

A person in a red jacket and backpack is seen from behind, standing on a vast, white, snow-covered mountain peak. The person is holding a red rope. In the background, a large, translucent blue shadow of a person in a similar pose is cast onto the sky and snow. The sky is a deep blue with some light clouds. The overall scene conveys a sense of solitude and challenge in a high-altitude environment.

Trekking Deeper

UNITED IN DISCIPLESHIP



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INTRODUCTION

United in Discipleship is a fundamental element of Christian spirituality. It could also be described as fellowship or Christ-centred solidarity. At its core is commitment to God and other believers. Christians are people of community who are being formed into one assembly of worshipping, loving saints! We need to begin to think in terms of “us” and “we” instead of “I” and “me”. In these studies, we are going to examine the concept of being united in discipleship and explore various key themes.

This is a massive subject and this booklet is in no way definitive. Whatever the reason you chose this module, please make these studies your own and pray that the Lord will lead you forward in your fellowship with Him and with others.

There are twenty studies in this booklet. The course is designed to take one month, but you can do it at whatever speed you choose. There are two free days each week, but I would encourage you to use these extra days to pray and to look more deeply at any particular topic the Lord has been speaking to you about. Alternatively, you may like to read and reflect on the Bible passages connected with being united in discipleship that are listed at the end of this booklet.

Most days I have given a relatively long Bible reading. There are two reasons for this. First, every verse must be seen and read in its context. Secondly, the Bible is the only perfect and pure word of God. Therefore, the Scriptures are far better for teaching about faith than any notes could ever be! It is better to take far more time over the Bible readings than my imperfect notes. Don't rush the Bible readings but allow the Lord to speak to you through them. Please note all Scripture references are from the New International Version

My prayer for you is that through your Trek experience you will grow in your relationship with God, drawing closer to Him, and learning more of Him and from Him.



DAY ONE: INDIVIDUAL OR COMMUNAL

READING – 2 CORINTHIANS 6:1-18

Verse 14 “For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness?”

Our relationship with Christ must be the greatest priority in our lives, far above everything else. But while we have a personal relationship with Jesus, it is not supposed to be private because believers belong to each other. The word “fellowship” occurs twelve times in the New Testament. A check of their context shows it is exclusively used in relation to other Christians.

The Greek word for fellowship is *koinonia* and has the idea of having things in common or sharing. So, fellowship means a common life where something is either given to another believer or received from another believer. In fact, someone has said that give and take is the essence of fellowship.

One of the greatest problems in our contemporary society is that people don’t, or won’t, relate to one another. God has created us to be relational beings, but in “developed” nations, we try to be as independent as we can. There has been a breakdown in relationships to the point where self-reliance and self-sufficiency are now widely promoted.

The followers of Jesus are not immune to the values that surround them. The church emphasises an individual understanding of God and an individual relationship with Christ rather than a shared experience of the Lord. We think more of our own personal life of faith than of being part of the family of God, but no believer can fulfil God’s purposes by him or herself. It maybe that on your Trek you will discover Christians who think less in terms of “self” and more in terms of “community”. Try to learn all you can from these believers.

Have you been affected by your culture to believe in independence or partnership? Is your Christian experience individual or shared? Pray that through these studies the Lord would enable you to truly understand the nature of relationships.

**DAY TWO: FELLOWSHIP UP**

READING – 1 CORINTHIANS 1:4-31

Verse 9 “God, who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful.”

Fellowship needs to be expressed in two directions: upward to God and outward to others. The two are very closely linked since our relationship with God affects our relationship with those around us and vice versa.

Today let's consider the vertical. God Himself is our best example of fellowship. Within the Trinity, there are beautiful relationships of love and harmony between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God doesn't need us: He is already perfect and complete, but He has chosen to fellowship with men and women. The Lord shares Himself with us through all that He has done, is doing, and will do. We deserve nothing since humanity broke fellowship with God, but God restored fellowship through Jesus Christ. Now He shares everything with those who trust in Him. It's true: the King of the Universe wants friendship with you!

When we accepted Jesus as Saviour and Lord, God accepted us as His children, so we are sons or daughters of God. Whatever you might think about yourself, *you* are a child of God. He adopted you into His family and you can now enjoy fellowship with your Father, your Saviour, and your Counsellor. God has done it all. We owe God everything, so our solidarity with Him means giving absolutely everything to Him, including our very lives. We are to give to Christ all that we have and are and long to be. It also includes receiving from Him His love, mercy, and spiritual power so that our lives and faith are real and evident.

Why not take some time to worship God for all that He has done in you, for you and with you, and for all that He will do in you, for you and with you if you will let Him! God has given everything for you. Have you given everything for Him? Is there anything you need to do?



DAY THREE: FELLOWSHIP OUT

READING – PHILIPPIANS 2:1-18

Verse 2 “... make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose.”

Yesterday we were looking up, now we need to look out!

The Bible shows that horizontal fellowship with those around us is extremely important. In Eden, everything was perfect and yet God said it was not good for man to be alone (Genesis 2:18). Those who believe in Jesus are part of one family who have been drawn together by the Father and called to be generous with all their resources. On Day One, we saw that the Greek for fellowship is *koinonia*. We can see the link to giving in that the Greek word for generous is *koinonikos*.

The mutual sharing that should take place can be expressed in different forms. It may be that time and energy are what are required. Faithful family members may need us to spend time with them. They require our attention and our companionship. Or maybe we need theirs.

It maybe our generosity is with our finances or physical items. A brother or sister in Christ has a need and we are able to meet that need. Jesus said, “Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you” (Matthew 5:42). Maybe we have a need and one of our spiritual siblings can help us.

Alternatively, it could be sharing with our holy family the things that God has revealed to us about Himself. This will enable them to know Him better and so enrich their own fellowship with the Lord. Of course, it may be discovering what God has made known of Himself to our spiritual relative, so that we can grow and develop in our devotion to Him.

As you can see, you both give and receive. You love, care for and help others and at the same time you are loved, cared for and helped by others. Pray that you would be a brother or sister who both freely gives and freely receives.

**DAY FOUR: ONENESS IN CHRIST**

READING – GALATIANS 3:15-29

Verse 28 “There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

To fellowship both up and out requires certain attitudes. Through most of the rest of this module, we will consider a number of different characteristics.

It is crucial for us to recognise that Christ lives in each of us. He lives in you; He also lives in me and in every other believer! So, if God lives in Michael and Michelle, then we need to be very careful how we treat Michael and Michelle.

We are united in Christ. This means that every person on this planet is in fellowship with every other person on this planet if they believe in Jesus Christ! We often divide people into many different categories – black and white, male and female, rich and poor, old and young – but, as our passage shows, Jesus cuts through all these labels and separates people into just two groups – those who know Him and those who don't. So, there is equality for all who believe in Jesus whatever their background, status or achievements. As a result we can learn from each other, whether from a rich, well-educated European man or from a poor, uneducated African woman. Why? Because living for Jesus is not tied to upbringing or education: it is tied to the Holy Spirit guiding people in truth and righteousness. God has no favourites; we are all one in Christ. Our position in Jesus is not earned; our Saviour gives it to us, so no one can boast (Ephesians 2:4-10).

There is a saying that blood is thicker than water. However, in the spiritual realm, the waters of baptism draw us closer together than even our family ties. We remain in our earthly families, but we are called into a much bigger and more permanent heavenly family.

Do you recognise your position in the family of God? Do you realise that all believers are one in Christ? Is there someone you treat differently for some external reason?



DAY FIVE: IS THAT REALLY YOU?

READING – MATTHEW 6: 1-18

Verse 2 “... when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do ... to be honoured by men.”

All relationships rely on honesty. If there is any façade then fellowship will not be built up but knocked down. We need to be open and honest with God. The Lord knows more about us than we know about ourselves so there is no point in trying to con the Almighty. We also need to be open and honest with other people. We have more control here because others don't know our hearts, but for real relationships, we must be ourselves.

Far too many people wear an invisible character mask, but there can be no intimacy if we are in disguise all the time. If we say one thing but feel another, we are being hypocritical. In Greek a “hypocrite” was an actor, someone who pretended to be someone else. He transformed who he really was into someone he really wasn't! His true identity was covered over by a false one. Of course, this is true of actors today, but the world is not a stage and we are not to act a part. If we interact with people “in character”, how do they know who we really are? Yes, we have our faults and failings (but some good points too!) and so does everyone else. God has made us unique and it robs Him when we try to be someone else. So, we must be true to who we are and allow other people to be true to who they are.

Someone has said that we often try to meet each other from positions of strength (our abilities and achievements), but fellowship begins when we meet at the point of weakness. This can be difficult and requires both courage and humility. But it is worth it! When we are willing to be open with others about our own personal needs, and willing for others to be equally open with us, then we will live together in unbreakable relationships.

Are you honest about who you are in your relationships with others? Are you a hypocrite who acts a part? Come out from behind your mask and let the world know who you really are.



DAYS SIX AND SEVEN: **WALK, SUP AND READ**

Space below for notes and doodles.

Take some time out – go for a walk, have a drink or read a book. Remember that God is with you as you walk, as you sup and as you read. You don't need to say anything to God, give the Lord chance to speak to you!





DAY EIGHT: UNITED WE STAND

READING – EPHESIANS 4:1-16

Verse 3 “Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.”

There are so many divisions between Christians that unity can seem an impossible dream. But it is possible. However, it is not automatic and does take effort.

When unity exists it’s a miracle, simply because ever since Eden men and women have an inbuilt leaning towards disunity. However, salvation in Christ corrects that tilt, so people’s relationships can stand straight. In addition, believers have an enemy who enjoys destroying unity and cunningly creates confusion. Satan knows that “united we stand, divided we fall” and he really hates it when Christians agree!

The Bible makes it clear that we are free! However, it also shows us that our freedom is not there to abuse but is there to use, so that we can be united with our Father and our spiritual family. We are now free to choose what is right and to follow the way of love shown through peace, kindness, faithfulness, and the other fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23). So, we must make sure that our attitudes and motives are not causing problems and difficulties for any other believer.

Unity can reveal the very heart of the Gospel and is a powerful witness to unbelievers. Mission workers often find that the unity between believers has a greater initial impact on local people than the preaching of the Word. Unbelievers carefully watch mission workers’ lives and are greatly challenged when they see loyalty to one another and a commitment to resolve disputes in love. Psalm 133:1 says, “How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity!”

Unity is not just a nice idea – it’s crucial. Are you someone who unites people with your love for them or do you segregate them through your disapproval? Right now, are you showing the ripening fruit of the Spirit or the decaying fruit of your sinfulness?

**DAY NINE: ONE TEAM, MANY PLAYERS**

READING – 1 CORINTHIANS 12:1-30

Verses 4-5 “There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord.”

If unity is paramount, does that mean we should all think and act the same? Certainly not! Christian unity is all about community not conformity; it’s about unity not uniformity!

If we were to examine the conduct and customs of believers around the world, we would find enormous diversity. The huge range in practice shows that we have a truly great God. The Holy Spirit does not like standardisation; He likes variety and works through believers in their own cultural situations. So, when running, dancing and shouting are done in worship of Christ it is as valid as singing choruses and having a three-point sermon!

However, it is not just about people in Africa or Asia being able to “do their own thing”. Whether you are at home or overseas you are a unique part of your situation. The Holy Spirit has equipped you to be a distinctive player on the team where you need the other players and they need you. The Spirit has gifted each one of us differently (Romans 12:6) so the players can take their positions yet join together and make Christians United FC (For Christ!) Your experience of life is dissimilar to everybody else’s and that diversity of insight helps create strong and vibrant solidarity.

So, be free to be yourself! If all Christians looked, talked, and lived the same, we would end up all having the same knowledge and experience. But we are gloriously different and our differences are a strength. God does not want clones, He wants a family of unique persons who love and cherish their brothers and sisters and who use their particular gifts to strengthen and build His church. God wants to transform your character not your personality.

Pray that you would delight in your uniqueness as you join together with others on one holy team.



DAY TEN: PERFECT LOVE

READING – 1 CORINTHIANS 12:31 - 13:13

Verse 2 “... if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.”

LOVE – what do you think when you see that word? Does it bring a smile to your face or a frown to your brow?

Our passage today is the best ever explanation of real love. Although Paul describes it as the most excellent way, he seems to have had a hard time nailing down a good definition so that he tells us primarily what love is not. However, he does state that, “It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres” (verse 7).

Do you notice there is not much about emotion? It is more concerned with attitude and temperament. This perfect love is only perfect when it is shared with others. To love our brothers and sisters in Christ is a basic truth of the New Testament. In fact, the command to “love one another” is found in Scripture more frequently than any other. A little boy once asked God “How can you love everybody in the whole world? There are only four people in my family and I can’t do it!” The Bible does not say it’s easy to love everyone, but Christ has given us the mandate to “Love the Lord your God” and “love your neighbour as yourself.” These two greatest commandments are tied together. You cannot truly do one without the other.

Perfect love is so important to discipleship because it always seeks to do good to the other person however they might have treated you or are treating you. Peter sums this up brilliantly: “Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins” (1 Peter 4:8).

How do you measure up to this kind of love? One author recommends you read 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 and replace “love” with your own name. This is very revealing in gauging your love ... try it! How did you get on? Do you love the Lord with all of your heart? Do you love others as you love yourself?

**DAY ELEVEN: LOVING OVER THE TOP!**

READING – 1 JOHN 4:7-21

Verse 12 “No-one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.”

God wants us to love Him *and* one another. He wants us to love everyone, but He is particularly concerned that we love others in His family. Why? Because God has said that He wants His family to be known for its love more than anything else. In John 13:34-35 Jesus said, “Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” Don’t you think that’s interesting? It’s not that the world will know we are one of Jesus’ disciples when our theology is correct or when we pray every day. No, this hurting world will know we follow Christ when we love one another.

How are we to love others? As Jesus loves us (John 15:12). Wow! How much does Christ love us? Enough to die for us: love is what we see when we look at the cross. So, we need to be willing to give literally everything for our spiritual family. “This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers”

(1 John 3:16). We are to lavish love on others without any concern as to whether or not they deserve to receive it or whether they will reciprocate it. Our love is supposed to be over the top!

1 Thessalonians 3:12 says, “May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else ...”.

Does this all sound rather idealistic? It’s true, we are all still battling with our human weaknesses, but through the grace of God, we can be transformed more and more into the likeness of Christ. In 2 Timothy 1:7 we read “For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline.”

Do you love as you should? Is your love overflowing to others? Can you say that your love is increasing and overflowing for the believers around you?



DAY TWELVE: ALL GOD'S PEOPLE SAID "AMEN!"

READING – MATTHEW 18:15-35

Verse 20 "For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them."

Prayer is vitally important in every aspect of our spiritual lives, not least as we rub shoulders and knock elbows with our believing family members. Is there a purer act of love than taking the time and effort to bring the names and situations of our brothers and sisters before our fabulous heavenly Father?

As with all prayer, we must recognise that the act of praying does not mean that God will automatically answer our prayers. Our God is sovereign over the nations and we must submit to His glory and will, but we do have the privilege and responsibility of interceding for our holy family.

There is a mystical element when believers pray together, agreeing wholeheartedly in their prayers. Maybe this is because it's hard to be selfish in a group or simply that consensus with other believers increases our faith. Certainly, we can grow in our prayer lives simply by listening to others as they pray.

Today's verse shows that Jesus Christ promises to be central when we come together and pray in His name. The early church sets us an example: we read that while the believers waited in Jerusalem, "They all joined together constantly in prayer ..." (Acts 1:14) and as a group, "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer" (Acts 2:42).

Collective prayer can be very significant. It is an enormous encouragement to be able to talk with other believers, to share your hassles and to listen to others and understand their struggles, then to join together and pray to the only One who is the answer to every problem.

Wherever you are, how about forming a duo or a trio with other believers to share and pray together? Are you willing to share your true feelings, so that others can pray clearly for you?



DAYS THIRTEEN AND FOURTEEN: **RENEW YOUR MIND**

Space below for notes. (Don't forget the Further Reading on page 27.)

“Floccinaucinihilipilification” is arguably the longest real word in the English language. How many other words can you make from it?



DAY FIFTEEN: **CHOOSE TO FORGIVE**

READING – COLOSSIANS 3:1-17

Verse 13 “...forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.”

We should forgive because Christ forgave us: that is the bottom line. The same Lord who has taken away our sins and forgiven us for all our mistakes, commands us to forgive those who do wrong to us. Read Matthew 6:14-15: it's uncomfortably black and white, isn't it? If we don't forgive others their sins, our Father will not forgive our sins.

We all need to forgive since we ourselves are not perfect so we cannot expect others to be blameless. Forgiveness is often difficult, especially when major issues are involved, because it seems unjust; but forgiveness is not about justice, it's about healing. Our hearts will remain in a deep freeze until we release the person from their “crime”. Only forgiveness can defrost our spirits. It may be that we run into someone who continually sins against us, but as often as someone wrongs us, we must forgive him or her. Peter asked: “ ‘Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?’ Jesus answered, ‘I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.’ ” (Matthew 18:21-22). We can only do this through God's grace.

We need to understand that forgiveness is a choice and not an emotion. When someone sins against us, we have the option of whether or not to forgive. Forgiveness is a process and restoring trust takes time, but we must choose not to hold onto the wrongdoing. Otherwise, we can end up suffering twice over: both from the original offence and from the pain it holds over us.

If someone wrongs us or we wrong someone, we must go to him or her as soon as we can and get the issue aired and released. Why wait? It only leads to anger and bitterness.

Do you need to forgive someone? Do you need to be forgiven? Spend some time asking the Lord to examine your heart (Psalm 139:23-24).

**DAY SIXTEEN: LET'S ALL WORK TOGETHER**

READING – ROMANS 12:1-21

Verse 5 “... so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.”

Humility is being honest in your estimate of yourself. You should neither think of yourself too highly or too lowly (verse 3) but realise your need to be totally reliant on God because without Him you can do nothing (John 15:5).

In addition, you need to realise that no individual believer can live effectively by himself and so you need your spiritual relations. The Bishop of Bradford once said, “The church is made up of saints and fatheads.” This is not the best way of thinking!

One of the greatest barriers to being united in discipleship is pride which is, of course, the opposite of humility. Pride pushes others away, while humility draws others close.

Paul writes that the people of God are a body and just as there are many parts to a physical body, so the body of Christ is made up of many different parts. We are interdependent; we all need each other and should have equal concern for each other. Therefore, no part should feel he or she is more important than another part of Christ's body. There are people who have more responsible positions and so attract more attention, but to God we are all just as important and necessary.

This means that every believer should celebrate when other believers achieve. We should see their “success” as our “success”. Conversely, when one part of the body suffers, so does every other part if we truly are mutually supporting (1 Corinthians 12:26). On our own, we are all inadequate, but we work together to the glory of God. Leonardo da Vinci said, “An arch consists of two weaknesses, which leaning against one another make a strength.”

Do you realise that you can do nothing, that is nothing of worth, without Christ? Do you believe that everyone has equal value and you should work together to be strong?



DAY SEVENTEEN: **READY ... SERVE!**

READING – JOHN 13:1-17

Verse 15 “I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.”

This is an amazing act of servanthood. Jesus Christ – “through him all things were made ... In him was life and that life was the light of men” (John 1:3-4) – knelt down and washed the muck off the disciples’ feet. It was the slave’s job to wash the feet but, for whatever reason, there wasn’t one around. As the disciples looked round the room and maybe looked at the basin and towel, Jesus willingly took the slave’s role and, to their astonishment, washed their feet. Why? To set an example of sacrificial service and to teach the disciples that this kind of radical action was the norm in God’s Kingdom.

In the account of the Last Supper in Luke 22, Jesus declared, “The greatest among you should be like the younger, and the one who rules like the one who serves ... I am among you as one who serves” (verses 26-27).

All of this is like a wrecking ball smashing against our self-centredness, but the same God who makes the weak strong and the foolish wise also honours believers who think of others above themselves and are not afraid of doing menial acts of service.

We are to serve others as an act of fellowship. If there is a job needing to be done ... let’s do it! If there is someone who needs to be served ... let’s do it! God loves it when we are unselfish, when we are determined to bless others rather than be blessed and when we are sensitive towards the needs of others. When we serve in this way we serve the Lord, and there is nothing better than that. “Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men” (Ephesians 6:7).

Do you follow Christ’s example? Do you serve or are you served? Pray that you will have eyes to see and a heart to respond to opportunities to take up humble acts of service in love of your brothers and sisters in Christ.

**DAY EIGHTEEN: SUFFERING TOGETHER**

READING – PHILIPPIANS 3:1-14

Verse 10 “I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings ...”

It is a fact that we will all encounter suffering. As followers of Jesus, the amount of suffering we encounter may be greater and not less than those who ignore His reality. Why? Because we live in a sinful world that squirms against the holiness of God.

We hear very little taught on this subject, but we should expect suffering. The Bible is clear that this is the way of the cross and this is what we are called to (Mark 8:34-37). Philippians 1:29 says, “For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him ...”

In *The Heavenly Man* (p.286-7) Brother Yun writes: “We have ... come to understand that the past thirty years of suffering, persecution and torture for the house churches in China were all part of God’s training for us.” Concerning Chinese missionaries he notes, “There is little that any of the Muslim, Buddhist or Hindu countries can do to us that we haven’t already experienced in China.” He adds, “Don’t pray for the persecution to stop! We shouldn’t pray for a lighter load to carry, but a stronger back to endure! Then the world will see that God is with us.”

We are unlikely to be imprisoned and tortured for our faith, but there are many Christians who are. We need to stand in solidarity with them, “Remember ... those who are ill-treated as if you yourselves were suffering” (Hebrews 13:3).

It is possible that during your Trek, you will encounter discouragement. If so, don’t simply pull back or put your head down and try to go it alone. Turn to your holy relatives for support and prayer. God has placed you in a spiritual family, so why suffer in silence when you can join with your brothers and sisters and find strength and comfort in your troubles? Are you suffering ridicule and rejection for the sake of the Lord? Share it with a close spiritual relative today.



DAY NINETEEN: **WILL YOU LISTEN?**

READING – JAMES 1:12-27

Verse 19 “... Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry.”

The heart of communication is not what we say, so much as what the other person hears. How many times have our words been misconstrued? We might feel we have communicated well, but has the other person really understood what we meant? Today, our focus is on listening. Communication is obviously both talking and listening, but most people are fairly good at talking and pretty terrible at listening. It has been estimated that the average individual listens for only 17 seconds before interrupting!

Listening is a skill which we all need to improve. It requires effort, but you must know from your own experience that listening is important. Isn't it frustrating when you are talking to someone and they are obviously not listening to you?

When you are listening to someone, try to put yourself in their place and understand why they thought, felt, or acted the way they did. Let the other person finish what they want to say, despite any pauses there might be, then ask questions to show you're interested. It is important to realise that learning to listen to others will also help you learn to listen to God.

You are really listening when you try to understand someone even if what they say is not making much sense, but you are not really listening if you have an answer before the other person has finished explaining the problem!

You also need to be willing to hear words of disapproval without exploding. It is a wise person who listens to correction. If what is said is fair then reflect upon it and make the necessary adjustments. If it is unfair, just reject it, but don't reject the person. A friend once told me that when someone criticises him, he thinks, “Oh, was that it? If you really knew me you could say a whole lot more!” James knew what is right: be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry (verse 19).



DAYS TWENTY AND TWENTY-ONE: **PRAY FOR THE WORLD**

It is crucial that we pray for world evangelisation. Wherever you are, how about praying for the Uyghurs:

- The Uyghurs are predominantly in north-west China, although they can also be found in Central Asia.
 - Hundreds of Uyghurs study abroad, and many are reluctant to return home.
 - Pray that Uyghur students would be evangelised in these foreign countries and some would return to share their faith in Christ with their own people.
 - Islamic beliefs and superstitions are practised, although few young people attend the mosques. Adherence to Islamic customs is stronger in the south, as there is more of an Iranian and Pakistani influence and less of a Communist one. There are very few believers.
 - Pray that many people, young and old, would turn to Christ.
 - Uyghur is a Turkic language. Some Scriptures are available in Uyghur, although there is a six-figure fine for possessing a Uyghur New Testament.
 - Pray for a wide distribution of the Scriptures and courage for people to examine them for themselves.
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DAY TWENTY-TWO: **ACCEPTED TO ACCEPT**

READING – ROMANS 15:1-22

Verse 7 “Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.”

Jesus accepts everyone just as they are. Our Lord had contact with many different types of people, but whether they were prostitutes, lepers, or Pharisees, He accepted them. Often Jesus would not only look at who they were right then, but He would see the potential of who they might become. In His love for each of them He showed them both who He was and who they were, so that they would believe and follow Him.

Just as the Lord accepted them, He accepts you. It is crucial that you accept His acceptance. It is only as you acknowledge that truth that you can truly accept other people. Unless you grasp that God accepts you, you will never truly accept others. If you can understand that God never gives up on you, despite all you’ve done and will do, but loves and welcomes you, then you can do the same with your Christian family.

God accepts you unconditionally. Isn’t that amazing? You are accepted with no conditions whatsoever. In *What They Didn’t Teach Me in Sunday School* (p.46) Rob Parsons writes: “... nothing I can do can make God love me more and nothing I can do can make God love me less.” It’s true, and guess how we are to love and accept others? Exactly, the same way.

We must allow people to be who they are and accept them despite everything! Is this easy? No, as we go through life there will be people who really irritate us. In fact, in my experience, the Lord will bring people across our path who He knows will wind us up! Why? So that we are dependent on Him and will grow in love and grace towards all people. When it does get difficult, we should pray to the “Great Acceptor” that He will give us His love for our “problem person”. After all, we may be someone else’s “problem person”! Is there someone you need to ask the Lord to help you to accept? Now is the time.

**DAY TWENTY-THREE: CULTURAL APPROVAL**

READING – 1 PETER 3:8-22

Verse 8 “Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble.”

I wonder, do you truly accept the people you are with? You may be living among a people whose culture seems totally bizarre, even barbaric, to you.

If you do have a problem with the strange culture, you must recognise that it is not “weird” but a valid way of life. Maybe if you asked questions and listened sensitively to the answers, you would discover the reasons for their “peculiar” customs.

If you’re normal, you’re probably blind to the failings in your own culture. Therefore, it’s good to realise that there are negatives in your own culture as well as positives, and that there are positives in the local culture as well as negatives. Every culture needs to be redeemed, but if the Bible has not specified something as wrong then we are not to judge others in, for example, how they eat or how they treat one another.

Prejudice is a hideous thing and Christians have done their fair share of discriminating against “foreign” cultures. It is common knowledge that missionaries have made mistakes. They have exported American and European Christianity to other parts of the world believing that this was best for everyone. These people are certainly not to be condemned. Today’s mission force stands on the shoulders of those who have gone before. However, we can learn from their mistakes and, as a result, accept other peoples and cultures as legitimate, whether we would do what they do or not!

There are believing brothers and sisters who worship and serve in ways that you might find difficult to accept. But if God accepts their worship and service then you need to accept it and accept them. So, as our key verse says, live in harmony with one another and love as brothers (and/or sisters). Can you identify any cultural prejudices that you have?



DAY TWENTY-FOUR: **RIGHTS OR RESPONSIBILITIES?**

READING – EPHESIANS 5:1-21

Verses 15 & 21 “Be very careful, then, how you live ... Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.”

A lot could be written about submission, but I want to focus on just one aspect. I find it interesting that many of the problems between believers are not caused by theological differences but by different ideas on practical matters. We often fall into the trap of imposing our principles on other people. We can sometimes show little respect for another believer’s way of life as if we have some superior understanding.

We may dismiss what believers in other churches do as inferior or belittle their traditions because they do not do things our way. If so, we should submit to the Holy Spirit at work in them. I went to an interdenominational Bible College where the students shared rooms. It was college policy to put people of different denominations together. I shared with a Brethren guy; a Methodist and a Pentecostal were paired up, and so on. There were varied opinions when it came to such things as worship, baptisms, or the use of spiritual gifts, but we soon found out that our core beliefs were the same and it was in the secondary issues where there was conflict. In the end, we submitted to one another in recognition that we did not have the right to slander another believer’s experience, but had the responsibility of loving each other as brothers and sisters in Christ. We met together at the cross where everything was stripped away. As we looked at God’s perfect sacrifice, we realised we couldn’t just coldly evaluate each other’s relationship with Jesus. Believers need to look at what we have in common – Jesus Christ!

You may be experiencing some rather irregular church activities on your Trek. But are they irregular to God or just to you? Does your approval of others depend primarily on what they do or don’t do? Are your attitudes and actions building bridges or building barriers?

**DAY TWENTY-FIVE: LOOKING TO ENCOURAGE**

READING – 2 CORINTHIANS 7:2-16

Verse 13 “In addition to our own encouragement, we were especially delighted to see how happy Titus was ...”

There is a story that a preacher in the US was expounding the qualities of the Apostle John. At the end of his sermon, he boldly declared, “What we need in the church are more Johns!” At this point, the congregation collapsed in hysterics. [In American slang, a “john” is a toilet.]

Well, I boldly declare that what we need in the church are more Barnabases – and I think I’m on safe ground with that one!

In Acts 4:36; we are told that the name Barnabas means Son of Encouragement. We discover this to be true when he went to find Saul/Paul and brought him to the apostles even though the rest of the disciples didn’t believe he really was a follower of Jesus (Acts 9:26-27). How encouraging it must have been for Paul to have Barnabas believe in his spiritual transformation.

We all need to become encouragers. The right words at the right time can make a massive difference. Words can either build someone up or undermine someone’s confidence. I’m sure you have been in situations when someone offered a word of encouragement and it meant so much. I’m also sure you have been in situations where a word of support would have made all the difference, but no one said anything. At every opportunity why don’t you be the one to say “That was great” or “Good job!”

Of course, encouragement doesn’t have to be verbal. Depending on circumstances a holy hug might be appropriate or a pat on the shoulder or even a smile from a distance. When you recognise how much you appreciate encouragement, you can understand why it is important to support others in their activities (Romans 1:12).

Pray that the Lord would turn you into a son or daughter of encouragement and that you will find an opportunity to encourage someone today, and tomorrow, and so on!



DAY TWENTY-SIX: **PULLING IT ALL TOGETHER**

READING – 2 CORINTHIANS 13:1-14

Verse 14 “May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.”

Do you understand that being united is worship and witness? This is because fellowship is experiencing life together both with God and with other people. We have examined a number of characteristics. If you become a believer who truly does forgive, encourage people, serve humbly and give generously, imagine what a difference that will make while you are overseas, or at home and in your church.

Our Saviour is our Shepherd. He does not have one sheep, He has a flock. We have our own personal relationship with our Shepherd, but we are to live and move in one accord with the other sheep. What an enormous difference there is between the sheep staying as a part of the flock and the sheep straying apart from the flock!

True Christian solidarity only happens through the grace and love of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit who unites us to Christ unites us at the same time to all God’s people. In *Know the Truth* (p.208) Bruce Milne writes: “... among the most enriching dimensions of [the Spirit’s] work are those relationships of love and sharing which he gives us within the life of the family of God.”

True fellowship brings together people who are naturally incompatible to be spiritually united. We become interdependent through our oneness in Christ and this is shown through our acceptance, love and submission to one another.

We all need to work at maintaining fellowship because it is like a fragile glass that is easily broken. As we go through life and collide with each other, may we find that we don’t shatter each other but, instead, resonate with each other in tuneful harmony.

Pray that the Holy Spirit would continue to mould you into the vessel He wants you to be as one who pours out love for God *and* for everyone around you.



DAYS TWENTY-SEVEN AND TWENTY-EIGHT: **TAKE FIVE (OR SIX)**

Some fun to finish: while sitting on a chair, lift your right foot off the floor and make clockwise circles. Now, while doing this, draw the number '6' in the air with your right hand! It is not easy, eh?

Christianity is about God and other people. Is there anyone you have been meaning to write to, or telephone, or email that, for whatever reason, you have not managed to?

Now's your chance ...



FURTHER READING

We can learn a lot about being united in discipleship by reading and studying portions of the Scriptures. Below is a small selection, but do not be limited by the ones listed here. Read the passages and discover what you can about fellowship with God and with your brothers and sisters in Christ.

Romans 8:1-17

Romans 13:1-14

Romans 14:1-23

1 Corinthians 3:1-23

2 Corinthians 2:1-11

Galatians 6:1-18

Ephesians 2:11-22

1 Thessalonians 4:1-18

1 Peter 2:1-12

2 Peter 1:1-11

1 John 1:1-10

1 John 4:7-21

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NOTES

Trekking Deeper is a devotional discipleship programme specifically written for short-term volunteers. The aim of the Course is to help “Trekking Deeper” keep their focus on Christ and to grow spiritually during their placements.



Trekking Deeper consists of a series of nine booklets:

The ABC of Preparation
Costly Discipleship
Dynamic Prayer
Exploring God's Word
God's Guidance

Practical Faith
Living Holiness
United in Discipleship
Returning & Advancing

“Refreshing, stretching, packed with helpful insights, I found the Trekking Deeper booklets an excellent tool for personal discipleship.”

Glenn Myers (author of the Briefings series)

“I learnt a lot about prayer and it was good to have notes with short-termers in mind.” **Gillian Thom (Mexico)**

“I learnt stuff I didn't know before.” **Jeremy Estabrook (Senegal)**

“The questions made you analyse and pray about your feelings rather than just pottering on.” **Lindsey Hale (Mexico)**

“I learnt things that I could apply and think about and they weren't boring!”
Alison Davey (Sierra Leone)