



# ZOOMING IN ON DISCIPLESHIP

**SANCTUARY FIRST  
CONNECT BIBLE STUDY**

*NOVEMBER 2024*

# WELCOME TO CONNECT!

A Connect Bible Study is a small group who meet regularly to explore faith and Godly responses to life issues, growing in the things of God together as we go. Anyone can host one using these materials and contact us for support and guidance. Online or in-person, our heart is that they offer a relaxed space for faith, friendship and fun.

We hope the resources and discussion points encourage, inspire, and invigorate you on your walk with God.

It might be the conversation follows the discussion as laid out or heads in a different direction, both are wonderful and we hope the outline we offer here is flexible and supportive to engage with the Bible and our faith in fresh and vibrant ways as we make our way in the world as 21st century disciples exploring the wonders of life with Jesus!

## WHAT IS INVOLVED?

Each week begins with an introduction and a 'seed to sow' conversation starter. These are open-ended prompts to inspire creative responses to the themes. Perhaps they will inspire you to write a song or a poem, or to paint, draw, move or explore! We imagine the material for each week would work for 90 minute sessions but feel free to adapt to your group!

There are more songs, videos, podcasts and blogs linked to this theme on our **website** and **App**, have fun exploring it all!

# ZOOMING IN ON DISCIPLESHIP

This month we are zooming in on discipleship! Join us as we zero in on four disciples we meet in the New Testament: Phoebe, Timothy, Lydia, and Apollos. For this theme the twist is that we are going to spend all month looking at just a small selection of verses — less than 30 over the entire month. In week one we are only going to be reading two verses!

What will we discover as we slow down and take time to get to know these men and women who were some of the first disciples of the Jesus movement. While Timothy has some letters addressed to him in the Bible (1st and 2nd Timothy!) the other three are only mentioned briefly in the New Testament — but what they offer us is a fascinating insight into the early life of Christianity. As we explore what it means to be a disciple in the 21st century we can learn from them how to be a bright spark, a trusted envoy, champion texters, and astronauts on the Apollos Mission!

## WEEKLY OVERVIEW

- **Phoebe, A Bright Spark** — *Sparking others!*
- **Trusty Timothy** — *Representing for Jesus!*
- **Lydia Texts Us** — *Getting to grips with pretext, context and subtext!*
- **The Apollos Mission** — *Humour, humility and holiness!*

# MEDITATION

## *BEFORE GOING ON A WALK*

Creator God

As I walk with you

Open my eyes to your beauty all around me.

As I walk with you

Open my ears to your song.

As I walk with you

Open my heart to your truth.

Amen

*Laura Digan*

# PRAYER

## *LET US PRAY*

Dear God of connections,

How amazing that, through the Trinity, you are made of connection

Thank you that you teach us to connect everyday

Please help us to build healthy lasting connections in our lives

Connect with us today and everyday

Amen

*Lily Cathcart*

# WEEK 1: PHOEBE, A BRIGHT SPARK — SPARKING OTHERS!

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## INTRODUCTION:

The name *Phoebe* means pure, radiant, bright! Part of discipleship is being bright sparks in the world. Phoebe wasn't just a bright spark herself — she sparked others! This week in a Sanctuary First *first* we are going to spend all week just reading *two verses*! The picture the early church gives us of discipleship is a diverse, distributed network of mutually supporting individuals and communities. Discipleship cuts across demographic, economic and cultural backgrounds — it is spread out but constantly on the move and communicating with one another.

## SEEDS TO SOW:

What candles of hospitality can you light in your local neighbourhood this week?

## READ ROMANS 16: 1

*Bright sparks!*

Something we glean from Phoebe right away is that her name means means *pure, radiant, bright!* Part of discipleship is being bright sparks in the world like Phoebe. It only takes a spark to start a fire, and sometimes it only takes one small gesture of grace to transform the world around you.

Phoebe was a landmark example of women in leadership! The use of *deacon* here is notable, read in the context of Paul's wider writing we can understand her to be a significant leader, preacher, and teacher!

How can we ourselves serve through leading and lead through our serving — teaching and guiding others?

And do we expect service in those who lead us? Or leadership in those who serve us?

Being a disciple sometimes means turning the world's expectations on their head, as Phoebe did, as we live lives transformed by grace.

## READ ROMANS 16: 2

*Any help!*

Hospitality is a crucial part of discipleship in the early church... and in the contemporary church! As God has welcomed us into our arms, we welcome others. The hospitality to Phoebe is a reflection of the hospitality already received from God. Why are we doing what we are doing... because of who we are in Christ!

Are we welcoming one another in a way worthy of the Lord's people? What stops us being hospitable? What helps us to be welcoming?

## READ ROMANS 16: 2

*Champion!*

Phoebe was a champion — not just in the sense that she excelled herself but because she championed others! From the context here it would seem that Phoebe financially or otherwise materially supported others. How are we investing (both financially and also our social capital) in charitable works and in others who need our backing and support?

Paul's gratitude to Phoebe is touching. What are our stories of the disciples who have supported us? Sharing these stories can be a wonderful testimony of Christianity in action — the Kingdom in motion!

# WEEK 2: TRUSTY TIMOTHY! — REPRESENTING FOR JESUS!

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## INTRODUCTION:

Paul thought very highly of Timothy, he is an example of a young person given tremendous responsibility in the early church. In Philippians and Thessalonians we get to see how much his integrity and character were appreciated.

## SEEDS TO SOW:

What are the different things we represent or are an ambassador for in our lives? How do we feel about representing those things?

## READ PHILIPPIANS 2: 19-24

*Trusted envoys.*

Paul saw Timothy as a trusted messenger and representative who could carry important news. As disciples of Jesus we are not lone agents who only represent ourselves — we are ambassadors for Christ who sends us out.

What way could we 'rep' for Jesus this week in an aspect of our life we don't normally associate with faith and the Kingdom?

In what ways is imagery and visual art important for expressing our mission?

## READ 1 THESSALONIANS 3: 1-5, 2 TIMOTHY 1: 5-7

*Strengthen and encourage!*

A key aspect of discipleship is strengthening and encouraging one another in faith, especially during unsettling times. Discipleship is not a call to an easy life — it's a call to life itself in all its fullness!

In Paul's letter to Timothy we hear about Timothy's deep connection. The deep fire that keeps him going. His relationship with God that powers what he does. How are we getting on with our fans? Deepening in our relationship with God?

All of the integrity and character we see in Timothy is because of who he is in Christ, and the gifts from God he is learning about. God is giving us gifts to fan into flame too! To do so, we come sit in his presence.

Take time now to strengthen and encourage one another through prayer.

## READ 1 THESSALONIANS 3: 6

*Remembering kindly.*

Timothy, we discover, is the bearer of good news!

What and who are we remembering kindly? Whose good news do we bear?

How can we, like Timothy, pass on and share kind memories in a world that's often full of bitter feuds and grudges?

# WEEK 3: LYDIA TEXTS US! — *PRETEXT, CONTEXT, SUBTEXT!*

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## INTRODUCTION:

In this text message about a textile merchant, we want to have eyes open for the *context* — what's around the words, the *subtext* — what lies underneath the words, the *urtext* — the origins of the words as an object in history, and then the *pretexts* we might bring to those words!

## SEEDS TO SOW:

If you could send a text message to someone in the Bible who would you text and what would you say?

## READ ACTS 16: 11-14

*Context and textiles.*

The context: apostles on the move looking for a place of prayer and a group of women who had gathered by the river. What do we gain if we don't just skip past this scene-setting but dig in a little further? What do you notice or what catches your attention when you take time to explore the scene?

Another of the *text* words we are thinking about this week is 'textile' as Lydia was a dealer in purple cloth. The Bible doesn't always provide CVs or job descriptions, especially of women, so it's significant that it's mentioned here. What does the fact Lydia was a textile dealer tell us about her?

## READ ACTS 16: 15

*Subtext and text messages.*

In this pocket of space that has opened up — across potential barriers of gender, culture and status — a woman comes to faith in Jesus.

Imagine Lydia texting her family and friends about what happened. One of the subtexts of *The Acts of the Apostles* (a title that came much later) is actually the importance of God's acts in the world. Lydia was someone who listened, Paul is someone who spoke, but it is God who opened her heart.

What is the text message of this encounter? For us as individuals and as a wider community?

Let's take time to pray that God might open more hearts.

## READ ACTS 16: 15

*Pretext!*

Lydia at the end of the verse seems to be putting the pressure on Paul a bit! Perhaps there was more she wanted to know or learn before he left town. While the hospitality was genuine it could also have been a bit of a pretext so that she could grill him further on this new faith!

If she came to Paul with a pretext... she isn't alone! At the time and over the intervening two thousand years people have come to Paul with their pretexts, their assumptions and agendas. What's lovely about Lydia is whether or not there was a pretext is that she offers genuine hospitality, shelter and connection.

When we come to the Bible, what do we bring with us? What are our pretexts?

How can our attitudes and past experiences hinder *and* help our understanding of the Bible?

# WEEK 4: THE APOLLOS MISSION! — HUMOUR & HUMILITY!

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## INTRODUCTION:

Suit up astronauts it's time to go on the Apollos Mission! Apollos was a very keen disciple and in his story we find humour, humility, and holiness! In a funny set piece one could imagine from *Early Church the sitcom* Apollos gets rather carried away preaching and needs to be quietly drawn aside by Priscilla and Aquila. You can picture the look on their faces: "Eh, should we jump in here?" He shows great humility and takes the new intel from mission control on board. The Apollos Mission is back on track!

## SEEDS TO SOW:

How best do you learn? What do you look for in a mentor?

## READ ACTS 18: 24

*The gift of the gab...*

There are various gifts God gives us and one of them is the gift of the gab! Apollos knows his onions and he can talk the hind legs off a donkey. Extroverted or introverted God can and does use our distinct ways of communicating in the world to communicate his grace.

In what ways do you think God uses your preferred ways of expressing yourself to share grace in the world?

## READ ACTS 18: 25-26

*The gift to boldly go...*

Apollos was a man on a mission and he spoke with burning enthusiasm. He's paid attention, learnt about Jesus, but there are some gaps in his knowledge. Houston we have a problem!

Priscilla and Aquila quietly take him aside afterwards to help him clarify things a bit more, to put him in the picture.

How do we deal with our blindspots? And who are the Priscillas and Aquilas we are grateful for — that keep our missions on track?

## READ ACTS 18: 27-28

*The gift of sharpening...*

Apollos's pals encourage him and vouch for him. They are witnessing a man in real time growing and maturing as a believer and they've got his back.

He has been greatly helped by Priscilla and Aquila and is now greatly helping others! Jesus isn't something to hoard or stockpile — he is someone to pursue with all our heart, mind, strength and then share!

As iron sharpens iron (see Proverbs 27: 17) Apollos has been sharpened and is ready to go toe to toe to powerfully promote the Messiah!

What happens when we sharpen each other (while keeping the kind spirit of Priscilla and Aquila)?

And who are the new leaders and missionaries that we are backing as they grow and mature?