



the COURSE of your LIFE

A personal revolution

Accompanying DVD
highly recommended



the
COURSE of
your **LIFE**

A personal revolution

Leader's Guide

Tony Payne

The Course of Your Life: Leader's Guide

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A nautical chart with a magnetic variation scale at the top, ranging from 270° to 350°. Below the scale is a map of the SYMI (Ancient SYME) region, showing islands like Yavales I., Marmara I., and others. The title 'Leader's introduction' is overlaid in large blue text on a semi-transparent grey background.

Leader's introduction

1. How to get started

- If you want to, you can watch the two introductory video clips on the DVD—entitled ‘What is *The Course of Your Life*?’ and ‘How **not** to use this course.’
- Read the introduction below. Some of the material (especially in points 2 and 3) is covered more briefly in the two introductory clips.
- Do some planning about how you are going to use the course in the context of your ministry.

2. The pressing need

A couple of years ago, I accidentally wrote a bestseller. Colin Marshall and I put out a small and uncomplicated book called *The Trellis and the Vine*,¹ in which we argued from Scripture that all Christians are involved in God’s great work in the world. We are all not only disciples but also makers and growers of other disciples—each in our own way, according to our circumstances, opportunities and gifts.

This is hardly an earth-shattering idea, nor are we the first ones to highlight it. From our Reformation heritage, evangelicals have long believed that there are not two kinds of Christian—the priests and the rest of us. We believe

1 Matthias Media, Sydney, 2009.

there is only one kind of disciple, and that all disciples have been entrusted with the word of God, not only to read and obey it but also to share it with others for their conversion and edification.

However, to believe this is true is one thing. To allow that truth to permeate our churches and our lives is something else. And (in large measure) this is why *The Trellis and the Vine* struck such a chord with so many readers. It simply restated what most of us have always believed about ministry and church and discipleship, but pointed out the ways in which the programs and structures and culture of church life tend to squeeze out this people-focused vision of ministry. The ‘trellis work’ takes over the ‘vine work’, and we find ourselves doing very little disciple-making, nor training and equipping of the congregation to be disciple-makers.

As Colin and I have talked about this with pastors and leaders around the world, one very common issue emerges. Many are keen to begin the difficult process of refocusing their congregational life on people and ‘vine work’ rather than on structures and programs. But the first pressing question is: **How can we convey this vision to the congregation? We may be keen to train people as disciple-making disciples, but what if they are not so keen?** What if they already feel busy and over-overcommitted? How can we fire up people with the desire and commitment to give themselves to God’s work in the world: to making and growing disciples of Jesus? How can we inspire them with the vision of how great God’s plans are, and how extraordinary it is that we have a part to play in them—that we **all** have a part to play? **How can we get our people to take their eyes off their small ambitions and their daily struggles, and catch the vision of being a disciple-making disciple in every aspect of their lives?**

This is not a structural problem, nor one that can be solved by better programs or snazzier church services or more impassioned appeals by the pastor for people to “get involved”. It’s a **heart** problem. It’s about what our people passionately believe to be important. And therefore it is also a mind problem—since what we really love and long for (our heart’s desire) is inextricably connected with how we view the world and ourselves, and what we think is important. It’s connected with our (usually unexamined) mental models of the world.

If we want to see our congregational life change, and individual members give themselves to being disciple-making disciples, we need to see hearts change. **We need to blow people’s minds with the wonder of God and the gospel, and to fire their hearts with a new love and joy and enthusiasm for serving Christ not only as a disciple but also as a disciple who longs to make and grow other disciples.**

How do we do this? How does that kind of revolution happen? Well, only two things are needed: the word of God and the Spirit of God. The Bible tells us that the word of God is the sword by which the Spirit of God transforms minds, changes hearts, and produces the fruit of a changed life. If we want to see people change, we need to dig deeply into the Scriptures.

We also need to be deep in prayer, because only the work of God's own Spirit will skewer our hearts with the word of God and bring real change. We need to beg God by his Spirit to work in the hearts of people.

We also need to recognize that proclaiming the word of God to people almost always involves both a negative and positive aspect. The Spirit uses the Word as a sword to hack away at the false and misleading ideas we have in our minds, and to refashion our thinking in line with God's reality. Like Paul in 2 Corinthians 11, then, there is some dismantling and demolishing that needs to be done in people's thinking, along with rebuilding. We need to get behind the defences that people often set up (even without realizing it).

Lastly, we need to work closely and individually with people. Real progress in people's lives almost always happens in close relationship, not in a big crowd.

This comes back to our impatience for change and growth. We want to transform everyone, and quickly! We want an immediate answer, a new program, a quick solution. But that's not how people change and grow. It happens over time as the Word penetrates people's minds, along with much prayer and personal connection.

3. So why this course?

You will note that I have not suggested that the particular resource you have in your hands is necessary for this task—because it isn't. All you really need for the task of making disciples (and disciple-makers) is the word of God and prayer ministered in relationship over time.

However, if we can help each other do this by sharing wisdom, then that is also a gift from God. And that's why I've written *The Course of Your Life*—as a framework to help you apply the word of God to people's lives prayerfully and intensively to see them grow as disciple-making disciples.

In particular, the primary aim of this course is to revolutionize people's understanding of who God is, what he has done in Christ, what his extraordinary plans are for the world, and how that relates to each of our lives. I want to set people's minds on fire with the wonder of who Christ is, and what a radical and extraordinary thing it is to live as his disciple.

In other words, the course aims to do what is often difficult to do in week-by-week sermons or in regular small group Bible studies. It aims to focus intently and intensively on the central and profound issues of Christian life and discipleship, and to revolutionize people's minds and hearts by bringing the Bible's teaching together in a focused and compelling way.

Another way of describing what this course is trying to do is to say that it is seeking by the work of God's Spirit to change head, heart and hands:

- Head: the course seeks to revolutionize people's minds with God's worldwide plans in Christ.
- Heart: the course seeks to do this in such a way as to motivate and inspire.
- Hands: the course seeks to impart a basic ministry skill (of how to read the Bible one-to-one with someone else).

This course is simply a useful framework to help you raise up disciple-making disciples in your congregation through God's word and prayer.

4. The three basic strands of the course

Before looking at the mechanics of how you might run the course, it's worth understanding the three main components or strands of the material and how they fit together.

A. The seminars

The nine seminars are where the core content is delivered. They are designed to contain around 90 minutes of content, although you may want to add discretionary time at the beginning for drinks/snacks and chatting, plus some informal time for talking and packing up at the end.

Exactly when and how you run the seminars will obviously depend on the people doing the course, and how many there are of them. If your participants are workers, you may wish to run the seminars from 7-9 pm and start with some finger food (so that people can come straight from work if they wish). If you're running it with college or university students, you may want to put the seminars on at the end of the day (e.g. 4-6 pm) and conclude with dinner.

Each seminar includes various Bible research activities as well as some video-based input that summarizes and pulls together the ideas. Using these video segments has some obvious advantages—it makes the course easier to run, it maintains a consistent quality, and it allows the group to interact with the material a bit more freely (because they're disagreeing with the person on the screen, not the person standing right in front of them).

However, please feel free to teach some or all of these input segments yourself. The video scripts are provided in full in this leader's guide, so you can use them as a base for preparing your own talk. PowerPoint slides for the diagrams are also available on *The Course of Your Life* website.²

Some of the Bible study and discussion activities are best done in smaller subgroups (and you will see suggestions on the way through where this is the case), but these groups do not have to be the same each week. If you have less than six people doing the course, you will do better to stay in one group for most of the activities.

B. The intensive

The course includes an intensive between seminars 8 and 9. In most contexts, this will work best as two full days away together. A Friday and Saturday works very well—that is, arriving on Thursday evening or first thing Friday morning, and then going home after an early dinner on Saturday. This allows people to be back for church on Sunday and not to be away from their families for the whole weekend.

It is also possible to run the intensive as two separate days (e.g. on consecutive Saturdays), or to run it without going away somewhere—that is, to work through the material on consecutive days, with participants going home to sleep. But if you can manage to stay at least one night together in a venue away from home, it really is of enormous benefit. It builds relationships, and allows more time and 'space' to think and talk.

However you decide to run it, make sure that those who are going to participate in the course are committed to the dates you have set down for the intensive **before they agree** to do the course. The intensive is a vital component. It brings all the material together and allows people the time to think it through, to integrate the ideas, to talk about the implications and to pray together.

C. The one-to-one meetings

For the duration of the course, participants meet together regularly for an hour or so in pairs for Bible reading and prayer. So once you have finalized the group numbers, sort people into same-gender pairs for these one-to-one meetings (and as the leader, you should be in one of the pairs, or more than one if that is necessary). Do your best to pair people up according to where they live or work, to make it easier for them to find a convenient time.

2 www.matthiasmedia.com/courseofyourlife

The one-to-one meetings serve three important functions:

- **They provide a different level for getting into God's word.** The seminars work through lots of different Bible passages, pulling together some of the major themes and topics of the Bible. But in the one-to-one meetings, participants work through just one book of the Bible (Colossians), which provides the opportunity to delve more deeply into individual passages. Many of the ideas that come up in Colossians supplement and support the material in the seminars.
- **They offer an opportunity for mutual encouragement and challenge.** As participants get to know each other in the one-to-one pairs, they can talk and pray together about what they are learning in the course.
- **They teach a basic ministry skill.** By the end of this course, the participants will have learned how to read the Bible one-to-one with someone else. The ten one-to-one readings are really a mini training course in different ways to read the Bible one-to-one. Without realizing it, participants will have gained the skills, knowledge, experience and confidence in how to get together with another person and build them up in Christ through one-to-one Bible reading and prayer.

5. How to run the course

A. How not to use this course

Before looking at the various ways you might use this material, it's important to say something about how **not** to use it. If you are the pastor of a church, the temptation with any course like this is for it to become the latest in a long line of programs that you run for a while, trying to generate some enthusiasm for it before moving on to the next one when this one runs out of steam.

Try to resist the temptation simply to push as many people as possible through *The Course of Your Life* as quickly as possible in the hope of transforming your church in 12 months. Not only will this sort of approach almost certainly not work, it will become rapidly counter-productive. Your people will become increasingly jaded as each year rolls around and a new 'silver bullet' course or program is rolled out, with the promise that this is the one that will really make a difference.

That is not how ministry works. It's not how people change and grow. Real, substantial, lasting growth happens as the Word is applied prayerfully in personal relationship over time. A course like this one (and this is true of any

framework or resource or set of ideas you might use) is not a substitute for the steady, consistent people-focused work of training people as disciples and disciple-makers. But it may be a very useful tool for doing that training.

B. How to use this course

The best way to use *The Course of Your Life* is broadly... but patiently. It is certainly not a course just for 'the elite'. Over time, it could become a basic framework that you want as many people as possible in your congregation to work through. Potentially, it is a course for everyone. But if you try to push everyone through it quickly, you will almost certainly fail because people need time—time to think and work the ideas through in their lives; time to change old habits and ways of thinking; time to gain confidence in their ability to minister to others.

Someone needs to stick with them as they do this; to keep reading and praying and talking; to keep mentoring and advising and following up. This is what training is like. It requires a trainer as well as a trainee. There are no shortcuts and no quick fixes.

However, the word and Spirit of God are immensely powerful. Over time, they can do what no program or structure or ministry fad can do—and that is profoundly change the hearts and minds and lives of God's people.

If you are the pastor or assistant pastor of a congregation, or a ministry leader of some kind (say, leading a Bible study group, or involved in a youth ministry or women's ministry or student/campus ministry), and you would like to see real change of the kind we are talking about, then you need to think in years—not weeks or months. Here's one approach:

Phase 1: gather 8-10 reasonably solid, mature Christians and work through *The Course of Your Life* at a pace that is most appropriate (see options below). This may take ten weeks or four months—the time is not important. Once you've finished working through the course, spend some more time digging further into the Bible together and building on the basics—for example, starting to do some one-to-one Bible reading with others and encouraging each other in that; working through some other training material together (like *Two Ways to Live: Know and share the gospel*); or sending down deeper roots into Christian doctrine. (For further suggestions of how to build a one-year basic training program with resources from Matthias Media, see appendix 2.) You may spend a whole year doing all this. But the aim is train 8-10 people whose minds and hearts have been changed, and who want to grow other disciple-

making disciples of Jesus.³

Of course, if you are part of a church with other staff members or key lay leaders who would be capable of leading such a group, you could start with multiple groups of this size. (For example, there might be pre-existing small groups with good quality leaders who would be able to run the course, or who would welcome you joining them for 3-6 months to work through the course material.) If you had multiple groups running the course, you could all meet together as a group of 20-30 for the first 10-12 weeks to work through *The Course of Your Life* and then split into smaller groups to carry it further for the rest of the year.

Or you could kick the process off in the middle of your year, with the aim of spending six rather than 12 months together. There are numerous ways to do it.

At the end of this first phase, work out what comes next for those you have been working with. Are some of them ready to lead others through *The Course of Your Life*? Are some ready to start following up fringe people and newcomers? Or do one-to-one Bible studies with new or young Christians? Or lead a small Bible study group? Or...?

Phase 2: Choose the more mature and gifted people from your original group, and get them to start another two *Course of Your Life* groups (with you mentoring and supporting). You would also need to keep meeting (say every month, one-to-one) with the rest of your original group to support and coach them in the ministries they are pursuing.

Phase 3: You might now have 30 people who have been through *The Course of Your Life*, and have taken the time to consolidate the ideas and begin to put them into practice. This might have taken you two or three years, or even longer. Where you take it from here depends on the kinds of basic ministry structures you are working with. For example, as well as continuing to train others using *The Course of Your Life*, you could think of deploying your 30 well-trained people in one of two ways:

- as small group ‘shepherds’: to lead a group of 8-10 people and be responsible for their growth as disciple-making disciples (through meeting regularly as a small group, and through other personal contact)

³ This is what *The Trellis and the Vine* calls the “pastor’s training team”—a group of people who begin to work alongside the pastor in ‘vine work’.

- as ‘sheepdogs’: those who chase and follow up visitors, newcomers and non-Christian contacts (by meeting with them, reading the Bible with them, and seeking to move them towards Christ and maturity in him). One of the goals of the ‘sheepdog’ might be to connect people with one of the small groups and see them safely under the care of a small group ‘shepherd’.

This is just one set of ideas to get you thinking, but I hope the principle is clear: don’t use this course as a quick-fix program; **use it over time to begin to build a team of fellow workers in the gospel whose hearts have been fired with the vision of disciple-making**. Don’t simply run people through the course and then move on to the next thing—you need to stick with the people. This will most often mean using the course as part of a longer-running group.

C. Different ways to run *The Course of Your Life*

The course consists of three strands of material (as we’ve just described):

- nine seminar-style sessions
- a two-day intensive
- nine one-to-one Bible readings.

Exactly how you weave these strands together, over what period of time and in what combination, is entirely up to you. You need to make a judgement about what will work best in your particular circumstances with your particular people. Here are three examples of how you could do it in three different time frames.

i. Over nine or ten weeks

- Each week, participants come to a seminar (around 90 minutes).
- Each week, participants also meet one-to-one with someone else in the group for around an hour (at a time and place of mutual convenience).
- Between seminars 8 and 9, you conduct the intensive as a two-day event (away for a weekend together, or Friday-Saturday).

This is the most time-intensive way to use the material, but is also usually the most effective. By doing the one-to-one meetings concurrently with the seminars, the content of the readings reinforces the seminar material. And by having the seminars follow one after the other each week, a real momentum is built as one concept builds on the next.

If you think your people can rise to this level of commitment, then I would strongly recommend using the material this way. It communicates that the

subject matter of the course is something special and serious—something worth devoting extra time to over a nine-week period.

ii. Over 18 weeks or more

- Instead of running the seminars and one-to-one readings concurrently, you could interweave them. One week you do a seminar, and the following week participants do their one-to-one readings—either each pair could sort out their own time and place for the one-to-one meeting, or you could continue to meet altogether at your usual time and place (i.e. starting together as a group for some prayer and catch-up before splitting into pairs for the one-to-one component).
- The intensive could be run as a two-day event (as above), or on consecutive Saturdays (say from 9 am till 3 pm).

This is a less demanding way to run the material, and it allows you to fit all the content into a normal week-by-week timeslot. You won't gain quite the same synergy and momentum of doing it all concurrently, but then again there is more time to digest the material and let it soak in. This comes down to a judgement about what you think will work best with your participants.

iii. As a week-long conference or camp

- If you could take a group of people away for five days, then it would be possible to cover a great deal of the course material in one hit. You might not get through it all, but you could cover a lot of ground together.
- This would potentially be very powerful in helping people think through the big issues together, away from the distractions of daily life.
- However, it would be vital to make this sort of conference or camp the basis for an ongoing group or set of groups. Participants would receive a 'turbo boost' by going to a week-long conference, but you would need to stick with them over the following weeks and months to work it all out in practice.
- For the material to work in this way, the role of the regular seminars and the intensive would need to be reversed—that is, it would make sense to use the conference to cover all the main material in the seminars, with all its cumulative power and impact, and then to use weeks subsequent to the conference to complete the material in the intensive at a steady pace, thinking through and consolidating the implications. Here's an example of how you could run the course in this way:

	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5
Morning	Arrive and register	Seminar 2 Seminar 3	Seminar 5 Seminar 6	Seminar 7 Seminar 8	Intensive 2 121 meeting
Afternoon	Seminar 1 121 meeting	121 meeting	121 meeting	121 meeting	Depart
Evening	Free	Seminar 4	Q & A time	Intensive 1	

Then in subsequent weeks you would do:

- Intensive parts 3-6
- Seminar 9
- 121 readings alongside or interspersed.

Again, these are three suggestions that could work well for you depending on your circumstances. But feel free to take the strands and the framework and come up with your own creative way of utilizing the material.

6. Nuts and bolts

A. Who to invite

In a sense, this is a course for every Christian—because it is about the normal Christian life. It aims to demonstrate that the course of the normal Christian life is one where we not only strive towards maturity in Christ ourselves, but where we long to see others grow to maturity as well. In this sense, it’s not really designed to be an evangelistic program for outsiders or for those on the fringes of our congregations who are still some distance from the kingdom. It’s aimed at the large majority of people in our churches who are Christian but have not yet really grasped what it means to be a ‘disciple-making disciple.’

This may leave you thinking, “Well, I can think of lots of those! Who should I invite to do the course?”

Again, this relates to your larger purpose in training a team of disciple-making disciples (as we’ve discussed above). The best people to start with are probably those whom you think have the most potential to join you in training others.

B. How to invite

Before you issue invitations for people to join a group in which you’ll be running *The Course of Your Life*, make sure you’ve nailed down the key details—in particular, the venue and dates for the intensive. It is important that people

know exactly what they're signing up for, and are willing to commit the necessary time. Make this really clear when you're talking to people about doing the course—they need to give a firm commitment, including to the intensive and the one-to-one meetings.

A useful way to handle the invitation process is to send a course brochure to people with a cover letter explaining why you're inviting them and what the key dates are, and mentioning that you will follow up with a call in the near future. A sample brochure and invitation letter are available for download at the website for the course.⁴

Instead of (or as well as) a brochure, you could also send people a link to the course invitation video. This is also available on the course website, as well as on the course DVD under 'Extra videos'.

C. What you'll need

You will need:

- a workbook for each person
- a leader's guide (the leader does not also need a workbook)
- a leader's DVD (assuming you want to use the video input clips).

You might also want to download other material (such as sample invitation brochures) from *The Course of Your Life* website: www.matthiasmedia.com/courseofyourlife

For each seminar, you will need access to a computer/projector or to a decent-sized TV if you are going to use the provided video segments.

The leader's guide contains all the material in the workbook, plus notes and scripts for the leader in **blue**.

7. The logic

Below is a summary of the main biblical ideas that the course seeks to cover, and the order and logic that connects them.

Seminar 1: Getting started

The course of our lives is determined by who we are (our background, nature, relationships, etc.) and where we are headed (our purpose, future, goals, dreams). Who are you? Where have you come from? Where are you headed?

This seminar aims to open up these ideas, and help participants start to get to know one another.

4 www.matthiasmedia.com/courseofyourlife

Seminar 2: God's creative purposes

To understand ourselves and our destiny we need to start with creation, for we are all creatures of the one good and sovereign God. God is the potter, we are the clay, and he made us intentionally and deliberately. His purposes for us are outlined in Genesis: to be fruitful and multiply, to fill the earth and subdue it, to have dominion over all other living things.

This means that the rationale for our lives—who we are, and why we are on this planet—is not self-generated. We don't impart meaning to our own lives. God our creator writes our mission statement and determines the course of our lives. And this grates against most of our deepest and most basic human beliefs.

Seminar 3: What went wrong?

We don't like bowing to God's rule. Adam and Eve didn't like it, and so they rebelled and were judged. They decided to write their own rules—to break God's rule—so they were judged and cast out. This is now who we are: rebels under judgement, excluded/alienated from God and his purposes, and under the reign of decay and death.

What does this mean for God's purposes? They seem to be frustrated. God's plan seems to have gone off the rails almost as soon as it got under way.

What does this mean for us and for our lives? The world we live in and the course of our lives is described perfectly in Ecclesiastes. We sense meaning but we can't properly grasp it, and it all seems absurd. We need to feel the weight of this: the frustration and unpredictability of human life; the universality of injustice, evil and death; the foolishness of thinking that we can sort out our own lives and control them.

Seminar 4: God's answer

There is an answer to the death, decay and absurdity of this fallen world and our lives. God's purposes are not frustrated. God's answer is revealed first in the Old Testament and then finally and majestically through his Son (Heb 1:1-4).

If God's answer to sin and evil and death is found in the Scriptural revelation culminating in Jesus, then this has radical implications for how we think about our lives. What God says is not an additional item to be fitted into the busy agenda of our lives. Instead, it completely rewrites the agenda of our lives. (This seminar is really about the sufficiency of Scripture.)

Seminar 5: God's agenda

So what is God's agenda for the world and for our lives? The Bible reveals that his big purpose is found in Christ—in fact, Christ **is** the purpose, the rationale, the agenda.

Passages such as Acts 17:22-31, Ephesians 1:1-10, Colossians 1:1-20 and Titus 2:11-14 reveal that God's agenda or purpose is history-long and world-wide. God has sent his Son Jesus into the world as a man to be the Christ and ruler of a new kingdom, to which redeemed and purified people from every nation (not just Israel) will belong. He has sent his Son to be the king of a new kingdom of God, a new creation, where there is no sin or pain or suffering or decay or death. Summary: God's agenda is to glorify Jesus the Christ by transferring forgiven rebels like us out of the domain of darkness and into his eternal kingdom.

Seminar 6: Christ's death, my life

How does God's agenda connect with the course of our lives? The answer lies in understanding the key moment in God's plan: the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Jesus died as our **substitute**, taking upon himself God's anger at our sin, and bringing us justification and redemption and reconciliation with God. But Jesus also died as our **representative**—that is, his death was our death (2 Cor 5:14-15; Gal 2:20). This means that when we are united with Christ by faith—that is, when we become Christians—a whole new life begins. Our old life is dead and gone, and we are raised up to lead a new life in which we live for the One who for our sake died and was raised.

So we actually have two lives: our old rebellious life that was crucified with Christ; and a completely new life that we now live by faith in the Son of God. It is the course of this new life that is now our concern.

Seminar 7: Transformation

Question: if our old life has been crucified with Christ, why do we still sin? Answer: it is because of the 'now' and 'not yet' nature of the kingdom of the Son. We have been transferred to his kingdom (past tense) and we are now raised up with Christ and seated with him (Eph 2:1-7)—but there is a delay, an overlap, in which we continue to live in a sinful world, and in a sinful body with a sinful mind, as we wait for the return of Jesus.

And so God's agenda for our lives is not just to transfer us to the kingdom of his Son, but also to transform us to be mature in Christ as we wait for his return. The new life we now live 'in Christ' is a life of killing off sin and clothing

ourselves with the character of Christ. A fuller summary of God's agenda for the course of our new lives in Christ is: to **transfer** forgiven rebels like us out of the domain of darkness and into his eternal kingdom, and to **transform** us towards maturity in Christ as we wait for his return.

Seminar 8: God's method

Taking a step back: how does God achieve his agenda in the world? What is his method or strategy for transferring and transforming?

Essentially it comes down to three P's: **p**roclamation of God's word, **p**rayer for the Spirit to work, and **p**eople (who do the proclaiming and praying). It is the privilege and responsibility of every Christian to be part of God's agenda in the world—not only by seeking maturity in Christ in our own lives, but also by building others towards maturity in him.

How do we do this?

- We move ourselves towards maturity in Christ by prayerfully setting our minds on Christ and his word.
- We move others towards maturity in Christ by prayerfully speaking God's word to them.

Intensive

So far, we have seen that God has an agenda for the course of our lives (to transfer and to transform), and that we put that agenda into practice in our lives by striving towards maturity in Christ in our own lives, and by seeking to move others forward towards maturity in Christ as well.

But how does this overriding agenda in our lives intersect with our everyday life at home? At work? At church?

Seminar 9: Where to now?

Given all that we have learned, how do we start to implement this new vision for the course of our lives?

In particular, who are the people (in our work, family and church lives, both Christian and non-Christian) we are going to pray for, and seek to move towards maturity in Christ?

The one-to-one skills that participants have been learning will be invaluable in this.

8. A final word about prayer

Earlier in this introduction I noted that this course is by no means the only way to go about the task of training disciple-making disciples. I said “All you really need for the task of making disciples (and disciple-makers) is the word of God and prayer ministered in relationship over time”.

The often-forgotten word in that sentence is ‘prayer’. We all know the importance of prayer. We all recognize that our task is not only to speak God’s word but also to pray that God would accompany his word with his life-giving, life-changing Spirit. And yet for most us, this recognition rarely translates into very much praying.

Let me encourage you: set aside time to pray for the people you’re inviting to do the course. Pray for them before they begin the course, pray for them as they go through the course, and pray before every seminar that God would drive his word home into the hearts of those present, and profoundly change their lives.

You can also demonstrate the importance of prayer throughout the course by not short-changing time for prayer during the seminars (as we so easily do). Show people that the course of their life is shaped by making prayer a priority.



Seminar 1

Getting started

About this seminar

This first seminar is a little longer than the others, mainly because it has two important aims. It aims firstly to introduce the framework and goals of the course, to inspire and enthuse the participants about what is to come, and to communicate how it's all going to work—including some basic training in how to conduct the one-to-one meetings. This needs time.

But there is a second aim as well: to help your group begin to bond together. Even if the participants already know each other to some extent (e.g. from existing church relationships), it is important that they feel comfortable with each other and are willing and able to talk freely about their lives, their dreams and their struggles. This also needs time. This is why we recommend that you allow a little longer for this opening session—perhaps up to three hours.

Before the seminar, make sure you have worked out the one-to-one pairings. As the leader, you should be in one of the pairs (or more than one if that is necessary).

It would be an excellent idea to begin or conclude this opening session with a meal. Some ideas:

- Run it on a Saturday morning, starting with breakfast at 8 am and finishing with morning tea at around 10:30 am. (Or start with morning tea at 10:30 am and finish with lunch at around 1 pm.)
- Run it on a Sunday afternoon, starting with afternoon tea at 3:30 pm and concluding with dinner at around 6 pm.

- Run it on a Monday night, starting with a light meal at 6:30 pm and concluding with supper at around 9 pm.

You may wish to get more creative and run this opening seminar in conjunction with a more extensive social event that suits the group of people doing the course—a game of football, a craft morning, a trip to the movies, a round of golf, lunch out at a restaurant, and so on.

1. Introductions

The idea is to break the ice and begin to get comfortable with each other. If you are starting the session with a meal, this discussion could take place during the mealtime.

Timing: 45 minutes

A. A quick get-to-know-you quiz

Introduce yourselves by getting each person in the group to answer the following three questions in no more than 60 seconds:

- What's your full name (including middle name/s)?
- Where do you live now and with whom?
- Can you name a book, movie or TV show you have enjoyed in the last three months?

B. Thinking about your life

Now take it in turns to answer one of the following two questions (no more than three minutes for each person). Group members are allowed to ask follow-up questions.

- What have been the turning points in your life so far—the key moments when the road has taken a turn?
- Can you name one or two people (excluding your parents and God) who have had the most influence (for good or ill) in making you into the person you are today? How have they influenced you?

C. Pray

Two or three of the group who feel comfortable to do so can lead in prayer:

- giving thanks for this opportunity to pause and reconsider where our lives are headed
- praying for the members of the group by name, asking God to give insight and clarity and conviction over the duration of the course.

2. Input: Why are we here?

Play video clip 1 here, or give your own talk based on its content.

Timing: 7-10 minutes

Script:

Do you ever stop and think about where your life is going?

We don't do this most of the time. It would be unhealthy if we did. We can hardly conduct a full enquiry into the meaning of our existence every morning before we get out of bed.

But most people stop and think about their lives from time to time. We pause and take our bearings. Is my life where I thought it would be now? Is there some sort of overriding purpose? Where is it all going? Where am I going?

Sometimes grief or failure or a scare with illness pushes us to these thoughts.

Sometimes it just happens naturally at different times of life—like when we leave school, or when we turn 50.

Of course, there's a deeper and more pressing reason for stopping to ponder the course of our lives—it's the wonderful possibility that our lives do in fact have a profound purpose; that we were made by God for a reason. If that was the case, would you want to discover that purpose, that reason, and live the rest of your life pursuing it?

That's what this course is really about. It's an opportunity for you to pause and 'take the temperature' of your life: to think about who you are and why God put you here on this planet.

More specifically, *The Course of Your Life* is designed to help you achieve three things:

- To understand afresh who God is, what he is doing in our world, and what Jesus Christ has to do with that.
- To see and understand yourself afresh—who you really are, what you're here for, and what your future holds.
- On the basis of both of these things, to discover what God wants you to do with the rest of your life from this point on—not just in a vague general sense ('give him the glory', 'be a good Christian'), but more personally and specifically.

Your group leader will explain more about the nuts and bolts of how this will work in just a moment...

But in the meantime, you need to recognize at the outset that this is not a light or small thing you will be doing as a group over the next several sessions. These are hardly small or inconsequential topics. And there is every chance that as a result of what you do together during this time, your life will never be the same again—because you are going to be delving into what God has to say about the purpose

and direction of your life.

But you should also recognize at the start that because the subject is so important and so personal, there will be times during the course when you will find it hard going. This may simply be because you find the content confusing or disturbing or unsettling. Some cherished ideas or assumptions might be challenged. Or you might long for a nice simple answer but find that none seems available. You won't find all the answers in the first week, or even by halfway through. Be patient, and keep searching and asking and grappling with the ideas.

But doing a course like this can be unsettling in another way. It can profoundly challenge not just our understanding but also our hearts and wills. It can call into question the very way we live our lives; our dreams, our goals, the things we love and long for. Be prepared for this, and pray that God would soften your heart to respond to his word.

3. Three gifts and three strands

Read through the following material with the group, pausing to clarify and answer questions as you go.

Timing: 20 minutes

A. Three gifts

You've just heard a summary of what this course is about. Another way of summarizing the methodology of this course is that we will be trying to make the most of three incredible gifts that God has given us:

- God has given us **his word**, the Bible, to light our path like a torch on a dark night. It is good to share our thoughts, feelings and experiences—but in the end it's God who not only has the answers, but also knows which are the truly important questions.
- God also gives us **each other**—to help, to urge, to encourage and to sharpen each other. You'll spend lots of time in the Bible during this course, and you'll do most of it together rather than individually.
- We also need God to work in our hearts and minds to help us understand and change. That's why **prayer** is such a precious gift—God invites us to come to him and ask him to work in our lives, and he promises to give us only good gifts in response to our prayers.

The Course of Your Life is built on these three gifts from God, and consists of three interconnected components or strands.

B. Three strands

i. Seminars

- Around 90 minutes in length.
- Addressing key topic areas by doing Bible research together, pulling ideas together, and praying together.
- There are nine seminars (including this opening one).

ii. One-to-one meetings

- With one other person, to read and pray together.
- Focusing on Paul's letter to the Colossians.
- Complementing and supporting the topics covered in the seminars.
- Providing opportunity to talk privately about what you're learning and being challenged by.

iii. Intensive

- Towards the end of the course (usually between seminars 8 and 9).
- Can be two days away together, or over consecutive Saturdays, or similar.
- Integrating and completing the course content.
- Providing time and space to think through the implications for different aspects of your own lives, and to pray.

The course has been designed so that these three strands interconnect and reinforce each other. The passages you study in your one-to-one meetings will feed into the seminar discussions, and the intensive will draw upon all the material that has been done in the one-to-one meetings and the seminars.

All this will take time and require a little patience. We won't answer every question by the end of seminar 3. If at various points in the course you feel a little frustrated, or even confused, that's not altogether a bad thing! A serious rethinking of our lives is not the easiest thing in the world to do. In God's grace, by the end of the course we hope and trust that you will have reached a new clarity.

4. More about the one-to-one meetings

For some of you, this may be the first time you've ever read the Bible one-to-one. Don't worry—it's not very difficult! And to make it even easier, we've provided you with a simple framework to use each time. This basically consists of:

- having a quick catch-up about what is happening in your life
- praying and giving thanks together briefly

- reading and discussing the Bible together for about 30 minutes (using the provided template/material)
- praying to conclude.

[At this point, you can flick over to the ‘One-to-one meetings’ section in the workbook and check out the template for the first one-to-one meeting.]

By far the most difficult thing about meeting one-to-one to read the Bible is... actually meeting. This is like Bible reading in general. The hardest aspect of personal Bible reading is usually just being disciplined enough to sit down, open the Bible and start reading. It’s the same with meeting one-to-one. Working out a convenient time and then sticking to it—that’s the key.

Once you’re there it’s really not that hard, and almost always very rewarding.

To make the meetings as convenient as possible, your course leader has tried to pair you up with someone who either lives or works close to you.

5. Meet your one-to-one partner

Apart from making a start on some Bible content, the aim of this section is for the one-to-one partners to get to know each other a little, and thus make their first meeting a little easier.

Divide everyone up into the pairs that you have already allocated, and work through the material below.

Timing: 30 minutes

- A. Start by working out a suitable time and place for your first meeting—which needs to happen before seminar 2. (This might turn into your regular meeting time. You can sort that out when you get together.)
- B. Share a little bit about yourself with your partner by answering one of the following questions:
 - When you were 18 (which might have been 3 or 30 years ago!), did you have any dreams or goals in life? Have they been met?
 - Can you think of a major mistake you have made in your life? What were the consequences?
 - Think back to a reasonably major life decision you have made in the last five years (relating to work, family, friends, church, etc.). What were the key factors that determined your decision? What process did you go through in making up your mind?

C. Read Psalm 139:1-16 aloud together.

(i) What does this passage say about God's place in the course of our lives?

(ii) How does the psalmist feel about this? How does he react?

(iii) How do you react?

Finishing up

Depending on timing, you can conclude the seminar in these one-to-one pairings, or get back together in the whole group and share some answers/responses to the Psalm 139 questions. Pray to finish.

Timing: 20 minutes

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A nautical chart with a compass rose and depth soundings. The chart shows a compass rose with magnetic variation and a depth soundings scale. The text "Seminar 2" is overlaid on the chart.

Seminar 2

God's creative purposes

About this seminar

In this seminar, we dive into the Bible and make a real start. And we start with the character of God as the sovereign creator and ruler of all things. There are two main reasons for this emphasis.

The first is theological: God's sovereignty as the creator and sustainer and ruler of all is the theological starting point for considering what our lives are about. We are creatures. We live in a ruled world. We do not create ourselves or fashion our own purpose for life. We are contingent. This lays the groundwork for arguing that it is God who determines the course of our lives, not us.

The second reason for starting at this point is to begin to unsettle the participants, and stretch their minds. The main spiritual problem we all have in working out what our lives are about and what they are for is our fundamental self-absorption. We find it hard to believe that life is not about Me and My happiness, satisfaction, fulfilment and pleasure (or at least about My family's enjoyment of all those things). The Copernican revolution that needs to take place in our thinking (i.e. that we are not at the centre of the universe, but God is)—begins with an understanding of God's supreme sovereignty as the creator.

You may wish to start this seminar with a brief discussion together, asking for feedback about how the first lot of one-to-one meetings went.

You can then outline the shape of this seminar, which starts with people in subgroups and finishes with everyone coming back together to share answers.

You will need large sheets of paper for each group to write on (and pens).

1. Bible research: God and his world

Do this section in two or more subgroups, working through the passages and noting basic content about God and his relation to our world. Divide the passages in part B up among the groups so that each passage is covered. If you have only one group then look at the following passages: Psalm 8, Psalm 135:5-7, Proverbs 19:21, Isaiah 45:1-9, Matthew 10:28-30 and Revelation 4:11.

Timing: 40 minutes

A. In your subgroups, read Genesis 1-2. As you read, think about the following two questions:

(i) Why did God make the world? What clues do we get here about his purposes or intentions?

(ii) More specifically, why did he make humanity? What purposes did he have in mind?

Spend a few minutes discussing your answers to these two questions.

B. Divide the following passages among the groups and fill in the table described below (you'll need to draw a larger version on the sheets of paper provided by your course leader). Select from:

Isaiah 14:24-27	Psalm 33
Isaiah 45:5-10	Proverbs 16:4
Isaiah 46:8-11	Acts 17:24-27
Isaiah 55:6-11	Revelation 4:11
Psalm 8	

As you do this exercise:

- Look up each passage as a group, and read it aloud.
- Choose one person to be the scribe.
- When questions arise, jot them in the 'question' column, but don't pause to discuss them (at this point).

- You won't be able to put things in every column for each passage.
- Keep moving quickly, and allow 5-10 minutes at the end of the exercise to do part C.

Draw up a table as follows. In each column jot down quickly what you learn about that subject in the Bible passages you have selected.

Passage	What do we learn about God the creator?	What do we learn about God's purposes or intentions?	What do we learn about ourselves?	Other notes and questions

C. Still in your subgroups, try to summarize the most important points you've picked up from your Bible research under the following headings:

(i) What did you learn about God the creator?

(ii) What did you learn about God's purposes or intentions for his creation?

(iii) What did you learn about yourself?

(iv) What questions puzzled you most?

2. Group feedback

Get one person from each group to share the group's findings/summaries. As they share their results, don't be afraid to interact with what they say—for example, to get them to clarify or push further.

If they share a question (from the last column in the table), throw it open for discussion among the whole group.

Timing: 25 minutes

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3. Input: Who are we?

Play video clip 2 here, or give your own talk based on its content.

Timing: 10 minutes

Script:

I made this little man the other day. I used some play dough. I haven't quite decided what I will do with him. I might stick him on top of my computer monitor to remind me of writing this course. Or I might just throw him away. But whatever I do with him, it's pretty much up to me. I made him. He belongs to me. Whether he continues to exist is up to me. What purposes he serves are my decision—not his. Which is just as well, because he's not really up to making decisions.

But the thing is: he is my little creature, which I made for a particular purpose—to use in this video.

If we gain nothing else from reading Genesis 1 and 2, and from the other passages we've looked at in this seminar, at the very least we learn that we are God's creatures—in our case, animate, thinking, willing, living, breathing creatures, but creatures all the same.

We are not self-generated, nor did we simply pop into existence by chance. We

are the creation of the God who made all things and who rules all things. In the words of Genesis 2, God fashioned us out of the dust of the earth and breathed life into our nostrils. He is the potter; we are the clay.

What's more, the God who brought us into existence is a rational, purposeful, intentional God. He doesn't make us for no reason. He works very intentionally. We see that clearly in Genesis 1, where God very deliberately creates every part of the world in order, and fills it with creatures, culminating in the creation of humanity. And God gives humanity a particular role: to be fruitful and multiply, to fill the earth and subdue it, to have dominion over all other living things.

The God who made us is a purposeful, intentional God. You no doubt also saw this in the various other passages you looked up. God has plans and intentions for his world, and he sees them through. God continues to rule and govern our world, to be completely in charge of its daily operation, to pursue his purposes within it. He didn't wind up our world like a clock and set it running, and then go off and get on with something else he had to do. God continues to be the sovereign, mighty ruler of every aspect of our world, including us—his creatures.

No purpose of this God can be thwarted or frustrated; nor can it even be questioned. It is not our place as the clay to tell the potter what he should be doing with what he has made.

Several implications flow from this. The first and most obvious is that we should honour and give thanks to this God who made us and owns us and rules us. He is worthy to receive glory and honour and power because he made all things (says Revelation 4:11). We need to recognize that God is God and we are not. Our lives are in his hands; we are dependent upon him for everything, including life and breath itself.

But God our maker not only determines **that** we exist; he also determines **why** we exist. As we think about the course of our lives—about what our lives are really for and where they are heading—this is a foundational truth: we don't determine the purpose and nature of our lives. God does.

We don't get to write our own mission statement. It simply is not our right. Our reason for existing is not self-derived or self-determined. It comes from outside of us—from the God who made us and who has his own purposes and intentions for us.

What are those purposes and intentions? Well, so far we've only seen them in broad outline. The first few pages of Genesis lay some foundations for understanding why God made humanity. He made us to live and multiply in his good world, and to rule over the other living creatures in the world. But there is much more to be said. The other 998 pages of the Bible build on the foundations of Genesis, and it is only when we get to Jesus and his place in God's great plans for the world that the whole picture really becomes clear. And we will come to this in the seminars to come.

But in the meantime, we need to pause and recognize just how much we hate

the basic ideas that have come out in this seminar. Our lives are not our own to do with as we wish? We are like clay in the hands of a potter? Our dreams and desires and wishes in life should all be subordinated to Someone Else—to God?

These ideas grate against everything we hold dear. A thousand Disney movies have taught us that you should be free to follow your heart; that no-one else can tell you what is important in your life; that you need to discover that ‘truth within’; that you need to find your dream and then follow it to the end of the rainbow.

There are very few basic beliefs that everyone in Western society shares, but this is one of them: the absolute right to self-determination; to be able to decide the course of our own lives, to be who we want to be, and not to let anyone else tell us who we are or what we have to do. The prominence of this idea in our world—the pursuit of personal freedom and autonomy as the highest goal of life—has a long history, and we don’t have time to trace that history now. But it is in the air we breathe, the TV shows and movies we watch, the books we read, the education system we are raised in.

Now as Christians, we know there is something wrong with this idea. We acknowledge that God really is God, and that we should submit to his plans—not our own. But we often underestimate just how deeply and stubbornly we also believe in self-determination, in basically charting our own course in life. But doing things our own way, and determining our own course in life, comes very naturally to us.

This is revealed not only in how little thanks we give to God our creator for everything he gives us, but also in how rarely we pause to consider his purposes and intentions for us as we make decisions about our lives.

We would much prefer to be in the position of the potter rather than the clay. And this desire and its consequences (as we will see in our next seminar) are as old as humanity itself.

4. Discussion and prayer

Give participants the opportunity for discussion, questions and comments on the input. Don’t be concerned if you can’t answer everything—in fact, having some unanswered questions at this point in the course is probably a good thing.

Leave some time at the end for a few people to close in prayer.

Timing: 10-15 minutes



God's word teaches us that all Christians are involved in God's great work in the world.

We are all not only disciples of Jesus Christ, but also disciple-makers—each in our own way, according to our circumstances, opportunities and gifts.

If this is the case, how can we teach and train Christians to catch this captivating vision of being a disciple-making disciple in every aspect of our lives?

The Course of Your Life aims to do just that: to revolutionize people's understanding of who God is, what he has done in Christ, what his extraordinary plans are for the world, and how that relates to each of our lives. Ultimately, this course is a biblical framework to help you fire people with a new love and joy and enthusiasm for serving Christ as disciple-making disciples, through God's word and prayer.



Tony Payne has spent more than 25 years in Christian ministry, serving for much of that time as the Publishing Director of Matthias Media. He is the author or co-author of many popular books and resources, including *The Trellis* and

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