



Freedom in Christ

Neil T Anderson and
Steve Goss



The Apprentice Series

James Bryan Smith



Square Mile

Evangelical Alliance

Freedom in Christ aims to revive Christians who are facing the spiritual dry patches which creep in to the Church in various forms. It does this by taking us back to Bible truths – truths which, if we really believe them, will transform our lives. It prides itself on having no gimmicks, no quick-fixes, but just reminding Christians of the promises they know but may have forgotten. More than 150,000 people have now done the course, which is hosted on the DVD by Steve Goss in front of a studio audience. What's clear from the video testimonies interjected throughout the series is that different people get different – often life-changing – things from it. Some are set free from addiction, some healed from depression, and some benefit from a renewed sense of assurance of God's love which goes on to impact them in everyday life. **Best bit:** Reciting biblical truths really makes them hit home – and it's truly liberating.

Could do better: Steve Goss' jokes are possibly some of the worst you'll ever hear, but he somehow pulls them off.

Quote of the course: 'Everything's in colour now, that's the only thing I can say. Everything's in colour and I can take on anything because I know God is with me.'

How it works: A 13-week DVD course, including pauses for thought for group discussion. The final week is a prayer counselling appointment with one or two other people in which you pray through any personal issues to ensure that you are 'free indeed'.

There's not an Alan Sugar in sight, but the weekly tasks in this brilliant series promise to reward you with a changed life. In the three books which make up the 34-week series, US theology professor James Bryan Smith takes participants through a 'curriculum of Christlikeness'. The first book, *The Good and Beautiful God*, invites you to fall in love with the God Jesus knows, rather than the worldly views which can often creep in to Christian life. The next book, *The Good and Beautiful Life*, tackles the unhelpful narratives which cause us to slip into life vices such as lying, lust, judging and worrying. Finally, the third, *The Good and Beautiful Community*, brings spiritual transformation together with community engagement. Throughout the series, Smith emphasises the fact that personal spiritual change cannot come without being in community. Packed with practical and engaging examples and extremely well written. A great resource.

Best bit: Each chapter includes 'soul-training' exercises – mini weekly tasks which bring the teaching to life.

Could do better: It's very book-based. A DVD version would be helpful for the visual learners among us.

Quote of the course: 'Apprentices of Jesus are not part-time do-gooders. They live in continuous contact with the kingdom of God, and are constantly men and women in whom Christ dwells.'

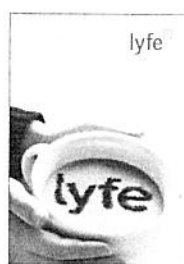
How it works: Small groups meet each week and, using the chapters in the book and the small group guide, discuss, share and encourage each other.

Would anyone in your community notice if your church ceased to exist? That's the headline question posed by this four-week course designed to inspire Christians to be Christ everywhere: in the community, in politics, at work and on the streets. Glancing at the understated packaging, you might think this an unassuming course which may succeed in provoking you to perhaps give 20p to the homeless man you see on the way to the station. But the course content is, in fact, dynamite. Theology heavyweights including Tim Keller, NT Wright and Elaine Storkey discuss Bible passages while ordinary Christians honestly discuss the challenges and perceptions they have. **Best bit:** There are some gritty case studies in which we hear from the people directly impacted as a result of Christians endeavouring to make a difference.

Could do better: While longer courses might cause small groups to lose interest, four weeks to think and mull over the content may just not be enough.

Quote of the course: 'When Mother Teresa was asked "How have you been able to lift 50,000 people off the streets of Calcutta?" she said: "I started with one." To me that's not too daunting of an invitation.' (Shane Claiborne)

How it works: Weekly small groups watch the DVD split up into the topics: Mercy, Influence, Life Discipleship and Evangelism. The DVD can be used on its own or along with the *Square Mile journal* which includes readings, activities and reflections on how to put biblical challenges into action.



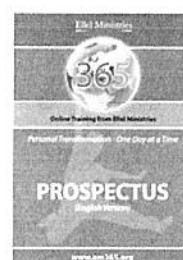
Lyfe

Good Book Company



Discipleship Explored

Good Book Company



Ellel 365

Ellel Ministries

Still lyfe. Real lyfe. Spirit lyfe. Just lyfe. Word lyfe. Whole lyfe. These are the six 'zones' which make up this free seven-week Bible Society course aimed at encouraging you to connect with God. The zones pretty much have life covered, touching on prayer, the Holy Spirit, justice, evangelism and whole life discipleship. The emphasis in this course is quite clearly on life rather than church. You're encouraged to gather a group of friends together rather than run the course as part of a home group. It also encourages groups to meet at a pub, coffee shop, café or home – emphasising the 'whole life' focus of the course. You can work through the booklet in your small groups, but one of the best things about this course is the accompanying website, which is a great resource.

Best bit: The active feel of the Lyfe booklet and the weekly challenges set in each session are refreshing. It's also free.

Could do better: Some of the best bits of the course are on the website, which may put off those who are more comfortable with the traditional home group set-up.

Quote of the course: 'Shockers' and 'Blockers': After each Bible passage, the course asks you to share something from the passage which surprises you (shocker) or something that raises questions for you (blocker).

How it works: Small groups work through seven sessions, each including a four-step process of reading a passage of scripture, reflecting, responding and reviewing.

From the makers of Christianity Explored comes the next step: Discipleship Explored. It's aimed at new Christians who have completed the first evangelistic course – the brainchild of Rico Tice – or for 'anyone wanting to make the most of the Christian life'. In true CE style, this is centred on the Bible, with detailed exegesis of the Philippians passages upon which the course is based. The main theme of the course is the meaning of Paul's words: 'For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.' Actor Barry Cooper delivers his sermon monologues straight to camera, visiting various locations to illustrate the passages – from a boxing ring to an underground tube station via the Royal Observatory. **Best bit:** It is a slick production, but at its heart is the simplicity of letting the Bible speak for itself. The course goes back to the basics of exploring a Bible passage without fancy or amusing anecdotes which might serve as distractions.

Could do better: It's pitched at those fresh-faced new believers who have recently completed a Christianity Explored course, but the chosen content and the way it's presented assumes an in depth knowledge of theology and the Christian life.

Quote of the course: 'What God starts (dramatic pause), he finishes.'

How it works: An eight-week course including a ten-minute film clip discussing a passage in Philippians. The DVD is accompanied by a study guide.

This is a mammoth endurance race of a course. The brainchild of Ellel Ministries – a UK Christian mission, discipleship and deliverance organisation – this online course provides 52 weekly modules, each including different content for every day of the week. Ellel 365 aims to help Christians overcome stumbling blocks to spiritual growth by reminding them of solid biblical truths. But this is not for the faint-hearted. If you're prone to signing up for things, or promising every New Year to read through the Bible, but losing your enthusiasm by Exodus, then the commitment needed for this course may be a little too much. But testimonies from those who have stuck with it show it is potentially life-changing. One says: '365 has been like a plaster cast holding a broken leg in position whilst healing takes place; it has held me in position whilst my Father God has touched the broken places.' Module topics include 'Living in God's Vision for my Life', 'Facing Reality' and 'Pentecostal Power For You and Me'.

Best bit: Recognising that those on the course might want to mull over a particular day's content before moving on, or may go on holiday, the course creators have included a Pause feature which suspends the daily release of the material until you're ready to move on.

Could do better: At £210 a year, or £19.50 a month, it's pricey.

How it works: Individuals sign up for 52 weekly modules, which they can access online. Each week is split up into five training days, one review day and one devotional day.

>> lyfe.org.uk

>> ceministries.org

>> ellelministries.org

Change the World

Mike Slaughter



Just People

At the heart of this six-week study for small groups is the rallying call for the Church to ‘rise up and be the Church that Jesus desires’. It is short, and to the point. It asks just six things of its participants: to follow, welcome, feed, heal, rescue and go. Course creator Mike Slaughter, lead pastor of Ginghamburg United Methodist Church in Tipp City, Ohio, takes participants from gospel stories to real-life faith which makes a difference to people’s lives – locally and globally. The course is all about action, and encourages participants to take the lead in shaking their local churches into action – whether by starting a homeless shelter or raising money for emergency disaster relief. There are no gimmicks, and the small group booklet is understated, reflecting the idea that Christians should not be spending too much time looking inwards at pretty resources, but getting out into the community and changing the world.

Best bit: To the point.

Could do better: While some will value the direct tone of the course, others might need more coaxing into the daunting world of local and global mission.

Quote of the course: 'Church is a verb.'

How it works: Participants look at a gospel story in each of the six weeks, then watch a DVD which illustrates how a mission project is changing the world in its own way. After this, the small group discusses how they can do the same.

From the hills of Loch Lomond to Cambodia, from privileged background to the council estates of Battersea, via the heat of Malawi and the streets of South Kirkby, the Just People course will make you want to get out and do something. Packed with inspiring stories, it really showcases the expertise of Tearfund and Livability in the area of mission. The down-to-earth theology film clips in which the narrator explains the biblical mandates for getting stuck in to mission are engaging. In each session, she presents her sermons to camera from an everyday setting: having a coffee, making breakfast in her kitchen or working on her allotment – a reminder that ordinary people can do extraordinary things.

Best bit: It's flexible. The comprehensive leader's guide tells you all you need to know, but leaves room for you to tailor it to your group.

Could do better: The pieces to camera in the Bible[®] sections are sometimes a little cheesy.

Quote of the course: 'We need to be getting out there. That's what we're supposed to do. That's what the Bible teaches.' [Phil, a church member in Battersea, who set up a charity working with young people excluded from mainstream education.]

How it works: A six-week interactive course focused on issues of compassion and justice, and how your church can bring about change both locally and globally.

