

*Being a Christian
in
the 21st Century*

Especially prepared for the Anglican Parish of Leongatha



GRASSROOTS

Home Group Contract

For the next five weeks, we agree to the following commitment as a group.

- [] **ATTENDANCE:** To give priority to group meetings.
- [] **PARTICIPATION:** To make every effort to participate fully within the group
- [] **CONFIDENTIALITY:** To keep confidential everything that is shared.
- [] **ACCOUNTABILITY:** To accept the challenge to reach the goals we have set ourselves.
- [] **ACCESSIBILITY:** To give one another the right to call at any time for spiritual help in time of need - even in the middle of the night.
- [] **EVANGELISM:** To make an effort to each encourage one person to join this group.

SPECIFICS

We will meet on(Day of week)
 We will meet at(Home/Place)
 The meeting will begin at..... and close at
 We agree to all have left by to not overdo our welcome.

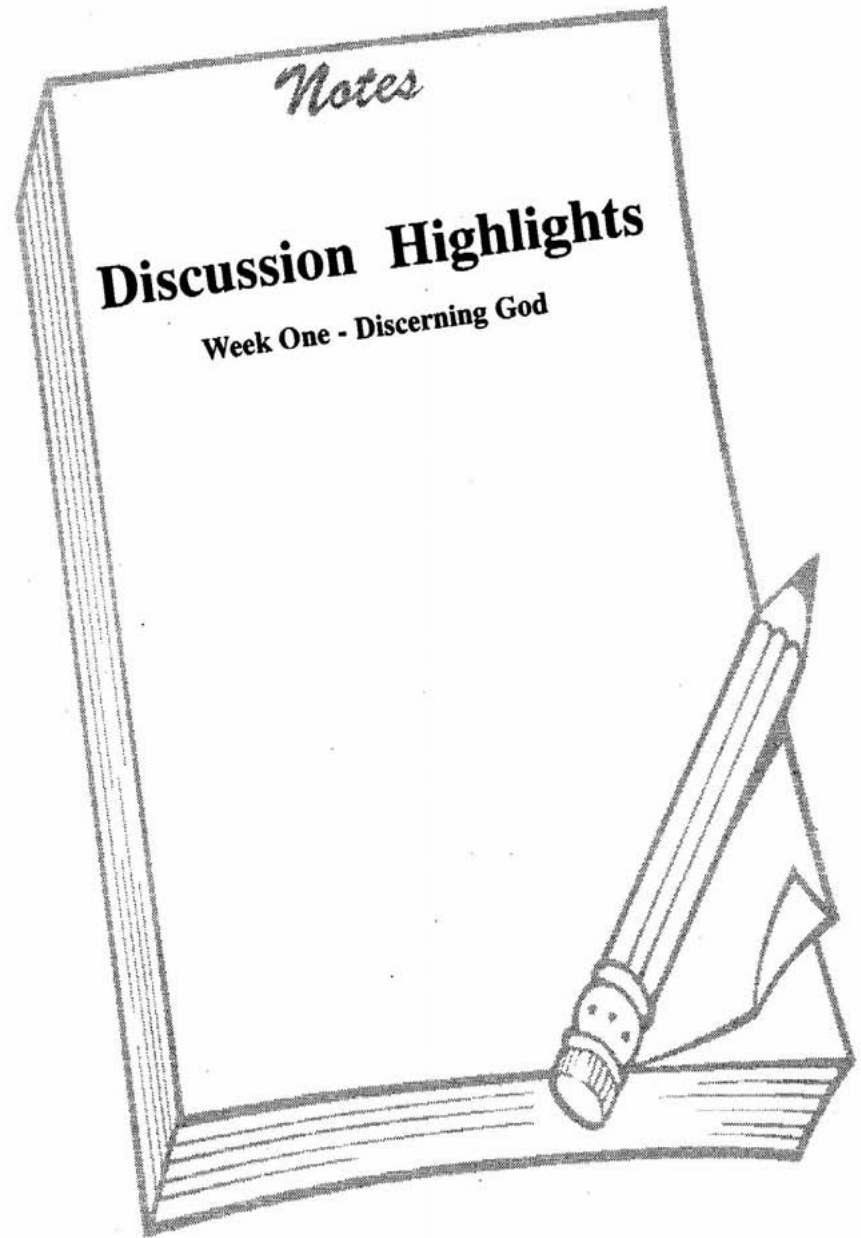
GROUND RULES

- [] Refreshments
- [] Baby Sitting
- [] Newcomers.....
- [] Absence.....

I WILL TRY WITH GOD'S HELP TO BE A REGULAR, FAITHFUL, CARING MEMBER OF THIS GROUP.

NAMES OF GROUP MEMBERS	PHONE
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
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.....
.....
.....

REMEMBER:
 NEW PEOPLE CAN JOIN THE GROUP AT ANY TIME.





Discussion highlights

Appoint a scribe to jot down (after the discussion), two things that you would like to be included in a report either to the parish or to a joint meeting of a number of study groups that may be meeting in your congregation/parish.

Alternatively, you may like to do this individually and share your points by meeting for a sixth session.

Closing prayer (5 minutes)



The Group may like to use this prayer or add their own prayers.

*God be in my head, and in my understanding;
God be in my eyes, and in my looking;
God be in my mouth, and in my speaking;
God be in my heart, and in my thinking;
God be at my end, and at my departing. Amen.*



Hospitality

Enjoy a break, have a cuppa!

NEXT WEEK!

- (a) For supper, ask someone to volunteer to bring a cake to share with the group.
- (b) Read the preparation material on Pages 12 & 13 for Study 2.
- (c) Bring along a copy of the Bible to Study 2. You may have an old family Bible to show members of the group.



A group that cares

One of the special ways a group values each other is when special events are recognised.

One way to show the group you care for them is to take a little time at the first meeting to note each others special days.

This could take the form of an icebreaker and if this was the case then you could include some fun things. Eg: Your first kiss, Graduation, First car, First date etc.

More general would be birthdays (You don't need the year although the inquisitive will try) and wedding anniversary.

If any of these events happen during the time the group meets, why not have a special cake to commemorate this.

It is also a good idea for someone to be appointed as the 'pastoral co-ordinator' to see that these events are not forgotten. It is this care that makes a small group like the one you are in, special and valued.

Group member's name	Special events and dates

OVERVIEW OF THE STUDIES

*"BEING CHRISTIAN
IN THE 21ST CENTURY"*

Introduction

On New Year's Day 2001, we welcomed the 21st Century. As we come to this new Century in Australia we are truly blessed with a wonderful country, one of the great democracies of the world, and a diverse and rich society, combining our Aboriginal culture and the diversity of many cultures who have settled here over the past two hundred years.



Bishop Andrew Curnow

Christianity came to Australia on the first fleet and has been part of the dynamic history of this country since. However, as we approach the 21st Century the churches and Christianity face challenging times, with overall church attendances decreasing and Australians finding many other alternative forms of religious and spiritual expression. Indeed across the Western world traditional denominations are all facing some decline as they are caught up in a first world pattern which involves a growing questioning and even distrust of institutions. The Law, Medicine, Government, Education and the Church do not enjoy the same levels of public confidence or respect, and even in an age of spin doctoring much has to be done if they are to recover their integrity particularly in the eyes of many young people.

For Christians and the churches, I believe, this means we need to go back to the basics of our faith and rediscover who we are as the people of God. Too easily the Church has been seduced and compromised by the society we live in. At the same time, particularly in the areas of education, welfare and social justice, the Church has been at the forefront of many developments in these areas.

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

Questions for reflection (40 minutes)

1. Share briefly what were two aspects of these readings that spoke to you. It may be a single word, person, action, name, place etc.
2. Can you identify in any way with Moses' experience and reaction to his encounter with God? Can you imagine how he felt?
3. In your experience is God close or distant from humans?
4. From the Introduction to this study can you comment on your own experience of discovering God
 - In people
 - In moments, occasions etc.
 - In places
5. As you look back over history in what ways do you discern the presence of God?

How do you discern the presence of God in our present time?
6. Share in the group unresolved issues and questions you may have about God.

You may like to list another session to come together and discuss them or set up a time for the group to meet with your priest/pastor.

Consider this...

An experience of God

During the two years just before and after I was twenty I had an experience which led to religious conversion. I was waiting at a bus stop on a wet afternoon. It was opposite the Odeon cinema, outside the station, and I was surrounded by people, shops, cars. A friend was with me. All of a sudden, for no apparent reason, everything looked different. Everything I could see shone, vibrated, throbbed with joy and with meaning. I knew that it had done this all along, and would go on doing it, but that usually I couldn't see it. It was all over in a minute or two. I climbed on the bus, saying nothing to my friend - it seemed impossible to explain - and sat stunned with astonishment and happiness. *Monica Furlong, Travelling In.*

Sharing with others

Focus: Understanding God in our contemporary world



Welcome and introductions

As this is the first time you have come together as a group each member should introduce yourself and tell something about who you are or alternatively say why you decided to come along to this group study.



Opening Prayer (2 minutes)

Almighty and most loving God, help us to discern your presence in the world, that we may know ourselves to be your people, and you to be our God; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.



Getting started (15 minutes)

- (1) Spend time discussing pages 2 and 3. Then each using your own study book fill the pages out together.
- (2) Select a colour that symbolises God to you, or an animal or a metaphor. You can choose to do all three. Share your choice with other members of the group.



Read the Scripture passage (2 minutes)

Exodus 3:1-14 / Acts 17:22-28

- Moses encounters a messenger or angel of God in the form of flame and in humility covers his face.
- Moses is commissioned for serving God.
- God is to be known as I AM WHO I AM. In Hebrew language this is a godly name and expresses divine freedom, majesty and mystery.
- In Acts, Paul gives a wonderful account of God.

These studies are designed to encourage Christians to reaffirm the foundations of their faith. They are not asking you to accept narrow, type-cast definitions but they are asking you in the light of Scripture, Reason and Tradition to look at your faith and see how you are travelling into the 21st Century.

I hope these studies offer challenge and encouragement, but most of all they are designed to help you explore your faith and enjoy the company of others. These studies are about being enabled by our rich tradition to embrace the future.

The five studies and the associated Scripture readings are:

1. GOD : Exodus 3:1-14 / Acts 17:22-28
2. THE BIBLE : Isaiah 40:6-11 / Hebrews 4:12-13
3. PRAYER : Nehemiah 1:1-11 / Luke 11:1-4
4. THE CHURCH : ITS WORSHIP : Genesis 28:10-17 / Romans 15:1-6
5. THE CHURCH : ITS MISSION : 1 Peter 2:4-9 / Matthew 5:11-13

Each of the studies follows a regular pattern. You may want to negotiate one or two areas, but you should always be willing to be flexible.

Prayers are printed for the beginning and end of each study, but the members of the group may want to contribute their own.



Remember that at anytime during the five week home group you would prefer not to comment, then all you need to say is "Pass", and the leader knows not to ask you on that question.

Week 1

God

An article in the Melbourne Age of August 19th 2000 was headlined:

At last, A God atheists can believe in? Hallelujah?

The article was written by a secular Jew and was thanking a variety of Anglican theologians for making God to secularists very attractive. Suffice to say the article had a mixed reaction, but at least in a major daily paper in Australia it put the subject of God into the headlines. For ninety-nine percent of the time God is largely or totally ignored by the media. So who is God of the 21st Century? Christians have a very particular view of God that is Trinitarian: God has three persons or expressions of being: God as Creator, God as Jesus Christ, and God as Holy Spirit. However, in this first study I want to focus on God as God! At the outset it is essential to realise that according to the Bible the knowledge of God is not reached by abstract speculation, as in Greek philosophy, but in:

- the actual everyday business of living
- social relationships
- current and past historical events

People are not born with an instant knowledge of God. Instead we must gain from a variety of sources an understanding of God.

From the Old Testament we gain the following:

- God is personal
- God is the Creator
- God loves the world that God has created
- God governs the universe
- God demands justice and unity among the people of the world
- God gives human beings free will and responsibility
- God judges and rewards goodness
- God seeks a relationship with humanity

In the New Testament we find the complete manifestation of all that God is in the person of Jesus Christ. It is important to realise that God is not just an entity operating in the past. Obviously God is a God of history and at the same time a God in our lives now and in the future. The writers of the Bible looked back and reflected on their own lives and experience and saw God at work. By looking at the things that happened in their lives and in the history of their nation, they drew certain conclusions about God. They learned to see God in the events of their times. We can do the same in the following ways:

- (1) We can look back and notice that there have been things/events/people who have given shape and substance to our lives. We may have experienced from another person forgiveness, compassion, understanding and honesty. Behind the behaviour of people there can be a set of values that reflects the unique goodness that only comes from God, a self giving love that is an expression of God's love to humanity.

- (2) There can be moments when we have suddenly discovered within ourselves a deep strength we did not know we had or courage we did not dream we could show. There can be the experience of when we were in an awkward or difficult situation we managed to say something appropriate, or answer a hard question, speak up for someone, or stick with a job and finish it. There are even occasions when we have been able to do the impossible. These moments, experiences of finding strength, courage, understanding and conviction, where we may have thought there was nothing can be another way of knowing and encountering God.

The remarkable thing about Christianity is that we believe that God not only gives our world shape, but that God actually works inside each one of us.

- (3) God can also be encountered in events and places. In Genesis 28 there is the wonderful story of Jacob's dream at Bethel. The outcome of the dream is that Jacob exclaims:

"Surely the Lord is in this place – and I did not know it!" (Gen 28:16)

The great English writer T.S. Elliott is reported to have come to a deep faith in God after entering St Peter's Basilica in Rome. He was overwhelmed at the same time by the greatness, and yet the close presence he felt of God. It was an overwhelming and yet affirming experience all at once.

Other people have had similar experiences when perched on mountain tops, or overlooking magnificent coastal vistas or even in the midst of suburbia.

Lastly, it is not all plain sailing: Many people ask why God doesn't make the world a better place? If God is at work in the world why do babies starve and people war? The key to addressing these issues lies in our conviction of God's presence in the world being expressed through us. Then we place ourselves, our resources, our abilities where God needs us and become God's co-workers.

Also it is important to remember that we are human and have limitations. God is always more than our minds or thoughts can imagine or grasp. Our lives, in a way, are about a journey of coming to know God more deeply and clearly. It is a journey that can be challenging, exciting and fulfilling.