



GALATIANS DEVOTIONAL

By Pastor Phil Emerson

NAME: _____

OUR DISCIPLESHIP FLOW

At Emmanuel Church, we are passionate about living out the call to be disciples of Jesus Christ, and make it our goal to see His Kingdom come in our lives and the world in which we live. We recognise that in Biblical times, a disciple was someone who followed a teacher or rabbi, not simply to gain head knowledge to pass an examination, but to be fully immersed in the life of the rabbi, and *learn his ways*, so that they in turn could replicate this to the world around them. As Christians, we are now those who have been invited to 'follow' Jesus and all of His ways, and we therefore call ourselves His disciples.

"This is how we know we are in him: Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did." 1 John 2:5,6

We therefore want to take seriously the words of Jesus in Matthew 28:19-20 to make disciples and also commit to an ongoing journey of teaching and discipleship together.

We all have differing personalities and learning styles. At Emmanuel, we recognise this diversity within the church body and therefore desire to support and journey together as we relate with God and each other in some of the following environments:

- **Public (20+)**

In the Bible, we see Jesus seeking to make disciples as He engaged with larger numbers of people, e.g., His interaction with the crowds (Matthew 4:25; Luke 14:25), and the 72 (Luke 10:1-24).

At Emmanuel, we want to use each of our **larger gathered environments** as an opportunity to make disciples, e.g., **Sunday services, Friday Youth/Kids'** environments, **men's/women's** gatherings.

- **Social (10-15)**

Jesus demonstrated the necessity for **smaller accountable relationships** as an essential part of the life of a disciple. He did this by teaching and doing life with his twelve disciples (e.g., Matthew 10).

At Emmanuel, small accountable relationships are offered through:

Lifegroup 12s

These are **gatherings of 10-15 people** who meet bi-weekly in homes or around specific interests, e.g., crafts, football.

- **Personal (2-5)**

As well as having smaller accountable relationships amongst His twelve friends, Jesus also seemed to go to even deeper levels of trust with three in particular – Peter, James and John (Matthew 17; Mark 9). At Emmanuel, we seek to do this through:

Lifegroup 3s

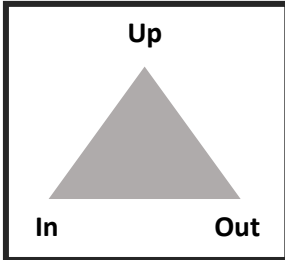
These are smaller **gatherings of 2-5 people** who are committed to transparent and accountable relationships in order to grow together in following Jesus. The aim for these groups is that after 1-2 years, each person in the group would be able to lead a smaller number of people themselves and replicate the process... **disciples making disciples!**

- **Intimate (1-1)**

Jesus regularly withdrew to spend time alone with the Father. This is the ultimate goal of discipleship, that each member of our church family would increasingly spend time alone with the Father and grow in devotion and desire to see the Kingdom come.

A TOOL TO USE

As stated previously, 1 John 2:6 makes it clear that for those of us who call ourselves disciples of Jesus, our goal should be to daily walk in the ways of Jesus, our Rabbi. As we examine the New Testament we see that Jesus lived His life based on three relationships: **Up** – with His Father; **In** – with His chosen followers; **Out** – with the hurting world around Him. This is illustrated in the following triangle:



Jesus taught and modelled out to His disciples how to live into each of these areas in life.

Up

Jesus frequently left the disciples to spend personal time with the Father (Mark 1:35; Luke 5:16). He taught them the significance of prayer, and how to pray and communicate with the Father (Luke 11:1-13). When comparisons with one another or insecurities presented themselves, He spoke into it in love and challenged them into a greater depth of living (Mark 9:33-37; Matthew 18:1-5).

In

Jesus had significant relationships with others in which He intentionally invested (12s and 3s). When He went to engage with the Father He brought the three with Him (Matthew 17:1). He taught them and modelled out the significance of Sabbath and rhythms of rest (Mark 6:31). He demonstrated with His life the significance of generosity and sacrificial love for others (John 13:1-17).

Out

Jesus personally lived a life that engaged with the crowds and the broken world around Him. He healed the sick (Matthew 8:1-4), fed the poor (Mark 6:30-44), and cast out demons (Matthew 8:28-34). But with the people who were closest to Him, He challenged them to do the same (Mark 6:37), and when they took risks themselves He critiqued and gave honest feedback to call out more for them (Luke 10:17-20).

As we spend time alone or together in this devotional, we want to help and encourage you to engage in each of these ways – UP, IN, and OUT.

HOW TO USE THE BOOK

First

If you haven't already done so, please take a second to fill in your name on the inside of the front cover. There'll be a lot of identical books floating around, and we don't want yours to get lost.

Prepare

Get ready for each session by spending some time to invite the Holy Spirit to speak to you. The Bible is a written word (logos), which becomes a living word (rhema) as the Holy Spirit breathes upon it and speaks directly to our lives through it.

Commit

Commit to the journey. Discipleship is not a commitment to a moment, but to a lifetime journey. As you personally commit to journeying with God daily, commit to others by sharing what you are learning (possibly in Lifegroup 12s or 3s), and in this way encouraging one another in what God is saying.

Reflect & Respond

Each day, as you spend personal time with God, we encourage you to ask the following two questions:

- 1) What is God saying to me?
- 2) What am I going to do about it?

This is how we become doers and not just hearers of what God is saying.

INTRODUCTION TO GALATIANS

The churches in Galatia were being influenced by those who sought to *'pervert the gospel of Christ'*, as we will read in Galatians 1:6-7 and 3:1. Known as *'Judaizing teachers'*, these individuals taught that Gentile Christians needed to be circumcised and keep the Law of Moses, according to Acts 15:1. Paul saw that this faulty teaching would lead people away from the truth of salvation in Christ alone by faith alone. These so-called *'teachers'* were just perverting the truth and were trying to support their case by undermining Paul's authority as an apostle of Christ, hence Paul's introduction ... *"This letter is from Paul, an apostle."*

I had an old mentor who used to say, "Stop reading books *about* the Book and read the Book." It is so important to have sound theology in our heads before we get blown about by every wind of doctrine.

Hope you enjoy this great wee book.

Phil

Live

I find the book of Galatians interesting in that Paul hits the ground running and shoots from the hip. I try to imagine myself receiving this letter from Paul ... I run my thumb along the seal, open the envelope, unfold the letter, and BOOM! Very little introduction; no 'I hope you're doing really well,' no 'This is my prayer for you,' like in many of Paul's other letters. Verse 6 begins, "*I am shocked that you are turning away so soon from God Who called you to Himself.*" Paul has a message and a mandate to deliver and he isn't about to miss and hit the wall. As we said in the introduction, false teachers had crept in and were tampering with the true ways of the gospel; Paul is out to nail this issue right away. It's a dangerous thing to mess around with the King's truth and Paul declares a curse in verses 8 and 9 on anyone, including an angel, who dares tread into this domain. The true gospel is spelt out so beautifully and simply in verses 3 and 4. Read these verses and allow the power of the words to fill your soul today.

This letter should be our flashing amber light for times when we allow ourselves to be swayed from the Word of God. I don't think for one moment that the churches in Galatia consciously set the Word to one side as much as it was deserted through distortion by so-called teachers. Always remember this, the Cross was the finished work of Christ. It was not an accident; it was an accomplishment. Nothing needs added, and we dare not take anything away. This is why our theology needs to be strong. We often say in church, 'If we are going to be soft at the door, we need to be strong at the core.' As we accept people for who they are and love them, let's be careful not to be influenced by their practices or even their sins, but rather remain true to our calling and mandate from heaven. Stay strong in the Word!

Pray

Father, may my eyes and heart stay on You alone. I know I live in a day in which a million ideas can come at the touch of a button, and so, all the more reason to stay tight to my source – You, and You alone. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT & RESPOND
What is God saying to me?

REFLECT & RESPOND
What am I going to do about it?

Live

I love Paul's opening line in this chapter, "*Then fourteen years later...*" I can't wait to get asking him in Glory about that loaded little line. Ever wonder what happened during those obscure times of Paul's life that Scripture decides not to record? The years that are too poignant, too painful, and far too personal to reveal. We all have them, don't we? Is it any wonder, when he reappears, he seems to tread cautiously as he declares in verse 2, "*I met privately with those considered to be leaders,*" only to find in verse 6, "*the leaders had nothing to add to what I was preaching.*" There is nothing to add to the true gospel. It seems that in those fourteen years there was a sifting of the Saul of Tarsus to the man who would pen thirteen of our New Testament books. All of this led him to be a man of absolute truth, which, in turn I suppose, led him to have the famous confrontation with Peter in verse 11. Peter, who was visiting, was willing at first to eat with the Gentiles, but when some came from James, he withdrew himself out of fear of what the Jews might think. Through Peter's influence the rest of the Jews, even Barnabas, got carried away into hypocrisy. This prompted Paul to withstand Peter "*to his face*" and rebuke him in front of everyone. Again, Paul goes straight for the jugular, no messing around here. In the course of his rebuke, Paul stressed that we are justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law, otherwise Christ died in vain. If the truth be told, we all are hypocritical about something and it might be a good idea to allow the Holy Spirit to minister to you today in that area.

We are told in this chapter to do all things without grumbling because we can find something in everything to grumble about. We grumble about politics, often more agitated by who is sitting in Stormont (or not sitting in it!) than comforted by Who is sitting on heaven's throne.

Pray

Father, by Your Holy Spirit, ignite my joy and gentle my words. Don't let me confuse perfectly good and appropriate lamenting with snarly, self-pity-laced grumblings. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT & RESPOND
What is God saying to me?

REFLECT & RESPOND
What am I going to do about it?

Live

What a kick off to this chapter and absolute reprimand, *“Oh, foolish Galatians, who has cast an evil spell on you?”* The gospel proclaims justification by faith in Christ, not by keeping the works of the Law. To back this up, Paul begins by providing a personal argument, asking the Galatians to recall how they themselves had received the Spirit, that it came not by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ.

Oh, how easy we sway to works! Let’s check our hearts today and remind ourselves that we are saved by faith alone, through grace alone, by Christ alone. Over the years, my prayer life, like many other parts of my discipleship, has suffered the effects of an incomplete understanding. Thankfully, the truth of the Scriptures has been deconstructing and rebuilding my prayer life. I now understand that Jesus is the only way to life; He is my great prayer warrior, ever living to pray for me, and ever so graciously purifying my prayers as they rise to heaven. The only claim to righteousness I have is the declared state of righteousness I have freely received in Christ. Because my life is now hidden in Him, because of my unbreakable union with Jesus, and because my permanent address is *“in Christ”*, I’ve been set free to pray with palms-up boldness, the recipient of pure grace. He is the sovereign King who is reigning over all things and actively working in all things for His glory and my good. He is not a computer waiting to be programmed by me, or a disengaged deity to be motivated or impressed with me. He is my great Bridegroom who enjoys communing and fellowshiping with me in prayer, long before I even ask anything of Him. Throughout eternity my testimony will be, *“Jesus, You have done all things well.”* The reason I pray today is because He is God and I am not, because He commands it, commends it, and communes with me through it.

Pray

Father, I love this chapter today, a timely reminder of my utmost reliance on You for everything I am and ever hope to be. My greatest freedom is in You alone. In Jesus’ strong name. Amen.

REFLECT & RESPOND
What is God saying to me?

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Live

The previous chapter ended with Paul setting out a practical argument, how by faith they had become the sons of God, the true seed of Abraham and heirs of the promise, putting on Christ in baptism. The practical argument continues in the first part of chapter 4 as Paul describes the condition of those under the Law prior to the coming of Christ. They were children and really no different from slaves. But when Christ came, He redeemed those under the Law and made it possible for them to receive adoption. A special blessing of this sonship was receiving the Spirit in their hearts. Now they were no longer a slave but a son and an heir of God through Christ. I'm not sure what that does for you, but I have goose bumps writing it, definitely a cause to rejoice today!

It seemed that there was so much faulty teaching and thinking going around these churches in Galatia. Some Bible expositors have pointed out that there were so-called 'lawless Christians'; they lived above the Law. Then there were 'Judaists', who believed you couldn't be a Christian unless you reverted to becoming a Jew. Then, of course, we have the 'legalists' with their idea of 'keep the rules and you'll be loved more'. All of these myths are enemies to the truth. As true believers we understand that confessing with our lips and believing in our hearts that Jesus Christ is Lord makes us sons and daughters of God – it is not of works lest anyone should boast. The same enemies exist today, undermining, subtracting and even adding to the gospel to sow confusion and doubt. Paul reminds the Galatian church that when he met them, they were worshipping gods that didn't even exist. Now that they knew the true God and, even better, the One true God who knew them, why in the wide world would they ever want to go back? Paul describes his own agony over this move backwards like labour pains as he prayed for them.

Pray

Father, I join the psalmist in crying out ... Intensify my thirst for You. Keep me panting like the deer, panting after streams of water, the unpolluted, un-distilled, never-ending brooks of Your grace. Quickly drain the broken cisterns of my own making. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

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Paul reaches the climax of this whole epistle in verse 1, stating what seems to be the theme of his letter in a few words: *“It was for this freedom that Christ set us free [completely liberating us]; therefore, keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery [which you once removed].”* He follows this with a downward spiral of warnings about the consequences of seeking to be circumcised and justified by the Law. He then reminds them that the hope of righteousness is for those who, through the Spirit, eagerly wait for it with a faith that is working through love. How about memorising this great verse today? Say it over and over until it’s instilled in your brain.

Sometimes I think that the further I go into the gospel, the more I get challenged and changed about how I think about everything. This is a clear example of God’s commitment to complete the good work He began in me. At times this process is quite disruptive and painful, but it’s always leading to more glory for God and more Christlikeness in me. It seems as if the folks at Galatia couldn’t see over the old systems to the perfection of God’s plan and the persistence of His heart.

Recently, I’ve been thinking about God’s promises, so generously and copiously given in His Word. Those promises are primarily about changing us, not channelling us. Through His promises, we increasingly share in His divine nature, that is, we become more like Jesus. By His promises we escape the corruption in the world and not simply accumulate more of its treasures. Every one of God’s great promises directs our gaze away from ourselves to Jesus, who is the ultimate “Yes!” to every promise He has ever made. Oh, the difference this knowledge of Christ makes in how we view all things. We don’t just claim His promises, rather they claim us! If you are going to name and claim anything, may it be to have greater passion for His glory and His fame. May our standing on His promises lead to living under His authority and serving well in His kingdom until Jesus returns.

Pray

Father, what a privilege it is to be called Your child. Thank You for completely liberating me, never again to be subject to slavery. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

REFLECT & RESPOND
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Live

In this final chapter, Paul grabs the tree of self-dependence and gives it a mighty shake. Paul reveals that liberty in Christ involves responsibilities. Those who are spiritual are to restore those overtaken in trespasses, and all are to bear one another's burden. At the same time, each Christian ought to examine themselves and seek to bear their own load. Further responsibilities involve sharing with those who teach and not growing weary in doing good to all, especially those of the household of faith. Wow, now there's a challenge today! Who can I help restore and what burden can I share? In this passage we are challenged to look around to see who needs us to stand with them. All of us need to be convicted and freed from always wanting to be first ... in our marriages, when we're more aware of things that bug us about our spouses than we are committed to encouraging and serving, listening to and loving them ... in our friendships, when our need to be remembered and appreciated is more pronounced than our commitment to stay in touch with, pray for, and serve our friends ... in our vocations, when the people who work with us feel like we're more preoccupied with 'me and my' success than to loving and serving as a member of a team ... in the general population, when we navigate through life with little eye contact, to-do-list driven, with no obvious effort to engage with strangers.

Remember this, Jesus didn't consider His equality with God something to be held onto for personal gain. Rather, He emptied Himself by taking the very nature of a man, a servant man. He was the promised Servant of the Lord Who served us by fulfilling all the demands of God's law and by exhausting all God's judgment against my sin on the Cross. Now He ever lives to serve us as our Advocate, Intercessor, and Bridegroom. If you need someone to model the servanthood principle, here you have it. The greatest One who ever lived became the beautiful model of humanity, putting others first at every turn.

Pray

Father, thank You for the reminder today that we are a body and must operate as one – not just fulfilling our little ideologies around self, but looking out for others at all times. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

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What is God saying to me?

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