

# How to go to church



4 Sessions



**RELATING**  
with God's people

*Part of Gold Hill's 'Take a Step' discipleship pathway.*  
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# Make the most of this guide

We believe this guide can be transformative. But as with most things, it can be used to the fullest or not have much impact. It depends how you use it. To help you get the most from it, we strongly suggest you ask and answer these 3 questions:



## 1. Who is alongside me?

This is not designed to use alone as a private study. You will get the most if you go through it with someone and take these steps together. If you haven't already worked that out, who could you ask to join you?



## 2. When will we meet?

It's best to have a plan before you start. You only need 4 slots, each 1–2 hours, and no closer than a week apart so you have time to try things out. So put them all in the diary up front.



## 3. Will we give this a real go?

In this guide there will be questions to consider and discuss, but the real impact will be as you give things a go and put things into action. Then it won't just be information but transformation. Will you do that?

As you use this guide together, there are various things that we will suggest along the way. They are marked by these different icons:



## READ

Read these bits. (And interrupt if you want to discuss!)



## DISCUSS

Use the prompts, and have an open chat about it together.



## ACTION

These are things to do, either together or before next time.

# How to go to church

Going to church can be the easiest thing to do. As long as you show up to the right place at the right time and stay for the correct amount of time, you have successfully 'gone to church'. The problem is that in the New Testament, we never hear about 'going to church' because church isn't just an event to attend. It's a people, a family, a gathering of people pursuing Jesus. Perhaps that's why, sometimes, just 'going to church' can feel like going through the motions and become stale.

But meeting together, and being part of church together, is of course a great thing! So the aim of this resource is not to discourage that, but to help us do it really well. You will explore some aims you can have every time you 'go to church' that can make it no longer about going through the motions but about joining with God's purposes in big ways.

## OVERVIEW

### 1. Why go to church?

Why we're there in the first place impacts hugely what we're able to achieve by going to church.

### 2. Prepared to Receive

We all want to get the most out of the time we spend in church with others, so how do we make sure we can?

### 3. Prepared to Share

What if God wants to use us to help someone else receive? It's a great thing to seek out and prepare to do.

### 4. Prepared to Serve

Since it isn't all about ourselves, it's good to consider how we can bless and serve others, in planned and unplanned ways.

# Why Go to Church?

## session 1

In this first session, we are going to start with ‘why’. If we don’t even know why we are doing something, or if our reasons aren’t as good as they could be, then everything else will be built on shaky ground.

### Why do people go to church?



Jot down as many reasons as you can think of why someone might regularly go to church. Not necessarily your reasons, just reasons someone might do.

- |         |          |
|---------|----------|
| 1. .... | 7. ....  |
| 2. .... | 8. ....  |
| 3. .... | 9. ....  |
| 4. .... | 10. .... |
| 5. .... | 11. .... |
| 6. .... | 12. .... |

Look at the reasons you gave. Have a conversation about:

- Which of them are **GOOD REASONS** to go to church (*underline these*)
- Which of them are **YOUR REASONS** why you do so (*circle these*)

### God’s Plan for the Church



To get a bit of a picture of God’s plan for the church, read the following from **Acts 2:38-47**. (This is a description of the early church, in the aftermath of Pentecost.)

<sup>38</sup> Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. <sup>39</sup> The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.”

<sup>40</sup> With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, “Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.” <sup>41</sup> Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.



<sup>42</sup> They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. <sup>43</sup> Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. <sup>44</sup> All the believers were together and had everything in common. <sup>45</sup> They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. <sup>46</sup> Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, <sup>47</sup> praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.



At Gold Hill, these words have inspired nine 'Constants' that we always want to be part of our church gatherings. For each, what is an example of it in Acts 2, and why does it matter?



## **WORSHIP**

Giving God praise together.



## **CELEBRATION**

In baptism, communion and testimony.



## **WORD**

Responding to the Bible together.



## **LEADERSHIP**

Leaders called by God for everyone's good.



## **PRAYER**

Coming before God as His people.



## **SHARING FAITH**

When gathered and when scattered



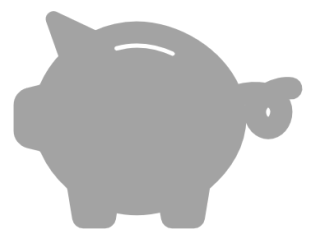
## **SPIRIT-LED**

Going where He leads at all times.



## **LOVE**

Caring and real partnership.



## **GIVING**

Sharing of all we have been given.

## Active or Passive



Before thinking about what you will focus on in the ways you engage with church, read **Hebrews 10:24-25** which speaks a lot to the kind of stance we should have as we go to church.

<sup>38</sup> And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, <sup>25</sup> not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

These words are full of *intentionality*. We're encouraged to really think about how we can use the time we have together to spur each other on, and to be consistent and committed in it. There's no 'going through the motions' here.

### Personal self-assessment

Everyone has different areas where they find themselves more or less motivated. If we've seen some essentials of why we are part of church, and that we are to be active, not passive, in our stance with it, how are we doing?



On the sliders below, mark an **X** on each line indicating how **PASSIVE (P)** or **ACTIVE (A)** you are in engaging with each area of church life. (e.g., *being active in 'Leadership' might mean actively looking for where leaders are leading and getting behind them.*) Do this individually at first.

#### WORSHIP

P |—————| A

#### SHARING FAITH

P |—————| A

#### CELEBRATION

P |—————| A

#### SPIRIT-LED

P |—————| A

#### WORD

P |—————| A

#### LOVE

P |—————| A

#### LEADERSHIP

P |—————| A

#### GIVING

P |—————| A

#### PRAYER

P |—————| A



After you have done this individually, are there areas you could become more active that you think would be good to explore? Share that together.

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So having explored some reasons that others, you and God in the Bible have for 'going to church', if there is anything that has shifted in your thinking or something you'd like to shift in your behaviour, take a bit of time to capture that. It could be:

- There is a reason for the church you want to remind yourself (or each other) of the next time you're stepping into church.
- There is an area where you want to seek to be more active. If so, how is it that you will try to do that?
- There is someone you want to encourage about some of these things.



### **TAKE-AWAY** *from session 1*

Use this space to note down what are taking away from this and any actions you've decided on.

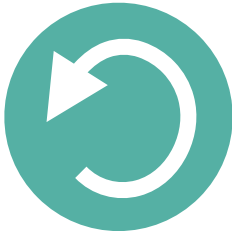
## **PRAY**

Before you finish, take some time to pray for each other, specifically for the things you have shared and the decisions you have made together.

# Prepared to Receive

## session 2

In this session, you are going to consider how you can prepare yourselves to receive what God wants to give you when you come to a church gathering. We shouldn't attend just to receive, but we should definitely expect to receive things from God that are good, and if we are more prepared that is more likely to happen!



### **CATCH UP** *since last session*

Before starting on this next week's material, how did you get on with the things you shared last session? Take a little time catching up on that first.

## Discussion Starters



1. Think of a time when you received something (anything!) good in church. How did it happen, and how often do you find that kind of thing happens?

**Note:** *For this session, we are going to focus now on receiving from God through the Bible, through sermons, through people opening and explaining God's word. (There will be a chance later to apply the same principles to other areas, but we're going to focus here first)*

2. Normally, how do you engage with a sermon? It might be that some of the words and phrases below apply, or supply your own:

Emotional

Lose focus

Questioning

Informative

.....

Critical

Entertaining

Boring

Take Notes

Follow in Bible

Confusing

.....

Waste of Time

Transformational

Often disagree



We are now going to consider a few Bible passages that help us explore the idea of being prepared to receive from God through His Word. For each of these, read the passage together, and discuss the questions.

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## Hebrews 4:12, the nature of God's word



"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."

**1:** If this is true of the Bible, what should we expect to happen in us as we are exposed to its truth through preaching?

**2:** How does this compare with the experiences you have had during talks and church gatherings when the Bible is opened?

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## 1 Thessalonians 2:13, the origin of the word



"And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is indeed at work in you who believe."

**1:** When you listen to a sermon, do you receive what you hear as being the word of God, or as being something from a human? Or both?

**2:** What are the dangers of always receiving sermons as God's word? And what are the dangers of always receiving them as human words? What do you think is the best way to handle this?

**3:** What do you think Paul means when he speaks of God's word being 'at work' in believers as well? How have you experienced that?

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## Acts 17:10-12, the Berean approach



<sup>10</sup> As soon as it was night, the believers sent Paul and Silas away to Berea. On arriving there, they went to the Jewish synagogue. <sup>11</sup> Now the Berean Jews were of more noble character than those in Thessalonica, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true. <sup>12</sup> As a result, many of them believed, as did also a number of prominent Greek women and many Greek men.

**2:** Eager as they were, they did not want to be duped! So they checked what they heard! Is this something you do? How would you do so? What would help you in being able to do this in church as people speak and share?

We will now broaden out again just from the sermon section of church, as there are many ways God might want us to receive: through prayer, in a time of worship, through conversation before or after, in a prophetic picture or word shared with us.



Jot down as many potential barriers as you can think of that would prevent you receiving from God. Some will be practical things, and others will be spiritual things. Think about both.

A 2x2 matrix diagram. The top row is divided into two columns by a vertical line. The left column is labeled 'PRACTICAL' and the right column is labeled 'SPIRITUAL'. The matrix is currently empty, with no text or symbols in the cells.

	PRACTICAL	SPIRITUAL

**Q:** Consider some of the barriers that feel like the biggest for you. What are some things you could do to seek to overcome those things?

Now you have spent some time considering how we can position ourselves to best receive from God (especially through the Bible but also more widely), what will you seek to do when you're next in church. Perhaps:

- There is something practical that often seems to be a distraction or a barrier, and you can take a step to remove that.
- You need to pray that God would give you both an openness and an eagerness to receive from Him, helping you to receive more readily.
- You need to do something simple like reading this week's passage ahead of time or bringing your Bible to church so you can better test what you're hearing and have confidence to receive it when it is from God.



### **TAKE-AWAY** *from session 2*

Use this space to note down what are taking away from this and any actions you've decided on.

### **PRAY**

As with last week, finish by praying for each other to be able to put into practice what you have spoken about and shared.

# Prepared to Share

## session 3

In this session, you are going to explore different ways you can share when you come to church. While we get many things out of attending church gatherings for ourselves, there are also lots of opportunities to share and bless others, and that should be part of our aim when we do come along.



### **CATCH UP** *since last session*

Before starting on this next week's material, how did you get on with the things you shared last session? Take a little time catching up on that first.

## The example of the Corinthians



One of the churches written to in the New Testament was in Corinth, who had many problems! In one section, Paul writes about what they do when they gather, in **1 Cor 14:26-33**.

<sup>26</sup> What then shall we say, brothers and sisters? When you come together, each of you has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. Everything must be done so that the church may be built up. <sup>27</sup> If anyone speaks in a tongue, two—or at the most three—should speak, one at a time, and someone must interpret. <sup>28</sup> If there is no interpreter, the speaker should keep quiet in the church and speak to himself and to God.

<sup>29</sup> Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh carefully what is said. <sup>30</sup> And if a revelation comes to someone who is sitting down, the first speaker should stop. <sup>31</sup> For you can all prophesy in turn so that everyone may be instructed and encouraged. <sup>32</sup> The spirits of prophets are subject to the control of prophets. <sup>33</sup> For God is not a God of disorder but of peace—as in all the congregations of the Lord's people.

**1:** What do you make of the kind of gathering described here by Paul? Do you like it, hate the idea or something in between?

**2:** What seem to be Paul's aims in writing this particular section to them?

**3:** What different things are there that people can 'share' in this passage? Are there others you can think of not mentioned here? (Compare also with Col 3:15-17)



## Principles for sharing

From these words in 1 Corinthians, there are a few principles it's important to note as we then consider how we can prepare ourselves to share. For each, have a conversation based on the prompt question.

### 1. Sharing when we gather is good

Paul could have tried to stop them sharing because they were disordered, but he doesn't. Instead He encourages them to do it well.

***Q: when have you benefited from others sharing things in church?***

### 2. It should not be chaotic

The emphasis is on order and things being shared for the common good of all. For that to happen, things need to be orderly.

***Q: what are the dangers of (a) too much structure; (b) too much chaos?***

### 3. We always have a choice

It is very clear that we have a choice whether and how to share. God does not take us over and force us. It is always subject to our choice.

***Q: what makes you more or less likely to choose to share something?***

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## A question of context



The Corinthian church would have been a fairly small group of people meeting, where everyone engaged in most things all together as a whole group. Things were interactive and, as we read, there was opportunity for all to get involved and share.

Have a discussion, considering the context where you tend to 'go to church', and think through these things about that:

### SIZE

*How large is the gathering you are part of?*

**SMALL** |—————| **LARGE**

### WHEN TO SHARE

*Will it normally be more helpful to share before or during?*

**BEFORE** |—————| **DURING**

### HOW TO SHARE

*Will sharing normally be public, or done privately for an individual?*

**PUBLIC** |—————| **PRIVATE**

## What could you share?



We have seen some examples in the 1 Corinthians passage, but now we will consider a fuller list of things we could do to share with others. The list below is probably not complete, so do add to it, and also have a conversation about which of these are things you feel might make most sense for you.

## A Bible Verse

## Prophecy

## Encourage someone

## Testimony

.....

## Word in Tongues

## Interpretations

## Pray with someone

## Good News

## Your Experiences

## Sit with Someone

.....

Before you move on, briefly discuss what practically it would mean for you to be able to share in one or more of these ways. What would you need to do to prepare yourself beforehand, what would it mean when you do it, and what would it mean for you afterward to follow up?

## What's stopping you?



As before, things can prevent us from being able to share with others when we gather in a church setting. Discuss what they are, and what could be done to overcome them.

# BARRIER

## SOLUTION

Now you have spent some time considering how we can position ourselves to best share with others, consider your response. What will you seek to do when you're next in church. Perhaps:

- There is a way of sharing you have done more regularly in the past that God is calling you back to.
- You need to pray about some of the hindrances and obstacles.
- You need to invest a bit of time ahead of the next time you are in church to pray about if there is anything God wants to use you to share with a person or with the whole gathering.



### **TAKE-AWAY** *from session 3*

Use this space to note down what are taking away from this and any actions you've decided on.

### **PRAY**

Take a few minutes to pray together, and ask God that anything He wants to use you for would be able to be freely shared.

# Prepared to Serve

## session 4

In this last session, you are going to consider how you can serve others when you come to a church gathering. This is a vital part of us all coming together as one body, each of us playing our part to build up the whole.



### **CATCH UP** *since last session*

Before starting on this next week's material, how did you get on with the things you shared last session? Take a little time catching up on that first.

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## Who serves you?



**DISCUSS:** last time you went to church, how many different people served you in one way or another? Which did you find most meaningful?

Then, consider the question in reverse: how many different ways have you served others in church? Think about it for a while – there are probably more of these than you think!

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## Jesus' heart of service

This is something Jesus said about Himself: **"The Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for man."** (Mark 10:45)



Having a heart to serve others is a big part of this. Jesus came to serve, which means none of us can consider ourselves off the hook with it! His example is our model. Consider these statements and how much you agree with them. (Place an **X** on the scale, and discuss your answers.)

*I am willing to serve others in church.*

**AGREE** | ————— | **DISAGREE**



*I know how I can serve others in church.*

**AGREE** |—————| **DISAGREE**

*I am grateful for the ways in which others serve.*

**AGREE** |—————| **DISAGREE**

*I feel as though I make a difference because I am present.*

**AGREE** |—————| **DISAGREE**

*I regularly serve others in church already.*

**AGREE** |—————| **DISAGREE**

*I would like to serve others in church more effectively.*

**AGREE** |—————| **DISAGREE**

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## Finding your part to play



An important part of preparing ourselves to serve is to know what we have to give in serving others. In **1 Cor 12:12-20**, Paul explores this idea. Read, and discuss the questions below.

<sup>12</sup> Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. <sup>13</sup> For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. <sup>14</sup> Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many.

<sup>15</sup> Now if the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. <sup>16</sup> And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. <sup>17</sup> If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? <sup>18</sup> But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. <sup>19</sup> If they were all one part, where would the body be? <sup>20</sup> As it is, there are many parts, but one body.

**1:** What do these words teach us about our unity? And about our diversity? Is there part of that you tend to think about more?

**2:** Paul warns us against pretending we are something we aren’t (an eye or an ear). How might that be a releasing thing for you or others? And how might it be a challenging thing?

**3:** It is clearly important for each of us to know what part we have to play, or the whole body can end up lacking. How well do you feel you know what you have to bring, your own spiritual gifts?

***Note:** If you would find it helpful, we have a resource called 'Find and use your gifts' which could help you here if you are less sure. You can find it as part of the 'Take a Step' discipleship pathway on our website.*

**4:** Are there particular gifts you feel you have that could be used more fully to build up God's people?

**5:** Are there things you need to step back from because, at least now, they aren't the right shape for you or you aren't the right shape for them?

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## Two kinds of serving

There are two types of serving that we can do when we gather with others: **planned** and **spontaneous**.

### Planned Serving:

This involves joining a team, knowing when you will be serving in a particular way, and doing it. It is a great way of getting stuck in alongside others and at growing in particular areas and gifts.

**How:** *if you'd like to make a plan for serving on a team, speak to the person who leads that area or, if you're not sure what area yet or who to ask, get in touch with a leader in the church who can help you out.*

### Spontaneous Serving:

This isn't on a rota, but is more about being on the lookout for things that you can step in and help with and taking the initiative to do so. This is a huge blessing as it meets needs as they arise and can make a huge difference.

**How:** *before you come to a church gathering, pray that God would help you spot anything that you can step in to help with. Then keep your eyes and heart open to it. Then, in ways that don't disempower others involved in the area you're stepping into, get stuck in.*



**DISCUSS:** which of these has been your approach to serving up until now? Is there a way you would like to serve more, or in a different way going forward?

Now you have spent some time considering how you can prepare to serve, take a moment to decide on your own response. Perhaps:

- You need to ask God to grow your heart and willingness to serve.
- There is a particular area of serving you are going to approach someone to step up into more fully.
- There is something you need to step back from.
- You are going to explore your spiritual gifts more so you can better find ways to serve God's people that are right for who He's made you to be.



### **TAKE-AWAY** *from session 4*

Use this space to note down what are taking away from this and any actions you've decided on.

## **PRAY**

This is the final session, so pray about all you have covered together:

- About engaging more actively with all parts of what happens in church
- About preparing yourself to receive from God more fully
- About preparing yourself to share with others more freely
- About preparing yourself to serve others in the church more fruitfully

Commit to continue praying, and why not also put a date in the diary to get together again and catch up on how you are doing with all these things.



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