

SEASONS OF LIFE

PROXIMITY

BIBLICAL REFLECTIONS AND CHALLENGING
CONTENT DESIGNED TO RESOURCE
RELATIONAL DISCIPLE-MAKING.

WHAT IS PROXIMITY?

This booklet provides you with biblical content and practical questions that aim to resource you in your discipleship journey.

However, Proximity is much less about the booklet you are holding and much more about the relationship you will foster.

Just as Paul shared the truths of the Christian faith with Timothy in the proximity of close relationship, this resource gives you the opportunity to dive deeper into key discipleship themes and talk about them with other disciples with whom you can learn.

SEASONS OF LIFE

The 'Seasons of Life' theme focuses conversation around how followers of Jesus face the different circumstances of life such as suffering, change, celebration and disappointment. Each session digs into the Bible and offers practical questions, helping to balance between personal reflection and practical conversation.

As you journey through this resource, may you be better equipped to walk in closer proximity to others as you navigate the seasons of your life as a follower of Jesus.

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Navigating changing circumstances and following Jesus throughout life's different seasons.
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Following Jesus as he draws us to places we may have never been before.
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Storms aren't just possibilities but realities. To endure these storms our foundations need to be firm.
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It is vital to develop a faith that is able to deal robustly with the realities of suffering and pain as we live in the world.

"And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others."
2 Timothy 2:2

GETTING THE MOST FROM PROXIMITY

Proximity will work best if you come to the conversation having already engaged with the first two sections of the material.

ON YOUR OWN

'INTO THE THEME' helps get you thinking about the topic in the context of your own life situation. Then 'INTO THE BIBLE' introduces a Bible passage for you to read slowly and carefully, asking the Holy Spirit what truth he particularly wants to reveal from his Word. Following this, there is a short reflection on the passage which begins to open up God's specific application and challenge for your life. Both these sections are meant to be completed on your own and space is provided to make notes if you want.

WITH OTHERS

Having read the material before meeting together, you will come to the conversation with some thoughts, reflections and questions already in mind. This is where the conversation begins as others share what struck them as they read and what truths jumped out. The 'INTO THE CONVERSATION' section provides a series of trigger questions to help you go deeper together in discussion.

IN YOUR LIFE

The 'INTO OUR LIVES' section is vital at the end of each session. It helps you move towards living out the truth and ground it in everyday circumstances. There are three aspects to this: Respond (suggesting one specific action in your life), Reach out (signalling a missional or outward implication that will impact your witness to others) and Read further (signposting an additional Bible passage to read to continue reflecting on). At this point, you should also take time to pray together and for one another.

1/ SEASONS

Change is inevitable in life. Just as the seasons of a year come and go, God's Word reminds us that we will pass through different seasons in our life as well. Disciples of Jesus learn to navigate changing seasons and continue to follow him no matter what circumstances arise.

"For everything there is a season and a time for every matter under heaven."

Ecclesiastes 3:1



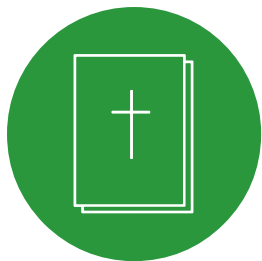
INTO THE THEME

Each year we observe the changing of seasons around us. The newborn lambs or budding flowers in spring. The warmer days and longer nights of summer. The falling leaves and heavier coats in autumn. The colder weather and dense darkness of winter. In the world around us, change is inevitable.

Just as the seasons of a year come and go, we are also guaranteed seasons in our life as well. Some seasons are expected and welcomed. Some may be unexpected or even unwelcome. The challenge for disciples of Jesus is learning to navigate these seasons, continuing to follow him through all the circumstances that life throws up before us.

As a couple declare the vows of marriage on their wedding day, they take into account that there will inevitably be changing circumstances and shifting seasons ahead of them. Whether it will be sickness or health, for better or worse, or in riches or poverty, the couple are promising that no matter what lies ahead for them, they will continue to honour, love and cherish one another for the rest of their days.

So too with followers of Jesus. We face life's unknowns like everyone else, unsure about the specifics but certain about the reality of God's presence with us in times of suffering and joy, challenges and opportunities, illness and death. In this curious mix of known uncertainty, we can still choose to trust in God and to honour, love and live for him through all our days.



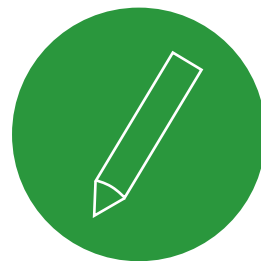
INTO THE BIBLE

Take time to read Ecclesiastes 3:1-11. *Let the words sink in.* What captured your attention? What questions surfaced for you? Into what circumstances of your life did it seem to speak? What is God revealing to you?

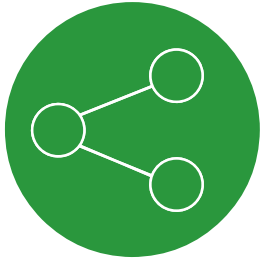
Solomon recognised the changing circumstances of life as he wrote Ecclesiastes 3. He acknowledged times of mourning and weeping, but also laughter and joy. He referred to destruction and death, mingled with healing and birth. However, he also pointed to two great truths in verse 11 that would never change. Firstly, that no one can fathom the ways of God, and secondly, that God would make everything beautiful in its time.

In whatever season we face, we can trust fully that God is holding on to us, even when we are struggling to hold on to him. And while we are being held by Christ, our challenge in every season is to continue to be faithful to him no matter what the circumstances.

Perhaps it isn't a question of what things will change in our lives, but of what things will remain constant in our faith. In the different seasons of your life, what things will you continue to prioritise and cling on to?



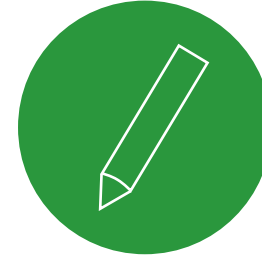
WRITE YOUR REFLECTIONS ON WHAT YOU HAVE READ IN THE SPACE BELOW



INTO THE CONVERSATION

As you meet together, take time to catch up with one another, sharing some things that are going on in each other's lives. Then use some of the following questions to help guide your discussion, taking time to share your reflections on the truth that was revealed to you through the Bible passage and reflection.

- 1/** Which of the four seasons of the year is your favourite and why? Which season does it most feel like in your life right now? Why?
- 2/** Share together what struck you about the Bible passage and reflection you read?
- 3/** Ecclesiastes 3:1-11 talks about a variety of times or seasons in life and the responses they call for. What particular 'times' in the passage strike you, either because you have passed through them or are doing so now?
- 4/** These verses paint a picture of how complex life can be as we move through different seasons and situations. Sometimes we can't make sense of what is happening at the time. Share an example of a time when something didn't make sense in your life. How did God help you through it?
- 5/** Verse 11 speaks of God making "everything beautiful in its time". What would it mean to trust in that promise throughout a variety of seasons in your life?
- 6/** What challenges and blessings are you currently experiencing as a follower of Jesus? What are they teaching you about God?



WRITE YOUR REFLECTIONS ON WHAT YOU HAVE SHARED IN THE SPACE BELOW



INTO OUR LIVES

RESPOND:

What does it look like for you to live consistently trusting in Jesus no matter what season you are experiencing right now?

REACH OUT:

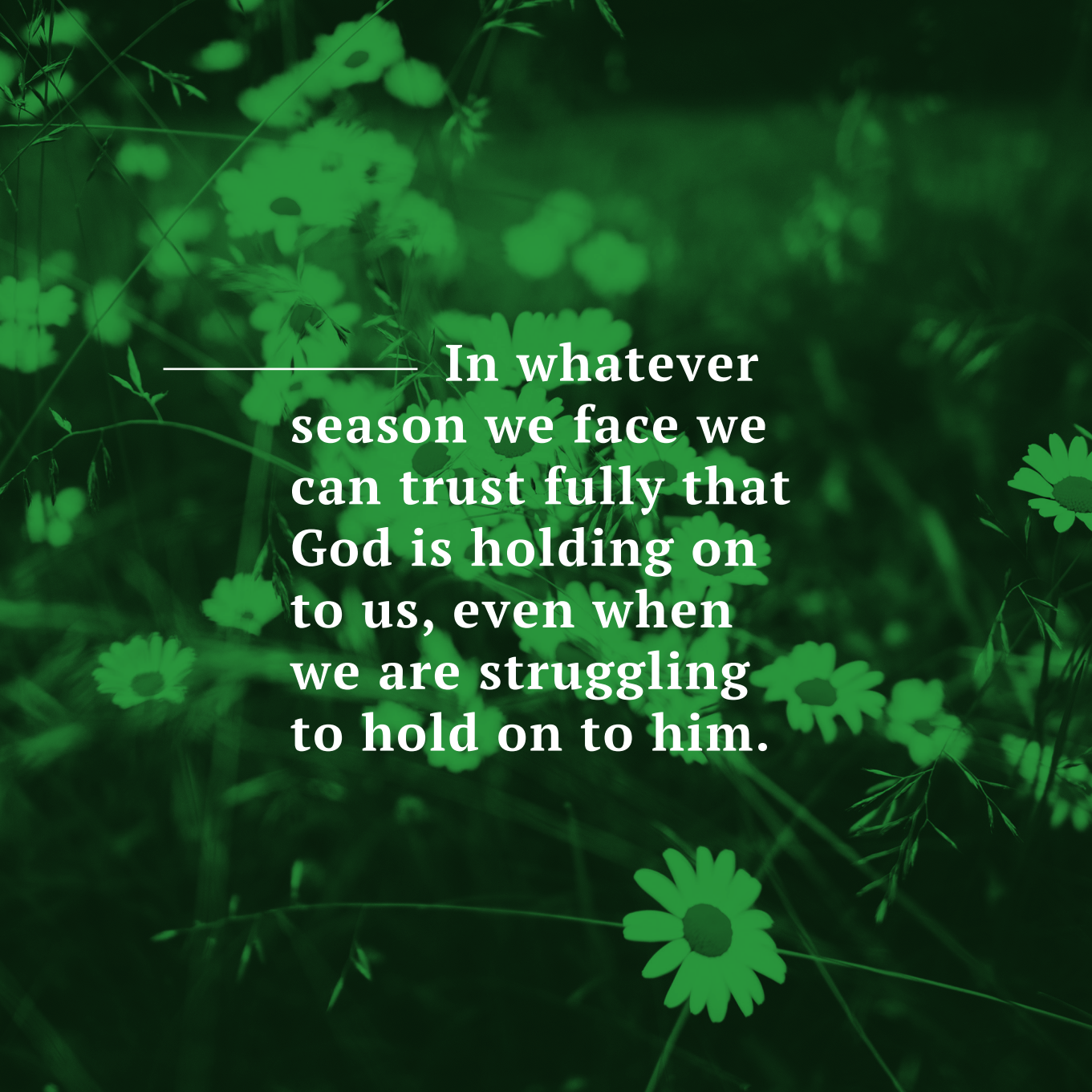
What people come to mind as you reflect on this theme of living through changing seasons of life? How can you practically encourage or stand with them as they walk through their present circumstances?

PRAY:

Talk about the **RESPOND** and **REACH OUT** sections together, being specific about what you hope to do. Commit to praying for one another for these things and take time to share about the outcomes of this in your next session together. Memorise verse 11 this week.

READ FURTHER:

Matthew 5:3-12



In whatever
season we face we
can trust fully that
God is holding on
to us, even when
we are struggling
to hold on to him.