you can think of? Why might we give someone good advice?

Paul spent a lot of time writing letters to the new churches. The part of the Bible we are reading today is part of one of his letters to a church in Galatia, and it is full of good advice. What good advice would you give to a new church? How could they love God and love others?

At the end of this part of his letter Paul also gives the church some good news. He tells them that if they allow the Holy Spirit to help them, their lives will be filled with lots of wonderful things like love and gentleness. What other wonderful words can you think of? Can we find all the wonderful words in Paul's letter?

Each week we think about different fruits of the Spirit in Explore It, and this is the part of the Bible they all come from. Have you ever seen a tree that is growing fruit? What does the tree look like? Have you ever eaten fruit from a tree? What words could describe it? Often it's the healthy trees that make fruit that tastes delicious. Paul's letter calls these wonderful words 'fruit of the Spirit', because when we live the way God wants us to, our lives can be filled with joy, love, peace and all the other words!

### 29 May: Ascension Day

There are many extraordinary key moments in Jesus' life. Ascension Day marks when Jesus was taken up into Heaven. Before Jesus left, he assures the disciples that the Holy Spirit will support them.

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## Session 5

### 31 May / 1 June

**Session Aim: To explore the book of Psalms and Psalm 23**

**Bible Ref: Psalms; Psalm 23**

#### Today's fruit

Psalm 23 will remain the focus for next month, so today's focus is on **love** as shown in the book of Psalms, and how the **love** between people and God is expressed beautifully through words.

#### Special Songs

Psalm 23 expresses trust in God as the shepherd who provides, guides and protects, offering peace and comfort even in the face of challenges.

Today is an introduction to the Psalms, with a particular focus on Psalm 23, 'The Lord is my shepherd'. An introduction to the book of Psalms will include an exploration of what the word 'psalm' means, who wrote them and why. It will explore the idea of worshipping God through poetry and music, but will also reflect on King David's relationship with God and how he expressed a whole plethora of emotions and situations.

There are 150 Psalms in the Bible which are a collection of hymns, poetry, prayers. Over 70 of them have links to King David, whether he was full of praise or lamenting his grief. The Psalms teach us about connection with God. They teach us about resilience and faith: that despite pain and grief God is unchanging, and by his grace and power these experiences don't have to rule our lives. The Psalms acknowledge the reality and hope that God will keep his promises from the Torah, and he will send the promised saviour.

The fruit of the Spirit today is love, and the idea of love can be reflected in the fact that often the Psalms are very emotive. But they're all a way of people connecting to God because of their love for him, and his love for us.

#### Think about

The word 'psalm' in the Bible means a special song. It comes from a Greek word (Greek is one of the languages that was spoken at that time). When we look at the Psalms in the Bible, we understand them as songs or poems that were written to God, many of them as songs of praise. Are there any special songs that you like singing or listening to as you worship God?

King David was an ancestor of Jesus, and he wrote many of the Psalms as a way of connecting to and worshipping God. How do you like to connect with God? Do you enjoy music, or dancing, or thinking? Do you like being with God in the quiet times or in nature or on the way to school? What other times and ways do you think we can connect with God?

There are 150 Psalms in the Bible, and they are about all sorts of different themes and feelings. Some are about being worried, some are about being happy, some are about feeling lonely.

Look at Psalm 23 and listen / look out for what it might be about. How do you think King David was feeling when he wrote this psalm? What do you think he was saying to God?

The Psalms are examples of different feelings and thoughts people have wanted to share with God. They praise and pray to God because they love him and know that God loves and cares for them too. Just like he loves and cares for you!

If you were to write to God, what would you want him to know? What things does God think are really special about you? How can we know that God loves us?