

FAMILY DEVOTIONS

THE

VINE
THE
TRELLIS
AND THE
CROW

CITY
ON A HILL

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INSTRUCTIONS

For each week we will upload three devotions that build upon and link to both our City Kids message on Sunday and seek to apply the adults teaching series. Three devotions means:

- Those who already do devotions can continue these the other half of the week;
- Those for whom devotions are possible at most every second night of the week can also be included.

The devotions will follow this format:

INTRO

A short introductory activity or discussion.

RECAP

A recap of the previous devotion.

READ

A short passage will be printed from the International Children's Bible. This makes it less time-consuming and also excludes the need to find a bible.

EXPLORE

Some simple comprehension questions that direct our understanding of the passage.

APPLY

Something we can learn from the passage and apply to our own lives

PRAY

Suggested prayer points that come from the passage.

VERSE OF THE WEEK [OPTIONAL]

This is only suggested if time permits as it may be a slightly longer activity. You may design something to remember the verse or do some fun games or activities to aid in remembering the verses.

WEEK 1
JULY 16-22

DAY ONE

INTRO

Discuss with your family: in what different ways have you grown in the past year?

RECAP

What did your children learn about at church on Sunday?

READ - 2 PETER 1:3, 5-8

³ Jesus has the power of God. His power has given us everything we need to live and to serve God.

⁵ Because you have these blessings, you should try as much as you can to add these things to your lives: to your faith, add goodness; and to your goodness, add knowledge; ⁶ and to your knowledge, add self-control; and to your self-control, add the ability to hold on; and to your ability to hold on, add service for God; ⁷ and to your service for God, add kindness for your brothers and sisters in Christ; and to this kindness, add love. ⁸ If all these things are in you and are growing, they will help you.

EXPLORE

What has Jesus given us? (*Everything we need to live and to serve God*)

What does Peter encourage us to add to our lives? (*Goodness, knowledge, self-control, holding on, serving God, kindness and love*)

Why should we grow in these things? (*Because they will help us*)

APPLY

On Sunday the children learnt that, just as our bodies grow naturally, so we need to grow spiritually. Here in 2 Peter we see some suggested areas that we might need to grow in. Think through the list in verses 5-8. Which might you need to develop? Write these down! Then discuss this with your family. What do the other members of your family want to encourage you to work on? Sometimes we need others to help us see things that we might miss ourselves!

PRAY

Thank our heavenly Father that Jesus has given us everything we need to live and to serve God. Pray that we will grow in the areas we have identified.

VERSE OF THE WEEK [OPTIONAL]

"If all these things are in you and are growing, they will help you." - 2 Peter 3:8

Write this week's verse on a large piece of paper. Then draw a vine down the centre of the page and add ten leaves down the page. On the first eight leaves write one of the areas Peter suggests we need to grow in, and add to the leaf anyone's name who said this is an area they need to grow. Use the last two leaves as spaces to add any areas you think you might need to grow, and add your name there as appropriate. Use this vine as a growth chart, so that at the end of our series you can look back to it and reflect how you have grown!

WEEK 1

JULY 16-22

DAY TWO

INTRO

Bring in a stick and ask your children why is this stick brown and dead? If needed, help them understand it is because it is no longer attached to the plant that gives it life!

RECAP

Who has given us everything we need to live and to serve God?

READ - JOHN 15:1-5

¹ "I am the true vine; my Father is the gardener. ² He cuts off every branch of mine that does not produce fruit. And he trims and cleans every branch that produces fruit so that it will produce even more fruit. ³ You are already clean because of the words I have spoken to you. ⁴ Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can produce fruit alone. It must remain in the vine. It is the same with you. You cannot produce fruit alone. You must remain in me. ⁵ I am the vine, and you are the branches. If a person remains in me and I remain in him, then he produces much fruit. But without me he can do nothing."

EXPLORE

Why did Jesus compare himself to a plant? (*He said that he is the true vine because he is the source of life*)

Why did Jesus compare us to branches? (*Branches need to stay connected to the plant so that they can bear fruit*)

Why did Jesus compare God the Father to a gardener? (*The gardener cuts off the branches that are dead, and trims other branches so they can bear more fruit*)

APPLY

On Sunday the adults looked at this passage. It is both very encouraging (we are already clean because of Jesus' death on the cross for us (v3)) and very challenging (we will be cut off by God if we fail to produce fruit that fits with living a life that pleases God (v2)). Reflect together as a family: how connected to Jesus do you generally feel each week? How can we encourage one another to stay connected to Jesus? Are there things in your life that are stopping you from feeling more connected to Jesus? What might you do to cut these things out?

PRAY

Thank our heavenly Father that he has cleansed us from sin by his death on a cross. Pray that we will deal with sin in our lives and work with God to cut it out.

VERSE OF THE WEEK [OPTIONAL]

"If all these things are in you and are growing, they will help you." - 2 Peter 3:8

Add some autumn coloured leaves to the vine you created under this week's verse. On these, write things that you want to trim from your life. Keep the whole thing where you can see it and work on together as a family over the course of this series!

WEEK 1

JULY 16-22

DAY THREE

INTRO

Share with your family: what is your favourite fruit? What is your least favourite?

RECAP

Who helps us trim things from our life so that we can remain connected to Jesus?

READ - GALATIANS 5:19-25

¹⁹ The result of sin's control in our lives is clear. It includes sexual immorality, impurity and wild living, ²⁰ worshipping false gods, doing witchcraft, hating, making trouble, being jealous, being angry, being selfish, making people angry with each other, causing divisions among people, ²¹ having envy, being drunk, having wild and wasteful parties, and doing other things like this. I warn you now as I warned you before: Those who do these things will not be in God's kingdom. ²² But the Spirit gives love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control. There is no law that says these things are wrong. ²⁴ Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified their own sinful selves. They have given up their old selfish feelings and the evil things they wanted to do. ²⁵ We get our new life from the Spirit. So we should follow the Spirit.

EXPLORE

Looking at verse 21, what warning does Paul give us if sin is in our lives? (*Those who do these things will not be in God's kingdom*)

How can we live a new and different life according to the final verse? (*Through the power of God's Holy Spirit*)

What then does this passage say we should do? (*Give up our old selfish feelings and the evil things we want to do and follow the Spirit*)

APPLY

This passage is often known as listing the fruit of the Spirit. Interestingly, it is not 'fruits' of the Spirit, but simply 'fruit'. God's Holy Spirit will produce in us ALL these things over time, not just one or two!

PRAY

Thank our heavenly Father that he has given us new life by his powerful Spirit. Pray that we will therefore give up the evil things we want to do and follow the Spirit by living a life that pleases God.

VERSE OF THE WEEK [OPTIONAL]

"If all these things are in you and are growing, they will help you." - 2 Peter 3:8

Work together as a family through this passage. Add to your vine growth chart any sins from this passage that you need to deal with, and any areas to grow in. Then turn this week's verse into a prayer: may the Lord Jesus, who saved us from sin, and his Holy Spirit, who gives us life, help us to grow throughout this series to do these things!

WEEK 2
JULY 23-29

DAY ONE

INTRO

How do you feel about tests? Sometimes we do them at different places, for example at the doctor, at piano lessons or at school. Is there a type of test you enjoy more than others?

RECAP

What did your children learn about at church on Sunday?

READ - 2 CORINTHIANS 13:5-9

⁵ Look closely at yourselves. Test yourselves to see if you are living in the faith. You know that Christ Jesus is in you—unless you fail the test. ⁶ But I hope you will see that we ourselves have not failed the test. ⁷ We pray to God that you will not do anything wrong. It is not important to see that we have passed the test. But it is important that you do what is right, even if it seems that we have failed. ⁸ We cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth. ⁹ We are happy to be weak, if you are strong. And we pray that you will grow stronger and stronger.

EXPLORE

What type of test did Paul want the Corinthians to do? (*He wanted them to test themselves to see if they were living out their faith in Jesus*)

In v5, what should the Corinthians know about this test? (*That Jesus was living in them to help*)

What was Paul's prayer about this test? (*That the Corinthians not do anything wrong and do what is right; that they might grow stronger and stronger in the faith*)

APPLY

The children looked at this passage on the weekend to remind them to pray for spiritual growth. This passage encourages us to test ourselves because Jesus is in us... apart from him we can't ever live by faith and please God! We can only ever hope to do what is right and to stop sinning by the power of the Holy Spirit, the one who raises the dead to life and who produces the fruit of holiness. We can all therefore take a good, long look at ourselves and our lives because God is with us to change us and to make us more like Jesus.

PRAY

Thank our heavenly Father that Jesus lives in us by his Holy Spirit. Pray that we will diligently test ourselves then to see what in us needs to change so we will become more like Jesus our Lord.

VERSE OF THE WEEK [OPTIONAL]

"We pray that you will grow stronger and stronger." - 2 Corinthians 13:9

Spend some time as a family praying this week's verse for one another. Refer back to your vine growth chart if needed and bring each leaf to the Lord, asking him to cut out those sins that need to be removed and requesting the Lord produce the fruit of the Spirit in you.

WEEK 2
JULY 23-29

DAY TWO

INTRO

Share with your family: if you could change anything about your life, what would it be?

RECAP

What test did Paul want the Corinthians to do?

READ - JOHN 10:7-10

⁷ So Jesus said again, "I tell you the truth. I am the door for the sheep. ⁸ All the people who came before me were thieves and robbers. The sheep did not listen to them. ⁹ I am the door. The person who enters through me will be saved. He will be able to come in and go out and find pasture. ¹⁰ A thief comes to steal and kill and destroy. But I came to give life—life in all its fullness.

EXPLORE

Why did Jesus call himself a door? (*He said that whoever comes to the Father through him will be saved*)

What did Jesus call everyone who came before him who pretended to show the way to the Father? (*Thieves and robbers*)

What is the difference between Jesus and these people? (*They came to steal and destroy; Jesus came to give us life in all its fullness*)

APPLY

"Life in all its fullness" sounds pretty awesome! Do you feel like you have experienced this life in Jesus? What things in your life might be stopping you from experiencing this? What things might you do more of in order to experience this? Spend some time praying as a family that through this series the Lord might help you answer these two questions more clearly.

PRAY

Thank our heavenly Father that Jesus came that we might have life in all its fullness. Pray that the Lord might show you what in your life to lose and what to do so you might experience this more fully.

VERSE OF THE WEEK [OPTIONAL]

"We pray that you will grow stronger and stronger." - 2 Corinthians 13:9

Choose ten items of differing weights. Arrange these in order of lightest to heaviest. List each one as you say each word of this week's verse. Who in your family can do this the fastest?

WEEK 2
JULY 23-29

DAY THREE

INTRO

Who in your family do you look like the most? See if you can find photo evidence to back your claim!

RECAP

What sort of life did Jesus say he came to give us?

READ - 1 PETER 1:13-16

¹³ So prepare your minds for service and have self-control. All your hope should be for the gift of grace that will be yours when Jesus Christ comes again. ¹⁴ In the past you did not understand, so you did the evil things you wanted. But now you are children of God who obey. So do not live as you lived in the past. ¹⁵ But be holy in all that you do, just as God is holy. God is the One who called you. ¹⁶ It is written in the Scriptures: "You must be holy, because I am holy."

EXPLORE

In this passage, how is God our heavenly Father described? (*He is called holy*)

Why are we told to be holy like God? (*Because we are his children*)

What are we told to do to be holy? (*Prepare our minds for service; be self-controlled; don't live as we did in the past doing evil things*)

APPLY

We become children of God through Jesus' death and resurrection. Jesus died so that we might die to sin, and he rose again so that we might live a new life of holiness as God's adopted children. In today's passage Peter calls us to prepare our minds for this new life. In our series we need to do the same, for we want to grow in holiness so that we look more and more like our Father in heaven!

PRAY

Thank our heavenly Father that he is holy and he can make us holy through his Spirit. Pray that we might grow to bear the family resemblance of holiness more each day.

VERSE OF THE WEEK [OPTIONAL]

"We pray that you will grow stronger and stronger." - 2 Corinthians 13:9

Our passage today began with the words "Prepare your minds for service". We want to do that in our series: we want to prepare to serve the Lord and grow closer to him. Have each member of your family pick someone to pray this week's verse over them so that in faith we might see one another grow stronger in holiness as this series progresses.

JULY 30-AUGUST 5

DAY ONE

INTRO

Discuss as a family: how is your bible reading going?

RECAP

What did your children learn about at church on Sunday?

READ - ACTS 17:10-12

¹⁰ That same night the believers sent Paul and Silas to Berea. There Paul and Silas went to the Jewish synagogue. ¹¹ These Jews were better than the Jews in Thessalonica. They were eager to hear the things Paul and Silas said. These Jews in Berea studied the Scriptures every day to find out if these things were true. ¹² So, many of them believed. Many important Greek men and women also believed.

EXPLORE

How were the Jews in Berea better than those in Thessalonica? *(They were eager to hear Paul preach the gospel)*

How did they respond to Paul's preaching? *(They studied the Scriptures every day to find out if what he said was true)*

What happened as a result? *(Many of them believed)*

APPLY

The Berean Jews read the bible regularly to check if what Paul taught from it was right. This is not untrusting but wise! As Christians, how much more should we read our bibles regularly to see if what we are taught is in accordance with the good news of Jesus! Studies show that people who read their bibles three or more times a week have lives that look different from others. Discuss how you might read the bible both personally and as a family. When might you do so? How can you make it a helpful time for everyone?

PRAY

Thank our heavenly Father that he has preserved the Scriptures for us throughout thousands of years so that we might know him better and know how to live his way. Pray that we might regularly make time to read his word so that we might grow to be more like Jesus.

VERSE OF THE WEEK [OPTIONAL]

"These Jews in Berea studied the Scriptures every day to find out if these things were true." - Acts 17:11

Divide up a piece of paper into seven columns to represent a week. Write above the columns this week's verse. Then as a family write when you will read God's word yourself and when you plan to do so as a family. Put up this weekly planner in a place where everyone can see it so that you know when people are spending time with the Lord so you can leave them alone for this time so that they can do so.

JULY 30-AUGUST 5

DAY TWO

INTRO

Have you ever had a splinter? How much did it hurt? How did you remove it?

RECAP

How were the Bereans different to the Thessalonians?

READ - MATTHEW 7:3-5

³ "Why do you notice the little piece of dust that is in your brother's eye, but you don't notice the big piece of wood that is in your own eye?" ⁴ Why do you say to your brother, "Let me take that little piece of dust out of your eye"? Look at yourself first! You still have that big piece of wood in your own eye. ⁵ You are a hypocrite! First, take the wood out of your own eye. Then you will see clearly enough to take the dust out of your brother's eye."

EXPLORE

What does this passage say is our natural tendency? (*To find fault with others (the dust in their eye)*)

What does it suggest we do instead? (*Deal with our own faults; remove the wood from our own eye*)

Why does it suggest we do this? (*So we can then help others*)

APPLY

On Sunday the adult services considered how we should examine ourselves so that we can help others. How reflective are you? Would you honestly say you are quick to judge or be critical of others? Jesus took the judgement of God against our sin on the cross, but we still need to examine ourselves regularly so we can deal with our sin (see, for example, 2 Corinthians 13:5 from a few weeks ago).

PRAY

Thank our heavenly Father that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1). Pray that we might use this freedom to examine ourselves regularly so that we might remove sin from our lives.

VERSE OF THE WEEK [OPTIONAL]

"These Jews in Berea studied the Scriptures every day to find out if these things were true." - Acts 17:11

One of the most helpful ways to examine ourselves is to read the bible with others. This is because we might read a passage and feel we are fine with what it says but someone might gently help us see this might not be the case. Discuss how as a family you can apply this week's verse in a kind, caring and sensitive way together so that you can see clearly to help one another remove splinters.

WEEK 3

JULY 30-AUGUST 5

DAY THREE

INTRO

Who do you find to be a particularly encouraging person? Why is this?

RECAP

Why do we need to take wood out of our own eyes?

READ -HEBREWS 3:12-15

¹² So brothers, be careful that none of you has an evil, unbelieving heart. This will stop you from following the living God. ¹³ But encourage each other every day. Do this while it is "today." Help each other so that none of you will become hardened because of sin and its tricks. ¹⁴ We all share in Christ. This is true if we keep till the end the sure faith we had in the beginning. ¹⁵ This is what the Scripture says: "Today listen to what he says. Do not be stubborn as in the past when you turned against God."

EXPLORE

What does an unbelieving heart lead to? (*It stops us from following the living God*)

What is the cure to this? (*Encouraging one another every day*)

What does this practically look like? (*Helping one another listen to the Scriptures so that we will not become hardened by sin and its tricks*)

APPLY

The bible speaks regularly about endurance and perseverance. This is because the Christian life is a marathon, not a sprint. Sometimes it can be hard to keep going! This is why God calls us into his family; we have a community around us to encourage us to keep going and to deal with sin. Who are you encouraging? Who is encouraging you to keep going and to deal with sin?

PRAY

Thank our heavenly Father that "we all share in Christ" and so can spur one another on to faith and good deeds. Pray that we will both give and seek encouragement to and from other believers.

VERSE OF THE WEEK [OPTIONAL]

"These Jews in Berea studied the Scriptures every day to find out if these things were true." - Acts 17:11

Spend some time encouraging your family members. Help them to see God given gifts and to appreciate growth you have seen in different areas of their life. Then pray for each other using this week's verse so that they will continue to grow in "following the living God".

WEEK 4

AUGUST 6-12

DAY ONE

INTRO

Describe someone who is rich. What sort of life will they live? What sort of things will they be able to do?

RECAP

What did your children learn about at church on Sunday?

READ - 1 TIMOTHY 6:17-19

¹⁷ Give this command to those who are rich with things of this world. Tell them not to be proud. Tell them to hope in God, not their money. Money cannot be trusted, but God takes care of us richly. He gives us everything to enjoy. ¹⁸ Tell the rich people to do good and to be rich in doing good deeds. Tell them to be happy to give and ready to share. ¹⁹ By doing that, they will be saving a treasure for themselves in heaven. That treasure will be a strong foundation. Their future life can be built on that treasure. Then they will be able to have the life that is true life.

EXPLORE

What did Paul want Timothy to teach rich people? (*Not to be proud; not to hope or trust in their money, to do good and to share*)

Why did Paul say rich people should trust God instead of money? (*Because he richly takes care of us*)

What did Paul say would happen if rich people learn to give? (*They will have treasure in heaven*)

APPLY

Generally when we think about rich people we think about others with very different lifestyles. However studies indicate that we are all incredibly rich when compared to most people in the world (e.g. see howrichami.givingwhatwecan.org/how-rich-am-i). This means that, when Paul wrote to Timothy about what to teach rich people, this is a message for us! We are called to be rich in doing good deeds, which includes being happy to give and ready to share. Does this describe us, or might it indicate that as a family we perhaps trust more in money and less in God than we might think?

PRAY

Thank our heavenly Father that he richly cares and provides for us. Pray that we might be happy to give and ready to share because the Lord Jesus gave his life for us so that we might have riches in heaven.

VERSE OF THE WEEK [OPTIONAL]

"Be rich in doing good deeds. Tell them to be happy to give and ready to share." - 1 Timothy 6:18

Discuss how you give as a family. Do you give regularly to the church? Are there other organisations you support (like Compassion)? Reflect on this week's verse and dream together what it would look like for your family to 'be rich in doing good deeds' and 'happy to give'.

WEEK 4

AUGUST 6-12

DAY TWO

INTRO

In this series we want to connect to Jesus to experience living life to the full as he promised. So far we have talked about how prayer and reading the bible helps with this. How many other ways to do this can you think of as a family?

RECAP

What did Paul want Timothy to teach rich people to do?

READ - LUKE 5:12-16

¹² One time Jesus was in a town where a very sick man lived. The man was covered with a harmful skin disease. When he saw Jesus, he bowed before Jesus and begged him, "Lord, heal me. I know you can if you want to." ¹³ Jesus said, "I want to. Be healed!" And Jesus touched the man. Immediately the disease disappeared. ¹⁴ Then Jesus said, "Don't tell anyone about what happened. But go show yourself to the priest. And offer a gift to God for your healing as Moses commanded. This will prove to everyone that you are healed." ¹⁵ But the news about Jesus was spreading more and more. Many people came to hear Jesus and to be healed of their sicknesses. ¹⁶ But Jesus often slipped away to other places to be alone so that he could pray.

EXPLORE

How did Jesus heal this man with a harmful skin disease? (*By touching him*)

What happened as a result? (*The news about what Jesus had done spread so many people also came to be healed*)

What did Jesus do then? (*He slipped away to be alone to pray*)

APPLY

Two other ways to connect with Jesus appear in this passage. Both are surprising! The first is to connect with other people. Jesus engaged with this man by touching him, something that someone with a harmful skin disease would probably not be used to at all. The other is to do the opposite! When life got busy, Jesus withdrew from people to recharge himself by spending time with the Lord.

PRAY

Thank our Heavenly Father that Jesus set us an example of both engaging and withdrawing from people. Pray that we might have wisdom to know when to do both of these things.

VERSE OF THE WEEK [OPTIONAL]

"Be rich in doing good deeds. Tell them to be happy to give and ready to share." - 1 Timothy 6:18

Reflect together as a family on engaging and withdrawing from others in the light of this week's verse. For example: when does Mum need a quiet time alone to find strength and encouragement with the Lord? Do you need to schedule in daddy / daughter dates? Work together to rethink your family schedule as needed so that everyone gets the chance to engage with one another or to withdraw when they need to do so.

WEEK 4

AUGUST 6-12

DAY THREE

INTRO

What sort of things do you think it is totally inappropriate for a Christian to do?

RECAP

What did Jesus do after many people were seeking help from him?

READ - EPHESIANS 4:21-28

²¹ I know that you heard about Jesus, and you are in him; so you were taught the truth. Yes, the truth is in Jesus. ²² You were taught to leave your old self—to stop living the evil way you lived before. That old self becomes worse and worse because people are fooled by the evil things they want to do. ²³ But you were taught to be made new in your hearts. ²⁴ You were taught to become a new person. That new person is made to be like God—made to be truly good and holy. ²⁵ So you must stop telling lies. Tell each other the truth because we all belong to each other in the same body. ²⁶ When you are angry, do not sin. And do not go on being angry all day. ²⁷ Do not give the devil a way to defeat you. ²⁸ If a person is stealing, he must stop stealing and start working. He must use his hands for doing something good. Then he will have something to share with those who are poor.

EXPLORE

What were the Ephesians taught about themselves? (*They needed to leave their old self and the evil ways they lived before and be made new in their hearts so they would be truly good and holy*)

What three areas did Paul particularly highlight? (*Lying, anger and stealing*)

How should Christians view their work? (*As an opportunity to do good so we have something to share with the poor*)

APPLY

Of all the things that Paul could have said were totally inappropriate for Christians, he focused on lying, how we behave when we're angry and stealing. This last one is particularly worth considering. Rather than taking things for ourselves, God's people are meant to give generously to others. How do you go with this individually and as a family? Do you think that you have anything to share with the poor, and do you do it regularly?

PRAY

Thank our Heavenly Father that he makes us new through his Holy Spirit so that we will be more like Jesus. Pray that we might be made new in our hearts so that we use our hands for doing good so we have something to share with the poor.

VERSE OF THE WEEK [OPTIONAL]

"Be rich in doing good deeds. Tell them to be happy to give and ready to share." – 1 Timothy 6:18

Generosity in the bible includes giving regularly to the church and to the poor. Discuss as a family how you might practically do this. Can you support a Compassion child? Will you donate to or volunteer for the work of Many Rooms? Is there another opportunity that you can embrace together? Use this week's verse to inspire you and challenge you to not only share but to be happy to do so! schedule as needed so that everyone gets the chance to engage with one another or to withdraw when they need to do so.

WEEK 5

AUGUST 13-19

DAY ONE

INTRO

Brainstorm with your family: what do you need to make your body grow stronger?

RECAP

What did your children learn at church on Sunday?

READ - EPHESIANS 4:11-13

¹¹ Christ gave gifts to men—he made some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to go and tell the Good News, and some to have the work of caring for and teaching God’s people. ¹² Christ gave those gifts to prepare God’s holy people for the work of serving. He gave those gifts to make the body of Christ stronger. ¹³ This work must continue until we are all joined together in the same faith and in the same knowledge about the Son of God. We must become like a mature person—we must grow until we become like Christ and have all his perfection.

EXPLORE

What will make the body of Christ grow stronger? (*The gifts he gives to people so they can serve*)

What will it look like when the body of Christ grows stronger? (*We will be joined together in faith and knowledge*)

What will be the result of the body of Christ growing stronger? (*We will mature and become perfect like Jesus*)

APPLY

Imagine a church where everyone trusts the Lord and believes the same things. Picture how beautiful it will be when we all become like Jesus and have all his perfection. What could possibly bring about this? Everyone at church serving! This seems hard to believe, but it is the image we are given in this passage. Share with your family how you do serve at church. Then plan both how you might serve and how you will serve together as a family to help bring about this result!

PRAY

Thank our Heavenly Father that Jesus has given us people who equip us to serve. Pray that we might make the time to serve others at church so that we all become mature.

VERSE OF THE WEEK [OPTIONAL]

“Christ gave those gifts to prepare God’s holy people for the work of serving.” – Ephesians 4:12

Read together this week’s verse and then encourage one another: by sharing what gifts you think each person in your family has.

WEEK 5

AUGUST 13-19

DAY TWO

INTRO

What things in your life bring you joy?

RECAP

What will make the body of Christ grow stronger?

READ - 1 TIMOTHY 4:1-5

¹The Holy Spirit clearly says that in the later times some people will stop believing the true faith. They will obey spirits that lie and will follow the teachings of demons. ²Such teachings come from hypocrites, men who cannot see what is right and what is wrong. It is as if their understanding were destroyed by a hot iron. ³They tell people that it is wrong to marry. And they tell people that there are some foods that must not be eaten. But God made those foods, and the people who believe and who know the truth can eat those foods with thanks. ⁴Everything that God made is good. Nothing that God made should be refused if it is accepted with thanks to God. ⁵Everything God made is made holy by what God has said and by prayer.

EXPLORE

Why did the Holy Spirit warn us about the teaching of some men? (*They have stopped believing the true faith and so teach that some good things are wrong*)

What examples did Paul give? (*They teach that marriage and eating some foods isn't right*)

How should we respond to the good things God has made instead? (*With thanks*)

APPLY

While this passage might seem a bit random at first, it actually reminds us that God has created things for our enjoyment! As Christians we can tend towards seriously doing all the good things that God requires and thus forget that God has also given us so many good things to gladden our hearts! We need to respond in delight and thankfulness to the good things God has made. How often do you make and take time to do this?

PRAY

Thank our heavenly Father that "everything that God made is good". Pray that we might make and take time to be mindful and thankful and to enjoy his good things.

VERSE OF THE WEEK [OPTIONAL]

"Christ gave those gifts to prepare God's holy people for the work of serving." - Ephesians 4:12

The things God has made are also gifts that help gladden our hearts and refresh us to serve the Lord. List the things above that you thought of that bring you joy. How might you make time in your busy family life to enjoy these things so that you increase in thankfulness? How might you free one another up so that you can all do those things that refresh you and so serve one another with greater thankfulness?

WEEK 5

AUGUST 13-19

DAY THREE

INTRO

Discuss with your family: what things would you say you want most in this world?

RECAP

How should we respond to the things God has made?

READ - MATTHEW 16:24-27

²⁴ Then Jesus said to his followers, "If anyone wants to follow me, he must say 'no' to the things he wants. He must be willing even to die on a cross, and he must follow me. ²⁵ Whoever wants to save his life will give up true life. And whoever gives up his life for me will have true life. ²⁶ It is worth nothing for a man to have the whole world if he loses his soul. He could never pay enough to buy back his soul. ²⁷ The Son of Man will come again with his Father's glory and with his angels. At that time, he will reward everyone for what he has done.

EXPLORE

What did Jesus say we must do if we want to follow him? (*Say 'no' to the things we want*)

What did Jesus say we have to give up to follow him? (*Our life*)

What will happen if we do this? (*We will gain true life and he will reward us when he comes again*)

APPLY

Jesus is not saying in this passage we have to give up absolutely everything we want; for example it starts with "if anyone wants to follow me", and that is not a 'want' he is asking us to say 'no' to! However Jesus is saying we need to give up our selfish and sinful desires and the idea that our life belongs to us. What things in your life might you need to deny yourself so that you can follow Jesus well? Think about your time on tech, at work or doing schoolwork, and anything else that might not be the most helpful thing for you to pursue if you want to follow Jesus.

PRAY

Thank our heavenly Father that Jesus gave up his life for us so that we might experience true life. Pray that we will be willing to give up those things that make it harder for us to follow Jesus well.

VERSE OF THE WEEK [OPTIONAL]

"Christ gave those gifts to prepare God's holy people for the work of serving." - Ephesians 4:12

This week's verse reminds us that Jesus gave us certain people who equip us to serve the Lord. Discuss the things you listed above with your family, and see if they have anything to suggest about what you might need to give up in order to follow Jesus better.

WEEK 6

AUGUST 20-26

DAY ONE

INTRO

In what ways does your mum care for you?

RECAP

What did your children learn at church on Sunday?

READ - 1 THESSALONIANS 2:6-8

⁶ We are apostles of Christ. When we were with you, we could have used our authority to make you do things. ⁷ But we were very gentle with you. We were like a mother caring for her little children. ⁸ Because we loved you, we were happy to share God's Good News with you. But not only that, we were also happy to share even our own lives with you.

EXPLORE

How did Paul care for the Thessalonians? (*Very gently, like a mum caring for her little children*)

What did he share with the Thessalonians? (*God's Good News and even his own life*)

Why did he do this? (*Because he loved them*)

APPLY

Who has shared the good news of Jesus with you? This shows how much these people love you! Who have you shared the good news with? Who do you love enough to share the good news with?

PRAY

Thank our heavenly Father for your mum and anyone else you thought of who loves you enough to tell you about Jesus. Pray that we will follow their example and make Jesus known to others!

VERSE OF THE WEEK [OPTIONAL]

"Because we loved you, we were happy to share God's Good News with you." - 1 Thessalonians 2:8

As a family, reflect on this week's verse. Who finds sharing the good news of Jesus easy? Who finds it difficult? Understanding this, how might you work together to invite another person or family to church?

AUGUST 20-26

DAY TWO

INTRO

How do you honestly feel about the work you do? Are there parts you enjoy? What are these?

RECAP

Why should we share the good news of Jesus with others?

READ - EXODUS 20:8-11

⁸ "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. ⁹ Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, ¹⁰ but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. ¹¹ For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

EXPLORE

What did Moses command God's people to do? (*Remember the Sabbath and set it apart from work*)

How many days should we do all of our work? (*In six days, and we should not do any work one day of the week*)

What reason did Moses give to do this? (*Because God set us an example to do this when he rested from his work of creation*)

APPLY

There is a lot of debate about whether the Ten Commandments are binding on Christians today, but at City on a Hill we generally accept that Jesus has fulfilled the whole Old Testament for us. Nonetheless, we endeavour to uphold the spirit of the law, for we find life-giving principles within it. This commandment, however, often seems to be placed in a different category in our minds, for while we agree we shouldn't have any other gods or that murder is still wrong, many of us may find reasons as to why we don't follow this commandment. Discuss as a family: why should we set apart a whole day from work each week? What would it look like if we did this? How might such a thing be possible? What sort of things would you do as a family?

PRAY

Thank our Heavenly Father that, although he never needs to rest, he set us an example in doing so and blessed a whole day for us to enjoy in his presence. Pray that we might have godly wisdom and self-control as we work out what this might look like in our busy lives.

VERSE OF THE WEEK [OPTIONAL]

"Because we loved you, we were happy to share God's Good News with you." - 1 Thessalonians 2:8

For some of us, the idea of a Sabbath doesn't sound like good news! Reread this week's verse and then the verse that follows. How might your family prioritise sharing your lives together in a way that expresses both worship, rest and delight in the Lord? How might practising this communicate God's good news to others around you?

AUGUST 20-26

DAY THREE

INTRO

Discuss as a family how you feel about the idea of rest. Is it something you look forward to? What do you find most restful?

RECAP

Why did Moses say God's people should observe a Sabbath?

READ - MATTHEW 11:28-30

²⁸ "Come to me, all of you who are tired and have heavy loads. I will give you rest. ²⁹ Accept my work and learn from me. I am gentle and humble in spirit. And you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ The work that I ask you to accept is easy. The load I give you to carry is not heavy."

EXPLORE

Who did Jesus invite to come to him? (*All who are tired and who have heavy loads*)

What did Jesus promise we would experience if we do come to him? (*Rest for our souls*)

What work did Jesus want us to accept? (*His work (v29), which is easy (v30)*)

APPLY

Have you experienced 'rest for your soul'? Jesus is speaking here about how he has done the work of salvation for us. He has fulfilled the Old Testament laws, rules and regulations so that we can rest in him and enjoy life with God. How might you do this as a family, when attending church often seems to be just another thing that makes us busy? How might you structure a day in worship so that you experience true rest and joy in the Lord?

PRAY

Thank our Heavenly Father that he has promised us rest for our souls. Pray that as a family you might be able to experience and genuinely enjoy this as you rest and delight yourselves in the Lord.

VERSE OF THE WEEK [OPTIONAL]

"Because we loved you, we were happy to share God's Good News with you." - 1 Thessalonians 2:8

Try to plan a 'restful soul' day for your family. What might it look like for you to collaboratively and individually make time to enjoy the Lord? Ask others at church what this might look like for them so that you can experiment with different ideas and hopefully find something that works well for you!

AUGUST 27-SEPTEMBER 2

DAY ONE

INTRO

What do you find most encouraging about attending church?

RECAP

What did your children learn at church on Sunday?

READ - HEBREWS 10:19-25

¹⁹ So, brothers, we are completely free to enter the Most Holy Place. We can do this without fear because of the blood of Jesus' death. ²⁰ We can enter through a new way that Jesus opened for us. It is a living way. It leads through the curtain—Christ's body. ²¹ And we have a great priest over God's house. ²² So let us come near to God with a sincere heart and a sure faith. We have been cleansed and made free from feelings of guilt. And our bodies have been washed with pure water. ²³ Let us hold firmly to the hope that we have confessed. We can trust God to do what he promised. ²⁴ Let us think about each other and help each other to show love and do good deeds. ²⁵ You should not stay away from the church meetings, as some are doing. But you should meet together and encourage each other. Do this even more as you see the Day coming.

EXPLORE

In the Old Testament only the high priest could enter the Most Holy Place. Why does this passage say that we can now do this? (*Because the blood of Jesus opened a way for us to approach our holy God without fear*)

How did the blood of Jesus do this? (*We have been cleansed and made free from feelings of guilt*)

Since we can approach God, why does this passage say Christians should gather together regularly? (*To help one another show love and do good deeds; to encourage one another*)

APPLY

Often when we consider if 'church was good' we think about whether we learnt something or if we felt the worship connected us to the Lord. This passage suggests the main reasons we meet together is because we have been cleansed and so can gather with our holy God, and so that we can encourage one another through the difficulties of life. Does this describe your average experience of church?

PRAY

Thank our heavenly Father that we can approach him with a sincere heart and a sure faith because Jesus has cleansed us from sin. Pray that we will gather regularly in order to encourage others with these truths.

VERSE OF THE WEEK [OPTIONAL]

"You should meet together and encourage each other." - Hebrews 10:25

Discuss with your family: what might it look like for you to show others love and to encourage them to do good deeds when you attend church? How might you remind one another to do this, when our tendency is to consider church something for ourselves? Search on the internet for a photo of your church gathering or take one next time you meet and add to it this week's verse to remind you to gather for the sake of others.

AUGUST 27-SEPTEMBER 2

DAY TWO

INTRO

How do you picture heaven? Invite each member of your family to draw a picture of it.

RECAP

Why should we gather regularly at church?

READ - REVELATION 7:9-10

⁹ Then I looked, and there was a great number of people. There were so many people that no one could count them. They were from every nation, tribe, people, and language of the earth. They were all standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They wore white robes and had palm branches in their hands. ¹⁰ They were shouting in a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb."

EXPLORE

How did the apostle John picture heaven? (*With more people than anyone could count from every part of the world*)

Who were all these people worshipping? (*God on his throne and the Lamb (Jesus)*)

How were they worshipping? (*They were shouting that God & Jesus have saved us*)

APPLY

This is our future! One day we will gather together in heaven to praise the Lord, and we can practise this now when we gather together as a church.

PRAY

Thank our Heavenly Father that he will save people from every nation. Pray that we will experience this in part as we gather together as a church each week.

VERSE OF THE WEEK [OPTIONAL]

"You should meet together and encourage each other." - Hebrews 10:25

Write out this week's verse and then draw a picture of your church building underneath it. Around the picture draw stick figures of some people from your church who come from different nations. Then pray as a family for your church to be filled with more and more people from our world!

AUGUST 27-SEPTEMBER 2

DAY THREE

INTRO

Have you ever been to a wedding? Describe either how your wedding was or how you would like it to be.

RECAP

What will our future in heaven look like according to the last devotion?

READ - REVELATION 21:1-5

¹ Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth. The first heaven and the first earth had disappeared. Now there was no sea. ² And I saw the holy city coming down out of heaven from God. This holy city is the new Jerusalem. It was prepared like a bride dressed for her husband. ³ I heard a loud voice from the throne. The voice said, "Now God's home is with men. He will live with them, and they will be his people. God himself will be with them and will be their God. ⁴ He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death, sadness, crying, or pain. All the old ways are gone." ⁵ The One who was sitting on the throne said, "Look! I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this, because these words are true and can be trusted."

EXPLORE

What did John see that was like a bride dressed for her husband? (*The holy city, the new Jerusalem; this is a picture of us as the church!*)

What 'old things' will no longer be present when this happens? (*There will be no more tears, death, sadness, crying or pain!*)

What will God make new? (*Everything!*)

APPLY

In his final vision the apostle John saw that God will do away with a number of old things that will not continue into eternity and he will make everything new. In this series we have had a chance to reflect on what 'old things' we want to do away with, and things that we would like to make new. Reflect as a family: how have you gone with the things you've discussed? What things do you need to continue to try? What has worked well? What new things might need to begin?

PRAY

Thank our heavenly Father that he is ultimately the one who makes everything new. Pray that the Lord will be powerfully at work in your family as you continue to get ready for eternity.

VERSE OF THE WEEK [OPTIONAL]

"You should meet together and encourage each other." - Hebrews 10:25

Spend some time reflecting on this week's verse and encourage one another how you have seen the Lord work in each other's lives throughout this series. Then praise the Lord for these things!