

HOW TO BEAR THE WEIGHT OF LIFE

Small group notes - How to bear the weight of life
St Mary's and Sale West
October 2021

USING THE SMALL GROUP NOTES

- We start with **Catching Up** (+/-15 minutes): This is a chance for a cuppa, catching up on life and hearing if there have been any answers to prayer, or any 'God-moments' during the week.
- Use the **Key Idea** and **Setting the Scene** to help give some context to this week's topic and passage
- Read the **Bible Passage**: one person could read it all out loud, read it round the room, or everyone could read it individually.
- **Discuss** is the main part of the session (+/- 1 hour).
 - The questions are designed to get us praying, not just talking about it.
 - You may wish to sub-divide the group into 3's or 4's for part of the session, to allow more time for each person to contribute.
- Leave time for **Prayer**.

The Bible passages are not printed in these notes, so encourage everyone to **bring their own Bible**. Different versions may be useful: hearing familiar verses in a newer translation such as The Message or The Living Bible may bring new insights.

Pens and paper may also be needed.

All Bible extracts in these notes are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version, 2011 version ©Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.

HOW TO BEAR THE WEIGHT OF LIFE

Week 1

The Belt of Truth



KEY IDEA

The belt of truth is the foundation of our faith. Jesus doesn't just tell the truth, He is the truth! "I am the way and the truth and the life." (John 14:6)



SETTING THE SCENE

Belts were not meant for civilian use; they were the mark of a soldier. These belts were narrow and decorated with embossed or engraved metal plates all the way around. Belts may well have indicated a soldier's status, but its prime purpose was:

- To hold the sword
- To take some of the weight off the soldier's shoulders
- To hold all the armour together, so it didn't fall off - or fall apart - during the fight!



BIBLE PASSAGE

Read Ephesians 6:10-18



DISCUSS

1. What do you understand by Jesus' statement '*I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me?*' (John 14:6)
2. What struck you in the Ephesians passage?
3. Is truth something that is different for different people, or is it the same for everyone?
4. In a world of spin doctors, fake news, internet influencers and social media, how does Scripture help us discern between right and wrong?
5. How can God's truth help us bear the weight of life?

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Week 2

The Breastplate of Righteousness



KEY IDEA

The breastplate of righteousness protects our hearts. Righteousness means we are in right standing with God.



SETTING THE SCENE

RIGHTEOUS IS DEFINED AS: ethical, honourable, law-abiding, upright, blameless, faithful, guiltless, just, trustworthy

SELF-RIGHTEOUS IS DEFINED AS: egotistical, hypocritical, goody-goody, holier-than-thou, self-satisfied, superior

"Federal agents don't learn to spot counterfeit money by studying the counterfeits. They study genuine bills until they master the look of the real thing."

Jesus was righteous and people from all walks of life were drawn to Him. The religious leaders were self-righteous and developed a reputation for being aloof and cut off from real life.

"God received from me something He didn't have on His own - my sin. I received something from God I didn't have on my own - His righteousness." (Jonny Hunt)



BIBLE PASSAGE

Read Acts 8:5-25



DISCUSS

1. Describe righteousness in your own words.
2. What struck you in the passage?
3. What was the fundamental problem with Simon's request and his motive? What did it reveal about his heart?
4. Why is the breastplate of righteousness so important to put

on? What does it protect?

5. Explore how the devil could take advantage of us not understanding that our righteousness is in Christ?
6. How can putting on a breastplate of righteousness help us through the storms of life?

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Week 3

The Gospel of Peace



KEY IDEA

The gospel of peace enables us to experience God's peace, even when life feels heavy and turbulent.



SETTING THE SCENE

"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid." (John 14:27)

When asked, "What's wrong with the world today?" many will point to corrupt governments, worsening effects of climate change, patchy healthcare, broken families, racial injustice, lack of civility in politics and more. The world tries to fix these problems through regulation, investment, reform.... These are important countermeasures, but they fail to fix the root problem – sin. Only Christ can remedy and heal sin-disease and bring about an inner peace that rides out life's turbulence, and withstands its burdens.



BIBLE PASSAGE

Read Acts 12:6-19



DISCUSS

1. Describe God's peace in your own words.
2. What struck you in the passage?
3. Peter was chained up, guarded by soldiers, and facing next-day trial at the hands of Herod who had just had the apostle James killed. Yet Peter is sleeping soundly! How do the verses below from Philippians 4:4-8 explain Peter's serenity?

Philippians 4:4 Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: rejoice! 5 Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. 6 DO NOT BE ANXIOUS ABOUT ANYTHING, but in every situation, by prayer and

*petition, with thanksgiving, PRESENT YOUR REQUESTS TO GOD. 7
And THE PEACE OF GOD, which transcends all understanding, WILL
GUARD YOUR HEARTS AND YOUR MINDS IN CHRIST JESUS.*

8 Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – **THINK ABOUT SUCH THINGS.**

4. How can these verses help *us* to reject anxiety? What is our part and what is God's part?
5. Can you share any practical tips on how you reject anxiety and take hold of God's peace?

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Week 4

The Shield of Faith



KEY IDEA

The shield of faith protects us from the enemy's attempts to undermine, distract, discourage and divert us from following God.



SETTING THE SCENE

The Roman soldier carried a curved shield which weighed 10 kilograms, and was made from 3 sheets of wood glued together. The shield was covered with canvas and leather which helped extinguish flaming arrows. The shield was light enough to be held in one hand, and yet it was large enough to cover the soldier's entire body. It was useful both in hand-to-hand combat and in deterring missile fire. Entire units could protect themselves by interlocking shields into a 'tortoise formation'.

Up until now the armour has been limited to items we wear. We put on the belt, the breastplate and the shoes, and they essentially stay in place by themselves. The shield is different. It is something we must take up, something we are required to raise. Just strapping it to our arm won't do any good at all if we don't make the effort to hold it up and use it. It is also not just for individual use; when interlocked, it protects the whole regiment of soldiers.



BIBLE PASSAGE

Read Acts 4:1-31



DISCUSS

1. Why is a shield associated with faith?
2. What struck you in the passage?
3. How did Peter and John use the shield of faith and what were the outcomes?
4. How can we protect ourselves from worry, anxiety, and fear?

5. How can you let others exercise faith on your behalf? What is the role of the church community in protecting individual believers who are going through a difficult time?
6. Are there “attacks” going on in your life which cause you worry, fear and anxiety? How can you take up the shield of faith and stand firm?

The Helmet of Salvation



KEY IDEA

The helmet of salvation is vital for protecting our minds. It helps us to make wise choices and live life well.

The helmet of salvation serves as a filter for all invading thoughts that oppose, resist, insult, or belittle the words of Christ.



SETTING THE SCENE

For most people, feelings are the guiding factor in their lives. Feelings dictate their behaviour, actions and decisions. But God's order is very different: Our faith is based on facts, and feelings follow facts. God is constant and unchanging. His truth is immutable, regardless of how we feel about it. Our thinking determines how we act, feel and live life.

Peter has a 180 degree turn in his thinking, and this changes the course of the church forever.



BIBLE PASSAGE

Read Acts 11:1-18



DISCUSS

1. Why do you think salvation is pictured as a helmet in the armour of God?
2. What struck you in the passage?
3. What was the impact of Peter's testimony?
4. At the end of the passage the church changes its thinking and approach. Are there lessons here for us as a church?
5. Transformation is an on-going, lifelong process. Sometimes it's quick and immediate, other times it's slow going. How is God currently challenging your thinking and making you more like Christ?

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Week 6

The Sword of the Spirit



KEY IDEA

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:16)

This verse is worth memorising! The better we know the Bible the better equipped we are to think, speak and act wisely. People can sometimes make us feel like we don't matter, but we know what God's word says about us. People sometimes ask us about God / our faith, and the Bible helps us to know what to say. And when the enemy tempts us, or accuses us, we are able to fight back with God's word.



SETTING THE SCENE

The Roman gladius has become known as "the sword that conquered the world." When sharpened, its dual edges wreaked havoc, while its tapered point could pierce through heavy duty armour.

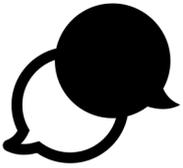
Hebrews 4:12 For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

The idea here is that the Word of God penetrates to the "heart," and lays open the motives and feelings of those it touches.



BIBLE PASSAGE

Read Acts 2:22-41



DISCUSS

1. Why do you think God's Word is called the Sword of the Spirit?
2. What struck you in the passage?
3. When Peter preached and used the Scriptures, he provoked a strong response from his listeners. Have you ever reacted to the word of God in an immediate & decisive way? Have you ever changed your thinking / behaviour / actions as a direct result of hearing or reading God's word?
4. What is the difference between head-knowledge and heart-knowledge in relation to God's Word?
5. What are your favourite ways of engaging with the Bible? Share any Bible reading tips / methods that work for you.