

Starting an Action Group

agape
essentials

Intro:

Agape Essentials is a resource to help students Walk *with* God and Talk *for* Jesus. These Essentials contain the theology and DNA of Agape. They are best used in a community of students who want to engage in evangelism and discipleship i.e. form an Action Group

Read: Matthew 4v18-22

What were these four fishermen doing when Jesus met them? What happened next?

Why do you think they were willing stop their usual activities to follow Jesus (see 12-17)?

Why did you begin to follow Jesus? How did this affect your usual activities?

What has been your experience of following Jesus at university?

What did Jesus promise the fishermen? What does this mean? What can we learn from this?

What has been your experience of fishing for people?

True or False:

If we are not fishing, then we are not following Jesus.

Pray:

Commit yourself to following Jesus above all else at university. Ask Him to help you to do this day by day, and for practical insights into what this might mean.

Action Point:

This week, ask a friend to join this embryonic Action Group

Digging Deeper:

Find out a bit more of the background of these first disciples.

How old were they?

How much did following Jesus mean to them?

What did it mean for their careers?

How did they die?

Feedback:

What was last week's action point? How did you get on with it?

Intro:

What do you think makes someone a follower of Jesus? On a scale of 1-10, how sure are you that you are a child of God and that you will be with Him forever?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Tell the group the story of how you became a follower of Jesus in 2-3 minutes.

Read: 1 John 5v9-13 (twice)

What does John want for the readers of his letter (13)?

Where does John point them to help them "know" (9-10)?

What is the difference between God's testimony and man's? What does God say is true?

How easy do you find it to believe God's testimony?

What is the key to gaining eternal life? What does it mean to have the Son?

Do you think eternal life is just for the future or is it a "now" thing? (Check out John 17v3.)

Where do you stand in light of these verses? How can you be sure?

In these verses, we are pointed to God's testimony (his word) to give us assurance. In the rest of 1 John we are pointed to other sources of assurance including the Holy Spirit's presence in us (4v13), our obedience to God (2v3) and our love for one another (2v14).

True or False:

If you are a true Christian you will always feel like one.

Pray:

Ask God to give you a deep assurance of His goodness and love, and to help you trust His promises. Pray for one another.

Action Point:

This week, tell at least three people that you are a follower of Jesus.

Digging Deeper:

Read further about these things that give us confidence in our relationship with God:

1. Our trust in the authority of God's Word and the promises He makes. (2 Tim 3v16-17)
2. The Holy Spirit in our hearts assuring us that we're God's children. (Rom 8v15-17)
3. Over time we see evidence of change in our lives. (Galatians 5v22-23)

Feedback:

*What was last week's action point? How did you get on with it?
How is your personal evangelism going? Who are the people you live among?*

Intro:

When you become aware that you've done something wrong, how do you deal with it?

We all make mistakes in our friendships. We need to face our mistakes and put things right to keep our relationships healthy. If we want to enjoy God's friendship we need to know how to sort things out when they go wrong.

Read: 1 John 1v5-2v2

*What do you think this metaphor of walking in darkness and light means?
How is our relationship with God affected by how we "walk"?
What different "claims" are addressed here? What are the results of these claims?
What is the right response to sin? What is the result of this?*

Note: Confess literally means "to agree with".

*What is the basis for our forgiveness (2v1-2)? How can we be sure it has happened?
What do we learn about what Jesus is doing right now (2v1)? How do you feel about this?
Do you think that walking in the light means never sinning? Why?
How often does it make sense for us to confess our sins to God?*

True or False:

If you don't confess it, then it's not forgiven!

Pray:

Take some time now to ask the Holy Spirit to remind you of any sin he wants you to deal with. Remember, the devil's general accusations bring guilt, while the Spirit's challenge is to deal with specific sin. (Confess a selfish attitude, but reject the vague label of "selfish".) As a symbol write 1 John 1v9 over your list and then destroy it, thanking God for his forgiveness.

When we trusted in Jesus, all our sins were forgiven; past, present and future (1 Peter 3v18) because Jesus paid for them all on the cross. Our **eternal relationship** with God is secure. However, sin messes up our **daily friendship** with God. By confessing our sin as soon as we become aware of it we can live in friendship with God and experience his love and forgiveness continually.

Action Point:

Memorise 1 John 1v9 for next week.

Digging Deeper:

Read Hebrews 9 & 10.

What more do you learn about the work of Jesus? What more do you learn about God's forgiveness?

Holy Spirit 1: The Person

Intro:

What has been your understanding or experience of the Holy Spirit?

Read: John 14v15-21 (Note: Jesus is meeting his disciples for the last time before he dies.)
What does Jesus teach about the identity & character of the Spirit?

The original Greek wording for “another Counsellor” literally means “another counsellor of exactly the same kind” (v16). In other words, the Holy Spirit perfectly represents Jesus, and is fully God just as Jesus is.

What does Jesus promise the Spirit will do?

What did Jesus mean when he said “I won’t leave you as orphans” (v18)?

How might the disciples have felt after hearing this? Why?

What are the implications of the Holy Spirit’s presence in us:

- a) In our attempts to obey God?*
- b) As we share our faith?*
- c) When we face difficulties?*

Living the Christian life in our own strength is impossible. The only way to live as a Christian is for Jesus to change us, directing and empowering every aspect of our lives. He does this through the Holy Spirit.

True or False:

We can’t do a single thing of worth without the Holy Spirit.

Pray:

Thank God that he has given us the Holy Spirit. Ask him to help you grow in your understanding of the person and work of the Holy Spirit in your life.

Pray in pairs.

Action Point:

Read *The Life* booklet.

Digging Deeper:

Read the rest of John 14-16. *What else does Jesus teach about the Holy Spirit?*

Holy Spirit 2: Being Filled

Feedback:

What was last week's action point? How did you get on with it?

How are you doing in your personal evangelism? What's been going well? What's difficult?

Intro:

What's been your experience of trying to live out the Christian life?

As Christians, we know that living God's way simply by our own efforts doesn't work. We need God's help and his Holy Spirit transforming us from the inside out. Although all Christians **have** the Holy Spirit, not all Christians **rely** on the Holy Spirit to change them.

Read: Ephesians 5v8-21

In Ephesians, Paul reminded them of the wonderful new life that they have because of Jesus. He then gets practical about how to live in response to his grace.

What kind of lifestyle does Paul encourage the Ephesians to live in verses 8-17?

Why does Paul bring the Holy Spirit into this?

Why is the comparison made between drunkenness and being filled with the Holy Spirit?

What effect does being filled with the Holy Spirit have? What verbs are used?

What can we conclude from these verbs?

What does this passage teach us about being filled with the Spirit?

An Illustration: Spiritual Breathing

Exhale - We 'breathe out' by confessing sin to God as soon as we become aware of it.

Inhale - We 'breathe in' by surrendering our lives to Jesus again, trusting the Holy Spirit to fill us with his presence and power.

Spiritual Breathing is something we can do any time. However, we may not always **feel** different. Although experiences are great, they do not always define what is true. We are wise to trust God's promises whatever happens.

True or False: The Christian Life **is** the Spirit filled life.

Pray: Take some time now to think seriously about some of these questions:

Do I want to give myself wholeheartedly to God? Am I willing to admit where I have sinned against God, and turn away from such attitudes, thoughts and actions? Am I willing to be directed and empowered by the Holy Spirit? Do I trust God to fill me when I ask him to according to his promise in the Bible (1 John 5v14-15)?

If these things are true of you, ask God now to fill you with his Spirit and he will.

Action Point:

Aim to practise 'Spiritual Breathing' regularly over the next week. Observe how you are changed as you honestly submit yourself to God.

Digging Deeper:

Read Ezekiel 47v1-12 and John 7v37-39. *What is the connection between these two passages? What do we learn about the spirit filled life?*

Feedback:

What was last week's action point? How did you get on with it?

How are you doing in your personal evangelism? What's been going well? What's difficult?

Intro:

What does it mean to be filled with the Holy Spirit?

*What is the difference between **having** the Holy Spirit and **being filled** with the Holy Spirit?*

In the last session, we looked at “Spiritual Breathing”, and how we can trust and follow Jesus more closely. Following Jesus will always lead to changes in our life.

Read: Galatians 5v16-26

What does Paul urge these believers do (16)? What do you think he means?

Note: in verse 16 the word sometimes translated “live” is the Greek word *peripateo* which literally means “walk”. Walking is one of the most common pictures for the Christian life in the New Testament.

What does it mean to “gratify” desires?

How would you describe the relationship between the Spirit and the sinful nature?

How have you experienced this in your life?

How do the Spirit and the sinful nature impact our lives (relationship with God, others)?

How does the metaphor of “fruit” help us understand how the Spirit works?

What do you think it means to “keep in step” with the Spirit?

How would you summarise what we've learned about the Holy Spirit?

True or False:

Producing fruit is hard work.

Pray:

In pairs, look at the fruit listed in Galatians 5. Which fruit is in short supply? Ask God, through the Holy Spirit, to help you to see more fruit (Godly character) in your life.

Action Point:

Think about areas in your life where you are most tempted to gratify the desires of the sinful nature. Get together with a friend you trust and pray together for the Holy Spirit to help you overcome these temptations and produce fruit of the Spirit instead.

Digging Deeper:

The Bible describes three main enemies to living the Christian life: our “old” or “sinful” nature (Galatians 5v17), “the world” (1 John 16v33, 1 John 2v15-17) and the devil (James 4v7). We can overcome this opposition by being filled with the Holy Spirit and follow his leading.

Feedback:

*What was last week's action point? How did you get on with it?
How is your SEED Group evangelism going?*

Intro:

*Why do you think God doesn't take us straight to heaven when we become Christians?
What do you think that God wants us to be doing in his world?*

The last words of anyone are important especially when they know they are about to leave. Jesus gave some important "Last Orders" to his disciples. We call this the Great Commission.

Read: Matthew 28v16-20

*What is the setting of this commission? (When? Where? Who is there?)
Why does Jesus start his commission with the issue of "authority"?
What is significant about the word "go"?
What does "make" disciples mean in practice? What clues do we get in 18-20?*

Note: The word disciple in the Greek is *mathetes*, which literally means learner. A true disciple doesn't just gain head-knowledge, but puts what they know into practice.

*What is the geographical scope of these last orders?
Have you ever taken the gospel beyond your circle of friends or hometown?
What excites you about taking part in the Great Commission? What scares you?
What does Jesus promise his disciples? How can this encourage us?*

True or False:

If you're not making disciples then you're not helping to fulfil the Great Commission!

Pray:

In pairs, discuss your level of engagement with the Great Commission. Then honestly pray for each other.

Action Point:

Get more intentional (without being pushy!) by actively encouraging some students that are younger in the faith than yourself.

Digging Deeper:

Read the other accounts of Jesus' Last Orders in the other Gospels & Acts (Mark 16v15, Luke 24v44-49, John 20v19-23, Acts 1v6-8). *What is emphasised in each one?*

Feedback:

How did you get on with last week's action point?

How is your personal ministry of evangelism & discipleship going? Encouragements? Struggles?

Intro:

How do you think God sees you right now? Why do you think that?

Read: 2 Corinthians 5v16-21

What changed in the way Paul viewed other people (16)? What do you think this means?

Have you thought about people with a "worldly point of view"?

Before you met Jesus, what did you think of him?

What does Paul declare about all Christians? What does this mean?

Can you identify with this? What are some of the "old" & "new" things in your life?

Note: "In Christ" is a common way that Paul refers to Christians he writes to. When we trust Christ, we become united with him and experience his presence (Holy Spirit) working in and through us.

How would you describe our identity in light of this? What makes this change possible?

What does verse 21 say about our new identity? How does it relate to the work of Christ?

The Great Exchange: Jesus was the only righteous person who ever lived. He had no sin of his own, but on the cross he took our sins (became sin for us). As a result, our sins have been taken away, we have been given Jesus' own righteousness and we have become new people.

What is the "ministry of reconciliation" that Paul talks about in this passage?

How do you serve as "Christ's ambassador" on your campus?

True or False:

God not only loves me, but he actually likes me.

Pray:

Thank God for your new I.D. in Christ. Ask him for grace to live out this new life. Pray that you hear his voice over the loud & persistent noise of our culture that would drown God out.

Action Point:

Memorise 2 Corinthians 5v17

Digging Deeper:

Read & meditate on Zephaniah 3v7; Rom 8v12-17; John 15v15.

Feedback:

How did you get on with last week's action point?

How is your personal ministry of evangelism & discipleship going? Encouragements? Struggles?

Intro:

When did you last recommend someone/something to a friend?

We only recommend a person when we have confidence in them.

Read: John 1:35-45

This is an example of men recommending Jesus to other men.

What was John the Baptists recommendation to these two disciples?

What was Jesus response to the two disciples who followed him?

What was the "first thing" Andrew did?

What was the connection between Philip & the others? (43-44)

Finally, what did Philip then do?

Application Points:

Start where you are: your network of friends.

Come up with your "Five in Focus":

- Choose five acquaintances (people where you work, live, study or play)
- Think of "next steps" you can take to build your connection with them
- Come up with ways you can recommend Jesus to them
- Recommend them to Jesus (pray for them)
- Focus on Jesus

True or False:

Talking to random strangers with surveys is the Agape way!

Action Point:

Recommend Jesus to at least one friend this week.

Pray:

Lord may I walk & talk for you this week with _____ (your friend's name)

Digging Deeper:

Make a plan for your personal evangelism.

Feedback:

How did you get on with the Action Point, memorising 2 Corinthians 5v17?

Do you have any recent stories from your personal evangelism?

Intro:

Word association: *What comes into your mind when you hear the word “church”?*

Read: 1 Corinthians 12v12-31

What does the metaphor of a body say about church?

What things might people say (15,21)? What is Paul’s response to this?

What examples are given of different people’s contributions to the body?

How have you benefited from others in the body?

What do you think your contribution to the body is (or can be)?

Which do you find easier – giving to or receiving from others in the church?

It’s helpful to have some pointers to find a good church. No church is perfect; the churches described in the Bible had big problems, but the New Testament does give us some things to look out for:

- The leaders affirm that Jesus is God in human form (Colossians 1v15).
- The Bible, not just the opinion of the preacher, is the authority for teaching (2 Tim 4v2-4).
- Love for one another (1 Corinthians 13).
- People are serious about praying, seeking and enjoying God (Luke 11v1-4).
- There is a concern to make Christ known to others (Matthew 28v18-20).

True or False:

The primary role of church is the corporate worship of God.

Pray:

Pray that you will be able to contribute to and receive from your local church. Ask God to show you ways you can serve others and build them up in their faith.

Action Point:

Who could you invite to your church? Ask them this week.

Digging Deeper:

Read the following Bible passages about some of the first churches and consider what church should be like in light of this: Acts 2v42-47; Acts 4v32-35; 1 Thessalonians Chapters 1 and 2

Feedback:

How did you get on with last week's action point?

Share any recent stories about your personal witnessing for Christ?

Intro:

What has been your experience of prayer?

Jesus was once asked for some teaching about how we should pray. His response was not so much a formula but some great advice about how to relate to God. We call this "The Lord's Prayer".

Read: Luke 11v1-13

How should God be addressed? What does this say about our relationship with him?

As a group, take each line of the prayer and discuss its meaning.

Do you think the order of the prayer is significant? Why?

Is there anything you need to pray about more in light of Jesus' teaching?

What is the simple message of the parable (v5-8)?

What do we learn about God's character?

What is the application of this parable (v9-13)? What is promised?

True or False:

God will answer every prayer regardless of what we ask for.

Pray:

As a group use the "Lord's Prayer" as a pattern for prayer.

Hallowed be your name (Note: Hallowed means "to be kept holy")	<i>Pray that God will be praised and honoured in your life and at your University.</i>
Your Kingdom come	<i>Pray for God's rule and reign to be established in the world (particularly in the hearts of people you know).</i>
Give us this day our daily bread	<i>Ask God to provide for any needs you have at the moment.</i>
Forgive us our sins	<i>Confess any known sins to God and continue to experience his love and forgiveness.</i>
For we forgive everyone who sins against us	<i>Ask God to remind you of anyone you need to forgive. Then trust God to help you do it!</i>
And lead us not into temptation	<i>Pray for Gods protection and help in overcoming the temptations you will face.</i>

Action Point:

Begin to keep a prayer diary, a record of things that you pray about on a daily or weekly basis. You will then notice how God answers prayer.

Digging Deeper:

See how Jesus prays in John 17 and how Paul prays for others in Eph 3v14-21.

Feedback:

How did it go with your action point from last week?

How are things going with your personal evangelism? Who can we be praying for?

Intro:

How long have you been reading the Bible and what has been your experience so far?

As an older man, the Apostle Paul (who penned the majority of the New Testament) is writing some last words from prison to a young leader called Timothy. Amongst many issues Paul stresses the importance of the Bible.

Read: 2 Timothy 3v14–4v5

Make a list of all the things that Paul teaches Timothy about the Bible in 3v14-17.

What does “God-breathed” mean?

How has the Bible been “teaching, rebuking, correcting and training” you?

Can you give some recent examples?

Do you feel the Bible gets you “equipped for every good work”? How?

What is Timothy instructed to do in 4v2? Why will this be so important (3-4)?

How are we sometimes selective in listing to “the truth”?

How should Timothy respond? How should we in our day? How do you feel about doing this?

True or False:

It's wrong to listen to entertaining Bible teachers.

Pray:

In the group pray for the daily reading and application of the Bible in your life.

The Bible is absolutely essential for our walk with God. It's the Creator's book to His creatures about His creation. We can't grow in our faith without growing in our understanding of the Bible and basing our life on what it teaches.

Action Point:

Read the Bible for 15mins every day this week. Perhaps start with 2 Timothy.

Digging Deeper:

Study the following passages in the Bible and find out more about what the Bible says about itself:

James 1v19-27, Hebrews 4v12-13, John 5v39-40.

Feedback:

How did you get on with the action point?

How is it going with your evangelism and discipleship?

Intro:

“Everyone is doing it!” Therefore, how can I as a Christian student not join in? Does God really expect me in this sex-mad world to be pure?

Read: I Thessalonians 4v1-8

Paul helped plant the church in Thessaloniki, which was the capital city of the province of Macedonia. In this letter, he reminds them of some important instructions he had given them.

How are the Thessalonians doing? What does Paul encourage them to do (make a list)?

Sexual immorality is sex outside the context for which it was created. God designed sex to be between a man and woman committed to each other for life (i.e. married).

How can we avoid sexual immorality?

How does one “learn to control his own body”? Is this really possible?

What is the difference between the Christian and non-Christian lifestyles? Where do they lead?

What do we learn about these instructions (8)?

Do we believe God’s way is really best? What motivates us to live God’s way?

True or False:

In Christ we have everything we need to resist temptation.

Pray:

In pairs (same gender if possible) pray honestly for each other regarding sexual purity.

Action Point:

This week, in same-gender pairs, hold each other accountable by asking direct questions relating to sexual purity. Some questions you could start with are:

What are some of the temptations we are encountering at the moment?

Are we experiencing God’s love and forgiveness when we sin?

Are we depending on the Holy Spirit to help us change?

Remember, if we have trusted Christ, our **eternal relationship** with God is secure. There is no condemnation (Romans 8v1). However we need to confess any known sins to maintain our daily **friendship** with God.

Digging Deeper:

Use an online Bible concordance (e.g. biblegateway.com) or Study Bible to read more about sexual immorality in the New Testament. There is lots to read.