

Al Massira is a journey of discovery for small groups of friends.

Through short films and discussion the Al Massira course takes a chronological journey through scriptures, exploring the messages and signs of the ancient Prophets. Providing answers to challenging questions, it centres the Christian faith in its Middle Eastern context and is presented in Arabic, English and other languages.

This Guide helps leaders to:

- Prepare for the journey
- Welcome your travelling companions
- Lead constructive discussions
- Pray for your friends
- Reveal the true nature and work of the Messiah

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LEADERS' GUIDE



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AL MASSIRA



An open place: to walk with the Prophets and meet the Messiah



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Part One



1

Overview of Al Massira

“A journey of a thousand miles must begin with a single step.” Eastern proverb

What is Al Massira?

Al Massira is an explanatory course designed to present a biblical understanding of the faith and identity of the Messiah. ‘Al Massira’ in Arabic conveys the meaning of a journey in the company of others. Al Massira is a journey through history, the prophetic stories and signs pointing towards the Messiah, and through some of the lands where the events took place. It has been, in part, inspired by the journey of the two friends on the road to Emmaus in the company of Jesus. We pray, in a similar manner, for the opening of eyes that have been closed to the true identity of Jesus.

The Al Massira resource comprises thirteen, 40 minute (on average) DVD programmes along with a discussion guide (Questions from the Journey), participant’s notes (Notes from the Journey) and this Leader’s Guide.

Not just a video!

The Al Massira programme is not just a film presentation, but is a relational means of presenting the message of the Messiah. The DVD is just a part of a broader holistic approach. Al Massira draws together a small group of friends, some interested seekers and one or more believers, who will embark together on a journey of discovery. They will meet regularly, and alongside watching the DVD, they are encouraged to enjoy food and hospitality together, engage in open discussion and if possible spend time in prayer.

Who is it for?

Al Massira is intended for use by anyone with a desire to share the prophetic story of the Messiah with their friends. It is ideally suited to those who would like to discover what the Bible has to say about the Messiah in a non-pressured and relaxed manner.

Philosophy and Structure

Course Concept

Al Massira is a chronological and story-based presentation of the message of God's grace to mankind. It has been written and presented by people from the Arab World, and is available in Arabic, English and other languages. The course is Bible-based and is primarily explanatory rather than apologetic or comparative, and does not use other religious texts. The participants are encouraged to go step by step through the course in order to understand the whole message before being encouraged to consider their personal response to it. The course is thus designed to avoid forcing the participants to accept the message. Al Massira is intended to be used with small groups of friends, thus providing a way for the message to be presented in a culturally appropriate manner within the context of their community.

Presentation format

The DVD presentation is in documentary style, using a varied and contemporary media format, which includes: on-location shots, teaching slots, dialogue, discussion, vox pops, dramas and personal stories. A presenter fronts the film and provides cohesion to the programme. He does not identify himself as a 'follower of Christ'; rather as one who has many questions and who is himself on a journey of discovery. His questions are designed to resonate with those that exist in the hearts and minds of the participants. As he proceeds along the journey he processes the issues as they arise, and he moves towards, and encounters the Messiah himself.

Course Structure

The Al Massira course is set out as follows:

Introductory Episode	
First Quarter 1 – The Story of Adam & Eve 2 – The Story of Noah 3 – The Story of Abraham & Sarah	
Second Quarter 4 – The Story of Moses 5 – The Story of King David 6 – The Story of Mary & the Messiah	
Third Quarter 7 – The Story of the Messiah 8 – The Messiah & the Father 9 – The Messiah & the Holy Spirit	
Fourth Quarter 10 – Living with the Messiah 11 – First steps with the Messiah 12 – The fellowship of the Messiah	

Al Massira is structured in four distinct sections following the introduction. The first quarter explores the primary ‘signs’ that help us to better understand the nature of God, humanity and the problem of sin. The relationship between the Lord and mankind and the first pointers to the coming Messiah are revealed. The second quarter moves from the ‘signs’ into more specific prophecies which point to the details of the life and purpose of the Messiah. The third quarter is the heart of the message and unpacks the fulfilment of all the previous signs and prophecies in the life, death and resurrection of the Messiah. It explores the mystery of the divine relationship; Father, Son and Holy Spirit – and highlights God’s invitation to become a part of this family. The final quarter is practical in nature, showing us what it means to follow the Messiah and what difference he will make to our lives.

2

Sowing for Harvest

It is so important to lay the right foundations when starting a new venture, and this is certainly true if you want to run Al Massira. This chapter looks at three areas of foundation preparation. The personal cost of following the Messiah for ourselves, the Word of God and the preparation of the ground through prayer.

The Power of the Cross

The cross and resurrection are the central points of both our faith and world history, where God sent his unique Son to die for a broken and sinful world. We know the story well; we remember and rehearse it through the act of communion on a regular basis. However, the Lord does not want us to have only a theological or emotional response to it; the cross is to be embraced practically as the centre-point in our lives. For us to bring the message of Christ to our friends we need them to see that we ourselves are sincere followers of the Messiah. They will see this, in

part, through our willingness to embrace the cross.
(Matthew 10:38-39)

“Christianity is based on sacrifice. Take away the sacrifice and what is left? An insipid lifeless nothing, a shell without explosive, a farce – not a force. Sacrifice is written large over the pages of the Holy Bible. God so loved the world that he gave heaven’s best. Jesus so loved that he laid down his life. Unto us his followers it is given, on his behalf, not only to believe but to suffer for his sake.”
CT Studd

This is neither a popular nor contemporary message in many of our churches or cultures. However, when we downgrade the priority of this core aspect of Jesus’ message we reduce considerably our ability to bear fruit, and fruit that lasts.

Physical and spiritual principles

The principle of life and death is sown deeply into the fabric of the physical world we live in, and in just the same way it is intended to be an integral part of our walk of faith.

“I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.” (John 12:24)

In the Egyptian Museum in Cairo it is possible to marvel at seeds of grain that were stored in tombs with dead Pharaohs more than 3,000 years ago. These ancient seeds were never sown and never produced any harvest. Imagine the quantity of grain that could have come from one seed over a period of 3,000 years. New life always comes from the death of a seed. Death is the key to life: without the cross there is no resurrection, and the cross is the secret of fruitfulness for a follower of the Messiah. We often lack fruit, not because the cross is weak, but because we choose not to live in its power.

The cross at work through church history

From the times of the book of Acts until the present day the sowing of the message of Christ has always been under-girded by the willingness of believers to lay down their lives daily for the One who surrendered his life for them. They did not love their lives ‘unto death’ as John writes in Revelation (**Revelation 12:11**). The church father Tertullian, who decided to follow the Messiah when he witnessed seven Christians killed in the arena at Carthage, famously and accurately observed: *‘The blood of the martyrs becomes the seed of the church’*. It is not by accident that in many languages, including Greek and Arabic, the word for witness is closely linked with the word for martyr.

Today the ministry of the Gospel looks no different, and the proclamation of the message of Christ is being paved with willing lives, who are not looking for death, but rather, in obedience to the Messiah are willing to face the consequences. The following six areas are ways in which, as we embrace the cross, our lives are enriched and made more fruitful.

1. God’s training ground

Throughout biblical and church history we can observe how the Lord has prepared his people for great ministry through hardship and suffering. We can see this in the lives of: Abraham through the testing of time; Joseph through the testing of slavery and prison; Moses through the testing of the desert; David through the testing of life as a fugitive; and Paul through the testing of persecution. Of course the greatest example was the Lord Jesus himself. Some consider that he won his greatest battle, not on the cross, but in the desert before his ministry had even started. Was it here that he made the decision of obedience to his Father which took him all the way to the cross? The great writer Tozer has said – *‘God seldom uses greatly those he has not hurt deeply’*.

The Lord uses the hardships we face to prepare us for effective ministry. He uses these processes to:

- Develop, strengthen and refine vision.
- Overcome all kinds of obstacles and resistance.
- Build perseverance, endurance and maturity.
- Develop courage when all we want to do is give up or turn back.
- Allow his light and grace to shine more brightly in the darkness.
- Let his power be shown more perfectly through our weakness.

And ultimately this leads us to the place where the greatest fragrance can be released, when we can say with Paul *“For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain”*. **(Philippians 1:21)**

2. The vital weapon in spiritual warfare

Jesus won the battle against Satan through his death on the cross.

And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross. **(Colossians 2:15)**

We also see that the early believers also overcame Satan’s power through the laying down of their lives.

They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death. **(Revelation 12:11)**

See, I have refined you, though not as silver; I have tested you in the furnace of affliction. **(Isaiah 48:10)**

Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered. **(Hebrews 5:8)**

“My son, do not make light of the Lord’s discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son.” Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons... No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it. **(Hebrews 12:5-8,11)**

Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. **(James 1:2-4)**

from 3rd century Alexandria, had to say: *“Those victors who go as far as death for the sake of their unshakeable religious faith destroy the very authority of the demons”*.

Much has been said about spiritual warfare, but here we find that the cross, outworked in our lives, becomes the principal way that the power of the enemy is broken.

3. Dealing with fear

One of the foremost ways that the enemy guards and protects his domain is to threaten us and sow fear into our hearts. The fruit of fear is paralysis and inaction, which he is most content with. From Peter’s denial of Christ until today, this remains a major factor hindering believers from following through with God’s call and purpose in their lives. There is indeed, as always, much to be fearful about.

However, if we have truly surrendered our lives to the one who died for us, if we really know that ‘death has lost its sting’, if we have found ‘the perfect love that casts out fear’; then we will be able to pray along with the early followers: *“Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to your servants that with all boldness they may speak your word”*. **(Acts 4:29 NKJV)**

4. Authority to witness

In some parts of the world, we have unhelpfully become used to the idea that following Christ has no cost attached to it. In others places we have retreated within our communities and are mostly concerned with the preservation and defence of what remains. However, this is not the message that Jesus has given us, we are to be salt and light in every place, and we must be ready to pay the cost of following him. When we invite someone to follow the Messiah we are actually calling them to face the possibility of rejection, hardships, persecution and even death. So is it really ‘good news’? We all know, at least theoretically, that the eternal benefits are more important than the temporal ones, but do our lives practically reflect this truth? What authority do we have to invite people into suffering and even the ultimate sacrifice, if we ourselves are not ready to face the same. When Paul’s authority was challenged, he did not ask people to consider his educational background or status, he only reminded them of what he had suffered for the sake of the Gospel. **(Galatians 6:17 & 2 Corinthians 11:23-29)**

Our willingness to suffer and lay down our lives for him is a key component in earning us the right to invite people to follow Jesus. To do otherwise, and ask people to face what we are not prepared to face ourselves, is lacking in integrity.

5. The pattern for our fruit

Whether we like it or not we model to others what we are; parents see this happening with their children, often to their dismay! If we want to see those receiving the message living out bold and courageous lives, then we need to present them with a good example to follow. This is exactly what happened with the apostle Paul. We would expect his imprisonment to be a huge disincentive to his disciples, but the way he faced his sufferings actually had the opposite effect. His willing example spurred his followers on to do likewise.

Because of my chains, most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly. (Philippians 1:14)

Paul even modelled for his grandchildren in the faith!

You became imitators of us and of the Lord; in spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit. And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. (1 Thessalonians 1:6-7)

We need to be, and to show, the right example to those we disciple and lead.

6. Resurrection!

After the cross must come the resurrection, this is the hope that enables us to endure trouble and suffering. Whatever you have sown in faith, whatever you have laid down, given up, suffered or sacrificed, know that in God's divine plan it will be counted and stored up for an appointed time. There will be resurrection, fruit and harvest from all that has been sown in faith.

The Word of God

Al Massira is built upon the foundation of the Word of God. The Word is the primary source upon which we understand the nature of God, the world he created and the relationship we can enjoy with him. The Word is revealed through the Bible, and is also revealed through the Messiah, who is called the Word of God. The Word could not be contained solely on ink and paper, but became flesh and lived among us (**John 1:14**). The thoughts of the almighty God become tangible to us through their incarnation in a human body. The Bible anticipates and reveals the Messiah and the Messiah embodies and fulfils the Bible.

in today's world. Quite the opposite, God's Word speaks to us in fresh, dynamic and challenging ways for people of every culture, background and generation today.

We pray that your love of the Messiah and his Word will be rekindled as you take the journey of Al Massira. The Psalmist said:

Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long... How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth! (Psalm 119:97, 103)

It is the Holy Spirit who inspired the writers of the Bible (**2 Peter 1:20-21**) and who reminded the disciples of Jesus' words (**John 14:26**). Today, it is the same Holy Spirit who breathes life into the Scriptures and gives us confidence, through them, to understand the mind of the Messiah. (**1 Corinthians 2:9-16**)

"I have never met Christ in the flesh. No matter, he has written me a letter. Not he, himself. He chose helpers. By his Spirit, the Spirit of truth, these helpers wrote what he wanted me to know."

Cornelius Van Til

On a journey many years ago Jesus illuminated the words of the prophets about himself to his two travelling companions on the road to Emmaus. At the conclusion of this journey their eyes were opened to his true identity. We can have confidence that the Word has the same power today to bring revelation and life to the friends that we journey with. (**Luke 24:13-32**)

"I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life." (John 5:24)

Therefore as you embark upon this journey, let his Word be a foundation for your life, as you pray for it to become the same in your friends' lives. Take time to meditate, study and familiarise yourself with his Word before taking each session with your friends.

Prayer and Fasting

“The power of prayer has overcome the force of fire and lightning; stopped the fury of lions; it makes anarchy disappear and it has abolished wars; it has quieted the elements in fury and it has cast out demons; it has broken the chains of death and enlarged the gates of Heaven; it has soothed infirmities and repelled frauds; entire cities have been delivered from destruction. Prayer is an all-encompassing panoply, an inexhaustible treasure, a never ending mine, a firmament never obscured by clouds, a sky never disturbed by storms. It is root and spring, a mother of a thousand blessings.”

St John Chrysostom

The Lord comes when he is anticipated, expected and called upon. The history of heavenly breakthrough and harvest is inseparable from the fervent cry of God's people for him to come and do what humans cannot. In the final analysis Al Massira is just a tool and cannot of itself bring people into the light. Like any other resource it only works if God breaths his life through it, and this will happen as we, in humility, pray and call upon him to come and anoint our efforts. Look up the following verses: **(Isaiah 40: 3-5, Isaiah 58:6-12 & Isaiah 62:1-7).**

Here are some points that may help in this:

Prayer as partnership

Ministry is in essence a partnership between God and man, to achieve heaven's purpose. As in all joint ventures there is a two-way dependency.

Dependence on us

God is sovereign and he is working out his divine purpose on the earth. Yet, at the same time, he limits himself, in some ways, to the obedience of willing human hearts. This is paradoxical. He knows the end from the beginning and at the same time makes himself dependent on our human availability and response. **(Ezekiel 22:30 & Matthew 9:38)**

Dependence on him

Prayer is the declaration of our absolute dependence on him. It is the great step of humility where we confess that we don't know what to do, and when we do, that we have no human power sufficient to complete it. Unless the Lord builds the house, the labourers build in vain **(Psalms 127:1)**. Prayer releases the activity of the Holy Spirit, so that his power can be seen in the context of our weakness **(John 15:5)**.

Authority in prayer

Jesus says; “*As the Father has sent me, I also send you*” (**John 20:21**). Our authority comes from being empowered and sent by the Father and the Son. For as long as we function in this capacity, we represent the Messiah and operate in his authority (**Luke 10:19**). Paul gives us the following three steps of logic in explaining the authority we have been given:

1. That Christ has been raised from the dead and seated at the right hand of the Father, far above all rule and authority and with all things under his feet (**Ephesians 1:20-22**).
2. That Christ has raised us up to be with him in the heavenly realms, that his grace may be shown and that we may do his works (**Ephesians 2:6-10**).
3. That Christ through the church will make the wisdom of God known to rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms (**Ephesians 3:10-11**).

We exercise this authority, in part, through our prayers, through understanding the will of the Lord and declaring it over people, places and situations (**Matthew 16:18-19**).

Prayer as intercession

Many people spend a lot of time praying, but the big problem is that they have no direct access into the presence of the Lord. Jesus is the only one who can intercede for us before the Father. Those of us who believe have been promised access, through Jesus, to heaven’s throne. This means that through Jesus’ intercession, we can bring our friends (or tribes, peoples and nations) before the one who has the power to intervene and transform their lives. This kind of prayer is raised on behalf of people who are yet to have the right of admission. It involves the recognition and confession of their sin and hopelessness, and appeals to God’s grace and mercy. This was the prayer of Moses at Mount Sinai (**Exodus 32:31-32**), Nehemiah in Jerusalem (**Nehemiah 1:4-9**), Daniel in Babylon (**Daniel 9:3-19**) and the encouragement of Paul to Timothy (**1 Timothy 2:1-8**).

Prayer over strongholds

As mentioned above, we have been given authority over the dominion of the Devil. These spiritual authorities operate on the macro level, for example over Persia (**Daniel 10:13**), and on the personal level for example with the boy afflicted by the evil spirit (**Mark 9:17-27**). In both cases, dedicated prayer and fasting were key to the breakthrough (**Daniel 9:4-19, Daniel 10:2-3 & Mark 9:29**). We encourage you

to exercise this kind of prayer and fasting on behalf of your friends, that their eyes may be opened, their hearts unlocked and that whatever oppression dominates their lives may be broken.

Prayer Toolkit

Waiting and listening

 When you pray, give time and space for the Lord to speak, don't just besiege him with words and requests. When you ask him questions, give him room to answer. You may find he will give you revelation in prayer and promises for your friends.

"I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I put my hope. My soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen wait for the morning, more than watchmen wait for the morning." (Psalm 130:5-6)

Promises



We are encouraged to use the power of his promises to accomplish his will, and not ours. We have been given many promises to hold onto; here are just two:

"I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it." (John 14:12-14)

"If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you." (John 15:7)

We need to know that these promises are true not only generally but specifically for us. Then we can lay hold of them, root them in our hearts and live them out.

Ask for great things



God is great and he can do anything! Honour the Lord and his great power with what you ask him for. He is interested in the small things, but he also waits for those who have the audacity to ask him for the great things and for impossible situations. These prayers bring great glory to the Lord. *“Ask me and I will give you nations for your inheritance, and the ends of the earth for your possession.” (Acts 2:8)*

Ask specifically



Generalised and indefinite prayers become a refuge from the reality of un-answered prayer. Ask him for clear direction as you pray for your friends and then pray specifically until you receive his answer. The Bible says we do not have because we do not ask! **(James 4:2)**

When and where



The scriptures encourage us to pray everywhere **(1 Timothy 2:8)** and without ceasing **(1 Thessalonians 5:17)**. We encourage you to make a list of the people that you are considering inviting to Al Massira. You can call it a ‘blessing list’ and carry it with you at all times and use it as a stimulus for regular prayer until you have your group. When the group has formed, you can make a new ‘blessing list’ of their names and continue to pray for each one as they go through the course.

Don't give up



Be ready to persevere in prayer for your friends. Don't be discouraged and give up. Bear in mind that ‘apparent’ delays in answer to your prayers will be for good reasons. Patient persistence demonstrates your willingness to trust God and his perfect timing for answers. Have a look at the parable of the persistent widow. **(Luke 18:1-8)**

“I have posted watchmen on your walls, O Jerusalem; they will never be silent day or night. You who call on the Lord, give yourselves no rest, and give him no rest till he establishes Jerusalem and makes her the praise of the earth.” (Isaiah 62:6-7)

Fasting

There is one other thing we suggest you do in addition to praying for your friends, and that is fasting. In the 'Praying over Strongholds' section above two examples are used to demonstrate the importance of fasting to see breakthrough. It is important to approach this discipline more out of personal worship and devotion than legalistic duty. We encourage you to consider taking a day (or more) to fast before you start your Al Massira group and perhaps at other key times as well. Remember that Jesus spent forty days fasting before embarking upon his three years of ministry.

Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood? Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the Lord will be your rear guard. Then you will call, and the Lord will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I. (Isaiah 58:6-9)

Unity



If at all possible take time to pray with others, in unity, for the course, and specifically for your friends. The place of unity in prayer is the place of power and authority. Jesus tells us that when we are in agreement together we can ask for anything and it will be done by the Father. **(Matthew 18:19-20)**

How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity! It is like precious oil poured on the head, running down on the beard, running down on Aaron's beard, down upon the collar of his robes. It is as if the dew of Hermon were falling on Mount Zion. For there the Lord bestows his blessing, even life forevermore. (Psalm 133:1-3)

Prayer and action

Prayer in the end must lead to action. James observed that you would know his faith through what he did, and for us today, the difference between intellectual belief and faith is personal involvement. John Wesley said that if we pray we must act as if we have already received the answer.

Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage – with great patience and careful instruction. (2 Timothy 4:2)

- If you are praying for opportunities, walk as if you are expecting them to come **(Colossians 4:3-4)**.
- If you are praying for boldness, expect that you will have a context where you will need it **(Acts 4:29)**.
- If you are praying for the gift of healing, start praying for sick people **(James 5:14-15)**.
- If you are praying for miracles, don't have a back-up plan **(Exodus 14:10)**.

Finally, remember that: *'The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and wonderful results'*. **(James 5:16 NLT)**

3

Getting Started

“Small opportunities are often the beginning of great enterprises”. Demosthenes

Here we explore the practical preparations that are needed to get an AI Massira group up and running.

Beginning an AI Massira Journey

First step – the core team and prayer

Good preparation in advance of running the AI Massira course is very important. Your first prayerful consideration concerns which of your friends you would like to invite to take the ‘journey’ with you.

Jesus sent his disciples out two by two and, if at all possible, we urge you to run the AI Massira course with at least one other believer. The advantages of this are:

- There is good prayer back-up before, during, and after the meetings.
- There is greater control of the spiritual environment during the meetings.
- Your friends can see at close quarters the behaviour and quality of love that exists between believers – ‘how they love one another’ (see the section ‘The Power of Fellowship’ in Chapter Four, Part One).
- Working together you can share responsibilities and halve the load: eg organising the venue, preparing food, leading the sessions, and follow up calls and visits.

The training course

We encourage you, if at all possible, to attend the AI Massira training course. This will give you the best possible start to leading an AI Massira group yourself and works in tandem with the Leader’s Guide. The course is made up of eight interactive sessions which include practical demonstrations and opportunities to practise leading group discussions.

The ideal group – what should it look like?

The ideal size for most groups will be around four to six people, though in some contexts it can be up to twelve people. Any more than this and it gets harder for people to share and express themselves openly. While it is possible to do this course one-to-one, we would recommend a minimum of two ‘seekers’ and one believer. However, while we strongly encourage at least two believers to be in the group, it is probably better if the believers do not outnumber the ‘seekers’.

If it is being done in a family environment then greater numbers are possible, though it will be even more important in these cases to have at least two believers present. The guiding of the discussion may also require sensitive handling. You will need to skilfully create the environment where each participant can talk freely. Try to engage the head of the household to support you in encouraging participation, otherwise some of his family may feel inhibited in his presence.

We advise you to bring together groups of existing friends. In the majority of contexts it will be very hard to bring together a group of people successfully who do not know each other, nor have any degree of mutual trust. With the exception of a family group, it is difficult to build a group including both men and women, though sometimes with people who consider themselves to be of a higher class this can be less of an issue. Typical examples of kinds of Al Massira groups you could form are:

- A group of existing good friends, probably of similar age; they could be friends at college, from a work situation or in the local neighbourhood. Let them choose the group not you; you may not be sensitive to the history of their relationships and any areas of distrust.
- A family grouping where the head of the household is in agreement, or is encouraging it himself.
- In more rural communities, it may be possible, with the permission of the head of the village, to do something with the village as a whole, or at least for those who are interested. In this case, thought will be needed as to how you break into and manage the discussion groups.

Shilla

In some Arabic countries the word ‘shilla’, describes a group of friends amongst whom you share your deepest secrets, and with whom you spend most of your time. It translates into English as ‘gang’ but does not carry the criminal connotations. This is the ideal kind of group with which to run Al Massira.

- In contexts where there is greater freedom of expression the make-up of the group can be more flexible. It could include people who don't know each other well, those from different cultural backgrounds and even mixed sex groups. As a general rule, those higher up the social ladder tend to have greater freedom.

Promotion – how to invite your friends

“Perplexity is the beginning of knowledge.” Khalil Gibran – Lebanese Poet

Al Massira will work best with those who have some degree of interest to discover what the Bible teaches about the Messiah. It is important, from the outset, to explain clearly the nature of the course. There are likely to be problems when people attempt to do the course with insufficient understanding of what it is, especially if they are under any kind of false pretences. They will need to understand the following key points.

Al Massira is a course which:

- Explores the lives of the prophets using the Bible (from the Torah through to the Gospels).
- Builds progressively from one episode to the next, forming a related and consistent picture.
- Explains the life, work and identity of the Messiah.
- Is presented through a thirteen part, DVD presentation.
- Is presented in Arabic.
- Is filmed largely in the Middle East and North Africa, where faith in the Messiah first began.
- Will challenge the way people think through relevant questions.
- Provides an opportunity to eat together and openly discuss the subject matter.
- Does not pressurise or force anyone to accept what is being presented.

You can inspire your friends to embark on this course with the following ideas.

Al Massira is a journey which:

- Explains the ‘signs’ of the prophets and the messages that God spoke through them. Perhaps you have never understood them before!
- Shows how the different messages from the prophets are woven together to make one consistent story of God's love.

- Explores the hidden meaning of the name 'Al Masihi' (the Messiah).
- Investigates the birth, life and death of Jesus and explains why this is still significant to us today.
- Unveils the great Bible prophecies, and the amazing ways in which they have been fulfilled.
- Clarifies what the Bible teaches about eternal life and how to escape the fires of hell.
- Promises to give biblical answers to the questions of life which we all carry.
- Uncovers God's heart and purpose towards every man, woman and child.
- Reveals how we can all be true sons and daughters of Abraham.

Once you have a group interested in finding out more about the course you can point them to the Al Massira website (**www.almassira.com**) which will give them more information. They may ask you how you came across the course yourself, and you will probably be able to say that you heard about it, or received it from a friend.

You may find that it will be more helpful to directly invite the whole group to take Al Massira rather than just asking one of them. Also you can allow them to decide who they would like to include in the course.

The first step will be to take them through the introductory episode. This is specifically designed to inspire and motivate the prospective participants to go through and complete the whole course. In addition, it brings further clarity to the nature of the course and how to navigate through it.

Flexibility

People will come into Al Massira with all sorts of conditions, viewpoints, prejudices and concerns. Be ready to assess where each one is coming from and adapt how you lead and guide the group, being sensitive to their unique requirements. This is not a course that can be run mechanically; it needs to be lead intuitively under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Preparing for the Meeting

Venue – what kind of places can we meet in?

Finding the right venue for the meeting is essential to the success of Al Massira. Some of the requirements will be as follows:

- It needs to have a certain degree of privacy so that the participants will feel

free to open up and express themselves.

- Ideally, there will be appropriate and sufficient seating for a relaxed time together – this will mean many different things in different situations.
- It will need to be a place where at least snacks and drinks can be dispensed and consumed (if not a full meal).
- It will need to be suitable for the private viewing of the film. This may need the right equipment and power supply to be present, although most portable DVD players and laptops have enough battery to show 35-40 minutes of film.
- In some situations careful consideration will need to be given to the lighting. Too much outdoor daylight may make viewing the screen of a portable device difficult. In other places the volume may be an issue.
- It may be advisable, in some contexts, to use more than one location for the meetings.

Potential venues could include the following: home, tent, community room, office, workshop, hotel, restaurant or coffee shop (if there is a more secluded area or a booth seating arrangement), park gardens or under a tree!

Hospitality – food and drink

If it is possible to have food, prepare in advance a suitable amount of drinks, snacks or even a meal for all to eat together. Be sensitive to what is appropriate to the culture and social background of the guests. While hospitality and generosity are highly esteemed, you should avoid making food the focus of the evening. It is primarily a means of helping each other to relate and relax. Be aware that in some contexts it may not be appropriate to have food at all.

Equipment and resources

Make sure you have the right equipment to show the film, that you know how to use it, and have tested it in advance. Ensure you have printed and prepared the resources you need for each participant if you are using them: 'Questions from the Journey' and 'Notes from the Journey' (you will find them on the CD). You may want to purchase a folder for each of the participants, to hold all the notes as they get passed out in each meeting.

Reminders

In many cultures a reminder sent not more than 24 hours before the meeting is expected. This can be a text message, phone call or similar, and should affirm the date, time and place of the meeting.



Checklist for Each Meeting

Prior to the meeting it is important to ensure you are ready to lead the session. The following points give an idea of what you need to do:

WATCH ☒ **The relevant episode.**

READ ☒ **‘Notes from the Journey’.**

- ☒ the **relevant episode in Part Two** of this book so that you are familiar with:
- the questions under ‘Setting the Scene’
 - the ‘core of the story’ and the focus of the discussion
 - the questions (and the answers).
 - and any ideas for finishing up.

You will only have the ‘Questions from the Journey’ sheet going into the meeting – the rest you will need to remember as it is strongly recommended that you do not take your Leader’s Guide into the meeting.

- ☒ **Any other notes** you may need to familiarise yourself with.

PRAY ☒ Take some time to pray (with the other believers in the group) **for each person** before each meeting.

- ☒ In addition try and **pray in the venue** (if it is not your home) at least fifteen minutes before the guests arrive. You can use the following as a guide for your prayers:

Focus your mind and heart on the Lord before the meeting, re-surrendering your life to him and inviting him to fill you with his Holy Spirit. Remember that this time is about God, not you.

Try asking the Lord these questions:

- What is he doing in each person in the group?
- Where is he leading the group as a whole?
- What does the Holy Spirit want to do in the group today?
- How can I be a vehicle for the work of the Holy Spirit today?

The answers that the Lord gives you to these questions will be a great help in both praying for each person and in planning what you will be doing during the meeting.

4

Life-sharing Skills

In this chapter we look at four essential life-sharing skills which will help you as you share the Messiah with your friends through Al Massira. They are: relational witness, testimony, making room for God's power and using the Word.

The Power of Friendship - *relational witness*

"Let there be no purpose in friendship save the deepening of the spirit".

Khalil Gibran – Lebanese Poet

One of the main principles of Al Massira is that friendship and community are key elements to an effective and meaningful sharing of the gospel. Jesus built his outreach ministry upon the strength of the relationship he had with the twelve disciples and this became the dynamic hub of the new outwardly focussed community he initiated.

As believers we know that the love of Jesus is the most powerful force on the face of the planet. However, this real love cannot be presented as theory. It must be given 'legs'; it can only be truly expressed through practical and costly expressions. Jesus said:

Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.
(John 15:13)

Do to others as you would have them do to you. If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' love those who love them. **(Luke 6:31-32)**

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. **(1 Corinthians 13:4-8)**

One powerful way that love is expressed is through friendship. Our relationships become the window for our non-believing friends to see the reality of our faith. This is both an opportunity and a challenge! Statistics tell us that on average a person chooses to follow Christ after having met ten believers. Someone who is interested in the claims of Christ will want to know that they really work. The way they will find out is by looking at the reality of Christ in our lives. We need to give them the opportunity for this by building a trust-based friendship with them that will reveal the difference that Christ makes in us.

A faithful friend

An Arabic expression, that is commonly used when facing a seemingly impossible situation, is the '*fourth impossibility*' or '*rab'a el mustahil*'. This represents the most intractable situation that could exist. It is also commonly known that the '*third impossibility*' is a true and faithful friend ('*Khal al wafii*'), i.e. one who will never let you down even at their own cost. The implication from this is that there are very few faithful friends around. This is a great opportunity for us to become true and faithful friends for our fellow travellers on Al Massira.

Definitions of friendship

A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity. (Proverbs 17:17)

A man who has friends must himself be friendly, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother. (Proverbs 18:24 NKJV)

Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work... Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken. (Ecclesiastes 4:9,12)

Practical steps in building friendship

These may seem obvious, but consider the following points as you think about the friends you have been given.

- **Friendship** takes time; to get to know each other and to build trust.
- **Friendship** is built through doing things together – whether as family or at work or play.

- **Friendship** is more often than not built through the family; open family friendships are therefore key.
- **Friendship** is cemented through hospitality, the opening of our homes, eating together and through visiting the homes of our friends. In Oriental cultures more honour is given when you visit another than when you are the host – which is opposite to Western culture.
- **Friendship** is explored through the asking of questions, finding out who they are and what makes them tick.
- **Friendship** is expressed in two directions, where there is give and take, where there is learning from each other. When it is purely working in one direction it becomes imbalanced.
- **Friendship** is enjoyed through humour, laughter and jokes.
- **Friendship** in some cultures is expressed with open displays of affection; in others a more reserved expression is normal.

Al Massira provides a context for building your friendships as you share the message of the Messiah.

Love is a verb!

Love for many is a noun or perhaps an emotional condition. However, real love, as can be expressed through friendship, is really all about practical actions:

Standing against injustice, releasing the oppressed, breaking bondages, sharing food and drink, providing shelter and clothing, binding up the broken hearted, proclaiming freedom to captives, comforting those who mourn, giving companionship and hospitality to strangers, providing care and healing for the sick, visiting for those in prison, replacing grief with joy, despair with praise, ashes with beauty! (This selection of 'love' actions is taken from **Isaiah 58, 61** and **Matthew 25**)

Bearing the image of Jesus

"Preach the Gospel at all times and where necessary use words." St Francis of Assisi

Our joy as believers is to shine the light of Jesus and make him known. The witness of our words and even the message of Al Massira will only be useful, however, if our lives match up with the faith we profess. Our Christian testimony must be

compatible with our actions, behaviour, lifestyle, morality and practical ethics. When these do not match up, we are easily seen as hypocrites, and our message bogus. Of course none of us are perfect in this, so when we fail, swift recognition, apology and restitution (where necessary) will also testify to the power of Christ in transforming our lives. Our friends need to feel that we really care for them as people, that we have a genuine concern for them, and not only for their souls. It is not necessary always to be witnessing and our friendship should **never** be dependent on their future decision to follow Christ.

Be aware of different cultural filters for interpreting what is happening. We may be acting righteously but if our friend's cultural observation is otherwise then our witness is inadvertently damaged. For example men publicly kissing men, in one culture, is completely normal; in another, it implies homosexual inclination. On the other hand, women publicly kissing men in the second culture is normal, but in the first it is completely unacceptable. If your friends are from cultures other than your own, be aware of the differences. It is important to behave righteously but just as important to be *seen* to be behaving righteously.

The power of fellowship

This happens when friendship is multiplied. One of the reasons that we strongly encourage you to have at least two believers in the Al Massira group is that it releases a powerful spiritual dynamic.

If a friend knows me

- *he can see the light of Jesus in me*

If a friend knows two or more believers

- *he has met with the 'Body of Christ'*

"For where two or three come together in my name, there I will be with them."
(Matthew 18:20) Jesus is present when two or more believers are together, in a more profound way than when we are on our own.

"By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."
(John 13:35) People can only see our love for each other when we are in groups bigger than one!

“May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me” (John 17:23). When our unity as believers is visible it is a powerful witness that the Father has sent the Son.

“All the believers were together and had everything in common... They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved” (Acts 2:44-47). Caring for each other, eating together and meeting each other’s needs is a strong testimony to those around us who are yet to believe.

The Western world is oriented towards the individual; however, the rest of the world is much more community-oriented. Most people are more naturally attracted to being part of a community of the faithful, rather than taking a solitary stand of faith. We need to show them what the redeemed community looks like and allow them to join as a part of their journey of faith towards Jesus.

The Power of Experience - *using your testimony*

One of the fundamental aspects of our faith in the Messiah is that at its core exists a relationship. This relationship by its nature is living and dynamic. It automatically has tangible expression and transforms us both inwardly and outwardly. The great thing about this relationship is that it always produces experience. The sharing of these experiences is a powerful part of our witness and is much wider than just the testimony of how we became a believer. Many other belief systems or religions give people lots of different doctrines, dogmas, zeal, convictions and passion – but in the end little or no tangible experience. The Lord has set a desire deep in the soul of man to experience a relationship with the divine (**Ecclesiastes 3:11**), and when we share what we have tasted of it we awaken that desire in others. There is a hunger and curiosity in most people for a tangible power that has the potential to impact their lives. In addition to this it has been said that a man with a testimony is never at the mercy of one with an argument.

The Bible shows us that testimony is a powerful weapon in our hands:

- The illiterate beggar who was born blind, following his healing by Jesus, was able to confound the arguments of the most learned religious leaders simply with his testimony that Jesus had given him sight – and the evidence was clearly before them. *“One thing I know, I was blind but now I see!” (John 9:25)*
- Believers in the Messiah even have power over Satan through the words of

their witness: *'They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony'* (**Revelation 12:10-11**).

- John shares at the beginning of his first epistle that the 'word of life' was something they had tangibly experienced (seen, heard and touched) rather than merely an idea or belief (**1 John 1:1-3 & Acts 4:20**).

What kinds of experiences can we usefully share with our friends?

- Prayers that have been answered.
- Miracles and healings we have experienced.
- How our inner desires and motivations have been changed.
- Transformed behaviour.
- Renewal in our family relationships.
- Deliverance from oppression, evil spirits, addictions and bad habits.
- Knowing in my heart that peace exists between God and me.
- A confidence and assurance in knowing that the Lord has forgiven my sin.
- Freedom from fear when I face the unknown, the future or even the possibility of death.
- How the Lord has caused scriptures from his Word to come alive.
- Hearing his voice in my heart, seeing him in dreams or visions.
- How the Lord gives me guidance for my life.
- The ways in which the Lord has provided for me.
- How I first came to know him as Lord and Saviour.

If we share our experience with those yet to believe, then when they believe they will do the same. This is how new believers can immediately become effective witnesses. We see this powerfully demonstrated in the story of the woman at the well (**John 4:29**) and with Andrew and Philip (**John 1:40-45**).

Application to Al Massira

During the discussion times, you may find opportunity to contribute with a brief testimony instead of other kinds of comments. The hospitality time will also yield many opportunities to share your experiences of him.

Making Room for God - *the power of God*

“Believe what you see and not all you hear.” Arab Proverb

We have been given a message to share which has the power, not only to impact people's thinking, but also to bring practical change to their circumstances. Jesus, when sending out his disciples, gave them authority to preach the message of his Kingdom, to heal the sick, dispatch demons, cleanse lepers and raise the dead (**Matthew 10:1-8, Mark 6:7-13 & Luke 10:1-9**). We can see, following this, that the disciples had a learning curve in their experience of this authority, they saw some results, but were not always successful. Later on Paul, towards the end of his ministry, testified that he had fully proclaimed the Gospel all the way from Jerusalem to Illyricum (present day Bosnia) with signs and miracles (**Romans 15:18-19**). He also confessed that he had come in human weakness, not with wise and persuasive words but with a demonstration of God's power, so that faith would be built, not on men's wisdom, but on God's power (**1 Corinthians 2:4-5 & 4:20**).

Many people today, when faced with the hardships and challenges of life, are open to prayer and the possibility of God answering from heaven. Be prepared to ask the Lord to back up the presentation of the message with tangible experiences of his touch and grace towards them. We cannot force this to happen, rather we create the space for God to act and humbly invite him to do what we cannot, and then leave the results to him.

If we are honest, few of us feel confident in these areas, we often have little experience, and sometimes we are indisposed to accepting these ideas. However, ultimately it is all about the Lord and his power, and not about us and our lack of power. It is he who made these promises, and he is able to back them up as we begin to take steps of faith. We desire our friends to experience the Lord in tangible ways and for their growing faith to be based not just on our words or a DVD, but upon his power which can be manifest in many different ways. Here are six areas in which we can ask God to act.

The prayer of blessing

We encourage you to take every opportunity to pray with your friends for God to bless their lives. The immediate effect of this is that they have a chance to overhear your conversation with the Lord, and this will be unlike any kind of prayer that they are used to, and is often a powerful experience for them. In **Luke 10** when Jesus sends his followers out two by two, he instructs them to pray the peace of God over the houses they enter. This prayer of 'Shalom' or 'Salaam' is a prayer which brings

not only peace, but also wholeness, welfare and completeness. We should take every chance to pray this over our friends, it is one of the most non-threatening things we can do and rarely will people refuse. Try to close **each Al Massira meeting** with a prayer of this nature.

Visions and dreams

It seems that God is revealing himself to many people these days through dreams and visions. The classic biblical example is that of Paul (**Acts 9:3-7**). In our prayer that the Lord would reveal himself to our friends, this is one way he may choose to answer it. In **Episode 6 (Mary)** we give space to ask if any are having such experiences. We may be called upon to bring an interpretation to the dreams that people are having – as in the story of Joseph and Pharaoh.

Prayer for practical needs and situations

Most people, at some time in their lives, face challenges and struggles which are beyond their ability to solve. These could be issues such as: lack of a job, financial difficulties, family problems or other needs. Try to find out what these are and offer to pray for God to provide a solution. Of course be ready, if the Lord indicates, to be the answer to your own prayer. You can exercise this kind of prayer in any episode but **Episode 4 (Moses)** has special relevance.

Prayer for healing

Jesus appeared almost continuously to heal the sick, and this was replicated by his disciples in the book of Acts (**Acts 3:6-9**). If any of your friends are sick, or any from their extended families, offer to pray for them. If they are not present offer to visit them wherever they are to do this. You can exercise this kind of prayer in any episode but **Episode 7 (The Messiah)** has special relevance.

Prayer for deliverance

People today are oppressed by demons, despair or evil situations, just as they were in Jesus' age (**Luke 8:27-37**). Much of this has come from occult spiritual practices which are often prevalent. Many know that they are oppressed but don't know how to free themselves, and they are open to prayer to Jesus when they are desperate enough. In **Episodes 2, 4 & 7 (Noah, Moses & the Messiah)** there is specific encouragement to pray for deliverance from sin, oppression, evil, despair or unclean spiritual activity. A word of caution here; be ready to call on the help of those more experienced in this area if necessary.

Messages from the Lord

There are times when the Lord wants to bring a message through us to another person. This could be in the form of words, an impression the Lord forms in your spirit, a picture or vision or even a dramatic action. These messages from God can have the following kinds of application:

- A message of affirmation or encouragement from the Lord – we hear Jesus speaking such words many times (**Matthew 8:10 & John 8:10-11**).
- A message of knowledge – information from the Lord about the person you could not have known any other way, such as Jesus' words to the Samaritan woman. (**John 4:17-18**).
- A message of wisdom – information of Godly wisdom which brings clarity and understanding, such as the words of Jesus to Martha and Mary. (**John 11:4**).
- A message of discernment – information that the Lord gives to uncover inner motives of the heart (such as Peter received about Ananias and Sapphira (**Acts 5:3**) or to reveal harmful spiritual influences (**Acts 13:9-10**).
- A message of prophecy – information from the Lord concerning the future, such as Jesus with Nathanael (**John 1:47-51**), or with Ananias in Damascus (**Acts 9:15-16**).

You can exercise this kind of prayer in any episode but **Episodes 3, 8 & 9 (Abraham, The Messiah & the Father and The Messiah & the Holy Spirit)** may have special relevance.

Exposure to real worship

Worship is a potent and emotive experience. Remember what happened with Paul and Silas when they were in prison (**Acts 16:25-26**). One of the reasons it is so powerful is that, in some way, it ushers in the presence of God. He is enthroned and present in the midst of worship in ways that he is not in its absence (**Psalms 22:3 & Psalm 100**). In the context of worship, his presence is often felt keenly, sometimes even more by unbelievers than believers.

There may be opportunity to introduce worship into an Al Massira evening, especially later on in the journey. If you do this, make sure that the worship is real

(not artificial) and that the style and language of worship is as culturally appropriate as you can make it.

As you think about the above areas of ministry and gifting, some of which are mentioned by Paul to the Corinthians (**1 Corinthians 12:1-11**), we encourage you to consider the following:

- Know that Jesus has given you his anointing for the task (**Luke 4:18-19 & John 15:16**).
- Ask the Lord for the Holy Spirit; he will not disappoint you (**Luke 11:9-13**).
- Ask the Lord for the spiritual gifts. They are distributed as God chooses. However, he does encourage us to ask for them (**1 Corinthians 12:11 & 14:1**).
- Wait patiently on the Lord until he brings his answers (**Luke 24:49 & Acts 1:4-5**).
- Be obedient to the Holy Spirit; exercise the gifts regardless of the initial results.
- Commit the answers, or results you are looking for, to the Lord.
- Encourage your friends to check out all that you say and do in the Scriptures (**Acts 17:10-11**).
- When God uses you in these ways, make sure you give all the glory to him, and let your friends see that you do this.

Take care

When operating in these six areas of exposure to God's power, please take care to:

- Ask permission before you do anything.
- Do all things in humility, relying on the Spirit to guide and empower you.
- Be sensitive to both the condition of the person and what the Spirit is saying.
- When you bring any kind of word, do it in humility and encourage your friends to test it.
- Don't feel you have to operate in all of these areas of gifting. (**1 Corinthians 12:11**)
- Let all be done with the goal of reinforcing your friend's reliance on the Lord as the source of power, rather than upon you as the vessel.

If you find it hard to understand or accept some of these ideas then feel free to pass over them.

"If you don't recognise God, at least know him by his power." Afghan proverb

Sowing and Reaping - *using the Word*

One of the titles of the Messiah is the 'Word'. Not only did he bring the words of heaven, he incarnated and embodied these words. His words and message have taken us from Genesis all the way through to Revelation, and yet John says this is still a fraction of what could be said (**John 21:25**). At the same time his message is also described as a seed of life, which is tiny and easily sown, and carries all the DNA necessary for the reproduction of life. We are asked to sow this seed, frequently, liberally and in many places and ways.

Al Massira and the Word

As stated previously, Al Massira unveils God's heart for man through a chronological presentation of the scriptures. It unpacks the message, in the order that God gave it and as it is recorded in the Bible. For some of you this will be a new way of presenting the truth and not the way that you came to follow Jesus yourself. From Adam through to Mary, the twin themes that characterise the Old Testament are explored; they are:

- God's desire to be in relationship with man and live amongst us.
- The sacrificial system enabling us to be made righteous with God.

These parallel themes come to a point of convergence in the person, life and work of the Messiah. They reveal him as the cornerstone upon which our lives can be rebuilt. The remainder of Al Massira explains the practical application of the message to our lives. It is important for you to understand the process of revelation through the Old Testament signs and prophecies. You will find the summary of these steps of revelation at the end of this chapter (**Step by Step**).

Confidence in his Word

While we may not always feel highly skilled or gifted in ministry, our confidence does not need to lie in the messenger, but more in the power of his Word. His Word:

Is successful - It accomplishes all that it was sent to achieve (**Isaiah 55:10-11**).

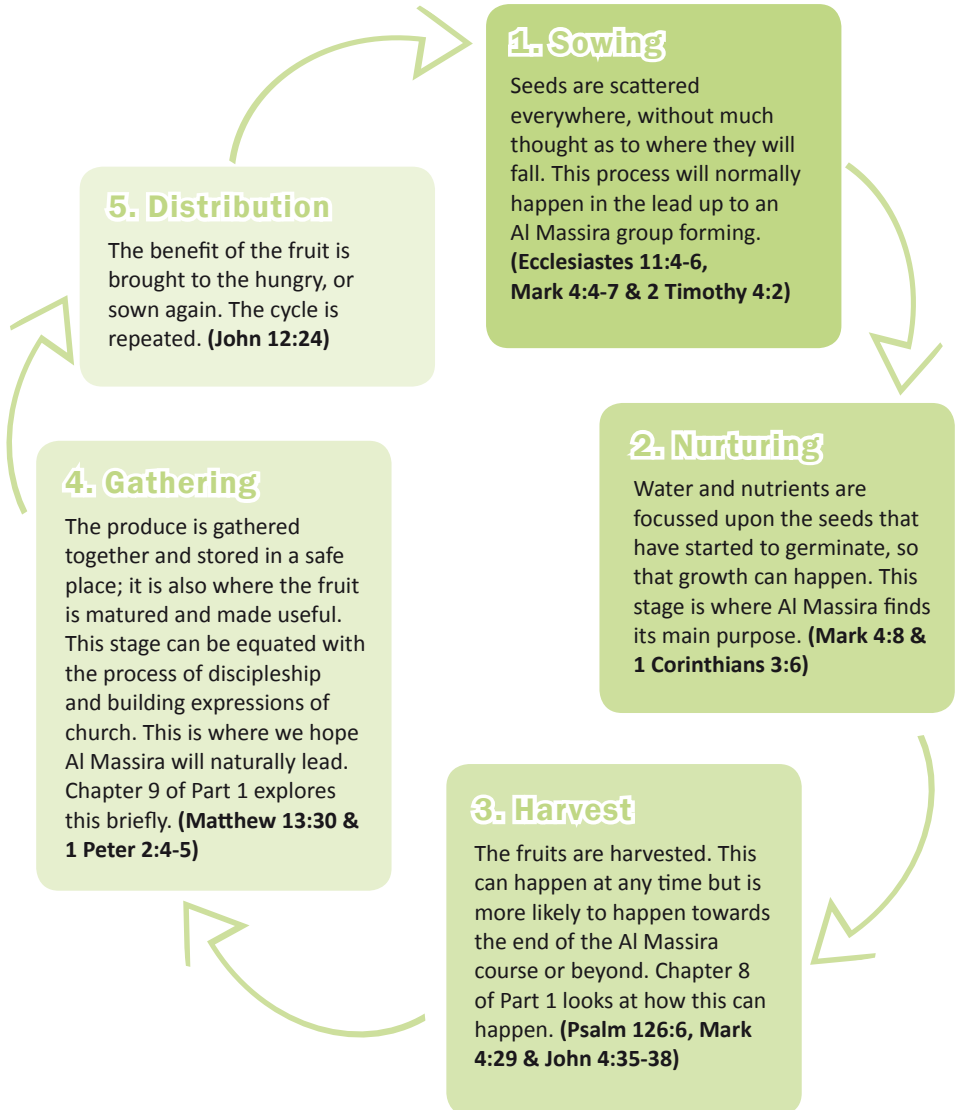
Is powerful against obstacles - It is the hammer that breaks the rock (**Jeremiah 3:29**).

Produces faith - His Word produces and releases faith into our hearts (**Romans 10:17**).

Is living and active - It can penetrate to the deep thoughts and attitudes of our hearts (**Hebrews 4:12**).

Cycle of growth

Jesus gave many parables that compare the process of sharing life to that of the agricultural life cycle. We will take a brief look at the different stages and how they relate to Al Massira.



As you go through Al Massira celebrate the amazing miracle of his Word, which has the power to unlock hard hearts, penetrate different cultures and places, and is applicable in any era and among any age group.

Step by Step

But the word of the LORD was to them, precept upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line, here a little, there a little. (Isaiah 28:13 NKJV)

The chronology of Al Massira leads us step by step through the revelation of God's redemptive message for mankind. Ensure that you familiarise yourself with these steps as they are the building blocks of the whole message.

1. Adam and Eve

The Message

- God walks with man in the garden, relationship with God was our original condition.
- Disobedience comes from a lack of trust in the Word of God and is a betrayal of this relationship.
- From the time of Adam, sin has become intrinsic to the nature of man.

The Signs

- Only God has a solution to cover our nakedness and shame, man cannot do this.
- Something dies to provide the covering for shame.
- The promise that the seed of the woman will crush the head of Satan.

2. Noah and the Flood

The Message

- One sin multiplies into many. God is grieved and angered by this, yet his promise still stands.
- Spontaneous sacrifice pleases the heart of God.

The Signs

- God provides a place of salvation from the consequences of sin, the place where mercy and justice meet.
- God renews his binding covenant with man.

3. Abraham and Sarah

The Message

- Abraham (Khalil Allah) was the friend of God, God appeared to him and they enjoyed a relationship.
- Abraham believed God and it was accredited to him as righteousness.
- The promise is revealed to bless all nations through Abraham's offspring.

The Signs

- God's promise is worked out through God's power and not through human ingenuity.
- A ram was provided for the sacrifice in the place of man.
- Another lamb for sacrifice will be provided on this same mountain.

4. Moses and the Exodus

The Message

- Moses had many face-to-face encounters with God.
- The law was given to show the standard of heaven and to point to the one coming to redeem us.
- A prophet priest will come who carries God's word and mediates between man and God.

The Signs

- The 'Angel of the Lord' brings judgement and delivers us from slavery.
- The Hebrews took shelter from judgement only under the blood of the Passover Lamb.
- The Tabernacle is a sign of God living in the midst of his people.

5. King David

The Message

- The kingdom of David points towards a future, eternal Kingdom with the Messiah as King.
- God chooses not as man chooses, the most important thing is for the heart to be in the right place.
- The nature of true repentance explored.

The Signs

- Many prophetic details about the coming Messiah.
- The Messiah King will be Son to God the Father.
- The Messiah will suffer and be killed.

6. Mary and the Messiah

The Message

- The fulfilment of all the prophecies and signs in the 'Word become flesh'.
- The faithful and obedient nature of Mary and Joseph.
- The arrival of the Messiah in obscurity and simplicity.
- John's preparations for the coming of the Messiah.

The Signs

- The prophetic signs pointing toward the identity and purpose of the Messiah.
- Immanuel 'God with us' - Isaiah (**Isaiah 7:14**).
- The suffering Servant - Isaiah (**Isaiah 53**).
- Saviour redeemer - Isaiah (**Isaiah 53:5-6**).
- The Son of the most high God - Mary (**Luke 1:32**).
- The Lamb of God - John the Baptist (**John 1:29**).
- The final revelation from God; "This is my son with whom I am well pleased" (**Matthew 3:17**).

7. The Messiah

The Message

- The character of the Messiah.
- The authority of the Messiah.
- The identity of the Messiah.
- The sublime teachings of the Messiah.
- The calling of the Messiah.

8. The Messiah and the Father

The Message

- Exploring the relationship between the Son and the Father.
- Our invitation to join the divine family.
- Jesus our Good Shepherd.
- The story of the vineyard defines our relationship with the Lord.

9. The Messiah and the Holy Spirit

The Message

- The identity and work of the Holy Spirit.
- The meaning of Pentecost.
- The transformation of the believer as seen through Peter.
- The divine family explained.

10. Living with the Messiah

The Message

- The Sermon on the Mount.
- A calling to a radical lifestyle.
- Following the Messiah is evidenced through changed attitudes, motivations and behaviour.
- The life of the believer reflecting the image of Christ.

11. First steps with the Messiah

The Message

- The transformation of Paul, from enemy to follower of Jesus.
- What it means to follow the Messiah.
- Counting the cost of following the Messiah.
- A Kingdom for all peoples, cultures and backgrounds.
- Entering the Kingdom of God.

12. Fellowship of the Messiah

The Message

- The story of the first church.
- The church is a united body of many parts.
- What happens in church.
- The Church as the Bride of Christ.

5

Group Leadership Skills

“God’s hand is with those who work in groups.” Arab Proverb

An important part of a successful Al Massira course comes through a healthy group dynamic. This is the context where a group is able to trust and enjoy each other’s company while being able to express themselves freely in safety in their journey of discovery. The aim of this chapter is to nurture the necessary skills you will need to achieve this level of group experience.

Ground Rules

In the first meeting of your group it is important to establish a few ground rules and give an idea of what is going to happen through the course. In the introductory episode (Part Two) you are given guidelines which you should encourage the group to follow in the discussion times.

In addition to these, encourage the group to build a good attitude towards each other as they go through the course, this will help to create a safe environment for transparent sharing. Make sure that you also are modelling these attitudes:

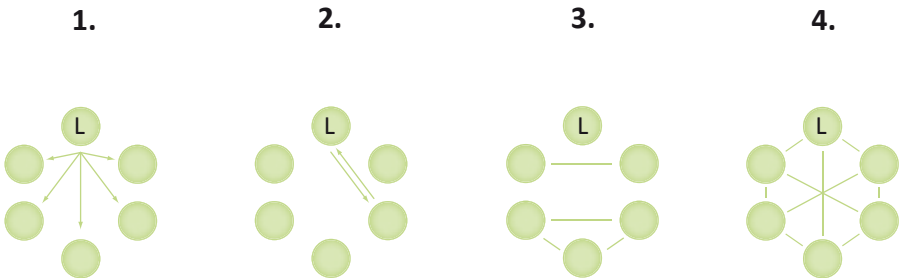
- Be open and honest with yourself, and each other.
- Respect each other, even when you don’t agree on everything.
- Endeavour to think the best of each other.
- When people share in confidence, respect this and don’t repeat it outside the group.
- In case of any perceived offence, resolve the problem with the person concerned in private, rather than sharing it with everyone else.

Leading the Group

The aim of the group leader, while an equal member of the group, is to facilitate healthy and stimulating discussion between the participants, rather than preaching the message. The task is to encourage people to take part, more as the conductor of an orchestra than the lead singer in a rock band. The DVD will bring the core information, the Holy Spirit will then apply it to each participant and give wisdom in guiding the discussion in the right direction.

Many of us learn and process by thinking out loud, so try to encourage an environment where the participants can share freely, discuss and explore together. You should aim to limit your speaking to no more than a quarter of the time. Be aware that people remember what they say, not what you say. Ask questions, offer your opinions, guide the discussion and encourage the others to respond. Do not be tempted to lecture or teach. At the end of the discussion it may be helpful to offer a summary of what has been covered.

The following diagram will help you to understand the different small-group dynamics that can emerge (L is the leader):



1. The leader speaking alone, the others are listening.
2. A dialogue between the leader and only one other.
3. Several mini discussion groups happening at the same time.
4. This is the best one to aim for, where there is mutual interaction between all members and the leader is providing overall cohesion and direction.

Room organisation

It is a good idea, after you have watched the DVD, to seat people in a circle. This conveys the message that all are respected and equal in value. If you as the leader are hosting the meeting then make sure you give your guests the best seats. If it is being hosted in one of the participant's homes then they may want to appoint each one to their seats.

It may be helpful to give space to the TV, DVD player or computer as a part of this circle. This may help the participants to feel less inhibited in commenting openly about the film because the 'voice' of Al Massira is inanimate rather than personal (i.e. you the leader). The physical presence of the device can help to reinforce this.

Maintaining Pace and Direction

Good leadership is required for any group to maintain its focus, pace, cohesion and direction. Here are some tips:

- Try to start and finish the meetings at the agreed times. Starting the time with hospitality does allow people to arrive a little late without disrupting the showing of the DVD or discussions.
- Try to keep the total time of the meeting, excluding hospitality, to between one and a half to two hours. You can continue relaxing afterwards but it is good to complete the film, discussion and follow-up within this timeframe.
- The frequency of the meetings can be decided by the group. However, if the time between meetings grows much beyond a week, then there may develop a sense of discontinuity with the narrative of the journey. If the interval is much less than a week then there will not be sufficient time for personal follow-up and for the participants to study 'Notes from the Journey'.
- Be flexible if necessary with people's different commitments and responsibilities when planning the meetings.
- Be aware that each one will have a natural walking pace in this journey and they will not all be the same. Therefore you will need to find a pace that will suit most of the group, it is far better to complete the journey together than all end it as individuals at different times.
- Try to keep a good balance between the different elements of the meeting.

- Sometimes it may be helpful to repeat an episode or return to a portion of the film again. If all agree then this should not be a problem.
- Do not let the direction of the group and the discussion be distracted into unhelpful or unrelated areas, this will waste time and eventually demotivate the group.
- If you make the group dynamic and stimulating then it will not be hard to maintain the interest and commitment.

Communication Skills

Try to work on developing these areas as you lead the group:

Listening skills



- Seek first to understand, then to be understood.
- Ask others what they think before you share your thoughts.
- Concentrate on what each person is sharing.
- Do not plan what you are going to say while others are talking.
- Express appreciation for every answer given.
- For clarity, it can help to re-state what you think you heard the person say.

Speaking skills



- Speak as clearly as you can, with enough volume. This is even more important when the discussion language is a second language to anyone in the group.
- Use everyday, descriptive language and avoid using religious jargon.
- Be aware of what is being heard and received, not just of what you are saying. If in doubt, ask questions to check for understanding.

Body language



- Be aware of your non-verbal communication. Make sure that it is appropriate to the culture you are sharing within.
- Affirm people with positive eye contact, nods and smiles.
- Lean forward, this can help to convey the message that you are listening.
- Don't cross your arms, or fidget, especially if you disagree with what is being said.
- Crossed legs and showing the soles of your feet to others is taboo in some cultures.

Watch your attitude



- Be humble and teachable. Let the group know that you are also on the journey.
- Be honest if you don't know the answer to a question. Pro-actively seek the answer in time for the following meeting.
- Avoid sarcasm and never put anyone down.
- Remember that 'winning' an argument with your friend could actually lead to losing their interest in the 'journey'.
- Do not force anything or pressurise anyone; it is through patient and persistent prayer that God changes hearts and attitudes.

Using Questions

"You can tell whether a man is clever by his answers, you can tell whether a man is wise by his questions." Naguib Mahfouz – Egyptian Author

Asking questions is a key component of Al Massira, both in the film and during the discussion. We can see that Jesus himself constantly used questions as a way of getting people to think in new ways and at a deeper level. 'Questions from the Journey' will give you a range of relevant questions to use as a discussion guide for

each episode. However, feel free to rephrase these questions in your own words or substitute your own questions. Here are some guidelines to help you do this:

Ask open-ended questions that provide an opportunity for interaction.
Kinds of open-ended questions are:



OBSERVATION QUESTIONS - to review what was presented in the episode, for example; “What was the first thing that Noah did when he came out of the ark?”



INTERPRETATION QUESTIONS - to explore a deeper level of meanings from the story, for example; “Why did God ask Abraham to go and sacrifice his son?”



PERSONAL QUESTIONS - to encourage people to relate their own experiences, for example; “How easy have you found it to love your enemy – or even just your neighbour?”



APPLICATION QUESTIONS - to focus on the personal application of the message, for example; “When we read of David’s repentance in Psalm 51, how could this change the way we pray to God?”

An idea that you could consider is to invite the participants to write down their own questions. If it helps, this could be done anonymously. This could be done instead of using ‘Questions from the Journey’ or alongside as a supplement.

Try to avoid closed questions which only require a “yes” or “no” response, unless it is a simple clarification question to see if the participants understood certain elements of the DVD. Be ready to rephrase questions if they are not understood or if they are leading the discussion in unhelpful ways.

Where possible resist the temptation to answer your own questions.

Above all, make the questions practical to your friends’ lives. Never let the discussion remain just on the theoretical level. You can ask at the end, “What practical difference will today’s discussion make to our lives in the coming week?”

Cultural Considerations

These areas are worth considering as you work with the group.



Trust building - The success of an Al Massira group is likely to depend on the degree to which trust is built and maintained both between you and the participants and also between each other.



Asking questions - This is not generally encouraged within some cultures, and it is often actively discouraged in the religious context. However, we should open the eyes of the participants to the fact that God is able (and big enough) to handle our questions and he even encourages us to explore through asking, searching and seeking. **(Luke 11:9-10)**



Open discussion - The free expression of thought and opinion is also not commonly experienced. However, when we create a 'safe' environment for people to present and listen to differing thoughts and opinions, participants may well find that they enjoy the experience.



Open expression - Do not expect everyone to open up and expose their real thoughts immediately. This will probably be a gradual process as trust is built between members of the group.



Honour and shame - These are vital elements in Oriental cultures. Be aware of them and avoid shaming and exposing each other. At the same time, we must not forget that the message we carry both originates from an Oriental culture and is still completely relevant to it. Our deep shame has been covered by the greater shame of 'one' who does not deserve to bear it. And we now carry his robe of righteousness which is the ultimate honour, though one which we do not deserve. As a leader, try to behave openly and be ready to make yourself vulnerable and you will model this to the others.



Circular thinking - 'Western' thought patterns tend towards a linear structure and involve logical progression. On the other hand 'Eastern' thinking tends to be more circular or holistic, considering all aspects of the matter at hand in an apparently more random way.



Consensus building - Following on from the above point, holistic thinking can enable a more considered course of action, and one in which consensus has been built, prior to a decision being made. The design of Al Massira is meant to cater for this way of thinking.

Try to Avoid These

In the group and discussion times try to avoid these common pitfalls:



Defending God, Jesus or the Bible - The Lord does not need you to do this for him, he is powerful enough to defend himself! The purpose of Al Massira is not a 'defence' of truth, rather it is 'presentation' of the message of heaven's grace to mankind. The Lord calls us not to be his 'lawyer' to defend him, but rather a 'witness' to tell of the difference he has made in our lives. Be confident in the message you carry.



Winning the argument - You will be tempted at times to try and win an argument. There is a subtle line between healthy persuasion and an overbearing argument. Remember the saying; 'A man convinced against his will, remains of the same opinion still'.



Comparative religion - You will at some point on the journey be encouraged to make comparison between the Messiah and his message, and other religious characters and narratives. This is rarely helpful in the group context, and will tend towards polarisation and make the discussion unmanageable. Remind everyone that the purpose of Al Massira is to present what the Bible teaches about the Messiah and not to compare this with other paths. If necessary it may be helpful to follow up some of these thoughts one-to-one outside the context of the meetings.



Other religious texts - It is similarly unhelpful to bring alternative religious scriptures into the group times; again it is contrary to the purpose of Al Massira.



Destroying other viewpoints - Al Massira is a presentation of the love of God to mankind through the Messiah. Make this your focus; avoid spending time dismantling other belief systems. Let your friends make their own conclusions once they have heard the message.



Arguing with other believers - Never argue with your co-leader or any other believers in front of your friends. This will really damage your witness.

Creating a Healthy Group Dynamic

Al Massira is ideally designed for groups who already have some kind of established relationship; yet each member will be uniquely different. They will differ in personality, gifts, commitment, passion, understanding, experience and maturity. There will be, in most cases, existing patterns and hierarchies of rapport, which can be either positive or negative. In addition to this, there may be other relational challenges to overcome. For example, there can be a strong reluctance to say what you really think in the presence of an elder. Sometimes, even close friends and family lack trust in each other. The goal of the leader is to build an environment where each participant feels open and able to share what they think and where mutual trust is being formed.

Here is a list of some of the characters you might find in your group and suggestions as to how to deal with them:



The extrovert

The outgoing character who tends to dominate the discussion.

Suggestion – Actively direct questions to the quieter members, and gently rebuke this person if they interrupt. You could also privately enlist their help in drawing out the opinions of the other members.



The time waster

The character who continually distracts the discussion and leads it away from the intended course.

Suggestion – Recognise the value of discussing the ‘distraction’ (even suggesting doing this outside of the meeting) but encourage the group to keep to the subject matter in hand, because there are lots of questions to work through. This is where ‘Questions from the Journey’ will help as you can then move on to the next question.



The quiet one

This may be due to a shy personality or because they are fearful of exposing themselves.

Suggestion – Try to draw them out with the easier or less challenging questions.



The “Yes” man

Those who will say what they think you, as the Al Massira leader, will want to hear.

Suggestion – Ask questions that do not have obvious responses.



The subordinate

The one who will either just back up or say what they think the natural group leader (i.e. one other than you) will approve of.

Suggestion – Try and ask them questions to which they will find difficulty in anticipating the natural group leader’s response.



The religious scholar

They will continuously present the standard response from any ‘approved’ religious scriptures (other than the Bible).

Suggestion – It will be important to respect these viewpoints, and certainly not berate or belittle them. However, gently but firmly, remind the group that the agreed purpose of Al Massira is to focus on what the Bible teaches concerning the prophets and the Messiah. It may be good to also remind the group that the goal of Al Massira is not to enforce an acceptance of the Biblical viewpoint, rather to understand it better.



The critic

The one who will consistently bring a critical or negative flavour to the discussion. Or perhaps who will try to control or limit the free expression of the others.

Suggestion - Ask them specifically to try to bring positive points of contribution and/or reserve for them the most challenging questions. Pray for a change in attitude, or as a last resort pray them off the course.



The head of the family

If he is present then presumably he will be in favour of his family doing Al Massira. However other members of his family may feel inhibited in openly expressing themselves in front of him. The more dominant he is, the harder this may be to solve.

Suggestion 1 – Try privately to enlist him in encouraging and give space for his family to contribute. Try directing the simpler ‘review’ questions to the family members and reserving the more challenging questions for him.

Suggestion 2 – For the women in the group try to reserve the questions that relate to the women that appear in the biblical stories – such as Eve, Sarah, Bathsheba, Mary, etc. In any case the men are likely to feel less comfortable in answering these questions.

Suggestion 3 – For any children present, there are plenty of good stories that can engage them from Al Massira. Try adopting a ‘Sunday school’ approach with them, and asking questions in a way that encourages their involvement. You may be surprised to find that ‘out of the mouth of babes, wisdom speaks’.

For suggestions 2 & 3, if you know that women and children will be present try mentally to prepare these questions in advance.

Whatever kinds of people you find in your group it is good to pray that their mutual trust and group identity grow.

Key Qualities of a Leader

As a leader and follower of Christ the image of Christ is being formed in you. As you nurture the following characteristics, you will naturally model them with your group of friends and provide them with a good example to follow.

- A genuine heart for God and people (**Matthew 22:37-39 & 1 Corinthians 13:1-7**).
- Humility and servant-heartedness (**Mark 10:42-45, John 13:3-17 & Philippians 2:5-7**).
- An example of courage and self-sacrifice (**Luke 9:23 & Philippians 1:13-14**).
- A life that reflects the 'Fruit of the Spirit' (**Galatians 5:22-23**).
- A firm trust in the authority of the Word of God (**Luke 11:28 & 2 Timothy 2:15**).
- Empowerment by the Holy Spirit (**Acts 4:31 & Ephesians 5:18**).
- Dependence on the Lord through prayer (**1 Thessalonians 5:17-18 & 1 Timothy 2:8**).
- Faithfulness in the small things and those things that are not seen (**Matthew 6:3-4 & Luke 16:10**).
- A vision of God's greatness and his ability to use me (**Revelation 7:9 & Philippians 4:13**).
- Being teachable and a life-long learner (**Proverbs 9:8-10 & Matthew 11:29**).
- Pursuing holiness (**Ephesians 1:4 & 1 Peter 1:15-16**).
- Encouraging people constantly (**John 14:12, 1 Thessalonians 5:11**).
- A life of vision, purpose, availability and dedication (**1 Corinthians 9:24-27 & 2 Timothy 4:2**).
- Not being self-confident but a conduit for displaying God's power (**1 Corinthians 1:26-2:5 & 2 Corinthians 12:9**).

6

Culture and the Kingdom

"A nation's culture resides in the hearts and in the soul of its people."

Mohandas Gandhi

As we share the life of the Messiah with our friends, we sometimes discover that there are significant road-blocks in our way. These difficulties are often distinct from the message, yet impede the ability of people to embrace it. The format and content of *Al Massira* anticipates these challenges but it is important for you to do the same. Central to this is the way that our cultural worldview influences the way we receive the message of the Kingdom. We will also look at three other areas that proceed naturally from this: history and politics, theological belief and language.

Culture

We are all familiar with the broad brush strokes of cultural difference that exist in the world today; differences between East and West, North and South, the 'clash of civilisations' and so on. However, cultural differences work on the micro as well as macro levels. Some of the criteria that define different cultures can include: tribal affiliation, first language, social strata, age group, religion, sub-religion, sport, dress, music, employment and even marital status or sexual orientation.

The Gospel is trans-cultural

The good news is that the message of the Messiah has been uniquely crafted to apply perfectly and equally to all the cultures and peoples of the world. All cultures were created to be redeemed and renewed through the Messiah, and every tribe, tongue, people and nation will be represented on that final day. **(Revelation 7:9)**

This of course does not mean that all cultures are equally receptive to the message. All have inherently sinful and rebellious aspects to their disposition and all are subject to the fallen condition of mankind. However, you will find positive elements in all cultures which are a part of God's redemptive purpose sown into each people group and nation.

Understanding culture

You may well be using Al Massira with people from a different cultural background to yours. This means that if you are to lead the course successfully you will need to:

- Understand something of their way of life and how they view the world around them.
- Take a step back from your culture and try and understand how they view you and your culture.

In doing this it really helps to go beyond the cultural stereotypes that exist. BUT be aware they may be less able to do this than you are. Here are 11 keys that will help you to explore the building blocks of both their culture and yours:

Language	Language and culture are closely intertwined.
Environment	How people relate to the surrounding space and environment.
Family	How the family relates to itself and the wider community.
Gender	How men and women express themselves within the culture.
Religion	The influence of belief system or attitude to the supernatural realm.
Time	Attitude towards time.
Authority	How the society is controlled or managed.
Crisis	How people cope with the crises and conflicts of life.
Labour	How people work or get things done in the culture.
Learning	How education, training and parenting happens.
Leisure	How people relax, entertain themselves, their games, humour and jokes.

As you explore these areas you will notice the particular areas of difference, or even potential misunderstanding that can emerge between each culture. As an example of this, and to get you thinking about it, on the following page is a list of general areas of difference between Western and Eastern culture.

WESTERN CULTURE

- Individualistic
- Efficiency-oriented
- Man-centred
- Equality of sexes (in theory)
- Fragmented nuclear family
- Elderly institutionalised
- Time-oriented
- Relationships in leisure & work
- Achievement focussed education
- Personalised religion
- Sacred/secular divide

EASTERN CULTURE

- Community-oriented
- Relationship-oriented
- God-centred (in theory)
- Stricter segregation of roles
- Extended family
- Elderly kept in family home
- Hospitality & relationship-oriented
- Relationships within the extended family
- Education by rote learning
- Communal religion
- God-aware world-view

The DNA of the Kingdom

Once we understand better who they are, and who we are, then we have to consider how best to translate and communicate the message within their cultural context. Of course the Al Massira film does this through one medium, but it is also important to consider all of the other means of communication that are available to you.

"The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed..." (Matthew 13:31)

Jesus gave us many illustrations where the Gospel, or Kingdom of Heaven, is described as a seed. The seed, a tiny unit, carries within itself the genetic code to reproduce itself. You can take it and plant it anywhere, in any soil (culture) and if it is watered it will grow. Try to understand what the core message of the Gospel really is, reducing it to its essential DNA, stripping it of some of the outward expressions of faith that are non-essential and purely from your own culture. This seed is easy to transport, plant and nurture, and once it grows, is entirely at home in its own environment. However, Christians have often ended up trying to transplant trees rather than planting seeds, a much more difficult endeavour. Evidence for this is seen in the western forms of church architecture, hymnals, church structure and organisation turning up in some surprising places around the world!

Messengers

As we prepare to lead an Al Massira course how should we, as leaders, present ourselves to our friends if they are from another culture? As usual our leading example is Jesus himself, who was the Word that became flesh and dwelt amongst us (**John 1:14**). Through this incarnation he crossed the greatest cultural divide that ever existed, and came from heaven down to earth. In fact he was so effective in this, that few people believed he was anything other than a simple carpenter from Nazareth.

And being found in appearance as a man... (Philippians 2:8)

Therefore in all things he had to be made like His brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful High Priest. (Hebrews 2:17)

The only thing that was noticeable about him before he started his ministry was his lack of sin.

For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. (Hebrews 4:15 NKJV)

We need to follow the example that Jesus gave us, and in humility embrace and adapt ourselves to the culture of the people with whom we are building friendship. Paul helps us further in understanding what this means:

Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law ... I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel... (1 Corinthians 9:19-23)

Paul was secure in his identity as a believer and this enabled him to adapt to different cultural environments in order to present the Gospel more effectively, yet without compromising the message. In the same way you need to be able to enjoy, embrace and honour the positive aspects of the culture you are sharing with, you are likely to find it an enriching experience.

History and Politics

Our worldview is almost always shaped to some degree by history, and history always tends to be interpreted differently depending on where you are standing. No-one has a completely objective viewpoint on the past, so it is very unlikely that you will always agree with everything that is adhered to by your friends. Historical issues

you will do well to be aware of can include: colonialisation, religious persecution and genocide, the crusades, racial discrimination and slavery. Within some of these national historical issues, the church has had its darker moments, and perpetrated some horrendous crimes.

In addition to the problems of history, current political events can also create barriers to understanding truth. Issues such as: globalisation, Israel, the balance of world power, the imbalance of wealth distribution, terrorism, perceived global injustices and more, all influence how people feel and think. Prominent Christians are not always viewed favourably, and common misunderstandings such as ‘the West is largely Christian’ also don’t help.

In all of these matters, what is important is to empathise with and understand the other person’s point of view, even if you don’t agree with it. Where there has been misunderstanding, you can gently correct the information. Where Christians or the Church have clearly made mistakes we need to recognise them and express remorse for the damage done to innocent people and also to the precious name of our Saviour.

Theology

Worldviews are profoundly affected by what people believe about God and the supernatural world. Differences between God’s story as revealed in the Bible and other narratives can be wildly dissimilar or subtle, and sometimes there can be considerable overlap. Even where it appears there is little or no obvious belief system, it is important to understand what theological assumptions are held. These are some of the core questions you need to research:

- | | |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The nature of God – if he even exists? • How God communicates with us? • The nature of man? • Understanding of sin? • The spiritual realm and how it functions? • Heaven and how to get there? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • God – distant, present or both? • The nature of divine revelation? • How we relate to God – if at all? • Salvation by works or grace? • Appeasing God – and the spirit world? • Hell and how to avoid it? |
|---|--|

Language

Language is vital to communication and we hope that Al Massira is available in a language that is helpful to you. However, even when we speak the same language

words can convey very different messages depending on who is listening. To illustrate this, for Christians the word 'Christian' has a largely benign meaning, but for others it could be understood in a completely different way.

For example:

- To an atheist** – a narrow-minded believer in fables.
- To a Jew** – the source of 2,000 years of persecution.
- To a Muslim** – an idolatrous consumer of forbidden drinks and meat.
- To a Hindu** – our recent, arrogant colonisers.
- To a Buddhist** – followers of an enlightened teacher.

Many other words familiar to Christians will have divergent understandings for different people. Try to be aware of this and explain meanings where possible. Al Massira tries to anticipate these and attempts to communicate religious terms in everyday language. Some words and concepts may not be understood at all, for instance atonement or substitution. These are explained in the film and there is a word meanings section at the end of each episode in 'Notes from the Journey'.

To help in this area, when you speak, give as much attention to what is being received as to what you are saying.

In Summary

Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles. (1 Corinthians 1:22-23)

We will try our best to navigate past the above human obstacles to the message of Jesus. However, we must remember that the cross itself is a stumbling block that should not be removed; it is the place where we all bow or fall. The goal in this section is to ensure that the stumbling block is the cross and neither ourselves, nor our culture, language, history or politics.

There will always remain gaps in our understanding of another's culture, and their understanding of ours. These gaps can always be covered by bearing the attitude of Christ and allowing his grace and love to work in and through you.

7 Leading an Al Massira Meeting

“People know each other better on a journey...” African Proverb

In this chapter we explore the five core elements of an Al Massira meeting: hospitality, setting the scene, the film, exploring together and finishing up. We also look a little at the follow-up needed between meetings and ideas for a day or weekend away.

Overview of a typical Al Massira meeting

COMPONENT	FOCUS	TIME
Preparation	Prayer and preparing the venue	30 mins beforehand
1 Hospitality Time	Social time	45 mins - 60 mins
2 Setting the Scene	Review of last week Preparation for this week	10 mins
3 Film	Watch the episode together	35 - 40 mins
4 Exploring Together	Discussion and application 'Questions from the Journey'	40 - 60 mins
5 Finishing Up	Practical / Spiritual Activities Give out 'Notes from the Journey'	10 - 20 mins

1. Hospitality Time - *food*

Creating a context where the participants feel genuinely welcome and relaxed is indispensable. If you are using your home then do what you can to help participants feel that 'your home' is 'their home'! Typically, when people visit, significant amounts of time are taken to exchange greetings and general pleasantries. The real 'business' is not usually conducted until at least several glasses of tea have been consumed. The aim of Al Massira is not just to get through the course but also to get to know each other at a deeper level. One of the key ways we do this is to eat together. A popular Arab proverb says that when we eat bread and salt together we establish a covenant of friendship. In Al Massira this is exactly what we are trying to do. It is a time when you can relax together to build and extend your friendship. It is probably best during the hospitality time to keep the discussion on subjects other than Al Massira. In most situations it will be preferable to have the hospitality time before everything else, though it can be held at the end as well. Be ready to be flexible and spontaneous.

2. Setting the Scene - *discussion*

This step has two parts which help prepare the group for the film. It is introduced by a few short questions and each person should be encouraged to give comments if possible. The questions given here are only a guide; others can be used as appropriate to the context and the group. If necessary, this section can be left out.

Looking back – 5 mins

This part is a short review of the last episode. The purpose is as follows:

- To remind participants where we were at the last stage of the journey, in order to set the context for the new episode.
- To encourage brief feedback from the last episode after consideration of the content and reading 'Notes from the Journey'. What do they remember?
- To address briefly any questions that have emerged. It is important not to get back into a major discussion again.

Looking forward – 5 mins

This part helps to prepare for the new episode by trying to discover what people already know about the characters or topic in hand. Again it is important to be concise and it is not important if the answers are incorrect. This time will help the

leader to identify what each person knows about the subject. The participants will also be able to compare what they thought they knew with what the Bible actually teaches. It is important not to prolong this section.

3. Film - DVD

Each episode is approximately 35-40 minutes long. The Leader's Guide has a summary of the main sections of each episode in Part Two. For a fuller written description of the content please refer to 'Notes from the Journey'.

4. Exploring Together - discussion

It is recommended that you spend no longer than 60 minutes on this.

After the film has finished the leader hands out 'Questions from the Journey' to each participant. The leader will also have a copy. These notes divide the episode into six or seven sections and give a brief summary of each part. Each section then has two types of questions: review questions and deeper level questions.



Review questions are there to jog the memory of the participants and help us to see if they have understood the presentation. The palm tree icon indicates this kind of question.



Deeper level questions are more provocative and designed to get people thinking more deeply. The crossroads icon indicates this kind of question.

These notes do not have to be followed too closely – but they may well be useful in focussing people's attention on the whole story rather than homing in on one or two problematic elements of it. Not all the questions need to be asked. The leader may also come up with other questions that are relevant for the group.

The purpose of this discussion time is:

- To remind people of the content of the message.
- To encourage people to think more deeply.
- To give each person the opportunity to express themselves. Even if they don't yet see things clearly, or have varying points of view, each person's opinion is appreciated.
- To show that we don't have to agree on everything to be able to enjoy a friendly discussion.
- To demonstrate that asking questions is not subversive or forbidden. God can handle our questions!
- To get to know each other better and at a deeper level.
- To give opportunity for participants to process the information and come to their own conclusions.

The purpose of the discussion is NOT:

- To engage in combative style debating. We are not trying to get winners and losers out of this.
- To get everyone to agree together. This is ideal though not essential.
- To get distracted with other avenues of discussion. Keep the discussion focussed on the subject matter at hand.
- To tell people that they have got the wrong answers to the questions.
- To debate or degrade other religious points of view or make constant comparisons between Jesus and other religious leaders, or between the Bible and other scriptures.
- To force people to accept what is presented as truth.

The way that the leaders host the discussion will set the tone and context for the above objectives to be realised. The questions and answers are given in each section of Part Two of the Leader's Guide. However, this is given for clarification for the leaders, not so that the leaders provide all the 'correct answers'. The main goal of the leaders is to elicit answers from the participants, only providing a few of the answers themselves. The leaders can also ask further questions which will help uncover the right answers. When the leaders present their comments in the discussion it may help to preface what is said with "I believe that the Bible teaches that ..." or something similar. This may be more helpful in the discussion than saying categorically "The Bible teaches us..." This may help to make the discussion more open.

In the end it is not imperative that each question is answered in the correct way and agreed upon, though for some questions it is good if the right answer is

aired at some point. It is likely that the discussion will range widely and many different opinions are voiced, this is not a problem.

Other questions have more open answers and are not aimed at a specific 'correct' response. Rather, they are designed to encourage the participants to open up and express themselves, and there may be no right or wrong answer. This kind of question is not followed by an answer in the Leader's Guide.

There may be reasons why you do not want to use 'Questions from the Journey'. Perhaps some, or all, of the group are illiterate or there are other reasons. In these cases you may decide not to have 'Questions from the Journey' with you as a guide for the discussion. In which case you will need to try and memorise the key questions to ask.

Led by the Holy Spirit

It is most important for the leader of the group to host the discussion both intuitively and flexibly. If he/she rigidly works through the questions robotically, it will be much less rewarding for all concerned. In some cases you may find that the discussion is moving in an unplanned yet fruitful direction. It may be better to let things continue rather than forcing the discussion back to the programmed questions. You don't necessarily have to follow the order of the questions either. Be prepared to change or omit questions that don't fit in with the flow of the discussion, or if time runs short. At all times be sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit.

5. Finishing Up - *prayer*

We encourage you to open up the final part of the meeting to go beyond discussion and into more of a practical, personal and spiritual response. Over the course of running Al Massira we encourage you to consider prayerfully some of the following activities for this section:

- Pray together and for each other, thanking the Lord for his mercy and grace.
- Personal petitions – in specific areas such as submission, repentance, personal transformation etc.
- Prayer for any needs or issues that the participants (and/or their friends and families) are facing.
- Prayer for healing and deliverance (from health issues, sin or demonic oppression).
- Worship – possibly using an appropriate CD, listening to music or joining in.
- Reading of Scripture.
- Meditation on a verse of Scripture.

- Times of joint silence asking the Lord to speak into each person's heart.
- Exploration of God's calling on our lives and prayer for each other.
- Opportunities to give words of knowledge, wisdom, discernment and prophecy.
- Helping people interpret the dreams and visions people may be having.
- Giving opportunity for feedback and testimony of what God is doing in participants' lives or how they are finding the course.
- Encouraging each one to think of one practical application from the session that they can achieve before the next meeting.

Be sensitive to what your friends can cope with in this, it is probably better to start with a simple prayer and build up slowly from there.

The Al Massira course presents a clear message about the Messiah. However, this message is not only an intellectual one. Jesus constantly backed up his words with displays of God's power and we are encouraged to do the same. Paul declared that his message was not human wisdom but a demonstration of the Spirit's power (**1 Corinthians 2:4-5**). Today, as in the times of the early church, new believers in Christ can encounter a God who has the power to intervene in miraculous ways in their lives. If we give room for God to move, he will back up all the other elements of Al Massira (hospitality and friendship, the DVD presentation, questions and discussion) with the signature of his power. In this way new faith can be founded on both the word and tangible experiences of God's power (**John 20:30-31**).

In each episode of Part Two of this book we give practical suggestions of what you can do at this stage of the meeting. However, these are not meant to be rigidly adhered to. Rather we encourage you to use them as a springboard to pray and ask the Lord what he would like to do and expect him to show you exactly what he has in mind. You will find some guidance as to how you can begin praying for your friends in Part One, Chapter Four.

We are expecting that the Lord will be at work in the participant's lives. The 'Questions to Ponder' (see below) from 'Notes from the Journey' are specifically designed to encourage a deeper level of engagement with the Lord. We can expect that the Lord will be doing some of the following things:

- Speaking to them through his Word, affirming what they are hearing, convicting them in their hearts through dreams and visions.
- Answering specific prayers, in their own lives and their family around them.
- Other miracles, healings or deliverance.
- Bringing a greater internal peace and contentment.

Don't forget to create space for the participants to share what is happening within them through this process, you cannot force this, but it can be a very encouraging element of the time together.

Finally

At the end of the session, if appropriate, you can hand out 'Notes from the Journey' for the relevant episode. This will have the key scriptures written out for the participants. However, if they have access to a Bible at home it will be helpful to encourage and equip them to use it. This will be useful also to check out all the other Bible references from the journey and to read in advance the relevant scriptures that prepare for the following episodes (these are given at the end of 'Notes from the Journey' and in the Leader's Guide). For those who don't have a Bible you can print out these verses from the document provided on the CD.

Please ensure you confirm the date, time and place of the next meeting.

Follow Up

We encourage you to follow up each person individually in between Al Massira meetings. Ideally it would be good to meet face to face with each one. However, if this is not possible try to do it by mobile, 'Skype' or through a social networking site. The follow-up can be shared between the believers on the course, if there are more than one of you.

In each chapter in Part Two you will find, under this section, some ideas to focus upon. However, the following areas can also be explored too:



- The 'Notes from the Journey' has a number of 'Questions to ponder' - these are generally deeper and more personal than the kind of questions we ask as a group. Be aware that some of the participants may be open or want to discuss these questions with you personally, you may find that you can help each one to process these questions, or ask how they are finding them.
- It is likely that there will be issues arising that people are not comfortable to discuss as a group. You will be able to go a lot further with them individually.
- The revealing of God's Word is often followed by a spiritual backlash (e.g. Herod's slaughter of the infants). There may be an increase in problems,

opposition and spiritual attack. Be prepared to support and pray with each person if any of these occur.

- As Al Massira moves towards its conclusion the participants may want to talk around the area of their decision to become a follower of Jesus. This is more fully explored in Chapter Eight of Part One of this book.

Day or Weekend Away

We encourage you to consider, if at all possible, taking the group for an extended time away from the normal setting. There are many benefits to be gained from taking a day or weekend away in a different setting where more time can be spent together in a relaxing environment and where the Lord can work in a different way. During this time you can go through several of the sessions, enjoy some other activities together and take time individually to listen and weigh up the message. This may not be possible to achieve, for many reasons but try to see how you might be able to make this happen.

Where? – Hotel, club, retreat centre, a friend's house or apartment (which has been vacated for the event), tent, country park, beach etc.

At what stage? – It is better to plan this for the second half of the course. There are two obvious groupings of episodes that can be put together for this extended time:

- Sessions 7, 8 and 9 – This combination will focus the time on the nature of Christ and his relationship with the Father and the Holy Spirit.
- Sessions 9, 10 and 11 – This combination will focus the time on transformation; transformation of Peter by the Holy Spirit, behavioural transformation from the Sermon on the Mount, and spiritual transformation through the example of Paul.

8 Leading your Friend into Faith

"I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again... I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the spirit."

Jesus of Nazareth (John 3:3-8)

This chapter looks at the process of initiation as a new believer, and your role in helping this to happen.

Stepping into the Light

Many of us have been conditioned to view our acceptance of the Messiah's message as a simple step, which is perhaps initiated by a short prayer. However, it is more helpful to view it as a process in which certain fundamental steps are taken. These steps are best applied intuitively rather than mechanically and will give your friends the best possible birth into their walk of faith with the Messiah.

The Prodigal Son

In the 'Finishing Up' section of Episode 11, we encourage you to read the parable of the Prodigal Son together. This story contains important ideas that help us to understand the process of a person coming from darkness into light (Luke 15:11-32):

- **He comes to his senses** – his eyes are opened to the reality of his condition (16-17).
- **He realises and confesses his sin** – against heaven and his father (18 & 21).
- **He responds in humility** – he understands his sin has broken his relationship with his father and does not assume that he can regain it (19).

- **He trusts in the mercy of his father** – and makes a decision to turn from his old life and return to his father **(20)**.
- **He discovers the love of the father** – though undeserved, this has been present consistently and is completely beyond his expectation **(20)**.
- **He receives a robe, ring and shoes** – which are completely undeserved. The robe covers his shame; the ring seals his relationship and the shoes equip him to walk, work and live as a son **(22)**.
- **The household celebrates** – he is publicly honoured and welcomed back into the family **(23-24)**.

There are two other things to highlight from this story:

- **Shame is replaced with honour** - the robe points towards the exchange that happens in Christ. Jesus took on himself the shame of our filthy garments and gave us the honour of wearing his robe of righteousness.
- **Two sons** – there are two sons in this story, and your friends may find themselves identifying with either the prodigal (broken because of his unrighteousness and sin), or the other son (satisfied in his own self-righteousness). However, what is common to both is the fact that they did not know their father or his heart of compassion towards them. This love could neither be earned through good behaviour nor extinguished through bad behaviour.

In a conversation with Nicodemus, Jesus calls all people to be born again. This introduces the fundamental concept of spiritual birth for all true disciples of Jesus **(John 3:3-8)**. At the end of Episode 11, the last discussion question uncovers five practical elements that help define the process of this new spiritual birth. We will look now at each element and help you to work through them with your friends (trust, repent, surrender,

Divine initiative = human response

It is so important to recognise that, while there are practical steps that take us into the light, no-one can take them in their human strength alone. Many people have the belief that salvation is won through good deeds, and they will need to understand that each step can only be taken with the Lord's help. Each step is a divine initiative of grace, yet requires a human response to what has been done for us. Remember also that each step is not only a step of initiation but also a new way to walk out the rest of our life with the Messiah.

testify and receive). You can identify all of these areas in the story of the parable of the prodigal, which is why it is so helpful. Please be aware that, while these steps do relate together, they do not necessarily define a chronological process.

TRUST

Helping your Friends to Trust

Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ (**Romans 10:17**). To follow the Messiah there are three vital truths in which our friends must be able to put their faith:

1. **Belief in the death of the Messiah** on the cross, and his payment of the penalty that is due for their sin. That, in his terrible shame, shed blood and death we can find freedom from the power of sin and forgiveness from heaven. That the barrier of sin between our lives and the Lord has been removed and there is no more accusation placed against us. That our shame and sin has been covered with his robe of righteousness and honour. (**1 Colossians 1:19 & 22**)
2. **Belief in the resurrection of the Messiah** from death back to life. That he was the first man to break fully and permanently the bondage of death and physically be raised from the grave to life. That in his resurrection we will find our hope of resurrection and eternal life guaranteed. That the Messiah, having removed the barrier of sin, has reconciled us to the Father and restored our relationship with him. (**John 11:25-26 & 1 Peter 1:3-5**)
3. **Belief in the Lordship of the Messiah.** That Jesus is the Lord God. He has been lifted up, exalted and given the name above every name in heaven and on the earth. This confession is an integral part in our salvation and enabled by the Holy Spirit. (**Philippians 2:9-11 & 1 Corinthians 12:3**)

Trust in the Word has to be awakened in both the mind and heart of the person. We will look a little at what this means:

A message for the mind

The DVD and discussion times are a presentation of the Word of Christ which primarily engages and enlightens the mind, thinking, logic and intellect. This message is one which carries a divine logic, yet in the eyes of the world is often seen as foolish. Despite this, there is evidence for God's story to be found in archaeology, history, linguistics, science, prophecy, morality, ethics and more. All of these show

that God acts within the world he has created and that his message is rooted in history. Please ensure that you understand the chronological message, the signs and steps of which are summarized in Chapter Four (**Step by step**).

Many people will come from a position of understanding watertight theories about God which in the end fail to describe his nature fully. Much of God's truth is held in tension, stretched out in a paradox of two apparently mutually exclusive ideas; such as justice and mercy, 'God apart from us' and 'God with us', or free will and sovereignty. The good news is that it is the Messiah who is the connection between each paradox, the image of the awesome God we search for. Perhaps his stretched-out arms upon the cross represent a picture of the tensile line of truth that describes, for example, the link between the just and merciful natures of God.

Salvation

It is helpful to understand that salvation is based primarily upon an understanding of the work of the Messiah through the cross and resurrection. While this must include an understanding of the Messiah as Lord, it is not dependent upon a watertight understanding of the full doctrine of God.

Therefore, while the 'message for the mind' does build confidence in the message, it is good to know that salvation is not dependent solely upon a mental grasp of the nature of God.

A message for the heart

To follow the Messiah each of us needs to hear the Lord speaking into our heart as well as our mind (**Romans 10:8-9 & 1 John 5:9-10**). Here we are referring to the living Word of God that is revealed personally, emotionally and intimately to each of us. This communication from God is awakened by the Holy Spirit within the human spirit. It can come through various channels, such as inner conviction, emotions, words, pictures, visions and dreams, through the Bible or other people; but it is received as a message from God himself. Without this, we follow an idea, theory or religion; with this we follow a person, the Messiah himself. We must encourage our friends to hear the voice of the Lord themselves, for without it they are truly lost. This is how they will build a relationship with the Lord. There are many ways through Al Massira that you can encourage this.

- Whenever we pray with our friends we expose our relationship with God to them, this can be a powerful witness.

- Episode 8 explores practically how we build a relationship with the Lord, through the parable of the vine and brings teaching on how to pray and how to use the scriptures.
- There are many questions in ‘Notes from the Journey’ where we invite the participants to ask God to speak to them in different ways (Episodes 4, 7, 8, 9, 10 & 11).
- We can use periods of silence to create opportunities for God to speak and bring words from the Lord to each other.

In the same way that the Holy Spirit brings revelation that leads to trust in the Messiah, he will also communicate in a tangible way the assurance of the Father’s forgiveness. As we pray and lead our friends through this process we can expect that they will receive his peace in their hearts. And just as the prodigal son was received by his father, they will know at a deep level that they have been received into the holy embrace of their Father in heaven. **(Ephesians 1:5-8)**

One way that you can encourage your friends is to help them express their faith to God, through words, through worship of him and through prayers. This can be encouraged as a group, or with them one to one as is appropriate to the situation. Their prayers are declarations of what they believe and serve both to reflect and reinforce their faith. Another way in which our friends will demonstrate their trust in the Lord is through repentance.

REPENT

Calling your Friends to Repent

Repentance is a foundational aspect of spiritual birth. This is more helpfully seen as a process, rather than just saying sorry or repeating a quick prayer. The more thorough we are in this, the greater the freedom that is likely to be experienced by your friends.

The most common expression of regret comes from suffering the personal consequences of our mistakes, as with Esau **(Hebrews 12:17)**. A more useful kind of sorrow is when we recognize the consequences of our sin in the lives of others **(Luke 15:18)**. However, real repentance begins when we recognize the damage

that our sin (inherently sinful condition, unbelief and bad behaviour) causes to God himself. (**Psalm 51:4, Luke 15:21 & 2 Corinthians 7:9**)

A genuine repentance will proceed from a revelation of God, through his Word, through a vision, or by coming into his presence in a tangible way. When this happens, there is realisation, in the face of his great holiness, of the awfulness of our condition of sin and its enormous offence before God. The immediate reaction to the holy presence of God is to hide, to break down, to run away or to fall down as dead. We can witness this in the lives of the following familiar characters: Moses (**Exodus 3:5-6**), Isaiah (**Isaiah 6:5**), Peter (**Luke 5:8**), John (**Revelation 1:17**). Our friends need to have some experience of this for true repentance to happen, and the Lord will have diverse and unique ways of bringing them to this place of recognition, brokenness and humility. You cannot make this happen, just prepare them for what is likely to happen. Read about the prayers of the Pharisee and the tax-collector for help in this. (**Luke 18:10-14**)

The practical outworking of an authentic repentance has three steps, each of which is important, and none can be avoided without risk of hypocrisy:

Shame and honour

When people come from shame and honour cultures, the step of repentance becomes more challenging, though the good news is that Jesus himself was a part of such a culture. Most of the people he dealt with seemed not to have their honour intact: lepers, those with menstrual diseases, prostitutes, tax-collectors, known sinners and the demon-possessed. His touch at the deepest level of their shame and pain was completely restorative. Where failure, sin and loss of honour tend to be avoided at all costs, it is preferable to cover up and even lie than to face the root of the problem. Repentance seems to be counter-intuitive. Yet when it happens, it can lead to a great degree of breakthrough from the past, in a way which is life transforming. The significance of his robe of righteousness covering our filthiness is thus more potent.

Repentance as conviction – We need to help our friends to recognise their sinful condition before the pure and holy God; that they have rejected relationship with God, not believed in his Son the Messiah, fallen short of his standard, and sinned against him (**John 16:8-9**). The Holy Spirit helps this to be an inner change of the way we think about our former condition.

Repentance as confession – Thoughts of repentance lead to words. This is the vocal acknowledgement of sin and unbelief to the Lord and to another person (or people).

Repentance in behaviour – Words of repentance lead to actions. Jesus recognised the genuine turn-around in Zacchaeus, not because of his words, but his intended actions. This is usually the most difficult part of repentance, but also the most powerful.

These initial steps can also involve the following elements:

- Sometimes it is helpful to work through the ‘sin lists’ found in scripture (**Galatians 5:19-21 & 2 Timothy 3:1-5**). Past sin can be identified, confessed and turned away from (**Ephesians 4:22-32**).
- Restitution for past sins, putting them right (**Luke 19:8**).
- Reconciliation where relationships have been broken (**Matthew 5:24**).

Note that these can take time, and may be contingent on the participation of another person. Be aware that restitution and reconciliation may be impossible or undesirable in some cases. You will find that Al Massira gives input in the area of repentance in **Episodes 5, 6 and 11**.

SURRENDER

Inviting your Friends to Surrender

The Lord calls us to follow him and this means we must surrender control of our lives. This has at least the following practical implications, and means we will:

Count the cost of following him – We need to ensure that our friends have taken the necessary time to count the cost of following him before they make the decision to start. For each one there may be a unique range of possible and painful consequences that will need careful evaluation. This takes time and should not be rushed. (**Luke 14:27-30**)

Submit our lives to him – The Messiah comes into our lives to be Lord, not just as a friend. To follow the Messiah is to surrender control of our lives to him; leaving behind sinful practices, unhelpful habits, plans and ideas for the future, and submitting our daily direction to him. This decision for our friends, is neither easy nor to be taken lightly. (**Romans 6:16-18**)

Make ourselves available to him – The Lord tells us he has good plans and purposes for us which have already been prepared in advance. When we surrender

our plans and follow him, we make ourselves available for his good will and purpose and allow him to direct both our present and future. We can walk with our friends as they discover the precious promises the Lord has in store for them. **(Jeremiah 29:11-13 & Ephesians 2:10)**

Give obedience to him – When he asks us to do something we follow through in obedience. Our response to requests that even appear to be very costly is; “not my will but yours be done”. Faith is displayed in obedient actions. The best way we can help our friends in this is by modelling it in our own lives! **(Matthew 26:39-44 & John 14:21)**

Consequences

Ensure, gently but firmly, that your friends understand the consequences of rejecting the invitation of the Messiah to follow him.

Testify

Encouraging your Friends to Testify

For our friends to walk in faith with the Lord there must be some kind of public expression. We encourage you to consider two steps in this and the associated practical implications.

1. Tell someone

Faith is verbal and involves confession before both God and man. Therefore a part of a healthy spiritual birth process involves making your allegiance clear, that you are a follower of the Messiah, to at least one person. This is not a duty; rather it is a natural response, an overflow of the blessing that we have received; think of the Samaritan lady in **John 4**. It is an instinctive part of human nature to want to share with others when we have some good news. However, there are sometimes huge challenges in this when there is a cost attached to testifying. This means that we have to give good guidance to our friends without countering what the Holy Spirit is asking them to do. From a human perspective it boils down to three factors – trust, wisdom and courage. This kind of sharing will take place where there is:

- A degree of trust in the first recipients of the information.
- Courage to take the risk.
- Wisdom to know what the Holy Spirit is asking them to do.

Who will your friends testify to:

1. Probably the first person who hears is you. And this is enough to fulfil this element of spiritual birth.
2. The next circle of friends they will be happy to share with will most likely be the group with which they have travelled the Al Massira journey. This is preferable to option 1 and is probably what you are praying for your friends, that at least two of them will complete the journey in faith together. The success of this will depend upon each person and the degree of trust that exists between them.
3. At some point they can also share with other friends and family members.
4. The ultimate ambition will be for them to want to share with all people that the Lord brings them into contact with.

The last two categories will be explored in more detail in the next chapter.

2. Be baptised in water

The Lord encourages us to believe and then be baptised (**Mark 16:16**). It is an event that is administered by a believer and witnessed by others.

What is baptism – It is important to explain the meaning of baptism to your friends, without this it will just be an empty ritual. The following pointers may help you to clarify this:

- Baptism is a physical action, yet full of spiritual meaning.
- Baptism is a sign of our union with the Messiah.
- Baptism is a watershed, a dedication of our lives until we meet him in glory.
- It is a bath for those who are dirty, though the cleansing effect is on the conscience rather than the physical body (**1 Peter 3:21**).
- It is a burial for the dead, in baptism we are buried in Christ's death, putting off the sinful nature, leaving it in the grave that we may be raised with him in new life and new behaviour (**Romans 6:3-5 & Colossians 2:12-13**).
- In some ways baptism is a replacement for circumcision, following the completed work of Christ (**Colossians 2:11-13**).

The flood & the Red Sea

Peter compares baptism with the great flood, in that Noah's family were saved and separated from the sinful world and brought into a new one (**1 Peter 3:20**). Paul makes a similar comparison with the crossing of the Red Sea (**1 Corinthians 10:1-2**).

When to do it – Repentance, trust and surrender are normal prerequisites to baptism. While each of these areas is a journey in itself and not just a step, there is an initial and significant movement to make in each one. You will need to assess, along with the person, when they are ready to take the step of baptism.

Where do you do it – The New Testament examples of baptism generally indicate that it was done where there was water available and the word in the Greek carries the meaning of immersion, pouring over, or plunging in. It is recommended that for the sake of those participating and witnessing it is done in a place of privacy. Possible places could include: the sea, a river or lake, swimming pool, bath or inflatable pool. Some traditions prefer to baptize through the pouring or sprinkling of water.

With whom – Many readers will be familiar with baptism taking place in church with many witnesses. While this context can make the event a powerful time of corporate testimony it is not always easy to replicate in all situations. What seems important is that this event is witnessed, in addition to the one baptising, by at least one other person. Ideally it can happen with at least a small group of trusted, believing friends from their community.

Who should baptise – Baptism can be administered by any true believer, it does not require an ordained minister. Sometimes it is preferable, rather than baptising them yourself, to get your newly believing friends to baptise each other.

How do you do it – It is usually accompanied with a confession and declaration of faith, and sometimes can be a time to give testimony. The one baptising can choose to encourage the participant to express themselves using a few questions. Following this they will be baptised in the name of Jesus, or the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. After this it is always good for some of those present to come, lay hands upon and pray for the one baptised. This will be an ideal context to pray for them to receive the Spirit – which is the subject of the last step of initiation.

RECEIVE

Praying for your Friends to Receive

The Holy Spirit is intimately involved in every stage of spiritual birth and we are urged in the scriptures to receive the Holy Spirit (**John 20:22 & Acts 8:15**). What does this mean and how can we help our friends to grow and develop their relationship with the Spirit?

Jesus is the Messiah or the ‘anointed one’, he was anointed by the Spirit to fulfil the will of the Father (**Isaiah 61:1 & John 17:4**). It is Jesus who baptises us with the Holy Spirit and with fire (**Matthew 3:11**); which means that he affirms our salvation, empowers us to live in the right way and anoints us to complete the will of the Father here on Earth. The steps of repentance, surrender and baptism all deal with the past (throwing off sin, negative behaviour and bad attitudes). As we receive the Spirit, the main orientation is our present experience and preparation for the future (regeneration, assurance, ongoing sanctification, empowerment for positive behaviour, anointing and ministry).

The Holy Spirit

The Spirit comes to us from the Father through the anointing of the Son.

“But the Counsellor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.” (John 14:26)

When do we receive the Spirit?

1. The Holy Spirit is the power, at work within us, through which we can believe in the Messiah and are born again. In fact it is only by the Spirit that we can say Jesus is Lord (**1 Corinthians 12:3**).
2. The scriptures urge us to receive, or be baptised in, the Holy Spirit. Some Christian traditions believe that this happens only at the point of being born again. Other traditions teach that this is an experience which can happen either at the moment of believing (**Acts 10:43-44**), or at a later time (**Acts 8:15-17**). The purpose of this guide is not to support one tradition or another exclusively, rather to recognize the range of viewpoints so that you can freely work within your context of belief and practice.
3. We are encouraged to be filled continuously with the Holy Spirit as we follow the Messiah and seek to serve and glorify him (**Ephesians 5:18**).

What can we do?

We can pray with our friends to receive, and be filled with, the Spirit, at various points on their journey: when they believe, when they are baptised, when they ask for it or when they are facing special tasks or difficulties. Sometimes it is helpful to lay hands upon them, sometimes they will encounter the Spirit when alone or while hearing the Word (**Acts 10:43-44**) or in the context of worship. Encourage your friends to ask, and keep asking, for the Holy Spirit; he comes when he is both desired and invited (**Luke 11:13**).

What to expect?

What should we expect to see happen when our friends encounter the Spirit? The following four areas cover a range of possible outcomes, some can happen immediately and regularly, others will take time to develop.

1. **Inner affirmation** – Through the process of spiritual birth, the Lord puts his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing our inheritance of eternal life until we can possess it (**2 Corinthians 1:22 & Ephesians 1:13-14**). The Spirit brings to us assurance of the love of the Father, his forgiveness, our salvation, his presence with us, and our heavenly destination. The Spirit is also our source of righteousness, joy, peace and hope (**Romans 14:17 & 15:13**). While these affirmations are not visible or audible, they are nonetheless very tangible to the person themselves, as we can attest. We expect the Lord to bring the signature of his Spirit to our innermost personality.
2. **Outward expressions** – These inner affirmations are sometimes accompanied with audible and visible expressions of the Spirit. These can include, though are not restricted to, praise and worship, declarations of God's glory, prayer in unknown languages, revelations from God and prophecy.
3. **Transformed behaviour** – The Holy Spirit lives in us (**Romans 8:11**), and he teaches us the words of Jesus (**John 14:26**). He is our guide and leads us from our natural sinful state to living pure lives in the likeness of the Messiah. He nurtures the following characteristics in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, humility and self-control. These are called the fruit of the Spirit (**Galatians 5:16–23**).
4. **Anointing for ministry** – The Spirit gives us the ability to serve God by giving a range of supernatural gifts, such as wisdom, knowledge, prophecy and preaching, miracles, healing, discernment, special tongues and the ability to interpret these tongues. The Spirit distributes these as he wills so that they will all work to build up the body of those who follow the Messiah (**1 Corinthians 12:4-11**). The Spirit also

gives boldness and ability to speak and preach when required (**Luke 12:11-12 & Acts 4:31**).

A word of caution

When you pray for your friends, make sure that you do so in humility and fully dependent on the Spirit. Avoid completely any kind of manipulation or human pressure; let the Spirit be free to do his work. If you bring any word or prophecy, encourage your friend to test it (alongside Scripture) and ask the Spirit to affirm it, rather than accept it just because it is from you. Also be aware of the cultural context in which you are sharing. In some cultures people will go along with things because it is considered rude to say no or disagree, be sure that you are not assuming a response which is unreal. Other societies are more conservative, and certain outward expressions may be interpreted in negative ways.

When you follow this counsel, you will ensure that their growing faith is built upon what the Lord is doing within them and not your personality, power or influence. (**1 Corinthians 2:4-5**)

Other Considerations

Timing

We see in scripture two general ways in which people came into faith. For the disciples of Jesus it was a three year journey and it is hard to pinpoint the actual moment when they were saved. With Paul and others in the book of Acts we can see that there were definitive moments where everything changed. Al Massira is a journey and our decisions can also be a journey. Our friends will need time to evaluate all that they have heard, and pressure at the wrong moment will be unhelpful. However there are times when we do need to bring both rebuke and positive encouragement to take a step (**2 Corinthians 6:2 & Hebrews 3:13-15**). The Holy Spirit will bring you confirmation as to the right time to bring this, and each group and individual will be unique. However, in the journey of

Build up or tear down?

The decision to follow the Messiah is not always dependent upon a prior and complete dismantling of the previously held system of belief (if there was any). As your friends move step by step into the clear light of the Messiah, they will be able to make their own judgments about their previous beliefs.

Al Massira, the logical place for you to begin considering this is at the end of Episode 11 or at the beginning (or end) of Episode 12. Be patient!

Praying with your friends

We are often encouraged to initiate seekers into the faith through the repetition of a short prayer. While this can sometimes be helpful you will see from the five steps above that initiation into faith has many elements, some of which occur within the person and some are outward expressions through prayer, word and actions.

What you encourage them to pray – While a repetition of set prayers can be helpful at certain times, we also want to encourage our friends to express themselves spontaneously and with their own words. These can be prayers of repentance, worship and praise, thankfulness and gratitude, declarations of different aspects of God's nature, requests for help and the dedication of their lives. Through Al Massira, at the end of each session, we encourage you to build a rhythm of prayer where this can be expressed. It does not have to be an extended time, but if it happens each meeting then you can help to build their prayer habit.

What you pray for them – There are prayers that we will need to pray - indeed we need to model prayer for them so they know how to pray. However, we cannot pray prayers of dedication and commitment for them, they must do these themselves. Once they have expressed their intentions to the Lord, we can then affirm them with our prayer, for example at baptism and when praying for them to receive the Spirit.

Together or alone?

Many cultures are community-oriented. However, through the dominance of 'Western' culture, the understanding of a person making the decision to follow the Messiah has swung to becoming solely a personal matter rather than a response from within the context of the community. You will need to gauge, with the help of the Holy Spirit, where your group of friends is at. Generally speaking, if the conditions are right, it is good to try to encourage the group to commit their lives to following the Messiah together. However you will need to consider the following factors, which might affect whether you can do this, or how you do it:

- Are they at the right point in the journey to take this step? Encouraging this to happen too early is not helpful.
- Each person will probably be at a different stage on their journey into faith, are they close enough to be able to do this together?

- What degree of trust exists between everyone, will this step unnecessarily compromise them in the future?
- If there is one person (or more) who is appearing resistant to the message, they may not cope well with this kind of group activity.

Ultimately you will need to trust the voice of the Holy Spirit in deciding what to do even if the other factors seem unresolved. He is the one who knows the true condition of each one's heart, not you. However, if you feel that it is not possible to do this as a group then you may want to proceed outside of the context of the main meeting with either a sub-set of the group or one-to-one.

What words can we use?

In many places we encourage people to convert to Christ or become a Christian. However, today these are increasingly terms that seem to relate to culture rather than faith, and have in some places distinctly unhelpful interpretations. It is better to use the more biblical terms which describe actions rather than define positions; which may be understood, in the community, more as a tribal or political re-alignment than a spiritual transformation. This is usually received negatively and is interpreted to mean that their culture, family or nation has been abandoned. Try to use verbs to describe what is happening, talk about **following** and **walking** with Jesus, **believing** in the Messiah, **trusting** in his grace, **beginning** a relationship, **hearing** and **obeying**, **receiving** from the Spirit.

While being attentive to this terminology it is also vital to keep in mind that there is a dimension where a new believer makes a positional re-alignment, this occurs in the spiritual realm rather than within the cultural domain. This is where we are transferred from the kingdom of darkness to the Kingdom of the Messiah, and involves a complete rejection of the past manner of living. However, by definition this relates to a heavenly and not to an earthly kingdom.

Heavenly DNA

It is helpful to understand that, while all cultures are affected by sin and Satan, they are neither wholly in the enemy's control, nor synonymous with his kingdom. All cultures have a healthy deposit of heavenly DNA, which can be discovered and then allowed to be expressed.

For he has rescued us from the kingdom of darkness and transferred us into the Kingdom of his dear Son.
(Colossians 1:13 NLT)

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After Al Massira – What Next?

Before even starting Al Massira, it is important to consider, and pray for, what might happen when you have completed it? Al Massira is not a mechanical process through which we shunt as many people as possible. It is all about building friendships of trust as we disciple people into the image of the Messiah. Thus, when the course is finished, the journey is not over; perhaps it is only just getting started! The quality of relationships you will have, on completion, will likely give you the best possible foundation to build upon in the work of the ‘great commission’. This chapter will help you to prepare yourself for what will follow.

Feedback

In order for us all to improve how we use Al Massira, we encourage you to collect the feedback in the two forms that are provided on the CD. They are explained as follows:

- **Form 1, Participant’s Feedback:** The last step in ‘Questions from the Journey’ in session 12, asks four feedback questions of the participants. As you ask these questions, make a mental note of their answers and use this to help you fill in the form afterwards.
- **Form 2, Leader’s Feedback:** This is for you to fill in after each course you have run.

When you have completed these please send them either to your Area Coordination Team (ACT) or by email to **admin@almassira.org**. This information will help us to improve and develop the Al Massira training course and written resources. Thank you in advance for your help in this.

What Next?

At the conclusion of Al Massira you will be faced with one of four possible outcomes:

1. The whole group desires to continue the journey together.
2. Some of the group desire to continue the journey together.
3. There is no desire to continue, but individuals want to continue meeting with you.
4. The course finishes and there is no further interest in any kind of meeting.

Some clarification of these outcomes is important:

- To continue with the group or any sub-set of it, does not require each person to have made a clear decision to follow the Messiah. If they are ready to carry on, then the journey of discipleship continues - from wherever they are, to the image of Christ being formed within them.
- In outcome two, there may be individuals who, for different reasons, prefer to continue with you alone, and not with the rest of the group. You will need to follow them up in this way until they are ready to be part of a group.
- Concerning all those who have expressed no interest to go further in the journey, it is very important to continue your friendship. Pray for them, that the Lord would awaken their interest at a later stage. The seed has been sown and we can be confident that it will germinate at some point. Do not abandon them, otherwise your friendship will appear insincere and only results motivated.

How to continue?

You have already established a healthy pattern of meeting together which can be continued in a similar format. You will not necessarily have a DVD course to guide you, but all the key elements can continue: meeting, eating, fellowship and mutual trust, studying scripture, discussion, prayer, application of what we are learning to our lives and worship. In this you have, between you, the seed of what the church is really all about. **(Matthew 18:19-20)**

What will be the focus?

In Al Massira the DVD provides the focal point of each meeting and you will need to think about what the focal point will be for any following meetings. Here are some suggestions:

- Look for an appropriate discipleship course that you can work through together.
- Ask the Holy Spirit to give you subject matter to present and discuss for each meeting.
- Together with the group, decide what you would like to study together.
- Pursue focussed studies on a book in the Bible, a topic or theme, or even a biblical character.
- Go through Al Massira again, or elements of it.
- If your friends have not fully made the decision to follow the Messiah, then it will be good to lead them through the five steps described in the last chapter (trust, repent, surrender, testify and receive).
- Any combination of the above.

Repeating Al Massira

Another possibility is that the group desire to do Al Massira all over again and invite more of their friends to do it with them. If they take this course of action you may still want to meet as a core group together for further discipleship.

The nature of the meetings

In Episode 12, we explain the function of the body of Christ (the church). As you continue to meet together, understand that you are being formed into the body of Christ together. Therefore, explore together and put into practice the teaching that has been given in this session. The seven elements below are also found in 'Notes from the Journey' for this episode:

A place of worship – Coming together to worship God with thankful hearts for his amazing gift of grace through hymns, spiritual songs and the submission of our lives to his will. (**Acts 2:47 & Ephesians 5:19-20**)

A table of sacrifice – The remembrance of the greatest sacrifice of all: the death of the Messiah on the cross, through the sharing of communion. At this table, there is the celebration of our reconciliation with the holy, almighty God. Here we also dedicate ourselves to the Lord as living sacrifices, to live for him and his glory and affirm our unity together, and our forgiveness of each other as he has forgiven us. (**Acts 2:42, 1 Corinthians 11:23-29, Romans 12:1 & Romans 6:3-8**)

A house of prayer – Together, we come to pray in unity to the Lord on behalf of all unbelievers that they would know the truth, for the broken world around us, for peace, truth and justice, for all nations and those in authority around us.

We also pray for each other, for our needs, problems and personal situations. **(Matthew 21:13, 1 Timothy 2:1-4 & James 5:13-16)**

The hearing and proclamation of God's Word – Together, we read, preach, teach and discuss the Holy Scriptures to build up each other and develop maturity in the Messiah. **(1 Timothy 4:13 & 2 Timothy 3:16-17)**

A place of offering – The sharing of the blessings and resources we have been given - for those in need within the church and beyond, and for the work of the Kingdom of God around the world. **(Acts 2:44-45, 4:32-35 & 2 Corinthians 8:1-4)**

A gathering – We spend time together to do all of the above as a community of grace, but it can also be just the simple sharing of our lives, eating together, encouraging and caring for one another, telling each other the stories of what God is doing in our lives. Church is not primarily about a regular location, it can happen in any place and different places, wherever and whenever we are together. It can be anywhere, in a home, under a tree, in a workshop or an office, a church, on the beach or even in a temple or prison. The community can be as few as two or three people or number in the thousands, but as we meet in the name of the Messiah, he chooses to be present among us. It is good to 'do' church in different places as much as possible; and therefore be open to meeting in different locations. **(Matthew 18:20, Acts 2:42, 46 & 1 Corinthians 14:26)**

A platform for witness – With all the believers of one heart, the community becomes the context from which the message of the Kingdom of God is shared with the wider community, even to the ends of the earth. This happens through good works, preaching, and miracles. **(Matthew 5:14-16, Acts 1:8, Acts 2:47, Acts 4:29-30 & Acts 5:12-16)**

What about other churches?

There may be existing churches nearby which are ready and relevant for your friends to join when they come into faith. This can be encouraged, though not as a replacement for the continuation of your meeting as a group together. They will still need discipling, and the best context for this will be within the circle of friendship you have already built up.

However, in some cases local churches may not be open, or may be culturally inappropriate for your friends. In such cases, it usually does more harm than good to force your friends to be part of a fellowship where there is fear, little cultural awareness or unhelpful expectations are put upon them. The importance of the fellowship of the group will be paramount in these situations.

Whatever you do in this, it is healthy to help your friends to understand the idea of the fellowship of all believers, regardless of background or culture. If there are other believers locally, then they will inevitably meet them and it is good to encourage positive contexts for this to happen, where the unity of the whole body can be expressed in some way.

Discipleship

“When your son grows up – become his brother.” Arab Proverb

It has been calculated that if every believer were to disciple just one new person into faith each year, then the process of multiplication would see the whole of the planet reached in less than 33 years. Yet so often, people are added into the faith without being intentionally or effectively discipled. Once your friends have come through the process of spiritual birth (trust, repent, surrender, testify and receive), discipleship will need to continue. Jesus calls us to disciple the nations (**Matthew 28:19**), rather than just initiate them into the faith.

This process of forming the image of Christ in each other can be explored in the following ways:

Discipleship as Impartation

To disciple is to pass on something through modelling it; here are some areas of impartation that you will want your friends to experience:

- **Focus upon building character** – They will change as they see your life being changed. The Sermon on the Mount is a great place to work from in this.

Three vital strands

Discipleship can be described as having three vital strands:

- To encourage your friends to deepen their walk with the Lord. This has two parts: developing their heart relationship with the Lord, and developing their mental knowledge about the Lord. Both are essential.
- To encourage your friends in the transformation of their attitudes, lifestyle and behaviour.
- To encourage your friends to discover and walk in the vision, gifts and calling that the Lord has for their lives. Alongside this will be training to help them to be effective ministers of the message.

- **Model humility, teach-ability and repentance** – As they see these in your life, they will begin to imitate you. Remember that discipleship is a two-way process. If we are not ready to learn from those we are discipling, then we do not understand the way the Lord works and will develop an unhelpful superiority in the relationship. We can learn the most profound things from the most unlikely people! (**Proverbs 27:17**)
- **Teach the divine relationship** – As you explore this yourself, share what you find with them. This is a journey, not of academic understanding, but rather of a deepening relationship with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. As we have done in Al Massira, continue to uncover this story from both the Old and New Testaments.
- **Be creative in communicating divine truths** – As you follow the biblical example using stories, parables and proverbs, they will be empowered to do the same with their friends.
- **Raise up worshippers of the King** – As you find freedom in worship; they will be inspired to do the same.
- **Lead them to the source of power** – You are not this, and as they see you leaning into the sufficiency of the Son and Holy Spirit, they will do likewise. They need to be in touch with the God of power, for whom nothing is impossible. You will build this dependency in part through showing them how to pray.
- **Pray faithfully with them** – Stand together in prayer and hold the Lord to his promises. When he answers remind them of the time they prayed. This builds confidence and tangible trust in the Lord who listens to and answers his children.
- **Maintain an outward focus** – As you are oriented to the needs and opportunities of the world around you, they will see this and discover ways to let the blessing flow from their lives to others.
- **Share vision** – Vision is a powerful motivation. Share what you see of God's heart for the future in your locality and beyond, and you will arouse it in others.
- **Call them towards their destiny** – As you uncover the purpose that the Lord is working out in your life, you will encourage them to find theirs. Do not limit them to what you have achieved; inspire others to go further, as Jesus himself did.

Discipleship and fathering

Paul described himself as a ‘spiritual father’ to his disciples, and especially Timothy (**1 Corinthians 4:15-17 & 1 Thessalonians 2:11**). This dimension of discipleship is often ignored and yet is vital to healthy spiritual growth. It will serve to redeem any negative experiences from earthly fathers, help to nurture believers who can relate to God as Father, and prepare them to repeat the process with their disciples. A good spiritual father, or spiritual mother, will do the following with their children:

- Be a good example.
- Encourage and rebuke in the context of a relationship of love. Praise in public and rebuke in private.
- Teach them to hear and obey the voice of the heavenly Father.
- Do not answer all their questions; point them to the Holy Spirit and the Bible to search for answers.
- Provide opportunities for them to develop ministry, and give them feedback.
- Release them fully into the calling of the Lord in their lives.
- Be available for counsel (not control) from there on.

Dependency

BUT - It is so important in this that you do not take the place of God in the lives of your spiritual children. This is a mistake, often made, which will lead to an unhealthy dependency, will stunt growth, and give you a big headache as you attempt to live up to impossible expectations.

Discipleship in community

Discipleship happens most effectively in the context of both relationship and community, and this all takes time. It will not happen just in a once-per-week meeting, it will involve the dedication of significant quantities of time spent together as a group and also one-to-one. For community-oriented societies, even more time is needed. The compelling model we can try to imitate is that of Jesus who shared his life with his twelve apprentices for three years. Living as

Transformation

Jesus never separated the discipleship process from his wider ministry. He worked to see transformation in the lives of his disciples as he, and they, engaged with ministry to others. Try and do this with your friends.

a community will encourage openness and inter-dependence, which powerfully express the Kingdom of God. Living as a community also gives us plenty of opportunity to live out practical forgiveness and reconciliation. Encourage loyalty to each other and mutual accountability.

Discipleship and culture

How can we disciple our friends when they have different cultures and worldviews? We need to remember that even if we come from the same nation or city we may be from completely different cultural backgrounds. Discipleship within different cultures means that we, together with our friends, will need to:

1. Evaluate each culture in the light of the message of the Messiah.
2. Distinguish between the positive, negative and neutral aspects of each culture.
3. Embrace the positive aspects; for in these are found seeds implanted by the Lord.
4. Embrace the neutral aspects where appropriate.
5. Turn from negative cultural attitudes and behaviour.

This is a process that will probably be followed through intuitively rather than mechanically. It is preferable, if you are of a different culture to the friends you are discipling, to encourage them to direct this process and make the key decisions rather than you doing it. In this case, what you can do is to ask the kind of questions that will help them to see the issues clearly and navigate a relatively safe course through their cultural context.

Identity and witness

How can we help our friends to identify themselves and witness within their community? This subject is introduced in Chapter Eight, Part One: **Encouraging your friends to testify**. Here are some suggestions:

- Encourage your friends to remain within their own cultural community. This is their principal kinship group and primary place of witness, even though this process may take time. Do whatever you can to avoid extracting them from their families; this will leave them rootless, and rootless plants tend not to bear fruit. This will probably mean that there will be expectations upon them to attend and participate in cultural or religious duties and festivals. It is important to pray with your friends for wisdom to know how to respond to challenges such as these. In

fact, many cultural features can be instilled with new meaning. Encourage them to explore indigenous forms of prayer, worship and church which will help the seeds to take root in their communities.

- Among family and non-believing friends it is usually better to allow their transformed lives to do most of the talking, at least from the beginning. Premature declarations of faith can be counter-productive, whereas changed behaviour will prepare the ground and stimulate healthy questions as to what has happened to bring about these changes.
- Encourage each one to listen to what the Holy Spirit asks them to say at any given time. He will give appropriate wisdom which uniquely fits each person's situation (**Luke 12:11-12**).
- Terminology – In most cases it is better to identify oneself as a follower of the Messiah than a 'Christian' for the reasons given in Chapter Six.
- Teach your friends the life-sharing skills you have learnt in Chapter Four.
- Encourage your friends to draw up a blessing list of five or six people with whom they feel the Lord would like them to share their faith. Then ask them to pray for them daily until the time the Lord opens a door for them to speak or do something. They are most likely to build this list from their existing social, relational and occupational networks. This should be encouraged as the natural initial place for their witness to shine.

Walking through adversity

Jesus makes clear to all of us that there is a cost to following him; it may involve the loss of family, freedom, occupation, inheritance or even life itself (**Matthew 10:34-39 & Mark 10:29-30**). However, we are neither encouraged to seek out this kind of adversity, nor court it through rash and unwise actions. A thoughtful and Spirit-led approach to revealing their identity and witnessing will help to avoid unnecessary problems. If and when problems start to happen, we then need to stand with our friends as they navigate these troubled waters.

The most important thing is for them to know the Lord's presence, comfort and leading as they face these challenges. As believers we must stand by them, being ready to offer practical help and take risks for them if necessary. Do not try to extract them from the context of their problems too quickly, and respect their desire to face suffering should it be required of them. In extreme circumstances, it may be necessary to help them escape their immediate environment for a short time, until the storm has passed (**Acts 9:25**).

Church Planting

Never forget that as you disciple the group, you are building church among them. As you do this, consider the following ideas:

- Deconstruction and reconstruction** – Jesus, in his three years of ministry, deconstructed the Jewish religion to the essential message that the prophets had taught. He stripped away from this core of faith all meaningless religious activities and all that was external, built simply upon tradition. The walk of faith he took was built with the following elements: friendship, trust (even apparently misplaced), informality, food, celebration, mystery, mentoring, empowerment, danger and purpose. We must do the same with our friends today. Then, once we have lived out these core principles of faith with our friends, we can encourage them to design and construct an expression of church that best suits their culture and environment.
- Mobile church** – As you continue to express church as fellowship rather than location, you will find that this will help the group to endure times of adversity. You may not be able to meet in large groups or publicly; therefore meeting in small groups and in diverse locations will really help. In the book of Acts, the early followers met in the temple and in their homes, but when they were persecuted they met only in the private places. Where your friends are from a different culture it is better in the long term (and sometimes from the beginning) to plan not to have regular meetings in your own home. This will help the church more easily be indigenous.
- Identifying leaders** – It is healthy practice to begin to identify the potential leadership gifts that are present in the group. We can see that Jesus identified Peter as the first leader even before it was clear that he had fully understood the identity of the Messiah and his message. Jesus prepared Peter, John and James for leadership throughout the three years of his ministry, so that when he was gone they were ready to lead. We must look for those who have the potential to be developed into leaders, and Paul's words give some criteria for how to do this (**1 Timothy 3:1-7**). It seems that Paul remained in a place for about two years before he moved onto the next location. After this he helped them from a distance through letters and occasional visits. Therefore train your friends to expect that your current role with them is probably limited.
- Discipling leaders** – The culmination and goal of your work will be to have transferred authority successfully to others (**2 Timothy 2:2**). It may be best in some situations for you not to lead the church, or even attend the church at all. In this case it is especially important to continue mentoring those that are leading, taking them to a place of maturity in their walk with the Lord. As you

mentor your leaders, aim to impart in them the qualities outlined at the end of Chapter Six, Part One.

- **Resourcing** – It is unhelpful, especially in the early stages of church growth, to nurture an expectation that those leading will require a salary. Leadership is primarily a calling and the Lord is able to supply what is needed for this to be pursued, whether through other part or full-time employment, projects, businesses or through miracles. As churches and ministries grow, then sometimes part or full-time stipends are required to assist people in the work of the ministry. However, these should, where possible, be sourced from the growing community. Any dependence on outside funding often stifles and corrupts the sustainability and potential of the church to grow and reproduce.

Divine Initiative

Be encouraged that the venture of building church is one which is on the Lord's heart more than it is on yours. He is the one who founds, builds and empowers the church, and not you. You just need to be a willing participant in his plan.

**(1 Corinthians 3:6-11 &
1 Peter 2:4-12)**

Summary of what it means to be a disciple of Christ

This is repeated in the last section of 'Notes from the Journey' in Episode 12:

- 1. To believe in the Messiah, to know his true identity, to love and know him personally.**
- 2. To recognise my sinful nature, to walk in daily repentance, to know God's forgiveness and assurance of salvation through the life, death and resurrection of Christ.**
- 3. To be a disciple of Christ, to follow him in obedience, desiring to become like him.**
- 4. To serve the Lord through the filling and empowering of the Holy Spirit.**
- 5. To trust in the resurrection of the body and the return of Jesus.**

Part Two



Introduction

Core Message:

The opening steps of Al Massira are designed to arouse an interest in discovering what the Bible actually has to say and what followers of the Messiah really believe. This is done primarily through the voicing and provoking of questions that are known to be simmering under the surface. These questions are raised but not answered in this session; the Al Massira journey promises to provide these answers along the way. The first gathering of the participants aims to inspire a solid commitment from each one to attend the whole course.

Since this is a course entirely based on the Bible, this introduction explains what the Holy Scriptures are and aims to give participants good reasons to have confidence in their authenticity.

In this session the course format is explained and instruction is given for the discussion times that will follow the viewing of each episode.



Film

Questions of life

LUKE 11:9-10, REVELATION 21:6, PROVERBS 8:4-13

This episode starts with the Presenter meeting a man on the side of a road who is burdened by the unanswered questions of life. This man has just met a stranger (the Messiah) on the road, who points him towards the Bible as the way to uncover the answers to these questions. The Presenter's curiosity is kindled and he both expands the questions and identifies himself as one who is also on a journey of discovery. The range of questions covers world issues, how we can connect with God, the meaning of life, our future destiny and the prophets and holy books. Reference is made to the 'Road to Emmaus' account. **(Luke 24:13-32)**

The Holy Scriptures

The composition, history, language and authorship of the Bible are explained, along with the main distinctions between the Old and New Testaments. Some of the evidence for the historical authenticity of the Bible is referred to, such as the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Codex Sinaiticus. The miracle of the consistency of the message, despite the long time span of writing and the great diversity of authors, is emphasised.

How the Bible was written

The way in which the Bible was written is explained and how the scriptures were given under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit rather than through divine dictation. The different kinds of content found in the Bible are outlined, such as historical narrative, law, prophecies, poetry and personal accounts. Lastly, the matter of language and translation is addressed.

Confidence in God's word

Here, the main issues that the participants have with the accuracy of the Bible are identified and addressed.

How to travel on Al Massira

LUKE 24:13-32

The way to navigate the journey is outlined. In particular the asking of questions and the respectful expression of personal opinion is encouraged. Participants are urged to check out the references themselves and reserve judgement until they have absorbed the whole message.

Key Truth

The Bible and translation

The Bible has been translated from the original Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek into more than 2,300 languages. Thus it is the most translated and published book in the world. In some languages the Bible is presented in many different versions. As our speech constantly changes and evolves, we need to keep updating the written message so that we can understand it in our everyday language. We can do this because God's word is superior to any human language and he designed it to be relevant, translatable and understandable to all peoples everywhere.

The first complete translation of the Bible into English was printed in 1535 by Myles Coverdale. There are many different translations of the Bible in English available today and in Al Massira we will be using the following versions: the New International Version (NIV), the New King James Version (NKJV) and the New Living Translation (NLT). The NIV translation is used for the majority of the texts. Where the NKJV or NLT are used, it will be indicated accordingly.

Exploring Together

First things first

It is recommended that at the beginning of the discussion in the first session that the discussion rules are explained and encouragement is given to follow them, for example:

“We encourage you to go through the whole journey even if you find some parts a struggle or a challenge. You will not be forced to accept or believe anything that is presented. Rather, you are encouraged to get an overall picture before making up your mind about the message that is presented. If you struggle with any particular episode you can always return there afterwards. There are a few pointers to guide you through this journey:

- *Don’t be afraid to ask any question. God is big enough to both receive and answer even the toughest questions you might want to ask.*
- *Feel free to express your thoughts and ideas respectfully – BUT:*
- *Ensure you extend the same freedom to the others on the journey with you. Listen to them and respect the opinions that they have.*
- *Please check all the Bible references yourself. Don’t just skim over them; see what you can understand from them.*
- *Don’t pass judgement too quickly. Have patience and try to absorb the whole course, reserving judgement until you have a considered view of all the material.*
- *It is possible to take this journey alone. However, we encourage you to take it in the company of friends. You will find you learn a lot more this way.”*

Notes

Be sure to check that the participants understand how the course is structured.

Questions of life



- Which of these questions burn in your heart?
- Are there other questions that you carry with you?

Notes

It is important to understand that not everyone is from a culture where it is easy (or even permitted) to ask questions.



- Do you think that there are answers to these questions?

The Holy Scriptures



- What do you think are the main differences between the Old and New Testaments?

Notes

Many people believe that the Bible, as we know it today, is different from the original version or has been lost or tampered with.



- How could a book written by so many people, in different languages and over such a long time span, really be so consistent?

Answer: This truly is a miracle and further evidence that the Bible is true.

How the Bible was written



- Why do you think it was important for the Holy Scriptures to be translated into all languages?

Answers:

- So that all people can have equal access to the Word of God in their heart language.
- God's words are deeper than any human language.
- No human language can communicate God's truth 100% perfectly.



- Why is it helpful to have the scriptures written in everyday language and expressed in the context of experiences common to man?

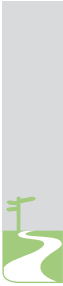
Answers:

- So that we can more easily understand God's Word and apply it to our daily life and experience.
- We can learn from others' experiences with God.

Confidence in God's word



- What concerns do you have about the accuracy of the Holy Scriptures?



- If the holy and powerful God can allow us to lose or corrupt his precious messages to us, what does that say to us about him?

Answer: That God is powerful enough to protect his own Word from corruption. If he is not, then he is not God.

- Why do you think we can have confidence in God's Holy Scriptures?

Answer: God is eternal and unchangeable and so is his Word. Therefore, any word he has brought to man, at any time, is both appropriate and necessary for us to know today.

Finishing Up

We want, if at all possible, to encourage the participants to check out the verses for themselves and not just take it as read from the DVD or written notes. An important tool for you to teach them at this stage is how to find scripture references in the Bible. This means becoming familiar with the chapter and verse numbering system and most importantly the contents pages at the beginning of the Old and New Testaments.

Verses to read in preparation for the next session – Genesis 1-3.

Follow Up

It may be useful to chat one-to-one with each participant to check their initial reaction to the course. You can confirm that they are comfortable going through Al Massira and help answer any questions that they would like to ask you personally before it starts in earnest.

1 The Story of Adam & Eve

Core of the Story:

This first step on Al Massira covers some important foundations for the whole journey. The goodness of God's creation and the original condition of man in relationship with God is presented. Man's natural tendency to disobedience and the consequences thereof are explored. We then look at man's solution to the problem and why it doesn't succeed. Last of all we conclude with God's solution and the prophetic promise that God gives to Adam and Eve.

Setting the Scene

LOOKING BACK:

- Do you have any thoughts or questions regarding the Al Massira course in general, or on the presentation of the Holy Scriptures in the last episode?
- Do you have more confidence in reading the Bible from what we discovered?

LOOKING FORWARD:

- What do we know about Adam and Eve?
- What do you think is the main message that they bring to us today?



Film

Creation

GENESIS 1:26-28 & 2:7-8

God creates the world and all that is in it; he declares all of creation to be good. The perfection of creation contrasts with the chaos, destruction and sin we see today. God creates a garden and places Adam in it. He then creates Eve to be a companion and helper for Adam.

Life in the garden

GENESIS 2:18-25 & GENESIS 3:8

God walks in the garden, and he gifts man with both relationship and responsibility in the garden.

Betrayal

GENESIS 2:16-17 & GENESIS 3:1-6

One rule is given for life in the garden. Adam and Eve ignore this condition and surrender to the temptation of the serpent. They rebel against the one rule that God has given and betray the trust God has placed in them.

Shame and fear

GENESIS 3:6-13

Adam and Eve begin to realise what they have done. They are ashamed and fear the presence of God. They try to find a solution to the problem of their shame. It is interesting to note that we still try to do the same thing today!

Consequences of betrayal

GENESIS 3:16-24

There are multi-faceted consequences to this act of Adam and Eve's disobedience. Their rebellion has far-reaching effects, not just in their own lives but in all of humanity. The roots of all the problems we face across the world today are somehow found here.

God's solution

GENESIS 3:15,21

God is not satisfied with Adam's remedy. He brings his own solution to the problem which includes the first sacrifice. The first covenant is then given to mankind, the promise that the seed of Eve will crush the head of the snake.

Key Truth

The first name of God

GENESIS 1:1-3

The first and most common word used for God in Hebrew is '**Elohim**'. This is a plural name. Where it is used with a singular verb (such as 'created' – see verse 1) it always refers to the one, true and living God.

In verse two: '*The Spirit of God (Elohim) was moving over the face of the waters.*'

In verse three: God (Elohim) creates through his word: '*And God said "let there be light", and there was light*'.

1

Exploring Together

Foundations are laid in this session which will be referred back to throughout the course. The story of Adam and Eve is, at surface level, very simple. However, more important are the meanings lying behind the facts. The most important areas to consider in the discussion are:

- God's desire for relationship with man.
- The inadequacy of Adam's solution to his shame.
- The meaning behind God's solution to the problem.
- The consequences of the betrayal.

1. Creation



- How did God create?

Answer: With his Spirit and his Word.

- What was God's response to his creation?

Answer: It was declared good.



- Why did God create man?

Answer: In some ways this is unanswerable, but we do know he created man in his own image so that he could enjoy the ensuing relationship.

2. Life in the garden



- Why was life in the garden good for man?

Answer: He could enjoy the beauty of God's creation – and God himself was there.

- How would you describe the relationship between Adam and God in the garden?

Answer: There was enjoyment and harmony in the relationship.



- Why would God choose to walk with Adam in the garden?

Answer: Because he enjoys the relationship with man.

Notes

The concept of God walking with man in the garden is often difficult for people to accept – the phrase 'relationship with God' may be more helpful for some.

3. Betrayal



- Was it difficult for Adam and Eve to obey God, even if there was only one rule?

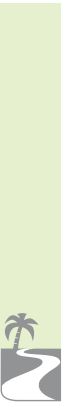
Answer: It seems to have been an easy thing for them to doubt God's Word and his one rule – just as it is today when we attempt to resist temptation.



- Why did God view Adam and Eve's disobedience as a personal betrayal?

Answer: Disbelieving and doubting God's Word in one simple matter was a huge thing - considering all the blessings that they had been given.

4. Shame and fear



- What was the immediate reaction of Adam and Eve to their betrayal?

Answer: Fear and desire to hide. They realised they were naked and tried to cover themselves.

- What excuses did they give to God to explain their betrayal?

Answer: They blamed each other – still a common human weakness!

- How did they try to fix their problem? Did it work?

Answer: They hid and tried to cover their nakedness with clothes made from leaves. Neither strategy worked – and they still don't today!

- Did they ask God for forgiveness?

Answer: Initially they neither repented nor asked forgiveness.



- How do we hide our sins today? Can we ever truly hide our sins?

Answer: God always sees everything.

5. Consequences of betrayal



- What were the consequences for Adam, Eve and humanity?

Answer: Separation from God, broken human relationships, alliance with Satan, creation and mankind under the curse of sin.

- Why were the consequences of the betrayal so great?

Answer: God is holy and cannot tolerate sin. The extreme consequences show that the relationship between man and God is of the highest value.

1



- Should we be afraid of God's punishment?

Answer: Absolutely yes!

6. God's solution

- How does God fix the problem, now and then?

Answer: He provides clothes made from skin.

- What changes took place for Adam and Eve?

Answer: They were expelled from the garden, life became full of labour and pain, they faced the reality of death, but God gave them a promise.

- Why did God fix the problem?

Answer: The Lord desires to be in relationship with mankind. Sin is the obstacle to this and his love and grace motivate him to remove the barrier.



Notes

Many people believe that the forgiveness of God is an arbitrary act. The Bible teaches that there is a means or process through which God forgives and reconciles us to himself. This method reconciles God's high and holy standards with his desire for mercy. We will look at this in more detail in the 'Divine Paradox' part of the Noah session.

Finishing Up

You can suggest that in the following week the participants consider the consequences of this one act of disobedience, which seems to have led to all the problems in today's world. Can all the problems they are facing, or the ones they see on TV, or read about in the newspapers, all originate from the disobedient nature of man?

Close with a short prayer thanking the Lord for what we have learned from the message of Adam.

Passages to read in preparation for the next session – Genesis 6-9.

Follow Up

Try and follow up each person individually to see how they are doing and if they have any questions about the story of Adam that you can answer one-to-one.

The Story of Noah & the Flood

2

Core of the Story:

In this episode we explore in greater depth the nature of God and his heart towards man. We move from one man (Adam) and his shame to the multiplication of sin throughout the earth. Rebellion and turning away from God seem to be the habitual behaviour of mankind. The emotional response of God to this reality opens up an insight into his heart, and the ensuing judgment brings a new understanding of his perfection and holiness. Yet alongside the requirement for punishment, God's mercy is expressed in an escape plan for the one righteous man, Noah. The paradox of his grace and justice is explored. Finally we look at Noah's spontaneous sacrifice, and how it released and renewed God's promise and covenant to mankind.

Setting the Scene

LOOKING BACK: Last time we looked at creation, the story of Adam and his fall and expulsion from the garden.

- What do you think about this story now? Do you have any questions that you would like to ask about this story?
- What do you think is the most important lesson from the story of Adam?

LOOKING FORWARD:

- Why did God send the flood?
- What was the 'sign' of Noah?



Film

The unleashing of evil

GENESIS 6:1-8

In the time of Noah wickedness had filled the earth. God's heart grieved and he regretted his creation of man.

2

Noah – a different kind of man

GENESIS 6:9-22

Noah was a righteous man and walked with God. God shares his plan to destroy the world – and to save Noah and his family.

Rain, rain and more rain!

GENESIS 7

Noah, his family and representatives of the animal kingdom spent more than one year, locked in the ark, floating on top of the flood waters.

Divine paradox – justice and mercy!

PSALM 85

The problem of sin for a holy God, salvation and deliverance (the ark) is the place where judgement and mercy meet.

Leaving the ark

GENESIS 8

The floods subside; Noah and family leave the ark, build an altar for sacrifice, and worship the Lord. God responds to Noah's burnt offering.

The covenant renewed again

GENESIS 9:1-17

The Lord God promises never again to destroy the earth and he renews his covenant with mankind.

Key Truth

The covenant name of God

EXODUS 3:15

Seth (Son of Adam) also had a son, and he named him Enosh. At that time men began to call on the name of the LORD (YHWH). (Genesis 4:26)

Literally the word **YHWH** means: **'He who is'** – the self-existent, eternal being. It is the personal name of God which distinguishes him from all false gods. YHWH is used over 6,500 times and the most common name for God in the Old Testament. This name was so holy that the Jewish people made a rule never to pronounce it.

Exploring Together

The central theme in this episode is the great love of God for mankind, which will overcome even extreme degrees of human rebellion. In the detail of the discussion try not to forget that this is a divine love story. Also, it is worth drawing attention to the significance of the spontaneous act of Noah, which brought pleasure to the heart of God.

1. The unleashing of evil



- Why was God so upset?

Answers:

- Man's rebellion and the multiplication of sin were a rejection of his creator.
- God in his great holiness hates sin with a passion. It makes him divinely angry.
- God in his nature is emotional: his heart was filled with pain. If you love, you will suffer.
- God in his nature is relational, but sin breaks that relationship.

- Why do you think God took such drastic action against sin?

Answer: Because he is the Holy God and cannot tolerate sin.

- Why did God allow the rebellion of man to multiply until this devastating solution had to be applied?

Answer: It seems that despite his hatred of sin, God respects the freewill which he has given man. Perhaps he was waiting to see if there were any righteous people who would turn and repent.



Notes

It is better to avoid saying that God was sorry that he created mankind. This gives the impression that he did something wrong. It is better to affirm the goodness of his creation and explain his sorrow as pity or regret for the subsequent actions of man. The concept of the emotional nature of God will be a new one for many people, though as humans we can understand that relationships always involves emotion, including both joy and pain. Love does not exist without suffering. In this regard, we are like God.

2. Noah – a different kind of man



- What made Noah different from the people around him?

Answer: Noah was righteous and blameless before the people around him – and he walked with God.

- When God shared his plan, Noah believed in it and started to work even though it looked like an impossible task. If God were to share his plans with you, would you be ready to believe and walk in them?

- We think that Noah must have faced ridicule and mockery as he built the ark. Do you think that this happens today – when believers are asked by the Lord God to do what appear to be unusual tasks?



3. Rain, rain and more rain!

2



- What would it have felt like for Noah and his family on the boat, isolated from everything and everyone?



- How easy do we find it to surrender and abandon ourselves to God and his way?

4. Divine paradox – justice and mercy



- Why is sin such a big issue? Why can't God just forgive without imposing such severe punishment?

Answer: Without judgement and punishment, justice cannot be achieved. For God to forgive without justice would be for him to deny his nature.

- Can anyone escape God's judgment?

Answer: Never – judgement must be passed.

- Can sinful man and a holy God really co-exist in heaven?

Answer: This is impossible.

- Why is death the punishment for sin?

Answer: Sinful man cannot co-exist with God. Therefore the punishment for sin is eternal separation from God, which is identical to death.

- How can God's solution show both his mercy and his wrath to mankind at the same time?

Answer: God promises to provide a rescue plan for those who are searching for God and for his mercy. Noah was one such person, and God's divine rescue plan made a way for him in the midst of the punishment, which was being poured out on the rest of humanity.

Notes

The concept of a 'mechanism of salvation' which satisfies God's sense of both justice and mercy is often misunderstood. Generally, people's grasp of God's justice and holiness, along with the concept of sin being punishable by death, is limited. The mercy of God, on the other hand, is often referred to, yet without a clear understanding of how it works.

5. Leaving the ark



- What would have been your first activity after one year in a boat with a load of animals?

- Why does Noah build the altar?

Answer: To sacrifice some of the clean animals he had with him; to worship in response to his salvation.



- Why is God pleased with the smell of the burnt animals?

Answer: Noah has followed the signs of the prophets who went before and fulfilled the sacrifice that God requires.

- Why is it important to sacrifice a 'clean' animal?

Answer: This is a sign that the sacrifice for sin has to be pure and without sin.

6. The covenant renewed again



- What are the different parts of the covenant that God affirms to Noah?

Answers:

- The Lord commands Noah to be fruitful, to multiply and to fill the earth.
- He places the highest value on the life of man – because man is made in the image of God.
- He establishes his covenant through Noah to all peoples of the earth.
- Never again will he destroy all living things.
- The rainbow is to be the sign of this covenant.



- After learning about the story of Noah, do you think there is any depth of sin to which God's rescue plan cannot reach?

- Is God's rescue plan powerful enough to reach us in the problems of today's world?

Finishing Up

The heart of the story of Noah is the rescue plan that God provides in the face of a terrible, yet righteous, judgement against a deeply sinful world. Consider asking the question: "Does anyone here need a place of refuge and safety (deliverance) from the power of sin (or evil) in their lives?" If the answer is "yes" then pray

2

a short prayer together asking for God's deliverance and rescue plan, there and then.

Passages to read in preparation for the next session – Genesis 12:1-8, 15-18 and 21-22.

Follow Up

If someone has asked for prayer in response to the question above then follow it up with them individually, and offer to pray with them at greater length. Also try to discern if any of the participants had issues they would like prayer for but did not have the courage to ask.

The Story of Abraham & Sarah

3

Core of the Story:

The heart of this episode is the account of the sacrifice of the 'son of promise', and how this acts as a prophetic signpost pointing towards the last hours of another 'promised son'. Here we explore, in greater depth, God's desire to bless all peoples, his relationship with Abraham (Khalil Allah), the faithfulness and miracle of his promises, and the concept of substitutional sacrifice. The promise of blessing to Ishmael and his offspring is also examined.

Setting the Scene

LOOKING BACK: Last time we looked at the story of the flood, the destruction of mankind and God's plan of salvation for Noah and his family.

- Do you have any questions from last week on this story?
- What does the story of Noah show us about the nature of God?

LOOKING FORWARD:

- What relevance does the account of Abraham and Sarah have for us today?
- What do we understand about Abraham when we call him 'Khalil Allah'?



Film

Who was the man Abraham?

GENESIS 11:26-12:9

Abram is called by God to go to a land where the Lord will bless him, and through him all the peoples of the earth.

Waiting for the promise

GENESIS 15:1-6 & 16:1-4

3

Abram believed the promise of God and waited. When nothing seemed to happen, he and Sarai came up with their own plan to fulfil the promise and subsequently Ishmael was born.

The promise still stands!

GENESIS 17:1-22

The Lord gives Abram and Sarai new names, and tells them Ishmael is not the son that God had in mind. He renews his promise that they will bear a son despite their advanced age.

Isaac and Ishmael

GENESIS 21:1-21

Isaac is born. There is tension in the tents of Abraham between Sarah and Hagar, and between Ishmael and Isaac. God promises to bless Ishmael.

Isaac and the covenant

GENESIS 17:15-22

While there is a powerful blessing for Ishmael, the line of promise (the covenant) passes through Isaac.

The hardest 'ask'

GENESIS 22:1-10

God asks Abraham to sacrifice Isaac on Mount Moriah.

The Lord will provide!

GENESIS 22:11-18

The Lord provides a ram for the sacrifice in the place of Isaac.

Key Truth Prophets

God appoints different people for specific roles and responsibilities. Prophets are men of integrity, who walk with God and are passionate for his holiness. Through God's power they:

- Proclaim God's Word.
- Point to the truth and reveal the will and mind of God.
- Expose issues and predict future events.
- Act on behalf of God.
- Perform wonders, miracles and signs.

Exploring Together

Competing stories may emerge here. Don't try to defend the Biblical narrative; just present it as it is. Moreover, focus on the meanings behind the events and try to elicit the deeper issues such as:

- The promises of God are fulfilled through God's power, not man's effort.
- Man's solutions always fail.
- The prophetic significance of this drama on Mount Moriah. It makes no sense as a one-off event. It must point to something yet to come.

We can expect, by this stage, that each participant is beginning to see things more clearly, and even be aware of the Lord coming close to them and revealing himself.

1. Who was the man Abraham?



- Why is Abraham called 'Khalil Allah', a close friend of God? What was it that made him God's friend?

Answer: The Lord appeared to Abraham and spoke to him many times.

Notes

Despite the name 'Khalil Allah', many people find it difficult to understand the concept of Abraham meeting with God.



- Can people today be friends with God - as Abraham was?

2. Waiting for the promise!



- How long did Abram and Sarai have to wait?

Answer: They waited for the promise for about 11 years and then they came up with the plan to have Ishmael.

- Did they really believe God's promise to them?

Answer: They believed the promise, yet they thought they could accomplish it through their own ingenuity.



- How easy is it to wait?
- Can we choose the time when God fulfils his promises in our lives?

3. The promise still stands

3

- What was the meaning of Abram's new name?

Answer: Abram (which means 'exalted father') becomes Abraham meaning 'father of the nations'.



- Was his name related to God's promise to him?

Answer: Yes, his name was a prophetic name. Many people: Jews, Christians and Muslims, all call Abraham their father.

- Why would God give them another son at this age?

Answer: The 'son of promise' would not be born according to human planning. He would be born through a miracle. God always fulfils his word in his way.

- Why was Ishmael not able to fulfil God's promise?

Answer: While Ishmael is clearly precious to God and has his own God-given destiny, the Lord has a special purpose that he will fulfil through the 'son of promise'.



4. Isaac and Ishmael

- What was the source of the tension in the tents of Abraham and why?

Answer: Between the two mothers and between the two sons. Both mothers thought that their son would inherit the line and God's promise from Abraham.



- What was Ishmael's blessing and calling?

Answer: God had plans to bless Ishmael and make of him a great nation.

- Why did the Lord ask Abraham to send Hagar and Ishmael away?

Answer: Only one son could inherit the line of promise. This was hard for Ishmael (the eldest son and hence the natural heir) to accept, so God decided to separate them.



Notes

The rejection of Ishmael as the 'son of promise' may be problematic for some. It can easily cause current political sensitivities to surface.



- Did God abandon Ishmael and his mother?

Answer: No. He met with Hagar and Ishmael in the desert as they were dying of thirst. He provided water and saved them, and then affirmed the promise he had given the boy earlier. God was with Ishmael as he grew into a man. (**Genesis 21:20**)

5. Isaac and the covenant



- Why does the line of God's redemptive promise have to pass through Isaac?

Answer: The promised 'seed of the woman' cannot be born from human effort. It must come from a miracle, totally depending on God's power. God's purpose to redeem man from his sins cannot be achieved by man's effort.



- How important is my human effort in reaching God's heart?

Answer: Human effort is important because it signifies a heart that is searching for God. However, without God's intervention and assistance it is not enough.

- What can we do to please God?

Answer: The main thing we can do to please God is to believe his Word and promises and live our lives righteously before him.

6. The hardest 'ask'



- What kind of offering was Abraham asked to make?

Answer: A burnt offering.

- What was the purpose of this offering?

Answer: A burnt offering signifies a total surrender to God and provides atonement for the sin of mankind (**Exodus:29 & 30**).



- This was a hard thing for Abraham, why did the Lord ask him to do this?

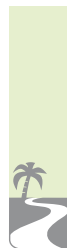
Answer: The Lord asked him to do this for several reasons – it was a test of obedience for Abraham, to see if he would trust the words and promises that God had already given him for Isaac. It was also a sign pointing to the future, which we will discover as Al Massira unfolds.



- Would God have been happy to see the shedding of Isaac's blood – is he happy to see the suffering of man?

Answer: The Lord is never happy to see the shedding of a man's blood. He was fully aware that he would provide a sacrifice in the place of Isaac. Nevertheless, he wants us to know the cost of the sacrifice, and this is a sign showing us the value of the sacrifice that will be made.

7. The Lord will provide!



- Where is Mount Moriah in today's geography?

Answer: Jerusalem.

- Did Abraham really trust God that he would be able to receive his 'son of promise' back from the dead?

Answer: Yes. He said to his servants that he and the boy would go and worship on the mountain and that they would both return to them (**Genesis 22:5**).

- What is the 'sign' that God gives us through this event in Abraham's life?

Answer: This event points to a future occasion when, on the same mountain, another only son (the Lamb of God) will be offered as a sacrifice for the sins of mankind, taking on himself the required punishment to restore everlasting peace and relationship between man and God.

Notes

While, by many, the prophetic significance of this sacrifice is not understood at all, this event still plays a central role in belief and practice amongst many peoples of the world. This may be the first time for your friends to grapple with the deeper meaning behind the story.

Finishing Up

In this episode, the personal relationship that Abraham (Khalil Allah) had with the Lord and the special calling that was given to him are striking features. Sometimes God comes close to us and speaks purpose into our lives, even before we properly know and understand him.

You may find that after the discussion you can ask one or more of the following questions:

- Have you ever had an experience where you felt that God's presence was close to you?
- Have you ever sensed God's calling on your life, to either be or do something?

A further question may also be appropriate:

- Have you, like Abraham, ever tried to fulfil God's purpose in your life through your own human effort?

Depending on the answers and other factors, it may be a good moment to pray and bless each other, affirming the fact that God calls each person to a life of purpose and fulfilment.

Passages to read in preparation for the next session – Exodus 1-12.

Follow Up

For many people the questions above can be private and personal matters. Therefore, you may find you can explore the questions at a deeper level with them one-to-one.

4 The Story of Moses

Core of the Story:

This session we look at the journey of the Hebrews from slavery into the nation that was promised to them. The central theme of this session is the Passover, which illustrates our need for sacrifice and the power of blood to deliver us from death. These concepts, which have been looked at earlier, are explored at a deeper level. A secondary theme is both the desire and the power of God to deliver us from slavery and bondage. The ideas behind the Law of God and the Tabernacle are also explained. At the end of this session we will have completed all the main prophetic signs that give us a basic understanding of the principles of judgement and punishment, substitutional sacrifice, atonement, redemption and grace. Woven through the story so far is the strong desire in the heart of the Lord to restore relationship between sinful man and a holy God.

Setting the Scene

LOOKING BACK: Last time we looked at Abraham, his call, the promise of a son, how Isaac was born and the sacrifice on the mountain.

- What is the most important thing you have learned from the story of Abraham as you have thought about it since our last meeting?
- Do you have any questions about Abraham you would like to ask now?

LOOKING FORWARD:

- What do we know about the story of Moses and why is it important to us today?
- What do you think is the main sign that comes to us from this story?



Film

Slavery in Egypt

GENESIS 15:13-18 & EXODUS 1:1-3:14

The descendants of Abraham move to Egypt to escape famine. They grow in number and are afflicted by Pharaoh. Moses is born and, as an adult, flees to Sinai where he meets with God on Mount Sinai. God calls him to lead his people out of Egypt and into the 'promised' land.

Confrontation – Moses and Pharaoh

EXODUS 5-11

Moses meets Pharaoh and asks for the people to be set free. Pharaoh refuses and the Lord unleashes a catalogue of plagues on Egypt. The last of these is the slaughter of the first-born.

The Passover

EXODUS 12:1-30

The last plague is unleashed. When the Angel of the Lord visits Egypt every first-born is struck down. Only those who sacrifice a lamb and put its blood on the doorposts are safe from God's judgement.

Escape from Egypt

EXODUS 12:31-14:31

The Israelites are free to go but Pharaoh pursues them to the Red Sea. The Lord opens the sea and the people finally escape from the hand of Pharaoh.

The Lord speaks from the mountain

EXODUS 19 & DEUTERONOMY 18:15-19

The Israelites arrive at Mount Sinai where the Lord speaks to them, affirming his calling of them as a nation who will show the world how to live with God at the centre of their community.

Key Truth

The Angel of the Lord

EXODUS 3:15

We first hear of the 'Angel of the Lord' with Hagar in the wilderness (**Genesis 16:7**). Moses then meets him in the burning bush, where he identifies himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The word 'Angel' in Hebrew means messenger or apostle. So the 'Angel of the Lord' is the messenger who is sent from the Lord.

"See, I am sending an angel ahead of you to guard you along the way and to bring you to the place I have prepared. Pay attention to him and listen to what he says. Do not rebel against him; he will not forgive your rebellion, since my Name is in him. (Exodus 23:20-21).

He is the Messenger of the Covenant: *"Behold, I send My messenger, and he will prepare the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple, even the Messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight. Behold, He is coming," says the LORD of hosts. (Malachi 3:1 NKJV)*

The Law and the Tabernacle

EXODUS 20, 26-27 & 36-40

The Lord through Moses gives the Ten Commandments and instructions for the building of the Tabernacle.

4

Exploring Together

This is a popular story and shows God's might and power to deliver. It will be helpful to review how the foundational concepts (of guilt and shame, holiness and mercy, judgement and punishment, substitution and atonement, sacrifice and the restoration of relationship) are built upon from Adam through to Moses.

Here are the key points you can try to bring out in the discussion:

- God listens and responds when we cry out to him.
- Idolatry and disobedience will be judged and punished.
- God has the power to act on our behalf and deliver us.
- Judgement is due to all; everyone needs to take cover.
- What kind of sacrifice is needed? A pure and spotless one.
- The power of the blood to cover us.
- The desire of God to live in our midst, i.e. through the tabernacle.
- The real purpose of the Law. It doesn't make us clean before God; rather it shows us the standards of heaven and exposes our inability to satisfy them.

1. Slavery in Egypt

- What does the Lord tell Moses on top of the mountain? Was Moses ready to hear God's voice?

Answer: The call to be an instrument in God's hand to go to Pharaoh and request that the Hebrew people be set free. Moses tried to excuse himself from this.

- Why does the Lord allow the people of his covenant to be slaves, to be mistreated and oppressed?



Notes

God appeared to Moses as a flame coming from inside the bush. This idea that God could reveal himself through an element of his creation is a major challenge for anyone to grasp, even though we know that God can do whatever he likes. However, it is a helpful step towards the understanding that God could also choose to appear as a man.



Answer: While the Lord is not the source of the suffering of the Hebrew people, he redeems the situation and weaves it into his sovereign plan to deliver them from slavery, move his covenant forward and build a new nation. Through this great deliverance he shows the people his great power and authority – even over the most powerful king of the age!

- Did the Lord have a plan to end his people's slavery?

Answer: Yes.

2. Confrontation – Moses and Pharaoh



- What did God want to show both the Egyptians and the Israelites through these plagues?

Answer: That there is one powerful God in heaven. It seems that each of the curses or plagues dealt with one of Egypt's pagan gods (eg sun, river, cattle, Pharaoh). God was showing the people the powerlessness and emptiness of the pagan religion.



- Why did Pharaoh and the Egyptians deserve such a heavy punishment?

Answer: Rejection of God and his word and purpose is a serious problem. Sin and idolatry were deeply imbedded in the land and culture of Egypt.

- What purpose was the Lord outworking through this power encounter between Pharaoh and Moses?

Answer: He was humbling an arrogant king who refused to acknowledge and respect the Lord.

3. The Passover



- What did God ask the Israelites to do to save themselves from the punishment coming to Egypt?

Answer: To slaughter a lamb and wipe its blood on the doorposts. He also asked them to roast the flesh, cook some unleavened bread and prepare to leave.



- But can an animal take our place? Does the blood of a lamb really save us from punishment?

Answer: We can see a pattern

Notes

The blood placed on the doorposts can be compared with the common practice of dipping hands in the blood of animals and placing it on the walls and entrances of buildings.



emerging: the animal skin for Adam, Noah's sacrifice, the provision of a ram for Abraham. To protect us from the punishment that is due for our sin an animal has to die.

- Is this a permanent solution to the problem of our sin? Do we still have to keep killing animals?

4. Escape from Egypt



- Were the Israelites true to the Lord after he saved them and brought them out of Egypt?

Answer: They were not.

They grumbled, complained and even built a replica of a calf (an Egyptian god) while Moses was on the mountain receiving the Ten Commandments.

- Why did they need to spend 40 years in the desert?

Answer: The Lord said they were a generation who refused to believe the words and purpose of the Lord despite all the miracles that they had witnessed. This generation would pass away and a new generation would be the one to enter the 'promised land'.

- Why part the Red Sea to deliver the Israelites from Pharaoh's army? Was there not an easier way?

Answer: The deliverance from slavery and sin needs a divine miracle; it cannot depend upon the work of man. The Israelites knew clearly that the Lord had delivered them – no-one else!

- Are we still in need of a divine miracle to deliver us from the slavery of sin?

Answer: Yes – our deliverance can only come from a mighty work from the hand of God.

Notes

The journey of the Israelites to a 'promised land' is a sensitive issue that will be difficult to view other than through the lens of the current political situation.

5. God speaks from the mountain



- When they arrived at Mount Sinai, what did they find there?

Answer: They found that the presence of the Lord was on the mountain, with thick cloud, thunder, lightning and earthquakes.

- What was the calling of the Israelites and how did they live it out?

Answer: They were to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation, demonstrating what happens when God lives in the midst of a community. They were to be a light and an example to the nations.

- Were they ready to be the people that God wanted them to be?

Answer: There were times in the history of Israel when the nation lived according to its calling, but more often than not they lost sight of the destiny that God had for them.

6. The Law and the Tabernacle

- What was the purpose of the Tabernacle? Who was it for?

Answer: The Tabernacle was the place where a holy God lived in the midst of his people and where people came to worship their God.

- Do you think God can choose to live in a specific place?

Answer: God can do anything he chooses within his holy nature, so he can be present anywhere with different degrees of intensity.

- The Ten Commandments explain to us the nature and condition of life in God's presence. Is anyone capable, by themselves, of reaching this standard and coming into his presence?

Answer: No one is able to live a life completely fulfilling the Law. The purpose of the Law is not to make us clean before God, rather it shows us the condition of heaven and exposes our inability to come before God without his help.

- What is the significance of the word Messiah? What importance does it have for us today?

Answer: The word 'Messiah' means the one anointed by the Spirit to do the work of God. The priests fulfilled this task at that time, but they were also a sign looking forward to the coming of the one who would be called 'Messiah'.

- Why was it so difficult for the High Priest to come into the presence of the Lord?

Answer: The Lord God is absolutely holy, the very definition of goodness and perfection. The anointed 'high priest' was also not without sin, so it was not easy, even for him, to come once a year into the presence of God.

Finishing Up

4

Consider asking if there are any situations where there is a need of God's powerful hand of deliverance (from despair, judgement or oppression), provision or intervention. With Moses we have met a God (the 'Angel of the Lord') who has the power to part an ocean to save his people from slavery and misery. What is he able to do for each of us when we are in this condition? If people respond to this, then you can pray together to the Lord asking for his answer from heaven.

Passages to read in preparation for the next session – 1 Samuel 16-17 & Psalm 51.

Follow Up

You may want to ask people the same question (as above) if you sense there are issues that they are not ready to be open about within the group.

At this stage we are expecting participants to begin to recognise (whether they acknowledge this openly or not) repeated themes and patterns that run through the message.

- The desire of the Lord for relationship and fellowship with his creation.
- Our guilt before a holy God and our need for cleansing.
- Our inability to cleanse ourselves before God.
- Sacrifice, substitution and atonement.
- God's power to deliver and save.
- That God's ultimate deliverance will come through a person (seed, promised son, Messiah).

The Story of King David

5

Core of the Story:

In this episode we look at the idea of the 'Kingdom of God' and explore the Messianic prophecies found in the Psalms. We meet David, learn the difference between a good and a bad king, and see how David's kingdom is a sign pointing towards a coming eternal Kingdom whose King is the Messiah. We learn the meaning of a repentance which is sincere and acceptable to the Lord. In this session (and the next) we move from prophetic signs that point towards the work of the Messiah to prophecies that point towards the person of the Messiah.

Setting the Scene

LOOKING BACK: Last time we looked at Moses, the escape from Egypt and the journey through Sinai to meet with God at the mountain.

- What do you think are the most important things we can learn from the story of Moses as you have thought about it since?
- What was the significance of the Passover?
- Do you have any questions about Moses you would like to ask now?

LOOKING FORWARD:

- What do we know about King David? Does his story have any relevance for us today?
- What sign does David bring to us?



Film

From Moses to David

DEUTERONOMY 17:14-20 & 1 SAMUEL 8-13

The Israelites pass through Sinai and into the 'promised' land. They are ruled by judges for many years through cycles of obedience and rebellion against the Lord. They demand to have a king like all the other nations, and their first king is Saul.

David, son of Jesse

1 SAMUEL 16:7-13 & 1 SAMUEL 17

David first comes into view when he defeats the giant Goliath. Saul had more regard for man's opinion than God's, so he was rejected as king. David who had a 'heart after the Lord', was anointed king in his place.

5

The kingdom of David

2 SAMUEL 6:12-19 & 1 CHRONICLES 17:1-15

David set up his kingdom from Jerusalem. This imperfect human kingdom is a sign pointing towards an eternal heavenly Kingdom. The Lord tells David that one of his descendants will be the Saviour of the world who will rule this Kingdom.

Failure and repentance

2 SAMUEL 11-12:25 & PSALM 51:1-17

David, despite being a great man, fell from grace in a catastrophic manner with Bathsheba. However, he repented deeply, turned from his sin and, through faith, was forgiven.

The prophetic Psalms of David

PSALM 2:6-8

David was perhaps the greatest worship leader in history, and wrote some of the most passionate love songs to the Lord that we call Psalms. Some of the psalms are prophetic signs pointing towards the coming of a Messiah who is the King of an eternal Kingdom. These psalms give an amazing level of visionary detail regarding the nature and life of this Messiah.

Injustice and agony

PSALM 22:1-24

This psalm gives us more prophetic information on another aspect of this Messiah King; he will be a King who suffers deeply and dies in agony.

Key Truth

The Messiah

PSALM 2:2

The root of the word 'Messiah' comes from the action of anointing or smearing with oil. When the Spirit of God anoints someone, it signifies that a person is being sanctified and set apart for a specific role or purpose. This anointing equips a person with God's power to accomplish the chosen task. Priests, prophets and kings were all anointed for their roles.

The King promised as a descendent to King David will be called the Messiah. The Messiah will simultaneously carry the role of Priest, Prophet and King, he will be called a Son, and God will be his Father.

Exploring Together

The prophecies of the Psalms are signs which present powerful evidence for the truth of the message of the Messiah. During the discussion it will be good to consider how slim the probability is of their fulfilment being down to chance. However, included in these prophecies are potentially unpalatable clues to the identity of the Messiah, which can be challenging to accept. He will be the Son of God the Father. The other main focus will be the character of David. Despite an unpromising outward appearance, he had a 'heart which was after the Lord' and he was passionate for the honour of God's name. However, he was not at all perfect, and Psalm 51 is a powerful example to us of what repentance is really all about.

1. From Moses to David



- What are the characteristics of a righteous king – or leader?



- Think of someone you consider to have been a good leader. What was it about them that made the difference?

2. David - son of Jesse



- What was the difference between David and Saul?

Answer: Saul was more concerned with what men thought; David was focussed on what God wanted.

- Why was David chosen to be King?

Answer: Saul was deliberately disobedient and lost his anointing to be a good king. David was a 'man after God's heart'.



- Why do you think God so often chooses people to do his work who don't seem to qualify from a human viewpoint?

Answer: God looks to the heart; man looks to external attributes.

- What was David's main motivation to challenge Goliath and fight him?

Answer: To defend the honour of God's Name.

3. The kingdom of David



- What does David do once he has made Jerusalem his capital?

Answer: He re-establishes worship as a central part of his kingdom just as it was for Moses and the community of Israelites.



- Why does he do this?

Answer: The worship of God is central to our relationship with God and central to the heavenly Kingdom.

5



- What are the main differences between David's kingdom and that of the Kingdom that is prophesied of in the Psalms?

Answer: The divine Kingdom is eternal, fully holy, righteous, just, and for all peoples and nations.

- How can this King be called a Son to the God in heaven?

Answer: This is the big question! It may be good just to read out the **Psalms 2:2-9** prophecy.

4. Failure and repentance

PSALM 51:1-17

- How can God accept the repentance of someone who betrayed his trust in such a way as this?

Answer: We learn from this that God can forgive even the worst sin.

- What is the difference between a genuine repentance and one that is superficial?

Answer: Real repentance is a brokenness that comes from recognising our sinful condition and the effect of our offence upon God (and/or the other person). It is throwing oneself onto the mercy of God and turning from sin. A superficial repentance is more about regretting the consequences of the sin.

Notes

The Bathsheba story is unknown to many unbelievers and there is a big element of shame here. How could a respected prophet behave like this, and if he did, why are we exposing it in such a way?

David was a great king and an honoured prophet. So why does the Bible expose his shame to all?

Answers: This shows that no human is beyond the capacity to sin, but also that through repentance God can bring forgiveness to anyone. This teaches us that leadership comes with the responsibility of giving a good example. The consequences of a leader's sin can be very heavy indeed, as it was with David (**2 Samuel 12:10-12**).



Before God, does an ordinary man need repentance more than a prophet? Is there any difference?

Answer: There is no difference. All are sinners before God and equally fall short of his standard, and therefore all need a deep repentance!

5. The prophetic Psalms of David

5

- What do we learn about this Messiah King through these prophecies?

Answers:

- He will be called the Son of God the Father (**Psalms 2:6-7**).
- He will speak to the people in parables (**Psalms 78:1-2**).
- He will call God his Father (**Psalms 89:26**).
- He will be rejected by his people the Jews (**Psalms 118:22**).
- He will go to the altar of sacrifice and be greeted by people holding branches and shouting "*Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD*" (**Psalms 118:26-27**).
- He will be hated without cause (**Psalms 35:19**).
- He will rise from death; he will not be abandoned to hell or see decay (**Psalms 16:10**).
- He will ascend to heaven (**Psalms 68:18**).
- All kings will come and serve him (**Psalms 72:10-11**).
- He will sit at the right hand of God and be the judge of all nations (**Psalms 110:1-6**).



- Do you think these prophecies help us recognise this King when he comes?
- Who in history could fit this profile, or are we (as the Jewish people believe) still waiting for this Messiah to come?



Notes

We start to come face-to-face with some of the more direct references to the identity of the Messiah as the Son of God the Father. These can be challenging for some to accept. The meaning of the names will be looked at more fully in the next episode. If possible it would be good to delay in-depth discussion on this until then.

6. Injustice and agony

PSALM 22

5



- How can God allow something as appalling as this to happen to one so precious to him?

Answer: There is a high and heavenly purpose at work. From verse 22 to the end we can read about the long-term results of this event.

- What justice is there in this great and terrible shame?

Answer: This Messiah King took this great injustice on himself; he embraces and absorbs it. What is clear is that he did not deserve this as he was wholly righteous.



- The description of this King suffering agony and abandonment seems to echo what nearly happened with Abraham when he went to sacrifice his son Isaac. What similarities do you think there are between these two events?

Notes

The crucifixion of the Messiah can be viewed as a death unbefitting a prophet. That God's most holy prophet had to endure this shameful and horrible death is almost unthinkable. For Christians, we seldom think objectively from this viewpoint because the cross is such an intrinsic part of all we believe. However, it is good for us to look at the cross from this perspective because this is exactly what it is, a catastrophic shame and a gross injustice meted out upon the precious and holy Son of the Father. This point is particularly relevant to sessions 5, 6 and 7.

Finishing Up

Consider reading out **Psalm 51:1-17** slowly, as a prayer of contrition and repentance, inviting each one to make this a prayer from their heart to the Lord. Suggest that before the next meeting, each one takes some time to meditate upon this passage of Scripture.

Passages to read in preparation for the next session: Matthew 1-3 & Luke 1-2.

Follow Up

If you are able to meet each one individually, try at least to cover the following ground:

- Check how they are responding to the prophetic Psalms and try to help with any questions they might have.
- Ask them: “Is there any sin or issue in your life that you think is too big for God to forgive?” Take this chance to talk about the greatness of God’s grace.

6 The Story of Mary & the Messiah

Core of the Story:

This episode rounds off the Old Testament era of prophecies and signs in preparation for the revealing of the Messiah. The story of Mary and Joseph and the birth of Jesus is explained along with the ministry of the last of the great prophets: John the Baptist. Towards the end of his ministry John makes the great declaration “Behold the Lamb of God” as the preface to the beginning of Jesus ministry. The ‘Messianic’ book of Isaiah is examined with a focus on the ‘Suffering Servant’ from chapter 53.

Setting the Scene

LOOKING BACK: In the last session we looked at the prophet king David, his life, his leadership and his prophetic writings known as the Psalms.

- What was the main sign that came from David’s life?
- Do you have any questions about David’s life and message?

LOOKING FORWARD: In this episode we look at the life of Mary mother of Jesus and John the Baptist.

- What do we know about these important characters?
- What do you think was the meaning of the ‘virgin birth’?



Film

Preparing the way

ISAIAH 40:3-5 & MALACHI 3:1

After the exile of the Jewish people and 400 years of prophetic silence the Angel Gabriel announces to Zechariah the arrival of John the Baptist (Yahiya) who will prepare the way for the coming of the Messiah. The lives of both John and Jesus the Messiah were predicted in extraordinary detail by the prophet Isaiah 700 years before they happened.

Mary and Joseph

LUKE 1:26-35, MATTHEW 1:19-21 & ISAIAH 7:14-16

The angel Gabriel visits the virgin Mary and tells her that she will miraculously conceive a son, who is to be called Jesus. Her fiancé, Joseph, also has an angelic visitation and they both willingly submit themselves to this heavenly plan.

What do these names mean?

2 SAMUEL 7:12-13 & MATTHEW 1:21-23

The boy that Mary will bear will be called Jesus and have the titles 'Son of God' and 'Immanuel'.

The birth of a King

MICAH 5:2, ISAIAH 9:6-7 & LUKE 2:29-35

Jesus was born in a stable in Bethlehem and visited by shepherds and eastern kings. The family then fled from the murderous intentions of King Herod all the way to Egypt and took refuge there.

The suffering servant

ISAIAH 53:3-12

This key prophecy of Isaiah points out that the Messiah is not only a King but will also be a servant who suffers injustice, torture and death for the sake of all people. He, the innocent one, will take the punishment which should come upon us – the guilty ones.

John the Baptist

LUKE 3:1-16, JOHN 1:29-34 & MATTHEW 3:13-17

John came out from the desert announcing the coming of God's Kingdom. He preached repentance and baptised many in the River Jordan. He met Jesus and proclaimed, "Behold the Lamb of God" and then baptised him.

Key Truth

Son of the 'Most High' God

LUKE 1:32

The word 'Son' is a title explaining the character of the everlasting relationship between God and the Messiah. The Messiah is the visible image of God and carries his nature and likeness.

It is essential to understand that the meaning of the phrase 'Son of God' does not describe a biological process of human reproduction; this idea is blasphemy and abhorrent to all Christians. Mary conceived through a miracle by the Holy Spirit; she was still a virgin until after the birth of Jesus.

Jesus is called the 'Son of God' in the same way as the people mentioned in the following verses in the New Testament are called "son(s) of...":

- Joseph is given the title 'Barnabas' meaning **son of encouragement**. (**Acts 4:36**)
- John and James, the sons of Zebedee, are called **sons of thunder**. (**Mark 3:17**)
- Some believers are described as **sons of disobedience**. (**Ephesians 5:6**)
- The sorcerer Elymas is called **son of the devil**, because he behaves like Satan. (**Acts 13:10**)

Exploring Together

This final stage of preparation for the revealing of the Messiah involves angelic visitations and a cast of diverse individuals – shepherds, kings, a priest, a carpenter, a teenage girl and a wild holy man of the desert. No other prophet has had such an introduction. As you lead the discussion let the drama of the story unfold, here there is great anticipation of an ancient mystery about to be unveiled.

6

While the characters of the other main prophets have significant flaws, when we look at Mary, Joseph and John we find only obedient and willing hearts. These heroes make great character studies and in Mary we have a key figure for all the female participants to really celebrate.

1. Preparing the way



- Why were the Jews exiled to Babylon?

Answer: Because they chose to worship other gods and rejected the calling God had for them to be a righteous nation.

- How long ago did the prophet Isaiah live?

Answer: Around 700 BC.

- In the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament) there are so many prophecies and signs pointing to the Messiah. Why do you think that many Jewish people still refuse to recognise the Messiah?

Answer: Paul, a Jewish convert to Christianity, who we will meet later on in Al Massira, wrote that for a season their eyes and understanding have grown dull to the promises found in the very scriptures that they guard and protect.

- Are they still waiting for a Messiah to come?

Answer: Yes.

- All prophecy has to be tested. From what we have learned on the journey so far, how do we determine whether a prophet and his prophecies are genuine?

Answers:

- The prophet speaks words which will later come true.
- The prophet speaks in harmony with previous revelations.
- The prophet always brings something new.
- The prophet speaks words that are in harmony with the holiness of his life.



2. Mary and Joseph



- This was an amazing revelation to Mary and Joseph. Why was it also a costly one for them?

Answer: In the eyes of their community she was pregnant out of wedlock, and the baby would be illegitimate – an enormous shame.

- How did God look after them?

Answer: God gave both Mary and Joseph angelic revelations so that they would understand what was happening.

6



- In the eyes of the world Jesus was illegitimate. Why is this significant for us today?

Answer: Jesus identifies with the lowest people in society – those who were despised and rejected. He wants us to know that he understands the pain that humanity sometimes has to endure.

- Why was it difficult for the Jews to accept the virgin birth of Jesus?

Answer: The Jews were looking for a human king, coming from an important family, who would deliver them from the power of the Romans and set up a human kingdom. The virgin birth means that he comes from heaven, he is not here to establish a human but rather a heavenly Kingdom. This Kingdom is not just for the Jewish society but for all the nations of the world.

3. What do these names mean?



- What is the meaning of the name 'Immanuel'?

Answer: God with us.

- Does the meaning of the name 'Immanuel' have any significance to us today?

Answer: Yes - it means that today we really can experience God's presence with us.

Notes

These titles and meanings will, no doubt, provoke lots of discussion. It will be good at this stage to point the participants back to the line of signs and prophecies that all converge upon this one event. Also to recall that the authenticity of all of these scriptures is safeguarded by the Jewish rabbis, who still do not believe in the Messiah.

- According to what we have learned so far, what does the title 'Son of God' really mean?

Answers:

- 'Son of God' means that he does not carry the infected (sinful) genes of man but instead, he is like God in heaven – pure in character and nature.
- We remember the prophecy given 1,000 years earlier to King David, where we learn that the future King will not only reign forever but he will be a son, and God will be his father.

- What does it not mean? Can God physically have a 'son'?

Answer: The relationship that this title describes is not one that was conceived through human physical experiences, it is a miracle and points us to a 'spiritual' rather than a 'physical' relationship between the Father and the Son.



Notes

Please remember that the understanding of the names and titles that are ascribed to the Messiah comes through heavenly revelation, rather than human intellect. Don't expect to convince the participants of the true identity of the Messiah. This is something the Lord himself does. Look at

Matthew 16:16-17.

It is helpful to contrast the three broad views of God; the deistic, the pantheistic and the Judaeo-Christian. For the deist there is no overlap between the earthly and the heavenly spheres. For the pantheist there is total identification of the two spheres. And for the Judaeo-Christian, there is overlap, with Jesus being the ultimate point of overlap.

4. The birth of a King

- Where was Jesus born, and what was significant about this place?

Answer: Bethlehem – it was the 'City of David' and predicted by the prophet Micah (**Micah 5:2**).

- Isaiah tells us that the Messiah will do things that are beyond the ability of man. What are some of these?

Answers:

- The blind will see, the deaf hear, the lame will walk and the dumb will speak (**Isaiah 35:4-6**).
- He will be holy (**Isaiah 7:16**).
- His Kingdom will be righteous and just and rule for ever (**Isaiah 9:6-7**).





- We have seen God doing amazing miracles prior to Jesus, now we will see Jesus doing similar 'impossible' miracles – can anyone do miracles like these or is it just God?

Answer: Miracles are evidence of divine power, several miracles are done by the prophets – but all according to God's power through the Holy Spirit. In the next episode we will see Jesus performing many miracles – more than any other person in the scriptures.

6



- Jesus, the Son of God and promised King, is born without fanfare in poverty in a stable. Then he becomes a refugee in a foreign country. What do you think God is communicating to us through this?

Answers:

- That God himself identifies with the problems and suffering of mankind – he understands the kind of experiences we can face.
- That God's Kingdom is different to man's idea of what a kingdom looks like.

Notes

See extra note on the crucifixion in Episode 5.

5. The suffering servant



- What prophecies from **Isaiah 53** can we think were fulfilled in the biblical account of the death of Jesus on the cross?

Answers:

- He was despised and rejected by men.
- He did not try to prevent what happened (like a sheep to the slaughter).
- He endured great suffering and was pierced (his body was nailed) for our sins.
- He would be with the wicked in his death and be buried by the rich.
- He would die, yet after the suffering was completed he would live.



- How can a righteous man take the penalty of unrighteous sinners like us. Where is the justice in this?

Answer: We learned from the prophets that innocent blood needs to be spilt in order for the sin of man to be dealt with. The principle is that the value of one life is another life – a life for a life. The justice of God has to be satisfied.

6. John the Baptist – a voice crying in the desert!



- According to the prophet Isaiah, what was the main purpose of John's life?

Answer: To prepare the way for the coming of the Messiah.

- What was the main message that John preached, and why was this necessary?

Answer: A call to repentance, the holy and heavenly King is coming – it is the most appropriate action to prepare for his arrival.

- John was particularly angry with the religious leaders. Why was this?

Answer: Because they were hypocrites: they tied others up with laws, which they themselves didn't follow.

- What does true repentance really mean?

Answer: A remorse for the effect that our sin condition has upon our relationship with the Lord, a sorrow for the effect of our sin on others AND a conscious turning/running away from the sin.



6

Finishing Up

1. In this part of the story God speaks to many people through dreams, angelic visitations and signs in the sky (Zechariah, Mary, Joseph, shepherds and kings). This could be a timely opportunity to ask if any of the group have had any personal dreams or visions that they would like to share or have explained. We can expect that the Lord is revealing himself, in these ways, to many (though not all) in these times, and we should be ready both to recognise this, and to help people interpret their experiences.

Encourage each one, on their own, to ask the Lord to reveal himself.

2. The heart of this story is about a teenage girl, willingly submitting herself to the revealed plan of the Lord, even though it would potentially have difficult (and even dangerous) consequences. Consider discussing this briefly as a prelude to a short time of prayer where all ask for a 'submissive heart' in response to the Lord and his word to us.

Encourage each one in the next few days to check through the summary of the signs of the prophets, found at the end of 'Notes from the Journey' for this episode.

Passages to read in preparation for the next session: Mark 1-16.

Follow Up

Again, since some may not be willing to discuss their personal dreams and visions within the group context, it would be a good thing to follow up this session individually. It may be good to ask each one, having now gone through all the signs and prophecies, if they have any questions that relate to the overall picture that has been presented.

6

7 The Story of the Messiah

Core of the Story:

In this episode, all the threads, signs and prophecies come together in the person and work of the Messiah. What has been shown in part is now revealed in full. We look at Jesus' ministry, his supernatural power and incredible personal claims. Many people were drawn to him, and yet some opposed him, as they still do today! We look at the account of his arrest, death and resurrection, and explain the significance of these pivotal events. This episode is a little longer than the others due to its central position and significance to the whole story.

Setting the Scene

LOOKING BACK: In the last session we looked at the story of Mary and Joseph, the birth of the Messiah and the ministry of John the Baptist.

- What do you think we can learn from the example of Mary's life?
- What was the main calling that was on John's life?
- Do you have any questions about the Mary episode?

LOOKING FORWARD:

- What do you think is the purpose of the miracles that Jesus performed?
- How does Jesus deal with ordinary people?
- What do you think is the essence of Jesus' teachings?



Film

Jesus begins his work

LUKE 4:1-22

Returning from forty days of fasting in the desert, Jesus begins his ministry with a small band of followers – telling stories, preaching, healing the sick and casting out demons. He quickly becomes known and large crowds of people eagerly come to hear him speak and witness his signs and miracles.

Trouble stirring

JOHN 8:52-59, JOHN 8:3-11 & LUKE 5:30-32

Most people welcome Jesus, but an influential minority of religious leaders resent his popularity and reject his teaching and personal claims. They accuse him of blasphemy and plot to kill him.

An unusual power

MATTHEW 8:28-34, LUKE 8:23-24, LUKE 8:52-55 & MATTHEW 9:2-7

Jesus demonstrates his authority (and his compassion) by working various kinds of supernatural miracles. He has authority over evil spirits, over the laws of nature, over sickness, disease and death, and lastly he claims authority to forgive sins. Who can do these things apart from God himself?

7

Who are you?

JOHN 5-14

Jesus made some incredible claims about his identity, his relationship with God, and what he can do for us. He does not allow us merely to accept him as a good and compassionate man, who worked some amazing miracles. He forces us to consider a more challenging possibility.

Last journey to Jerusalem

LUKE 18:31-33, MARK 14:43-50 & LUKE 22:1-23:21

Jesus leads his followers back to Jerusalem one final time, where he prepares to fulfil the purpose for which he was sent. He is betrayed to the authorities and endures arrest, false accusation, torture and trial.

Death on a cross

MARK 15:33-39 & LUKE 23:22-49

Jesus is whipped and scourged, then taken just outside of Jerusalem and nailed to a cross where over the next six hours his life is poured out. His death begins to be seen as the fulfilment of centuries of prophecies and signs, from Adam through to John. Jesus has become the ultimate substitute and taken upon himself the penalty for all our sins.

Risen from the grave!

LUKE 23:50-24:49 & JOHN 20:11-18

After his death, Jesus is taken from the cross and sealed into a rock-cut tomb.

Three days later when his followers come to anoint his body, they discover the gravestone removed and Jesus' body absent. He then appears to his followers, in his resurrected body, over a period of many weeks. Finally, the last enemy 'death', the punishment for our rebellion, has been defeated.

Exploring Together

7

This is the central point in the journey, where all the thoughts and ideas of the previous episodes converge on the person of Jesus. There is much here that will not easily be accepted, especially the crucifixion of the Messiah. We do not need to vigorously defend these truths in their own right. Rather, remind the participants of the prophetic journey we have been on and how his life, death and resurrection can be seen clearly as a fulfilment of the signs of all the prophets who came before. Even though in our eyes, the content of this session is the logical conclusion to everything that has come before, we should not expect an instant acceptance of these truths. Give space for people to struggle with God for these truths, and for God to back up the message with his own individual revelation to each one.

1. Jesus begins his work



- What does Jesus speak out from the synagogue in Nazareth?

Answer: He reads from the prophet Isaiah (**Isaiah 61:1-2**) and declares that these scriptures have been fulfilled in their hearing, meaning that they have been fulfilled in him.

- Why do so many people come to Jesus?

Answer: He has supernatural power over sickness and demons, and his teaching is powerful and comes with authority.

- How was Jesus' teaching different from the teaching of the Jews?

Answer: Jesus taught about the Kingdom of God and living righteously. He demonstrated it in his own life and encouraged mercy to the lost, the hopeless and the broken. The religious leaders focussed their teaching upon the Jewish traditions and the details of the observance of Jewish law, much of which was extraneous to the scriptures.

- Why does Jesus teach through parables and stories?

Answers:

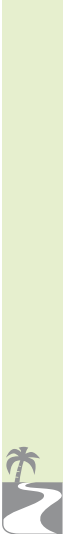
- They use understandable elements of everyday life to convey divine and eternal truths.





- They are easy to remember and pass on to others, unlike legal requirements.
- They contain multiple levels of truth and meaning.

2. Trouble stirring!



- If Jesus was the Messiah the Jews were waiting for, why did some of them reject him?

Answers:

- The religious leaders did not want their authority questioned or their religious system disturbed. They were not looking for the Messiah.
- Jesus' teaching challenged unrighteous behaviour, wrong motivations and the absence of mercy. Some did not want to admit to this.

- Jesus said that the Father in heaven bears witness to the Son on the earth. What was this witness of the Father to the Son?

Answers:

- Through the signs and prophecies in scripture that all point to the Messiah.
- Through the miracles of Jesus which are beyond the power of man to do.
- The voice of God at the baptism of Jesus declaring *"This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased"* (Matthew 3:17).

- Some of the things that Jesus said about his relationship with the Father could make us consider him mad. Why could we consider Jesus unique in respect of these claims?

Answers:

- His actions and behaviour do not fit the character of one who has lost his mind.
- The Old Testament scriptures give many indications of what to look for in the coming Messiah. If Jesus fits these prophetic descriptions, then maybe we could consider that he does uniquely fulfil these prophecies.

- The common understanding is that Jesus was a prophet. However, the big claims he made concerning his relationship with the Father seem to point to more than this. What do you think?



7

Notes

Many people today carry objections to the identity of the Messiah that are similar to those of the Pharisees of Jesus' day.

3. An unusual power



- In what ways does Jesus demonstrate unique and supernatural power?

Answer: Through healings (healing the blind, deaf, dumb and lame), deliverance (freeing people from evil spirits and mental bondage), cursing (the fig tree), supernatural knowledge (details of the life of the woman of Samaria), power over nature (calming the storm), creative miracles (multiplying food) and power over death (Lazarus).

7



- Other prophets performed miracles, for example Moses. What are unique about the miracles of Jesus? What do these miracles tell us about the identity of Jesus?

Answers:

- Jesus performed many different kinds of miracles (see above). Most of the prophets only had authority to perform one or two kinds of miracle.
- The sheer quantity of miracles set Jesus apart from those of any other prophet.
- These signs and wonders help us to realise that Jesus was no ordinary prophet and encourage us to listen carefully to all he has to say.

- Jesus said that if we have faith, we will do greater things than he did. The disciples were known to heal and deliver people from evil spirits. Do you think that we can do this today? Is this power still available to those who believe?

4. So who are you?



- What were some of the things that Jesus said about himself, and what do you think about these claims?

Answers:

- I am the light of the world (**John 8:12**).
- I am the bread of life (**John 6:35, 51**).
- I am the resurrection and the life (**John 11:25-26**).
- I am the way and the truth and the life (**John 14:6**).
- I am the door; if any one enters by me, he will be saved (**John 10:7-9**).
- I am the good shepherd (**John 10:11**).



- Other prophets brought us words from God, but Jesus is called the Word of God. What does this mean?

Answer: It implies that he is not just a messenger but the source of the message as well.



- It has been said that the only reasonable conclusion we can make about someone who makes incredible claims such as these, is that he is either a liar, a lunatic or he is actually who he said he was. What do you think?

5. Last journey to Jerusalem

- What similarities can you see between Jesus' final destination in Jerusalem and God's request for Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac?

Answers:

- Both events happened on the same mountain.
- In both cases, the sacrifice was to be a long awaited and precious son.
- Both Isaac and Jesus submitted themselves to the will of their loving fathers.
- The son, in both cases, carried wood (the means of death) up to the place of sacrifice.
- With Isaac, a ram (the first lamb) was provided in his place. With Jesus, the 'Lamb of God' (the final lamb) was provided and he takes the place of us all.

- What was the significance of the timing of these events within the Passover celebrations?

Answer: The Passover celebrates the time when a lamb was killed, whose blood was then wiped on the wooden lintels of the houses, providing a great deliverance from slavery for the people of God.

- Jesus must have known that he would be betrayed by one of his disciples and abandoned by most of the rest. Why did he allow himself to be surrounded by such unreliable people?

Answer: Perhaps the disciples represent us, as ordinary (rather than heroic) people, who are later transformed by God's power into men of God. This gives us hope that the same can happen to us today.

6. Death on a cross

- Can you remember which details of the crucifixion were prophesied by the Old Testament prophets?

Answer: The Messiah's hands were pierced, his bones were not broken, his garments were gambled for, he was given vinegar to drink, he was tortured, spat upon, betrayed by one of his disciples, rejected and mocked. They said, "He trusts in the LORD; let the LORD rescue and deliver him". Despite all that happened to him, he did not open his mouth or resist and finally he cried out, expressing his experience of agony and abandonment.

- We often focus on the physical pain of Jesus on the cross, but the anguished cry at the end: “Why have you abandoned me?” addressed to the Father, points to a different dimension of torment. What was this?
Answer: This was the anguish of separation between the Father and the Son. The eternal and intimate relationship had been severed.

Notes

A question that can sometimes arise at this point is: ‘If you believe that Jesus was God, then at the crucifixion, God must have died?’ In response, we can refer to the picture that has been built in the last three episodes of the Father and the Son. The deeper unpacking of this happens in the next session, so it may be good to defer discussion on this.

- What was the significance of the temple curtain being ripped in two?
Answer: It is the curtain that separates the presence of God from the people. With the debt finally and fully paid by the Messiah on the cross, there is now no longer any need for the curtain.
- How can the sacrifice of one, cancel the guilt of all who believe?
Answer: In the Old Testament, we see the lamb taking the place of the people (substitution) and cancelling their guilt. This ritual points towards the ‘One’ who will come and once and for all cancel the punishment due to all men. The guilt of one (Adam) opened the door for all to sin; the sacrifice of the ‘One’ (the only fully pure One) provides freedom from sin for all who put their trust in him.

7. Risen from the grave!



- Who was the first to discover that the tomb was empty and to see the resurrected Jesus?
Answer: Mary Magdalen.

- Most of his disciples, who were witnesses to the resurrection, were martyred for their Christian faith. If they had concocted this story, do you think that they would have been ready to die for it?
- Would you be prepared to die for something you knew to be false?
Answer: No-one of sound mind would die for a lie.
- The resurrection is evidence to us of Jesus’ power over death, sin and Satan. Why is this guarantee so important for us to know?





Answer: These are the three big inescapable realities we all have to face and for which we have no human answers: the inevitability and finality of death, the fact that we have all fallen short of the standard of heaven, and the strong power of Satan and his demons. To see all these major obstacles overcome in one event, is a huge faith-builder for us.

Finishing Up

Here are two ideas that can be explored together after the discussion:

7

1. This is an ideal opportunity to offer to pray for healing or deliverance with the participants. You could say something like:

“The authority that Jesus demonstrated over demons, evil spirits, sickness, disease and even death, he gave to his disciples and then to all those who believe in his name, all the way down through history to us here today. Are there any needs in these areas that you have in your life (or anyone close to you) that we can pray for together?”

2. The finale of this episode is resurrection – which is the guarantee, not only of freedom from the power of death, but also the chance of a new beginning and new creation. Consider asking:

“What if you had a chance to start again with a clean sheet, unhindered by your past mistakes and experiences? Would you take it?”

If possible, take some time to thank the Lord together for his resurrection and the promise and possibility of new life that it gives us.

Encourage each one, in the next few days, to check through the summary of the Messianic prophecies found at the end of ‘Notes from the Journey’ for this episode (also see below).

Verses to read in preparation for the next session – John 1-17.

FollowUp

Some of the prayer needs, mentioned above, may need exploring in another context. However, most of Jesus' miracles were done in public, so try to follow this example if at all possible. Maybe there will be family members who you can visit to pray with for healing.

There is a huge amount of information and many challenging issues in this episode, so be prepared to follow this up individually as necessary.

7

Summary of the main Messianic prophecies

Old Testament references are given with the New Testament fulfilment in green.

1. His genealogical line and birth

- Seed of Abraham – **Genesis 22:18** – **Matthew 1:1**
- Son of Isaac – **Genesis 21:12** – **Luke 3:23-34**
- From the house of David – **1 Chronicles 17:11-14** – **Luke 3:23-31**
- Born of a virgin – **Isaiah 7:14** – **Matthew 1:18-25**
- Born in Bethlehem – **Micah 5:2** – **Matthew 2:1,4-8**
- Presented with gifts – **Psalms 72:10** – **Matthew 2:1-12**

2. His ministry

- He will be a Prophet – **Deuteronomy 18:18** – **John 6:14**
- He will be a Priest – **Psalms 110:4** – **Hebrews 3:1 & Hebrews 5:5-6**
- He will be a Judge – **Isaiah 11:4 & Isaiah 33:22** – **John 5:30 & 2 Timothy 4:1**
- He will be a King – **Psalms 2:6 & Zechariah 9:9** – **John 18:33-38**
- He will have a special anointing of the Holy Spirit – **Isaiah 11:2 & Isaiah 61:1-2** – **Matthew 3:16-17 & Luke 4:15-21**
- He will be preceded by a messenger – **Isaiah 40:3** – **Matthew 3:1-3 & Matthew 11:10**
- His ministry will begin in Galilee – **Isaiah 9:1-2** – **Matthew 4:12-16**
- His ministry will be one of miracles – **Isaiah 35:5-6** – **Matthew 11:4-6**
- He will teach in parables – **Psalms 78:2** – **Matthew 13:34-35**
- He will enter Jerusalem on a donkey – **Zechariah 9:9** – **Matthew 21:6-11**
- He will be a stumbling block to the Jews – **Psalms 118:22, Isaiah 8:14** – **1 Peter 2:8 & Romans 9:32-33**

3. His death and resurrection

- He will be betrayed by a friend – **Psalm 41:9** – **Matthew 26:49-50**
- He will be sold for 30 pieces of silver – **Zechariah 11:12-13** – **Matthew 26:15 & Matthew 27:3-7**
- His disciples will be scattered – **Zechariah 13:7** – **Matthew 26:31**
- He will be silent before his accusers – **Isaiah 53:7** – **Matthew 27:12-14**
- He will be wounded and bruised – **Isaiah 53:5** – **Matthew 26:67 & Matthew 27:26**
- He will be mocked – **Psalm 22:7-8** – **Matthew 27:29-31**
- His hands and his feet will be pierced – **Psalm 22:16 & Zechariah 12:10** – **Luke 23:33 & John 20:25**
- He will be crucified with thieves – **Isaiah 53:12** – **Matthew 27:38**
- His garments will be divided up and lots will be cast for them – **Psalm 22:18** – **John 19:23-24**
- He will give a forsaken cry – **Psalm 22:1** – **Matthew 27:46**
- His bones will not be broken – **Psalm 34:20** – **John 19:33,36**
- He will be buried in a rich man's tomb – **Isaiah 53:9** – **Matthew 27:57-60**
- He will rise from the dead – **Psalm 16:10 & Psalm 118:18** – **Matthew 28:6**

8 The Messiah & the Father

Core of the Story:

At this stage in Al Massira we explore the mystery of the relationship between the Father and the Son. This is done mainly through the writings of John the apostle. We have been laying the foundations of understanding this relationship since the Moses episode, but here this divine relationship is unpacked in detail. This complex and sensitive area is vital for a better understanding of both the nature of God as well as the invitation he gives us to become not servants or slaves, but children in his family. As we explore the divine relationship, we also look at how we relate to the Lord as our guide, our good shepherd, and how to know him more deeply through prayer and reading his Word.

Setting the Scene

LOOKING BACK: In the last session we looked at the life, the work, the death and the resurrection of the Messiah.

- What did you hear for the first time about the Messiah in this session?
- Did you find anything hard to understand or to accept?

LOOKING FORWARD:

- How can Jesus call God his Father? What could be the meaning of this?
- In what ways do you think God wants us to relate to him, if at all?



Film

So you call yourself the Son of God

JOHN 14:8-13

Jesus continually referred to God as his Father, revealing to us that at the very heart of God, there exists an unbreakable bond of relationship and unity.

Understanding the Father and the Son

JOHN 1:1-14, JOHN 3:34-36, JOHN 6:45-46 & JOHN 17:1-5

The relationship that Jesus describes is distinct and different from any human father/son relationship. This uncreated relationship has always existed, is eternal and is held together with a bond of everlasting love and purpose. It is through encountering the Son that we can intimately know the Father.

Good fathers and bad fathers!

JOHN 5:19-23

The relationship of Jesus and his Father was perfect, yet our image of fatherhood is often tainted by the experiences we have of our earthly fathers. However, our human understanding of fathers and sons can help us to understand something of this divine relationship.

Born into a new family

JOHN 3:16-17, 1 JOHN 4:10 & JOHN 1:12-13

The relationship between Jesus and his Father is not closed. The divine plan of redemption does not just save us from the penalty of our sin but extends an invitation to us to join this relationship and become beloved children in God's family.

The Lord my shepherd

PSALM 23 & JOHN 10:7-16

Jesus declares that he is the Good Shepherd and the fulfilment of the most well-known Psalm (**Psalm 23**). He comes to lead and guide us into the fullness of his provision, care, life and purpose.

The garden, the vine and the branches

JOHN 15:1-16

The parable of the vineyard describes how we can relate to Jesus and the Father. It illuminates for us our life's purpose to glorify God and bear him fruit that will last for eternity. We also learn about prayer and how to nourish ourselves with God's Word.

Exploring Together

This episode covers what perhaps is the most contentious concept in Al Massira, that the Messiah is the Son of God the Father. We do not have to defend this concept. Indeed, an understanding of this probably comes more through revelation than academic study. We just need to reveal that this is a consistent teaching that is woven step-by-step through the whole of Scripture, rather than a deviant heresy tacked on at the end. Let us allow the Bible to speak for itself. When the understanding of the Father and Son does begin to emerge, it opens up to us the incredible news that we can become children in God's family and he can be our Father also. This is explained in the second part of the episode. Try not to spend all your discussion time on the first part and not get to the 'good news' at the end.

8

1. So you call yourself the Son of God



- What was the real reason that Jesus was crucified – according to the Bible?

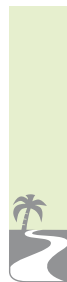
Answer: Because Jesus associated himself with God, calling himself the Son of God. Indeed, if Jesus had been only human, then this claim would be completely blasphemous and, according to religious law, death would have been the correct punishment.



- Jesus as the Son of God is a hard concept to understand. However, why would it be helpful for us to be able to see a representation of God in the flesh? What benefits are there in this?

Answer: In our sinful condition, man cannot see the Father. Therefore seeing God in the flesh helps us to better understand his nature, hear his words and model our lives on how he lived.

2. Understanding the Father and the Son



- In what ways is the heavenly Father/Son relationship completely different from a human relationship?

Answer: The heavenly relationship has always existed, is eternal and is held together in a perfect bond of love and purpose.

Notes

In the Arabic scriptures, the word for Son of God is not 'bin Allah' (bin is usually limited to describing human relationships). Instead 'Ibn Allah' is used. Ibn is the word that can describe non-human relationships and wider associations, for example 'Ibn el Nil' (Son of the Nile) is used as a term for an Egyptian.



- Can this relationship include humanity?

Answer: The desire of God is to share this relationship with mankind.



- From the words of Jesus, what do you think is his most important role? Is he still doing it now?

3. Good fathers and bad fathers!



- In what ways can the human father/son relationship point towards the heavenly Father/Son relationship?

Answer: The father instructs the son and the son loves, obeys and trusts the father. The son bears the characteristics of the father and upholds his honour. The father leads and gives authority to the son.

8



- How does the experience of our human father/son relationships give us problems when we look at the relationship between God the Father and God the Son?

Answer: Our human relationships are limited within time, and because they are tainted with sin, fail to describe the perfection that exists in the heavenly relationship.

4. Born into a new family



- Real compassion is never impersonal. In what ways does God show us he loves us through the Messiah his Son?

Answer: Not only are we given a way to escape from the power of our sinful nature, he then adopts us to become a part of his family. An intimate relationship is restored.



- What requirement do you need to satisfy to be a part of God's family?

Answer: Just to believe and put your trust fully in the Son who has been sent.

5. The Lord my Shepherd



- What is the aim of the thief in our lives? How have we seen this played out?

Answer: To steal, to kill and to destroy.

- What does Jesus, the Good Shepherd, say he will do for us?

Answer: He will save us, he will nourish us, and he will bring life in all its fullness.



- If we have been welcomed as a son or daughter into God's family, how should this change the way we live?

Answer: Our lives should be lived to honour and serve the one who has given us this great privilege.

6. The garden, the vine and the branches



- What do you feel is the most important message of this parable?
- Do you think that God has a plan for your life?

8



- How does the message of the vineyard clarify our purpose in life?

Answer: It encourages us to live close to him, remaining in his great love, and it teaches us to extend this love to all around us. It gives us a life-purpose to which we can dedicate ourselves, and if necessary, something worth dying for!

Finishing Up

The second part of this episode deals with two of the deepest needs that exist in the heart of every man and woman. You can make these (and the relevant scriptures) the basis of a time of prayer together:

- 1. The need to receive love, approval and belong in a family.** Our core identity will always flow from this, whether our life-experience has been good or bad. Most of us come from families that are dysfunctional to some degree. However, regardless of our experience, to know that our Father in heaven loves us completely (despite knowing all about us) and invites us to become his son or daughter, is the most freeing and healing experience we can ever know.
- 2. The search for significance and life-purpose.** We all get distracted by lesser goals in life, such as wealth, power, fame, pleasure and our own plans or grand ideas. The problem with these is that in the end they will all crumble and leave us empty. However, our Father in heaven has personally chosen and selected us to be involved in his heavenly plan, and to be a part of building something that will last for ever. This revelation is the door to finding a fulfilment that never tarnishes or fades.

As you pray together in this, you may find that the Lord gives words, scriptures, pictures or prophecies for each other. This can be of real encouragement to each other. Encourage the participants to refer to the extra sections in 'Notes from the Journey' on the meaning of prayer and how to use the Bible.

Passages to read in preparation for the next session – Acts 1-2.

Follow Up

Praying as outlined above can be continued in any one-to-one meetings you may have. Take time to ask the Lord if he has a word or promise for you to give to each of the participants.

8

9 The Story of the Messiah & the Holy Spirit

Core of the Story:

In this episode, seen through the eyes of Peter, we recount the story of Pentecost and witness the transformation of the followers of the Messiah through the coming of the Holy Spirit. We look at the person of the Holy Spirit and his role in our lives to both transform and empower us. Lastly, we conclude Sessions 7, 8 and 9 with an explanation of the divine relationship: the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Setting the Scene

LOOKING BACK: In the last episode we looked at the relationship between the Messiah and the Father.

- This is a challenging concept. Do you feel you can understand it more than before?
- What do you think about the invitation we have been given to become a part of the divine family?

LOOKING FORWARD:

- What do you think happened to transform the fearful and unreliable group of Jesus' disciples into a dynamic group of people that changed the shape of the Roman Empire?
- Who, or what, do you think is the Holy Spirit?



Film

Jesus is alive!

JOHN 16:7-14, LUKE 24:36-49 & ACTS 1:8-9

Jesus appeared to his followers for 40 days after the resurrection before ascending to heaven. During this time he commissioned them to take the message of his Kingdom to all nations, but first they needed to wait in Jerusalem until they were filled with the Holy Spirit.

The day of Pentecost

ACTS 2:1-41 & JOEL 2:28-32

The Holy Spirit came upon the followers of Jesus on the day of Pentecost and Peter boldly preached to the masses gathered in Jerusalem. Many responded to this message and followed the Messiah.

The transformation of Peter

LUKE 22:31-62 & ACTS 2:14

Peter was an impulsive and fearful man, yet on the day of Pentecost he was filled with the Holy Spirit and transformed from a failure into a man whom God could really use.

So who exactly is the Holy Spirit?

JOHN 14:26 & 1 CORINTHIANS 6:19-20

Looking through the Holy Scriptures we can see the Holy Spirit at work on many occasions beginning at the creation. It is the Spirit of God who is the power that enables God's servants to live righteously and testify to God's grace.

The work of the Holy Spirit in us

LUKE 3:16

The Holy Spirit is at work in our lives from spiritual birth and through the changing and transforming of our lives. He equips us to serve God faithfully and is the guarantee of our future destination.

Father, Son and Holy Spirit

JOHN 15:26-27

God has revealed himself as One God: the Almighty Father, the Messiah Son and the Holy Spirit united in an unbreakable and eternal bond of relationship and purpose.

Exploring Together

In this session it will be good to draw out that for us to live a righteous life before God and to do his work we need a power that is utterly beyond ourselves. We will all have experiences of failure in both these areas. Personal recognition of this can awaken an interest in the offer of getting to know the Holy Spirit and being filled and empowered by him. Make sure you don't forget to cover the significance of the 'sign' of Pentecost: that the 'Good News' is for all peoples, languages and nations.

The last point in this episode is a summing up of the triune nature of God. Don't feel you have to explain and convince everyone of this truth. It is a deep mystery and will take time to begin to grasp. Let us allow the Lord himself to reveal this truth into people's hearts in his own timing.

1. Jesus is alive!



- What would the coming of the Holy Spirit enable the followers of Jesus to do?

Answer: To be filled with God's power enabling them to boldly testify to the Messiah.

9



- When Jesus appeared to his followers it was as a physical body and not as a spirit. What do you think was the importance of this?

Answer: To show the physical reality of the resurrection and of the new world that is to come.

2. The day of Pentecost



- Why do you think that the Spirit came during the feast of Pentecost? Why was that day significant?

Answer: People gathered from many nations to celebrate the giving of the ten commandments and remember God coming down to confuse people's languages at Babel. So God was showing that the Holy Spirit had been given to write God's laws on people's hearts and to reverse the curse of Babel. It was also the festival of harvest and new beginnings.



- The people heard the message of the Messiah in their own language. Why was this noteworthy?

Answer: The time had come for the full measure of God's plan to be revealed – the Message and the Spirit would not just be given to one nation but to all tribes, languages and nations. This miracle opens the door to a new phase where all people can hear the message in their own language.

3. The transformation of Peter



- What do you think of Peter's behaviour before the death of Jesus?



- Why do you think that Jesus chose these simple, unimportant men, who were such apparent failures, to build his church?

Answer: So that the church (or God's Kingdom on earth) would be built not upon human strength and wisdom but upon the power of God instead. (1 Corinthians 1:25-2:5)

4. So who exactly is the Holy Spirit?



- What are some examples of the activity of the Holy Spirit?

Answers:

- The Spirit of God can be seen in the creation (Genesis 1:1-2).
- Pharaoh recognised the indwelling of the Spirit of God in Joseph (Genesis 41:38-40).
- The Spirit of God gave Bezalel creative ability to build the Tabernacle (Exodus 31:1-4).
- The Spirit of God came upon Samson giving him great strength. (Judges 14:6).
- King David declares that there is nowhere we can go to escape the Spirit (Psalm 139:1-15).
- Mary through a miracle of the Holy Spirit became pregnant. (Luke 1:35).

9



- Jesus said that it is better for us that he departs so that the Spirit can come. What do you think he meant by this? (John 16:7)

Answer: Jesus was limited when he was living as a man on earth. When the Spirit comes he is unlimited and can be active anywhere and everywhere all at the same time.

- What is the difference between the work of the Holy Spirit in the Old and New Testaments?

Answer: It is the same but after Pentecost the Holy Spirit is poured out upon all mankind, not just special individuals or certain groups of people.

5. The work of the Holy Spirit in our lives



- What are some of the ways that the Holy Spirit can work in our lives?

Answers:

- He helps us to believe in the Messiah and convicts us of sin and unbelief (John 16:7-9).
- It is through the Spirit that we can call upon Jesus to be our Lord and be a part of His family (1 Corinthians 12:3 & John 3:5-8).

- The Spirit fills our lives with righteousness, joy, peace and hope (**Romans 14:17 & Romans 15:13**).
- The Holy Spirit is our guide and helps us to live in the likeness of the Messiah (**Galatians 5:16-23**).
- The Spirit gives us the ability to serve God by giving a range of supernatural gifts (**1 Corinthians 12:4-11**).
- When we open the door of our lives, he comes to fill us and live inside us with the same power that raised Jesus from the grave (**Romans 8:11 & Acts 2:4**).
- The Spirit reminds us of Jesus' words (**John 14:26 & 2 Peter 1:20-21**).
- The Spirit is the guarantee of the heavenly destination of all believers (**2 Corinthians 5:1-5**).



9



- What do you think is the most important role that the Holy Spirit plays in our lives?

6. Father, Son and Holy Spirit



- What do we learn from the meaning of the first word for God in the first verse in the Bible 'Elohim'?

Answer: 'Elohim' is a plural noun which is always used with a singular verb – this helps to build the understanding that the unity of God is complex rather than simple.

- What do you make of the countless examples of the LORD appearing to prophets (and other people) in the Old Testament. In other places, we are told that no-one can see God and live. How can we reconcile these two apparently contradictory facts?

Answer: We can understand this as we understand that Jesus the Son is the visible

Notes

There are three families of pictures which, if used together, can help to give us a balanced illustration of the triune nature where the one-ness and the three-ness are given equal weight:

1. Three aspects or forms – Water (which appears as a liquid, ice or steam) or the Sun (the star itself, heat and light).
2. The dynamic picture – The tree (consisting of root, stem and branch).
3. The alliance – (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob).

Another key picture here is from **John 17**:

- The Son glorifies the Father by obeying him.
- The Father glorifies the Son by exalting him.
- The Holy Spirit glorifies the Father and the Son by revealing them to the believer.





image of the Father. No human can see God and live; his purity and holiness would destroy us. But in the Messiah Son, God comes close to us and we can know and meet him. **(Colossians 1:15)**

Finishing Up

If you can, try and take time to pray together. This prayer could include either or both of the following ideas:

1. Take some time in silence together. Invite the Lord through his Spirit to speak to each one in the silence. After five minutes (or more), take time for each one to share back what they sensed the Lord was saying.
2. This episode is about a man who was transformed from failure into being a man that God could use powerfully. Peter was unable to change himself; he needed an external power to do this. The message of Pentecost is about God doing what man cannot. Invite each one (in pairs or as a group) to call out to the Lord through his Spirit to come and change one aspect of our lives and make them into something beautiful for him.

9

Passages to read in preparation for the next session – Matthew 5-7.

Follow Up

This episode concludes the third quarter which, among other things, covers the triune nature of God. You may want to check with each one how they are managing with these challenging revelations. You may be able to answer some of their questions or pray for God to reveal his identity to them.

10 Living with the Messiah

Core of the Story:

Here we unpack the key messages of Jesus from the Sermon on the Mount. Our purpose here is to make clear that following the Messiah is not just a mental acceptance of truth, but also a transformation of our inner motivations and our outward behaviour. As James declares: “You will know my faith from my actions”. These are important truths to begin to understand, even before we fully decide to follow the Messiah.

Setting the Scene

LOOKING BACK: Last time, we looked at the Day of Pentecost and the beginning of the ministry of the disciples after they had been filled with the Holy Spirit.

- What do you think about the Holy Spirit now?
- Do you think he can do the same things today?

LOOKING FORWARD:

- What effect should knowing the truth have upon our behaviour?
- How can we purify the inner motivations of our hearts?



Film

Good fruit – bad fruit?

MATTHEW 7:16-20, MATTHEW 23:25-28 & JAMES 2:14-18

Jesus teaches us that you can know the condition of a tree by inspecting its fruit. The fruit will always reflect the quality of the tree itself. Our lives are exactly the same; our outward behaviour will show the kind of faith that we really have.

What is your motivation?

MARK 12:28-31 & JOHN 13:34-35

Jesus challenges us about our heart motivation for serving the Lord. He shows us that LOVE is the key, both in our relationship with the Lord and also with our neighbours.

A radical lifestyle

MATTHEW 5:21-48 & JAMES 3:4-10

Jesus confronts us with the hidden attitudes of our hearts and minds, how they influence the way we behave. He encourages us to change the way we think and then to live in a different way, to develop today the habits of heart, mind and body that will fit us to live in the new world that is to come. He even tells us to love our enemies!

10

Remaining pure before God

MARK 7:18-23

Jesus clarifies for us that we are polluted before God through what comes from within us – the evil thoughts and desires of our hearts and minds. It is not what we touch on the outside or what we put into our mouths; purity and righteousness only come from within.

Rewards in heaven – or on earth?

MATTHEW 6:1-18

Jesus encourages us to ensure that the practice of our faith is first personal and then public; when we give, when we pray and when we fast. We should do these things primarily in secret and not as a show of pride before men. Then we will receive our reward from the Lord.

Suffering – the path to maturity

MATTHEW 16:24-26 & JAMES 1:2-4

Jesus teaches us that to follow him we must daily pick up our cross and be ready to endure sufferings and hardship. In the writings of James, we learn that the fruit of our perseverance is maturity in the faith.

Exploring Together

This sermon contains the most radical lifestyle teaching in the history of this planet, and speaks to all cultures today as much as it did in the Jewish context 2000 years ago. We want the participants to be astounded, deeply challenged and inspired by these practical life attitudes and goals. Our shame culture encourages there to be a great difference between the private and the public, the hidden and the revealed, between what goes on inside our hearts and minds and what we choose to reveal to others. Jesus teaches a deep level of personal integrity (the unity of what we are on the inside and outside) and we want to arouse a desire for this. The cost of following the Messiah will be explored more fully in the next episode, but it is recommended to start the discussion on this important subject here.

Notes

Many people today still try to present an image of religious commitment and yet this somehow does not match up with either their outward behaviour or what is happening on the inside. Therefore, this message is very pertinent and will no doubt expose some raw edges, as it did amongst the religious hypocrites of Jesus' day. However, at the same time, people will easily recognise the authority behind this deep teaching.

10

1. Good fruit – bad fruit?



- What do you think of people who are hypocrites, who believe and say one thing and then behave in a different way? Do you respect them?



- What is the purpose of doing good works? Does it make God love us more?

Answer: Doing good works does not make God love us more, but it does demonstrate how much we love him.

- If we have received God's salvation through Jesus' death, how can we then practically show that we are his child?

Answer: By living every moment of our lives for the glory and honour of his wonderful name.

2. What is your motivation?



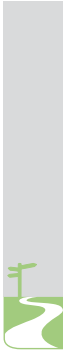
- What are some of the wrong motivations we have for worshipping God?

Answer: Duty, fear and pride.



- What are some of the problems that come when we worship God with wrong motives?

Answer: Dead rituals, empty religion, an absence of inner peace, deeply misunderstanding the one who truly loves us, hypocrisy, selfishness and arrogance.



- Why did Jesus say that love is the most important heart motivation in our relationship with God?

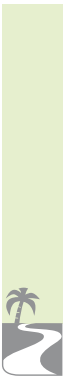
Answer: Because love is the only free response: it cannot be forced or extorted; therefore, it is the true mark of a real relationship.

- Sometimes it feels much harder to love our neighbour than it does to love the Lord. How can we find the strength to love our neighbour as ourselves?

Answer: We draw encouragement from the one who showed us how to love our enemies when he forgave those who were hammering nails into his hands.

10

3. A radical lifestyle



- We can sometimes hide our sins from other people, but can we hide them from God?

Answer: Of course not. We all know how ashamed we would be if our thoughts were to be placed on a video screen for all to see, yet God in heaven sees all things clearly.

- Controlling the tongue, telling the truth, letting our 'yes' be yes and our 'no' be no – Is this really important? Why?

Answer: Jesus declares that he is the 'Truth'. God himself is both the source and standard of absolute truth. Every time we are deceitful or bend the truth, we reject this aspect of his holy nature and prevent him from shining his truth through us into a world lost in lies and darkness.



- Why do you think that the Lord is interested not just that we act in the right way, but also that we think in the right way?

Answer: Bad behaviour (sin) always begins with a thought, idea or temptation. It is then given practical expression. If we can, through God's help, gain mastery over our thoughts then we will be able to live in a way that honours the Lord. **(Luke 6:45)**



- Jesus not only encouraged us to love our enemies, he demonstrated it in his own life. Why should we even attempt this almost impossible task, and how do we do it?

Answer: Jesus is our greatest example of how to live well and even die well. He loved us while we were still his enemies and he wants us to reflect his heart in this, that those who are enemies now may become brothers through our example of supernatural love. Through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit we have been given the power to do what is impossible for man.

4. Remaining pure before God



- Which do you think is most important in the eyes of God: the external observance of rules or the internal control of our hearts and minds? Can you explain why you think this?



- How do you think God helps us to control our thoughts and desires? Does the Holy Spirit help in this?

Answer: The Holy Spirit gradually shows us where our thoughts are unworthy of him, and he gives us the power to change the direction of our thought life. Similarly, the Holy Spirit educates and enlightens our conscience, especially as we read the Scriptures.

5. Rewards – in heaven, or on earth?



- Why is it important to exercise these expressions of devotion primarily in private?

Answer: Because they are expressions of love for an audience of one, the Lord himself. If they are for people, then our motivation is only to gain the respect and approval of man. The Lord says that this will be the only reward we get; it will hold no value for him.

- Is it not good to practice these things in public to give a good example to others?

Answer: There are times when we pray and fast together and in joining together we encourage each other and our devotion has great power before the Lord. However, if our heart motive is a spirit of competition or point-scoring then our actions lose all their value.



- What is the inner motivation that Jesus is trying to focus on in this?

Answers:

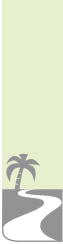
- The Lord is always seeking for us to grow our relationship with him.



This is the most valuable thing we will ever have in life.

- Purely outward expressions of devotion to the Lord have no value in our personal relationship with the Lord. In fact they are hypocritical and actually hinder our walk with the Lord.

6. Suffering – the path to maturity



- Jesus teaches about suffering many times in the Gospels. Why does he do this?

Answer: From the days of Adam, we know that there is a battle going on between those who are obedient and those who are rebellious. Even though they know the truth, many will still reject it and consequently also reject those who follow it. Sometimes, this means we will face suffering in order to follow the truth. Jesus wants us to know this clearly before we start on the journey of faith.

10



- How do we become more like Jesus when we pass through such experiences?

Answer: Jesus himself passed through many kinds of trouble and hardship. We can have the privilege of sharing with him in these sufferings (**Philipians 3:10**). Times of persecution force us to evaluate the importance of our relationship with the Lord. If it is something that we don't value very much, then we will discard it quickly and easily, but if it is something we value greatly, we will never forsake it.

Finishing Up

Perhaps you can finish this time by getting someone to read out the Beatitudes (copied below) and then spend a little time in prayer together asking the Lord to:

- Help our outward behaviour to truly reflect what we believe and help us to bear good fruit.
- Transform our inner heart motivation – in worship, serving God and our relationships. That our efforts may come not from duty, fear and pride, rather, that they may spring from the great love of God.
- Renew and cleanse our hearts and minds so that our thoughts, words and actions come from a pure heart.
- Help keep our thoughts pure and our hearts humble.

- Help us in our words to be truth-tellers and encouragers, and not full of negative gossip.
- Help us to forgive those that have wronged us and love even our enemies.
- Help us to practice our faith for the eyes and honour of God, not to prove something to other people.
- Help us to be ready to face trouble and difficulty in the strength of his grace so that we may become mature in our faith.

NB - You could even print out this list and the Beatitudes below to help each one in the group with these prayers.

Passages to read in preparation for the next session – Acts 9, 13-17 and 22.

10

Follow Up

The next episode is where we bring the challenge of deciding to follow the Messiah. We encourage you to take special time in prayer and fasting for each participant in preparation for this important stage.

The Beatitudes

MATTHEW 5:3-12

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.

*Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

*Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say
all kinds of evil against you because of me.*

*Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way
they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*

First Steps with the Messiah

11

Core of the Story:

In this episode, through the story of Paul's conversion and transformation, we look at what it means to follow the Messiah. We look at who this is for, the cost we first have to count, what happens and how we take the first step. By this stage, there has been time to acquire an overview of the whole message of the Messiah and see how chronology, signs and prophecies are all fulfilled in the coming of Jesus and his life, death and resurrection. It is in this episode that we encourage the participants to begin to consider their response to this message and alert them to the consequences of ignoring it.

Setting the Scene

LOOKING BACK: In the last episode we looked at the famous 'Sermon on the Mount' and discovered how our heart motives and behaviour have to change when we decide to follow the Messiah.

- What do you think was the most challenging part of this message?
- How easy is it to change our behaviour in these ways?

LOOKING FORWARD:

- What do we know about the Apostle Paul?
- How can we be sure that we are safe from God's judgement?



Film

Saul who became Paul

ACTS 9:1-18

As the followers of Jesus began to fearlessly share the message, there was opposition. Stephen became the first martyr after a crowd had been incited by someone called Saul. This angry man, who was one of the chief persecutors of the growing band of believers, had a powerful encounter with the Lord, which changed the course of his life and even his name.

So what is faith?

HEBREWS 11:1 & MATTHEW 16:13-17

Our first step begins with a revelation of the Almighty God and his Son the Messiah. The journey continues as we walk in obedience and relationship with the Lord, trusting in his amazing grace and work of transformation.

Counting the cost

MARK 8:34-38, MATTHEW 10:34-37, MARK 10:29-31 & PHILIPPIANS 1:18-21

To be a follower of Jesus brings many blessings into our lives (the grace of God, forgiveness, inner peace, membership in God's family and a purpose in life). However, Jesus also promises us hardship and suffering. He urges us to count the cost of this before deciding to follow him.

11

Two kingdoms

COLOSSIANS 1:12-14

When we follow the Messiah we are delivered into his Kingdom from the kingdom of this world which is controlled by demons, spiritual powers and Satan himself. We have been offered citizenship in the eternal and unshakeable Kingdom of the Messiah, of which the resurrected Jesus was the first fruit, and of which the fullness is yet to come.

Who is this Kingdom for?

GALATIANS 3:26-29 & REVELATION 7:9-10

This Kingdom is where people from all tribes, tongues, cultures and nations will worship the Messiah in unity of heart, mind and purpose.

Entering the Kingdom?

ROMANS 10:9-13 & MATTHEW 11:28-30

This is the invitation given to all people to enter the Kingdom of the Messiah and this is how we take the first step.

Exploring Together

The story of the transformation of Paul yields many useful avenues to explore in the discussion. These include the possibility of redemption for those who have vehemently opposed the message, God's calling on our lives, and the process through which we come to faith. It is important that the participants wrestle with

and understand the potential cost for those who come to faith. “Daily take up your cross” is what Jesus summons us to do and this is a part of real faith. The message breaking out of the Jewish context and its destination to all peoples and nations is looked into here and in the next session. The Gospel is designed for all cultures, not just some. This idea is not new; it is embedded in God’s heart from the beginning and revealed through the signs of the prophets. Please do not neglect to emphasise the consequences of rejecting the message of the Messiah and his offer of salvation.

1. Saul who became Paul



- Why do you think Saul was so upset with the early followers of the Messiah?

Answer: Not understanding the prophetic signs, he felt that the purity of the Jewish religion was being polluted.

- What happened that made him change and become one of them?

Answer: A direct encounter with Jesus.

11



- How could God choose and use someone who had caused so much damage to the followers of Jesus?

Answer: God’s redemptive power is able to cover the vilest of sins, and as Jesus said, those who are forgiven much, love much. **(Luke 7:47)**

- Is there any degree of sin that is beyond God’s grace and redemption?

2. So what is faith?



- Is faith simply obeying the rules or is it a deep understanding, or knowledge, or is it something else?

Answer: Real faith is a confidence built upon the revelation of the Messiah who God has sent, his person, his work of redemption and his offer of salvation to all.



- How can we be certain of the message that we have been given?

Answer: Perhaps the best way is to test him according to his Word and ask him to reveal himself. **(Jeremiah 29:13, Luke 11:10)**

3. Counting the cost



- Why did Paul have to face so much suffering in his life?

Answer: Paul was used powerfully by the Lord to spread the message through the Roman Empire. However, this was not an easy journey; there was a personal price to pay.



- Why do you think that so many people through history have considered it an honour and privilege to embrace the cost of following the Messiah and sharing in his sufferings?
- What do you think Paul meant when he said “For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain”?

4. Two kingdoms



- What evidence do we see around us today of the rule of the enemy kingdom of darkness?
- What does the Messiah say that his Kingdom will be like?
Answer: A Kingdom of righteousness, joy, truth and light where he is King.

- What are the consequences of rejecting the message of the Messiah and his offer of salvation and redemption?
Answer: We will face God’s judgement according to our own deeds, and along with all those who reject him we will be punished through an eternal and painful separation from God and his mercy.

Notes

It may be worth noting that a rejection of the message of the Messiah, if it is to carry any integrity, inevitably also means a rejection of the signs of all the prophets, for they cannot be satisfactorily explained in any other way.

5. Who is this Kingdom for?

GALATIANS 3:26-29 & REVELATION 7:9-10



- True worship comes from the heart; the outward expression of worship is less important and can have great variation. Do you agree with this? Why or why not?



- How do we know that the Kingdom of the Messiah is for people from all backgrounds, cultures and nations?
Answers:
 - Through Old Testament prophecy – that the Spirit will be poured out on all people (**Joel 2:28**).
 - Through the actions of Jesus (the Samaritan woman – **John 4**) and his great commission (**Acts 1:8**).



- Through the ministry and teaching of Paul. (**Romans 15:19-20 & Galatians 3:27-29**)

6. Entering the Kingdom?

- What does Paul teach us we need to do in order to be saved and follow the Messiah?

Answers:

- **Repent:** Come to the Lord with a humble and repentant heart.
- **Trust:** Believe in the Messiah and his crucifixion, receiving forgiveness through his death and shed blood. Believe that in his resurrection from the grave we will find our own resurrection and eternal life.
- **Surrender:** Make the Messiah Lord over every aspect of our lives, yielding our future to him, and allowing him to show us the good plans and purpose he has prepared for our lives.
- **Testify:** Tell another person that you have taken this step and be baptized.
- **Receive:** Ask for, and receive the Holy Spirit.

11

“Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” (Matthew 11:28-30)

Finishing Up

In some situations you may have found that the group (or members of it) have already made a step of commitment to the Lord. However, we encourage you to suggest that each one considers their response to the Lord from the invitation given in the verse above before meeting for the last episode.

To finish the time we suggest that you read the parable of the Prodigal Son (**Luke 15:11-32**) and then pray together as you all consider the content and implications of this session.

Verses to read in preparation for the next session – Acts 2:42 to 8:3.

Follow Up

It will be good to connect with each one personally during the intervening days. Try to see if they understand the message that comes through Paul's life, the importance of the invitation, the consequences of taking it, and also of ignoring it.

12 The Fellowship of the Messiah

Core of the Story:

Starting with the first church that was born out of Peter's preaching at Pentecost, we explore the life of the Church – the Body of Christ. We look at what activities take place within a church and its role within the wider world. We also debunk some of the popular myths and misconceptions about the Church. We look at the Church as the 'Bride' of Christ and consider his future return. Lastly, we summarise the message of the Messiah and clarify what it means to be one of his followers. We renew the challenge to respond and invite the participants to begin a new, life-long journey with the Messiah.

Setting the Scene

LOOKING BACK: Last time we looked at the journey that Paul took from persecuting the church to becoming its foremost messenger. We suggest you decide which of the following two options to take depending on how the Spirit leads you:

1. We have taken time to consider the invitation given to us from Jesus (**Matthew 11:28-30**). Ask the group for feedback at this point, giving enough time for people to say what is on their hearts.

What is your response to this invitation?

If people reply to this question openly and positively then you could suggest taking time to pray a prayer of commitment together, using the following points to guide the prayer. It is preferable to invite them to pray out these points, rather than you doing it for them. Alternatively, you could leave this to the end of the meeting.

Trust – Believe in the Messiah and his crucifixion, receiving forgiveness through his death. Believe that in his resurrection from the grave we will find our own resurrection and eternal life.

Repent – Come to the Lord with a humble and repentant heart.

Surrender – Make the Messiah Lord over every aspect of our lives, yielding our future to him, and allowing him to show us the good plans and purposes he has prepared for our lives.

2. Ask the following review questions as normal:

- What surprised you from the episode about the Apostle Paul?
- Do you have any questions about this episode you would like to ask?

LOOKING FORWARD:

- What is your opinion of the Church?
- What do you think the Church should look like?



Film

12

The first church

ACTS 1:8 & ACTS 2:42-47

The church was first formed following the preaching of Peter at the time of Pentecost when 3000 people came to believe in the Messiah. A dynamic fellowship emerged, dedicated to glorifying the Lord and serving each other, even in the midst of persecution.

One body - many parts

ROMANS 12:4-8 & 1 CORINTHIANS 12:14-27

The church is likened to a body where all the different parts, roles and functions are coordinated and directed by Christ, who is the head.

Jews and Gentiles

1 CORINTHIANS 12:13

In the new covenant of the Messiah, all tribes, cultures and nations are equally welcome to come to him. We do not need to come to the Messiah through another culture. We can come to him directly as we are.

So what really happens in church?

1 PETER 2:4-10 & EPHESIANS 2:19-22

As believers we are being built as living stones into the household of God, all on the chief cornerstone of the Messiah. As we meet together, we engage in activities which are directed in three ways: upward (towards the Lord God); inward (our care for each other), and outward (our responsibility to the community and world around us).

The Bride of Christ

2 CORINTHIANS 11:2-3 & REVELATION 19:6-9

One of the titles of the Messiah is the 'Bridegroom'. He is the one who awaits his precious 'Bride', the Church, who is called to keep herself pure and ready, anticipating the day of his return.

The end of a journey, beginning of a new one

REVELATION 3:20 & JEREMIAH 29:11-13

We have come to the end of Al Massira, but it can now be the start of a new journey in fellowship with the Messiah.

Exploring Together

The beginning of this episode in the DVD draws a compelling picture of the church made up of many nations and backgrounds, sharing their lives together. This is indeed how God sees it. However, it is likely that we will have to contend with the broken image of the church that many people carry. As followers of the Messiah we must be open about the significant failures of the church throughout its history, and while these represent a small part of the overall witness, the failure was great and the consequences have been long-lasting. Our response, where these cases are brought up, needs to be a frank and clear recognition of the damage this has done to the name of Jesus as well as to the people on whom these failures were inflicted. If we deal with this in humility and openness, we will then have built a foundation upon which we can discuss clearly what the church is meant to look like.

Notes

Be aware that the subject of the 'church' can arouse strong negative reactions amongst people. History, politics and personal experience can all play a part in this, some perceptions will be inaccurate but some will come from real areas of failure. This episode is an attempt to present 'what the maker intended' for his church.

1. The first Church



- What do you think was special or unique about this early group of Messiah followers?
- What role do you think the Holy Spirit played in the forming of this first Church?

Answer: The Holy Spirit transformed a small group of insignificant people into a dynamic group who planted the church (with signs and wonders) throughout the Roman world.



- What is your impression of the Church today, and how does this compare with what we have read about the first Church?
- The Church throughout its history has sometimes lost the heart and spirit of the early believers and even acted in extremely un-Christ-like ways. What do you think went wrong?

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2. One body, many parts



- Which part of the body do you think you could be? What gifts has God endowed you with?



- Why do you think it is important that we are not all the same, all having identical gifts and roles?
- The head of the human body is connected through the nervous system directly to all the different parts of the body. What does this tell us about the body of Christ and how it should function?

Notes

Why are there so many denominations (or types of churches)? This is a valid question that, if asked, will need to be answered clearly. A positive answer is that there are many different expressions of church that together reflect the diversity of God's creation. However, a big part of the reason for this is division, pride, political power and control which are all offensive to God. Point people to the prayer of Jesus in **John 17**.

3. Jews and Gentiles

- Why is it important for us to be able to come directly to the Messiah from our own cultural background?

Answer: The message of the Messiah is designed to be freely given to all people equally. The gospel is like a seed which can enter any kind of soil and bear good fruit. We don't have to access the Messiah through another culture or language. We can all go directly to him. He understands all languages and cultures equally.

Notes

In many contexts, it is assumed that for a person to choose to follow the Messiah, he will automatically embrace a new culture and reject his original one. Scriptures clearly teach spiritual conversion rather than cultural conversion since the message is uniquely designed for all cultures.



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- If all the stones that are being built into this new spiritual house are shaped differently (i.e. coming from different peoples, cultures and nations), how does this enrich the body of the Messiah?

Answer: It can become the one place in the world where there is real reconciliation between the divided peoples of the world. It also brings the blessing of diversity. We can see that God has blessed everyone with different gifts and flavours. They are like the different spices that come together in harmony to make a great meal.



4. So what really happens in church?

EPHESIANS 2:19-22

- What are some of the main activities that should happen within the church community?

Answer: Worship, celebration of Christ's sacrifice, prayer, hearing God's Word, the giving and sharing of resources, meeting together and the witness of Christ to the world.



- Why is each of these activities important?

Notes

It is good to draw attention to the fact that the idea of church is not a new one. It is the continuation of the concept of tabernacle from the time of Moses, which in essence is God living in the midst of the community of his people.

It will be helpful in most contexts to emphasise that the church is equally valid on a small scale, for example meeting in groups in houses or other locations, as it is on a large scale.



- When the body of believers is working together well, what effect do you think this will have on the surrounding community?

5. The Bride of Christ



- What will happen on the day of the Messiah's return?

Answer: The Day of Judgment.



- What is the role of the Bride (the church) as she waits for the return of the Bridegroom?

Answer: The Church needs to be ready for the return of the Messiah by keeping pure and devoting herself to the task that he left us, which is to bring his message of life to a waiting world.

6. The end of a journey, beginning of a new one



- Can you remember the main signs (or messages) that each of the first six prophets brought to us: Adam through to Mary?

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Having gone through Al Massira:

- What do you understand now that you didn't at the beginning?
- How do you see yourself at the end of the journey? Has anything changed?
- What did you like or dislike about Al Massira?
- What will you (as a group) do now?

"Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me." (Revelation 3:20)

Finishing Up

As people answer the last four questions, there is opportunity for them to testify to what the Lord has done in their lives. Let this come naturally and be aware that some may not feel comfortable doing this.

As the last four questions above are being asked, please take care to make a mental note of the answers. After the meeting has finished you can fill out the 'evaluation form' with both your thoughts and those of the participants.

As you finish, it would be good to summarise what it means to be a follower of Christ using the notes below. If the group is ready and you haven't done so before you can lead them in a prayer of commitment as described above under 'Setting the Scene'.

Otherwise, finish the session in prayer together, thanking the Lord for what he has done, what we have learnt and praying blessing into each others' lives.

Follow Up

In some cases it may be difficult for the participants to respond with a definite decision in the context of the group. Therefore, it is good to continue talking with each one individually following this episode. They may also need more time to consider the invitation and their response. Don't pressurise them; just be available and keep praying.

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You may choose to do a more in-depth and individual evaluation of the course after the last session. This may yield a fuller picture of what has happened.

What next? There are four possible outcomes:

1. The group expresses the desire to continue to meet on a regular basis. Note that they don't all need to have made a firm decision to follow Christ for this to happen. The journey of discipleship continues, from wherever they are, to the image of Christ being formed more fully within them. We give suggestions as to how you can do this in Chapter Nine, (Part One) of this book.
2. Some of the group desire to continue to meet. The other points above apply.
3. There is no desire to continue to meet in this way, but there is interest in individual follow-up.
4. The course finishes and there is no further interest in this kind of meeting. Your friendship, though, can continue as before and you should pray for God to re-awaken the interest at a later stage.

Chapter Nine (Part One) gives you much more information to help you follow up after you have finished the course.

Summary of what it means to be a follower of Christ

- To believe in the Messiah, to know his true identity and to love and know him personally.
- To recognize my sinful nature, to walk in daily repentance, and to know God's forgiveness and assurance of salvation through the life, death and resurrection of Christ.
- To be a disciple of Christ, to follow him in obedience, desiring to become like him.
- To serve the Lord through the filling and empowering of the Holy Spirit.
- To trust in the bodily resurrection and return of Jesus.

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thank you :-)