

DISCIPLESHIP. LESSON 9

1	PRAYER
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Pray for God's guidance through his Spirit, for awareness of his presence and for listening to his voice. Dedicate this lesson about disciple making to the Lord.

2	WORSHIP (20 minutes)	<i>[CHARACTERISTIC OF GOD]</i> GOD IS LOVE
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Definition.

What is "worship"? Worship is:

- *an attitude* of awe, adoration, submission and dedication to God,
- *expressed* in various kinds of prayer and the way we live every day (lifestyle).

In order to worship God, we need to get to know "the God of the Bible".

During every worship time we will learn one characteristic (attribute) of God for which we worship him.

Meditation.

Worship is to dedicate yourself to God.

Theme: God is love.

Read the Bible passages and the explanation or explain it in your own words.

1. God's nature is love.

Read Isaiah 43:2; Romans 5:8-10. How does God love us?

(1) God loves the people of the world like a lifesaver.

A lifesaver jumps into floodwaters or enters a burning house at the risk of his own life in order to rescue people. The flood of water (of the Red Sea) is a symbol of the godless and wicked nations that sweep across the world (Isaiah 17:12-13). The fire (oven in which Daniel's three friends were thrown, Daniel 3:25-27) is a symbol of the persecution against Christians.

(2) God loves the people of the world like a shepherd.

A shepherd loves his lost sheep, seeking them until he finds them.

(3) God loves us like a father and mother.

A mother loves her children, caring for them, protecting, nurturing and educating them.

(4) God loves us like a friend loves his friend.

A friend desires to be together with the other and do good and interesting things with one another.

(5) But most of all God loves us self-sacrificially.

God proves his self-sacrificial love for us by giving Jesus Christ to lay down his life for us on the cross. He loves us self-sacrificially in order to save us from sin and from eternal destruction. God's love sent Jesus Christ as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. That is, by his death on the cross, Jesus Christ became the One who turned aside God's righteous anger against our sins, took away our sins and reconciled us with God.

2. God loves us first.

Read 1 John 4:7-21. *God is always first* in his thoughts and plans, words and deeds towards us.

(1) Before the creation of this world.

God loved us and determined that we should become his spiritual sons and daughters (Ephesians 1:4-5).

(2) Before we were born.

God sent Jesus Christ to die on the cross for our sins (1 Peter 3:18).

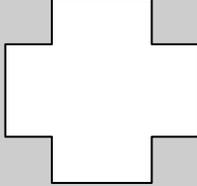
(3) Before we ever heard of him.

God decided to reach us and he sent others to preach the gospel to us (Romans 10:14-17).

(4) Before we believed in Jesus Christ and received him.

God worked in our hearts to understand and believe the message of the gospel (John 16:8). God loved us first in order to win us to himself. And now that he has won us and we have received him, we can respond with love to his love. God does not want to be the only One that loves. He also wants all his children to love him in return and to love one another as he loves them (Mark 12:30-31).

After we believed in Jesus Christ we no longer live in fear of God's punishment (in hell), but live in God, in love to God and to one another, and have confidence in the Day of Judgement (1 John 4:17-18).

<u>Before Christ</u>	 <u>The cross of Christ</u>	<u>After Christ</u>
<p>*We did not believe</p> <p>*We were under God's wrath (Romans 1:18)</p> <p>*We were under God's curse (Galatians 3:10)</p> <p>*We feared God's punishment (1 John 4:17-18)</p> <p>*We were sinners and lost (Luke 5:31-32; 19:10)</p>	<p>*He revealed the truth about God and ourselves</p> <p>*He made atonement that turned God's holy wrath aside (1 John 4:10), and reconciled us to God (Romans 5:9-10)</p> <p>*He redeemed us from the curse by becoming a curse for us (Galatians 3:13)</p>	<p>*We believe (acknowledge)</p> <p>*We are under God's love (1 John 3:1) and realise that he loved us first and will love us forever!</p> <p>*We are under God's blessing (Galatians 3:14; Ephesians 1:3)</p> <p>*We have confidence in the Day of Judgement (1 John 4:17-18)</p> <p>*We are found and saved (Luke 15:24)</p>

Only the cross (the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ) reconciles God's righteousness (just wrath) with God's mercy (gracious love)!

3. God loves us with an eternal love.

Read Jeremiah 31:3; Romans 8:39.

God loves us as much today as he loved us in the beginning and he will love us as much tomorrow, as he loved us in the past on the cross. God's love does not vacillate or swing up and down as the love of humans swing up and down due to their circumstances and feelings. God's love is eternal and constant. Nothing will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

4. God's love changes us.

Read Romans 5:5.

God's love does not just touch our feelings, but also changes our lives. His love causes us to love him and to love one another and even to love unlovely people and our enemies. Although the love between parents and children (affection)(Greek: storgé), the love between friends (friendship)(Greek: filia) and the love between a man and a woman in marriage (physical love)(Greek: erós) are created realities, the self-sacrificial love (Greek: agapé) comes only from God (1 John 4:7) and in a Christian when the Spirit of God comes to dwell in him. As a matter of fact, we can only love God after God has loved us and has poured his love out into our hearts. Romans 5:5 says, "God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us." Love does not originate in our hearts. Love comes only from God (1 John 4:7). The nature of God is love (agapé) and God is also the only Source of love in this world. Only the agapé love can perfect the other three loves!

Worship.

Take turns to worship God (in one or two sentences) in his characteristic of being love.

3	SHARING (20 minutes) <i>[QUIET TIMES]</i> JOHN 1:1 – 4:22
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Take turns and *share (or read* from your notes) in short what you have learned from one of your quiet times out of the assigned Bible passages (John 1:1 – 4:22).

Listen to the person sharing, take him serious and accept him. Do not discuss what he shares.

4	TEACHING (70 minutes) <i>[OBEDIENCE]</i> THE GROWTH STUDY
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In Luke 2:52 is written, "And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and men." Also Christians must grow in all the important areas of their lives (physical, intellectual, spiritual and social). Especially spiritually!

A. THE RESPONSIBILITY FOR GROWTH

Who is responsible for spiritual growth? Two parables from Mark 4 answer this question.

1. The parable of the sower (farmer).

Read Mark 4:1-20 (cf. Matthew 13:3-23; Luke 8:4-15). **What is the message of this parable?**

Notes. “The seed represents the Word of God (Mark 4:14), especially the message about the kingdom (Matthew 13:19). “The different kinds of soil” represent the different possible conditions and attitudes the human heart may have: hardened, shallow, divided or well prepared (Matthew 13:19; Luke 8:12).

Mark 4:1-20 is not a parable about a sower, but rather a parable about the receivers of the seed! It is a parable about the four possible attitudes and conditions of the human heart on which the sower sows the seed of God’s Word. It is not a parable about how God’s Word is sown, but rather a parable about how God’s Word is received!

(1) The seed sown along the path symbolises the first possible attitude of the heart (verse 4).

This is a picture of an unresponsive, insensible and hardened heart. Whenever your heart has this condition or attitude, you do not respond to God’s Word. You constantly think that God’s Word contains nothing of importance for you. You make no effort to understand its message (Matthew 13:19) and you do not accept it (respond to it)(Mark 4:20). Consequently, your heart grows indifferent and becomes hardened. Satan knows the potential power of God’s Word and is ever ready to snatch away what is left unaccepted (Luke 8:12)!

The main lesson is to hear, understand (Matthew 13:23) and to accept (Mark 4:20) God’s Word whenever you hear, read or study it! Deal immediately with your attitudes of indifference, procrastination or hostility!

(2) The seed that fell on rocky places symbolises the second possible attitude of the heart (verse 5).

This is a picture of an impulsive, shallow and rootless heart. Whenever your heart has this condition or attitude, you respond too rashly to God’s Word. You accept God’s Word without considering the consequences. In the beginning, you are thrilled or enthusiastic about God’s Word. However, when trouble and persecution come, you fall away. You lack “roots”, that is, you do not persevere and retain God’s Word. You fail to realise that true discipleship implies self-surrender and self-denial, even sacrifice and suffering.

The main lesson is to retain God’s word (Luke 8:15) and to persevere to believe and to obey it under all circumstances! Deal immediately with your tendency only to be emotionally touched when you hear God’s word! Learn to also follow God’s Word with your mind and will.

(3) The seed that fell among the thorns symbolises the third possible attitude of the heart (verse 7).

This is a picture of an impure and divided heart, a heart that is pre-occupied by other things. Whenever your heart has this condition or attitude, you choose for things leading to death rather than to life (Deuteronomy 30:19). Then you allow yourself to be influenced by things other than the Word of God. You have the wrong priorities. You are continuously distracted by the worries of life, the deceitfulness of wealth, the pleasures of life and the desires for other things than those things that please God. Your heart is divided between the things of the world and the things of God. The things of the world choke the things of God. Consequently, God’s Word never bears any fruit in your life.

The main lesson is to keep your heart clean, honest and good (Luke 8:15). Keep it free from the worries of life (Philippians 4:6-7), the deceitfulness of wealth, the pleasures of the world and the wrong desires. Deal immediately with your worries, your tendency to be materialistic and with your wrong desires and wrong priorities.

(4) The seed that fell on the good soil symbolises the fourth possible attitude of the heart (verse 8).

This is a picture of a noble and good heart – a responsive, retaining, well-prepared and fruitful heart. Whenever your heart has this condition or attitude, you respond to God’s Word in the way Jesus Christ would like you to respond.

- In contrast to the first soil, you hear, understand and accept God’s Word (Matthew 13:23; Mark 4:20).
- In contrast to the second soil, you retain God’s Word deep in your heart and cling to it under all difficult circumstances (Luke 8:15).
- In contrast to the third soil, you keep your heart clean and free from whatever can choke God’s Word (Luke 8:15).
- Thus, as the fourth soil you bear fruit for God with effort and perseverance (Luke 8:15). Sometimes you will bear thirty times more fruit and sometimes a hundred times more fruit (Matthew 13:23; Mark 4:20)!

(5) The message of this parable.

The condition and attitude of your heart determine the response you give to God’s Word. And the response you give to God’s Word determines how much fruit you will bear for God (how much spiritual influence you will have).

You can make a decision today to change the attitude of your heart and respond to God’s Word as the fourth soil, so that you will bear fruit. Every time you hear, read or study the Bible, you have to make this decision (choice). Every time you get a new chance to respond in the right way to God’s Word. Jesus Christ tells this parable because he longs that you will bear much fruit!

2. The parable of the seed growing in secret.

Read Mark 4:26-29. **What is the message of this parable?**

Notes.

(1) Growth is a mystery to people. The seed grows without people knowing how (Mark 4:26-27).

In the realm of nature, growth is always a mystery! Whether it is the growth of plants or trees, or of animals or people, nobody can adequately explain why and how growth takes place! The farmer scatters the seed on his field, fully realising that he cannot cause those seeds to grow. He lacks all control over the processes of germination, sprouting, growth, the forming of fruit and the bearing of fruit. Many days and nights pass in which the farmer does nothing to the plants and yet, growth takes place! But he does not know how! To be sure, he can cover the seeds, pull up the weeds, loosen the soil, add fertiliser, and perhaps even give water to the plants. All these things facilitate growth, but they cannot cause growth! All the farmer can do is trust that the seeds will grow and wait patiently till the harvest-time. He must leave the aspect of growth entirely to God and trust God to work.

Likewise, spiritual growth is a mystery. God is the Author of the establishment of his kingdom or reign and of its progress in the hearts and lives of people. It is because of his will that the spiritual seed, the words of the Bible, asserts its increasingly powerful influence upon the hearts and lives of people and thus upon society in general (John 3:5-8; 1 Corinthians 3:5-9).

(2) The potential power of the seed. All by itself the seed produces grain (Mark 4:28).

All by itself, without any visible cause and apart from any human help, the seed in the soil germinates, sprouts out, grows a tall stalk, forms an ear and finally develops the full grain in the ear. It is as if God has entrusted the secret or mystery of growth to a tiny seed, so that now, as it were, the seed knows exactly what it has to do, when to do it and how to do it. God has entrusted a great potential power or ability to the tiny seed.

Likewise, God's Word has great potential power. Christians make every effort to preach God's Word and see to it that God's Word is recognised and, if possible, obeyed in every sphere of life like the family, the church, the government, education, agriculture, industry, commerce, and mass communication. Nevertheless, without human help God's Word knows what to do, when to do it and how to do it in order to bring about that for what God designed it. Little by little, God's Word travels from one person to another, from one nation to another and increasingly causes its power and influence to be felt in every sphere of life (1 Peter 1:23 - 2:3; Acts 19:10).

(3) The harvest-time will certainly come. It will be the final victory of the Word of God (Mark 4:29).

Verse 29 literally says, "Whenever the fruit or crop permits, at once he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come." The description of the harvest is dramatic: "At once", when the harvest-time comes, the farmer will harvest the crop without any delay! This fact is a great comfort and an encouragement to wait patiently for the harvest to arrive, because when it arrives, it will arrive in total victory!

Likewise, God's plan concerning his kingdom must be carried out and is certainly going to be carried out! The coming of God's kingdom is irresistible! The seed grows according to its own inherent, God-given, laws, even if the farmer does not see it. Likewise, God's work in God's kingdom grows according to God's will, even if we don't always see it! At the moment decided in God's plan, the kingdom of God will be revealed in all its splendour (Matthew 13:41; Revelation 11:15).

God's Kingdom (kingship) grows already from the first coming of Christ and will certainly become bigger (just as the parable of the mustard seed teaches) and it will penetrate more and more areas of human life (as the parable of yeast teaches). In our time it brings people at the right time into the kingdom of God (John 3:8). At the right moment the harvest will be ready and the kingdom of God in its final phase will become visible on the new earth (Matthew 13:41-43; Matthew 25:34). The time to be harvested comes for every individual at a different moment, at the time he dies. But the moment of the harvest of the whole earth will take place at the second coming of Christ (Revelation 14:14-20)!

(4) The message of this parable.

Not man, but God alone is the Author of spiritual growth. He establishes his kingdom (kingship) in the hearts and lives (John 3:8) of his chosen people on earth (2 Thessalonians 2:13-14)!

This parable is a warning against so much human enthusiasm, human idealism and human impatience with regard to God's work. People ask, "Why does God not establish the fullness of his kingdom sooner in this dark and broken world?" The result is often discouragement, pessimism, doubt, and the loss of diligence and perseverance. But this parable wants to turn our pessimism into optimism and into idealism that trusts God.

God knows what he does and when and how he must act. He determines the right day and hour. Wherever we sow God's Word, there will be a harvest – in God's time! God has entrusted so much power to grow and so much potential to his Word that his Word will never return empty to him! It will attain its goal! "As the rain and the snow come from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my Word that goes from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve that purpose for which I sent it (Isaiah 55:10-11)!" Although there is much we don't understand, God's plan and programme cannot and will not fail (Isaiah 14:24,27)!

3. The relationship between these two parables.

(1) God's sovereignty.

The parable of the seed growing in secret emphasises God's sovereignty with regard to spiritual growth. Not you, but God alone is the Author of spiritual growth in your life. In a sovereign way he establishes his kingdom or reign in your heart and determines its progress in your life as well as in every other sphere of people on earth. "God makes it grow" (1 Corinthians 3:6)! The seed can only sprout, grow and bear fruit when God acts. In a complete sovereign way God establishes his kingdom (kingship, reign) in your heart and determines its progress in your life and the lives of others.

(2) Man's responsibility.

This does not rule out the fact that Christians should work together with God as those who plant and those who give water (1 Corinthians 3:6-9). The parable of the sower (farmer) emphasises the human responsibility with regard to spiritual growth. The result of spiritual growth and fruitfulness in your life depends on your response to God's Word. And your response to God's Word depends on the condition or attitude of your heart.

B. THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN DEAD AND LIVING THINGS

What are the differences between a car and a tree?

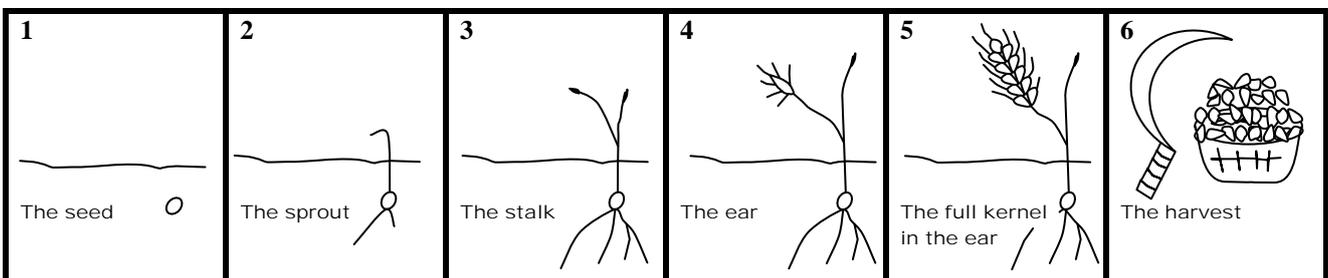
 <p>A car</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is dead and is fabricated of dead materials • is designed and made by man • by means of an outward assembly line • it is assembled in less than a day • complete parts are added externally • every car is one out of thousands of the same models • after production the model does not change • cannot reproduce itself • causes pollution and waste • costs a lot of money to maintain • only deteriorates and ends in rusted scrap material 	 <p>A tree</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is alive and grows as a living organism • is designed and made by God • by means of continual inward growth • it takes a long time to grow and has growth stages • every cell grows continually from the inside • every tree and every leaf is different, unique • and changes constantly • can reproduce • bears fruit in good time • makes a profit (wood and fruit) • finally dies, but serves as food for new life
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C. THE STAGES OF GROWTH

1. The physical growth stages of a plant.

Draw. An illustration of the various stages of growth described in Mark 4:28-29.

An illustration of the stages of growth.



The transition from one stage of growth to the next is so gradual that it is imperceptible. The farmer cannot indicate the precise moment when the tall stalk develops into an ear, or when rows of full kernels are produced in the ear. But under normal conditions, growth is inevitable. Nothing can stop the growth process. Physically, all living things either grow or die, but cannot remain stationary. Plants, trees, animals and people must grow or they will die, but they cannot remain the same like a stone or a car. All living things also go through different stages of growth. Likewise, spiritually, Christians must grow. They also grow through different spiritual stages of growth.

2. The spiritual growth stages of a Christian.

In the same way Christians pass through different stages of growth. We never remain the same. We must grow, or otherwise we die!

(1) What are the growth stages in Hebrews 5:11 – 6:3?

Read Hebrews 5:11 to 6:3. **Notes.** The writer rebukes the Hebrew Christians. He says that although they have been Christians for many years they have not grown. The three different kinds of Christians described are: the infants, the mature and the teachers. Each has the following characteristics:

The infants	The mature	The teachers
vs 11. They find it difficult to understand the Bible. vs 11. They are slow to learn. They need lots of time, motivation, repetition, encouragement. vs 12. They need a teacher to help them understand + grow. vs 12. They need milk (the very easy teachings of the Bible). vs 13. They are not acquainted with the teachings of the Bible. vs 14. They find it hard to distinguish good from evil.	vs 14. They eat solid food (They read and study the Bible by themselves). vs 14. They constantly use the Bible and put its teachings into practice. vs 14. They distinguish good from evil.	vs 12. They teach infants to grow to maturity.

(2) What are the growth stages in 1 Corinthians 2:15 to 3:11.

Read 1 Corinthians 2:15 to 3:11. **Notes.** Paul writes to the Corinthian congregation about what is really ‘spiritual’. The three different kinds of Christians described are: the infants, the spiritual and the workers. Each has the following characteristics:

The infants	The spiritual (the mature)	The workers
vs 1. They still think and behave like the people of the world. vs 3. They are jealous and they quarrel. vs 4. They split into groups.	vs 16. They think like Christ. vs 1. They are spiritual.	vs 5. They are servants of God. Each has his assigned task from God. vs 6. Some workers plant (evangelise). Other workers water God’s field (care for growing believers). vs 10. Some workers lay the foundation (lead people to Christ). Other workers build God’s building (disciple believers to maturity).

(3) What are the growth stages in 1 John 2:12-14?

Read 1 John 2:12-14. **Notes.** John writes to his various spiritual children. The three different kinds of Christians described are: the children, the young men and the fathers. Each has the following characteristics:

The children	The young men	The fathers
vs 12. They are forgiven. vs 13. They know God the Father.	vs 14. They are strong. The Word of God lives in them. They have overcome the devil.	vs 14. They know God as he has revealed himself in Christ (cf. Matthew 11:27; 1 John 1:1-3) vs. 14. As “fathers” they have (spiritual) children.

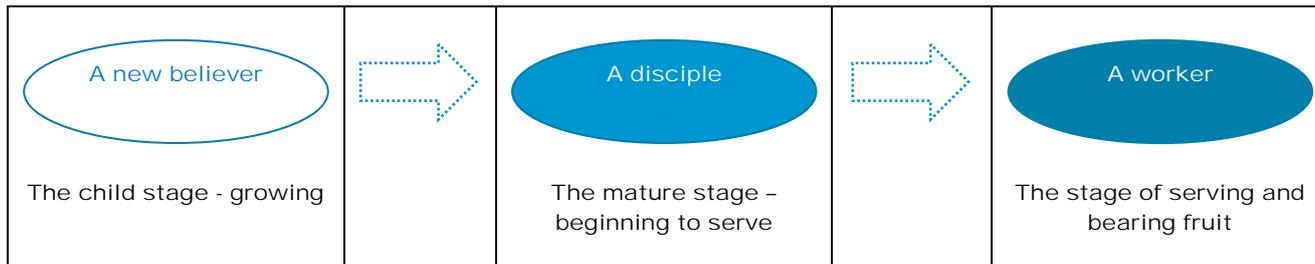
D. THE LESSONS CONCERNING GROWTH

3. In which stage of growth are you?

(1) The need to grow and to bear fruit.

The apostle Paul, the apostle John and the writer to the Hebrews all state very clearly that a Christian must grow. “Salvation” has a beginning point and then continues uninterrupted until the second coming of Christ (when his body is saved from death). Being a Christian is a continual growth process and not just a state. It is like making a pilgrim’s journey throughout life and not settling down. A genuine Christian does not merely attend “meetings”, but is actively involved in growing and serving. The Christian Church is not simply “a club with membership”, but a Body that grows and functions.

(2) The Bible speaks of three growth-stages for a Christian:
Every Christian ought to grow towards the next stage of growth. These stages of growth may overlap.



(3) Every Christian should grow towards the next growth-stage.

If you are still a new believer in Jesus Christ, then:

- You need the beginning teachings of the Bible (spiritual milk).
- You need another mature Christian to help you to grow (a mentor or teacher).
- Your goal is to grow to spiritual maturity (to become a disciple of Jesus Christ).

If you are a disciple (a mature follower of Jesus Christ), then:

- You take responsibility for your own spiritual growth and behaviour.
- You study and apply the Bible by yourself (in personal time with God)
- and together with other Christians (in a small group).
- Your goal is to grow in fruitfulness and to become a worker for Christ.

If you are a worker (a servant of Jesus Christ and his Church), then:

- You continue to grow as a disciple of Jesus Christ.
- You serve God in Jesus Christ by winning the lost (evangelisation) and/or building up the saved (discipleship training).
- Your goal is to glorify God, extend God's Kingdom and to bear fruit for God in other peoples' lives.

E. PERSONAL EVALUATION

Pray and think about yourself.

- In which stage of growth are you?
- What must you do to grow to the next stage?
- What does God want you to do about it?

5	PRAYER (8 minutes)	<p><i>[REACTIONS]</i></p> <p>PRAYER IN RESPONSE TO GOD'S WORD</p>
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Take turns in the group **to pray short** to God in response to what you have learned today.
Or divide the group into two's or three's and pray to God in response to what you have learned today.

6	PREPARATION (2 minutes)	<p><i>[ASSIGNMENT]</i></p> <p>FOR NEXT LESSON</p>
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(Group leader. Give the group members this preparation for at home in writing or let them copy it down).

1. **Commitment.** Make a commitment to grow to spiritual maturity and fruitfulness.
2. **Personal time with God.** Have a quiet time from half a chapter from John 4:23 – 7:52 each day.
Make use of the favourite truth method. Make notes.
3. **Bible study.** Prepare the next Bible study at home. (5) Revelation 21:1 – 22:6. Theme: Where am I going?
Make use of the five steps method of Bible study. Make notes.
4. **Prayer.** Pray for someone or something specific this week and see what God is doing (Psalm 5:3).
5. **Update your notebook** on making disciples. Include the worship notes, the notes on your personal time with God, the teaching notes and this preparation.