



WHAT'S NEW IN GALATIANS?

**SANCTUARY FIRST
CONNECT BIBLE STUDY**

SEPTEMBER 2024

WELCOME TO CONNECT!

A Connect Bible Study is a small group who meet regularly to explore faith and Godly responses to life issues, growing in the things of God together as we go. Anyone can host one using these materials and contact us for support and guidance. Online or in-person, our heart is that they offer a relaxed space for faith, friendship and fun.

We hope the resources and discussion points encourage, inspire, and invigorate you on your walk with God.

It might be the conversation follows the discussion as laid out or heads in a different direction, both are wonderful and we hope the outline we offer here is flexible and supportive to engage with the Bible and our faith in fresh and vibrant ways as we make our way in the world as 21st century disciples exploring the wonders of life with Jesus!

WHAT IS INVOLVED?

Each week begins with an introduction and a 'seed to sow' conversation starter. These are open-ended prompts to inspire creative responses to the themes. Perhaps they will inspire you to write a song or a poem, or to paint, draw, move or explore! We imagine the material for each week would work for 90 minute sessions but feel free to adapt to your group!

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

This booklet includes a poem and prayer that explore the wildness of Jesus to reflect upon.

We have a **Resource Pack PDF** for this month's theme with daily Bible readings and prompts.

There are more songs, videos, podcasts and blogs linked to this theme on our **website** and **App**, have fun exploring it all!

WHAT'S NEW IN GALATIANS?

What's new in the book of Galatians? This ancient text (likely the first of Paul's letters and perhaps the oldest part of the New Testament) is strange, often beautiful, sometimes spiky and always full of unbridled passion. In it we discover that Paul cares deeply about the Galatians — despite how much they frustrate and perplex him. The church in Galatia is caught in the push and pull of a dangerous world in flux, trying to find their way in uncertain times and Paul is desperate for them to know that the only place to turn, the only thing strong enough and deep enough to rely on is Jesus Christ.

So what's new in Galatians? Or, perhaps, what's *ever-new* in Galatians? What is the Holy Spirit going to reveal to us about our lives and our culture today through the drive, tenacity and conviction of Paul?

WEEKLY OVERVIEW

- **What's new about Paul?** — *Who are we reading about?*
- **What's new about faith and works?** — *What are we learning about following God?*
- **What's ever-new in the power of the Spirit?** — *What does it mean to be a child of God?*
- **What's new about freedom?** — *What is true freedom?*
- **What's new about our lives?** — *What is freedom like shared together?*

POEM

NEW THING

Lord we weep,

for love lost.

For the passage of time,

For the pain of others and for our own,

For the plight of the world,

For our brothers and sisters near and far.

What new thing,

What small seed,

What kernel of hope and life might you be
watering with our tears?

Where might your Kingdom be birthing?

Amanda MacQuarrie

PRAYER

LET US PRAY

Abba, Jesus, Spirit,

I stand in wonder at your grace,

That with all of time and space you stopped
to help us,

That with so much wonder to behold you
choose to hold onto us,

That you can see everything but delight also
in seeing each one of us so clearly.

Thank you,

Amen.

Lily Cathcart

WEEK 1: WHAT'S NEW ABOUT PAUL?

INTRODUCTION:

This is likely the oldest of Paul's letters and therefore one of the first parts of the New Testament to be written down. This is a raw, passionate Paul, going straight for the jugular! He is deeply concerned about the churches in Galatia and wants to immediately grab his listeners' attention. We often forget that for the majority of the Bible's history the majority of people have listened to it and not read it. This is especially true for the original audience, such as the Galatians here. This letter with all its bombast would have been read aloud to an assembled group. Have we got too comfortable with simply reading the Bible and not hearing the words enacted, springing to life? What's new in Galatians, in Paul, when we take time to hear the words, in translation, but still leaping from the page?

SEEDS TO SOW:

During this week, read the whole letter to the Galatians out loud. What do you notice after reading through the whole thing?

READ GALATIANS 1: 1-10

Thaumazō!

What, no thanksgiving!?! In all Paul's other letters he moves from greetings to giving thanks, but not here, he perhaps shocks his audience by launching straight into a rebuke! The bombastic sounding *Thaumazō* is Greek for 'I am astonished!' We're only 25 seconds in and it's time to hold on to your hats!

What is your reaction to the word *Thaumazō*, what does it make you think of? And how do you think it would have felt hearing it as a Galatian in the first century?

READ GALATIANS 1: 11-2:10

Not of human origin.

Paul is keen to stress his independence and claims only Jesus as his authority. What's striking here is what Paul is *not* doing. He is not playing a local power game, claiming the backing of powerful figures. The ancient world, much like our contemporary world, often rotated on trust and reputation, status and credentials. Whose faction are you in? Who's backing you? Follow the money. But here at the outset of this letter Paul chooses to go it alone. What's ever-new about this?

In chapter 2, Paul explains that while he was vulnerable enough to check in with apostles to make sure he was on the right path, he did so as his own man, unafraid to challenge their hypocrisy. At the heart of Paul's letter is the desire that the Galatians leap straight into relationship with Christ and not set up other mediators or unnecessary practices to get in the way of that life changing relationship. Paul is saying here: it's all about Jesus.

What is new and fresh or evergreen and timeless to you in these ancient words?

READ GALATIANS 2: 11-14

How come!?

Paul's warning about peer pressure, politics and hypocrisy has a timeless ring.

Paul confronts the cognitive dissonance of one of the heroes of the early faith — to his face. (Better keep hanging on to those hats Galatians!)

How would have Cephas/Peter felt to have been confronted like this do you think?

WEEK 2: WHAT'S NEW ABOUT FAITH AND WORKS?

INTRODUCTION:

Central to the book of Galatians is behaviour — what we do and why we do it. In the early church there was a lot of soul searching about what would hold these new communities together, these diverse, multi-lingual, multi-cultural groups that transformed traditional power structures. Was doing things as they've 'Aye been', behaving in very particular ways, not only *important* but *essential*? So as to hold these communities together and to please God? Does the right behaviour lead to the right relationship with God? Or does the right relationship lead to the right behaviour? What is new and fresh that we as churches need to hear today?

SEEDS TO SOW:

What new thing can you do for your neighbour this week?

READ GALATIANS 2: 15-21

Living by faith!

Paul is deeply concerned about anything getting in the way between the Galatians and Jesus. He speaks movingly of how Christ lives in him, how he walks the walk as well as talks the talk. Faith is not an abstract thing, a mental checkbox, it is lived and embodied day by day.

What words leap out at you in these verses?
What words do you see in a new light today?

READ GALATIANS 3: 1-9

Remember Abraham!

Paul's not holding back. The Bible is full of strong emotion as humanity learns how to be

humanity — beloved children of God. Paul is so annoyed not just because the Galatians don't get it, but rather because they got it and now have lost it! Paul goes on to appeal to Abraham and how it was his faith in God that mattered, before the law was even a thing. For those saying, "Let's go back to Moses" Paul says, "Let's go even further back..."

Who are the people of faith who have gone before who have encouraged you and why?

READ GALATIANS 3: 10-26

Cosmic unity!

Paul is blazing. Significantly here Paul is talking about the status of those who *rely* on the law, the traditional codes of living that the Jewish community lived by. He is not saying that the law is in itself bad and he goes on to say that it has been part of guiding the people but Paul wants them to know that we can only *rely* on Christ. When we rely on other things, even good things, we are on a hiding to nothing. Nobody's perfect, nobody can be perfect enough at observing the law that they can bank on it.

The promise of God, as made to Abraham pre-dates the law. The law codes have helped people to live, but it has not saved them, only God saves. It's not our good behaviour that gets us to God, it's God that transforms our behaviour! Paul recognises that the law was part of belonging but he also stresses that something new is happening, a new kind of belonging together through Christ — on a whole new scale — all God's children through faith.

How can we respond to the new things God is inviting us to through these words today?

WEEK 3: WHAT'S NEW ABOUT THE POWER OF THE SPIRIT?

INTRODUCTION:

What's new about the power of the Spirit in our lives? What new about being a child of God today? Are we ready for new encounters when we come to old texts in the Bible? God can and does do new things with the Bible through the power of the Spirit. What do these radical words mean to you and your community today? What's new about them? Let's get stuck in. Are you sitting comfortably? Don't worry you don't need to be! You're going to be on the edge of your seat anyway...

SEEDS TO SOW:

What acts of extravagant generosity can you do this week?

READ GALATIANS 4: 1-7

Abba, Father!

We are adopted, gathered in, pulled close!
We are prized! He is extravagantly generous to us!

The Spirit moves within us, helping us to recognise and reach for God. It is significant that in this letter, written in Greek, *Abba* is rendered in Aramaic, as Jesus would have said it himself.

In a time with more rigid social structures than our own this is a radical metaphor. We are not God's slaves, or servants — we are beloved heirs each cherished. Paul is keen throughout Galatians to cut the distance between us and God, cutting through the unnecessary and distracting, such is his heart that people hear the gospel.

How are we are of the Spirit moving within us? Are we conscious of the Spirit helping us to see past the baggage and recognise our Father God? If so, how does it feel?

READ GALATIANS 4: 17-18

The right kind of zealous!

Our world, like that of Galatia in the first century, is full of people zealous to make us zealous about things, to jump on the trend, the cause, a 101 missions.

Having care, passion and drive is not a bad thing but are the Galatians (and by extension us!) asking what we are zealous for and how consistent we are in our enthusiasm?

Are we responsive to how the Spirit of God is leading our communities and not just reliant on Charismatic communicators to fire us up while they're with us (see end of verse 18)?

READ GALATIANS 4: 19-20

Bamboozled!

Paul is perplexed. bamboozled, dumbfooned! It's fair to say he is far from detached! He is absolutely invested in the Galatians, he even thinks of them as his children, though they weary him, stretch him, push, and defy him (much like children the world over and throughout history then!).

Paul really cares and you can hear how much it matters to him.

Four chapters in to Galatians what do you make of Paul as a person? Of his personality and approach?

How can we reconnect to this man to experience his passion anew?

WEEK 4: WHAT'S NEW ABOUT FREEDOM?

INTRODUCTION:

This week we think about *freedom from* and *freedom for*. He challenges the specific issue of the day: whether or not Gentile believers are required to participate in circumcision, and argues vehemently (at one point incredibly viscerally) that they *don't* and that it's so utterly beside the point. This new thing that's happening, Paul argues, is not about buying your freedom through certain acts, but in recognising that you are in fact already free, that you have been freed from Christ and that means you are free not only from the things that hold you back but also free to love one another, to join in the vibrant flourishing of the kingdom! Despite these words being ancient is there something new here our society needs to hear? About Christianity as offering true freedom, true adventure, true living?

SEEDS TO SOW:

This week go and find out about, pray and support organisations that are freeing people from human trafficking, exploitation and modern slavery (for example Love146).

READ GALATIANS 5: 1-10

Running a good race!

Verse 1 gives us a brilliant image of the freedom of standing firm, feet planted where you want them.

From our perspective the debate about circumcision might well feel very remote and hard to identify with. And if that is our response we might actually find we chime with Paul himself! Paul agrees that it's an odd thing to focus on but the Galatians have got all caught up in it.

Paul finds the circumcising of traditionally uncircumcised believers as a drastic and unnecessary route that's taking the Galatians in the wrong direction. It's irrelevant and far from connecting these new believers it is alienating them and getting in the way.

While circumcision might not be water cooler conversation in our churches today — how can we ensure that we do focus on the things that matter and not get sidetracked?

READ GALATIANS 5: 13-21

Not just 'free from...', but 'free for...'

We are not just free *from*, we are free *for*. Free for loving one another. We are free *from* in-fighting and free *for* flourishing together.

Freedom is not a blank cheque to behave in any way we want. It's the power to choose, to not give in to harmful, destructive urges, but instead to take control of our lives.

What are some ways we could actively seek to flourish together with one another?

READ GALATIANS 5: 22-26

Let's keep in step with the Spirit!

We have to keep in *step* with the Spirit... because the Spirit is moving! The Spirit of God is not an abstract feeling, a static concept. And love, joy and peace are not simply vague ideals, they are all endeavours that take work! They are the product of our joining in with the Spirit. The freedom Christ gives us empowers us to keep up with the Holy Spirit!

How are we going to keep in step with the Spirit this week in our everyday lives?

WEEK 5: WHAT'S NEW ABOUT OUR LIVES?

INTRODUCTION:

A month in Galatians, a vibrant passionate text full of newness and ever-newness as we encounter it afresh.

So what's new for us? What are we carrying with us into the next season?

SEEDS TO SOW:

Have you thought about and could you take on a new role, volunteering in a new way with a local church, charity or organisation that are looking for help?

READ GALATIANS 6: 1-6

Give each other a hand!

These verses give us a beautiful picture of Jesus culture. This is healthy, loving and supportive discipleship, not judgementalism.

What does this message of discipleship mean for us today?

READ GALATIANS 6: 7-10

Don't weary of doing good!

What opportunities do we have to encourage other and do good to others tomorrow?

Perhaps as a group you could write a big list of good things you could do and pray about them.

READ GALATIANS 6: 14

Boasting only in Christ!

How do we feel about boasting? In the Greek here the word has the sense of glorifying, to 'glory' something.

Do we glorify Christ in our lives?

What are some ways we could 'glory' Christ this week in our lives relying on him?

What are we praising Christ for this week, giving glory to Jesus? Acting in ways that point to Jesus's ever present love.