

Session 1: Why Study Theology?

DISCUSSION: Introducing each other, what motivates you in Theology?

Go slow and ask each other questions. Try to get to know each other well especially if this is the first proper Theology Network session of the year.

- Name, Year, Course?
- Why theology? Why the particular course you've chosen?
- What are you most enjoying / most looking forward to in theology?
- What are your hopes/ plans for after university if any at the moment?

READ:

We come to our theology degrees with a variety of good motivations. Some want to prepare for some form of Christian ministry, others to be teachers. Some simply want to pursue the subject they enjoyed most at school.

Let's think more deeply about why we study theology through the perspectives of studying for the sake of God, the sake of others, and for our own sake.

DISCUSSION: Studying for God

READ:

Moltmann, in *Trinity and Kingdom*, criticised pragmatism in theology (theology that is studied primarily to achieve something). Instead, he describes theology as doxology (worship).

Theology isn't a scientific study of God as the (dead) object, using knowledge of Him to achieve something else. Rather, God is the 'revealing subject' of theology (see 1 Cor 2:10-11). When we attempt to know God more through theology, we are not initiating, but responding to his enacted desire to be known.

Our primary motive for theology must begin with Him, and this gives us reason to put our all into studying well – *If God wants to be glimpsed, then he deserves to be glimpsed well.*

- How does God as the 'revealing subject' of theology change the way that you approach studying?
- How can we practically put God first as we get into the mundanity of studying theology at university?

DISCUSSION: Studying for Others

READ:

Theology is meant to serve others and build them up in love and good works. It has been said "Theology is the skeleton; preaching is the skin." Dr Martin Lloyd-Jones wrote in *Preachers and Preaching*,

"To me there is nothing more important in a preacher than that he should have a systematic theology, that he should know it and be well grounded in it. This systematic theology, this body of truth which is derived from the Scripture, should always be present as a background and as a controlling influence in his preaching."

We may not all be preachers, but studying theology give us an opportunity to help overcome anti-intellectualism in the church (i.e. 'if we think about things too much that will damage our faith'). It's all too common for people to reject the knowledge of God in pursuit of a "simple Gospel".

Jesus quoting the commandments adds in loving God with all your 'mind'.

Deut 6:5 "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might."

Mark 12:30 "And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength." (cf. Matthew 22:37; Luke 10:27)

Studying theology is a good opportunity to help others engage their minds in loving God.

- Where do you see the need for good theological thinking in your Christian communities?
- How can you practice serving others through your theological study?

Consider 1 Corinthians 8:1-3 "This 'knowledge' puffs up, but love builds up. If anyone imagines that he knows something, he does not yet know as he ought to know. But if anyone loves God, he is known by God." (You may want to look at the whole chapter for context)

- What might it look like to do the work to take what you're learning and make it useful for others (rather than a show of your 'superior intellect')?

DISCUSSION: Studying for Self

READ:

Augustine wrote in *Confessions*,

"Can any praise be worthy of the Lord's majesty? How magnificent his strength! How inscrutable his wisdom! Man is one of your creatures, Lord, and his instinct is to praise you. He bears about him the mark of death, the sign of his own sin, to remind him that you thwart the proud. But still, since he is part of your creation, he wishes to praise you. The thought of you stirs him so deeply that he cannot be content unless he praises you, because you made us for yourself and our hearts find no peace until they rest in you.

Grant me, Lord, to know and understand whether a man is first to pray to you for help or to praise you, and whether he must know you before he can call you to his aid. If he does not know you, how can he pray to you? For he may call for some other help, mistaking it for yours.

Or are men to pray to you and learn to know you through their prayers? Only, how are they to call upon the Lord until they have learned to believe in him? And how are they to believe in him without a preacher to listen to?"

Theology is an opportunity to be led to deeper worship of God. It is personally edifying to contemplate the one in whom all life is found.

It is also an opportunity to seek answers to nagging questions that you have about God and faith. Don't underestimate the time that you have as students and the value of your access to libraries and scholars.

- What areas of theology are you most looking forward to as opportunities to rest in God?
- What questions do you hope to find answers to as you study theology?

PRAY:

Pray that you would know God more and be equipped to serve others with that knowledge.

Share any other prayer requests that you might have and spend time praying for each other.