

5 Core Values for a Gospel People Study Pack

Developed and compiled by Catriona Gorton (2007/2009)



(Photo from Hillhead Baptist Church Website)

This pack is designed to help you to think about the material we have shared in worship, either in private study or as part of a group.

It was developed in 2007 for use with a Baptist Church in Leicestershire, to compliment the BUGB material, which was already more than a decade old. It is reproduced (with a few tweaks on order) for a new congregation reflecting on covenant promises made together in October 2009.

5 Core Values for a Gospel People

The BUGB material was published in the 1990s and was widely used by churches to reflect on their call at the end of the 20th century. Although some of the specific examples are now dated, the essence of the material remains valid and is very relevant to our church at this time.

What does it mean to be a 'Gospel People'?

The word 'Gospel' simply means 'Good News', in this case specifically the Good News of God revealed in Jesus Christ. In the Baptist Union *5 Core Values* resources the word 'people' becomes very quickly replaced by the word 'community', which means 'a group of people having something in common.' In other words, a 'gospel people' is a group of people united in their commitment to share the Good news of Jesus Christ.

But what are we sharing and how do we share it? The resource material assumes a 'whole of life' approach to the core values – they shape our life as a 'covenant community of Baptised believers' (an old definition of a Baptist church) but also as individual disciples of Jesus: what happens on Sunday, in our church-related activities and our everyday lives are all shaped by the same values. So, we share the good news in words and in deeds, in private and in public.

The five core values are that, together, we should be

A Prophetic Community

An Inclusive Community

A Sacrificial Community

A Missionary Community

A Worshipping Community

However, the same values should also affect us as individuals as we seek to adopt lifestyles and attitudes that are

Prophetic

Inclusive

Sacrificial

Missionary

Worshipping

In the following pages these aspects are explored in more detail with theological and Biblical material to ponder at your leisure. They are not directly linked to the services or sermons, having being developed completely independently from them, but it should not be too much of a surprise to find the same themes emerging.

An Inclusive Community

To begin:

What do we mean by inclusion and exclusion?

What does it mean to be inclusive or exclusive?

What might an inclusive community be like?

Should a Christian community exclude anyone?

These are all good questions and it is hoped that this study might help you to think about them. There are no answers given, because it is the thinking, praying, discussion and sharing that will help you to uncover a response.

If you there are things you don't understand, or ideas you disagree with, don't worry, you won't be alone! For centuries this topic has been a difficult one for Christians who have both been excluded and have excluded others for what sometimes seem odd reasons.

⇒ When you hear the word 'exclude' what comes to mind? Note down any words or phrases that you think of.

⇒ Have you ever found yourself excluded from a group? Note down one or more examples of this. Having done so, try to recall how it felt – your emotions, your questions, anything it caused you to do.

⇒ Have you ever gone to a social event or a club and felt that you were an outsider or that you were right on the edge of what was happening? Again, note down one or more times that this has happened. Try to recall what it was that made you feel like an outsider – things that were said or done, unwritten rules or expectations, dress codes – or anything else at all

⇒ Now imagine that you are in a foreign country that does not use English at all, indeed it uses a different alphabet from ours. You manage to find a church (it has a cross on the wall) and go in to find a service underway. What would help you to feel included?

Is God 'Inclusive'?

That might sound like a daft question and you may leap to give the answer 'yes, of course' but actually spending some time thinking about may help us think about what it means for us to be inclusive. Below are some short extracts from a book called *The Inclusive God*.

⇒ Read them through, as you do so note anything that strikes you – that you agree or disagree with, that is a new idea, that you want to ask more questions about. You might like to underline or sideline these with different colours or symbols

This book is intended to make one thing absolutely clear. Inclusivity is not an optional extra for Christians, it has nothing to do with being liberal, it's not a churchy version of political correctness. It's a gospel imperative, fundamental to the nature of God and at the very heart of the mission and ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ. It's orthodox Christianity...

Jesus comes ... to stand alongside the despised and rejected. Either we stand with him, or we stand with the pious Caiaphas who cynically argued that the despised outsider is acceptable collateral damage in the overall story of salvation. If that's your salvation story, then you can never be on Jesus' side for Jesus turns himself into the despised outsider and is subsequently lynched by the faithful. It's a pattern that just keeps on repeating itself.

The Church should be inclusive because God is inclusive. Bluntly stated, that is the claim made by this book. We will try to give our reasons for this claim, and we will seek to do justice to the ambiguity and depth of real life. We are not interested in unexamined dogma. We do not believe in answers' to life's questions which filter out all the struggles, doubts and unknowing which are at the heart of human experience. But nor are we concerned with being 'relevant' for its own sake. The only justification for building an inclusive Church is that *this is what reality demands of us*. Inclusion is truth.

This book will flesh out what inclusion means by looking at what matters most in Christian theology: creation, revelation, Jesus' life, death and resurrection, the Church. It will end with an exploration of the nature of God. Our claim throughout will be that Christianity is inclusive to its core.

At a minimum, and at an administrative level, this means that the Church should no longer exclude from its life and ministry those who fall foul of merely cultural prejudices. For St Paul, inclusive theology and ecclesiology were focused on the status of gentiles, slaves and women... However, inclusive theology is not simply about the Church and its organizational policies at any particular juncture in history. It is about the world we share, the life we lead in common with all humanity. Inclusive theology is a joyful, outward-facing declaration that we are made and fulfilled by the love of God fleshed out in Christ, and spread abroad by the Spirit. It is a life-changing love which challenges every limitation we place on our ties of solidarity and responsibility. God makes all, draws all, saves all. Inclusive Christianity has for so long been at the heart of Christian service, peacemaking, action for justice and simple everyday kindness. Today, it is once more finding its radical, missionary, unapologetic voice. Today, it is reclaiming the mainstream of theology.

⇒ How inclusive is inclusive? Should the church exclude anyone? Why? Why not?

Tough Topics

The book from which the extracts are taken defines itself as having a broadly 'liberal theology'. Does that concern you? Do you understand what it means?

⇒ Should Christians only read books that reflect their own theological persuasion or tradition? What might be the implications of including or excluding resources that challenge our views?

The extracts above deliberately excluded these portions...

Inclusivity is often about homosexuality because the persecution of homosexuals, like the persecution of the Jews, is a litmus test for the presence of fascism, theological or otherwise.

The inclusion issues of our day concern the participation of lesbians and gay men, women and black people.

⇒ Note down your HONEST first reactions to these statements. How do they make you feel? Do you agree or disagree? Why? Why not?

⇒ If you were to make a list of people groups where the church needs to think about inclusion, who would they be? Notes them down along with your reasons.

What did Jesus Do?

Jesus spent a lot of time with marginalised people, from lepers to tax-gatherers, prostitutes to Roman soldiers. There are many stories we could focus on, but those chosen reflect some of the tough issues of racism, gender and sexuality that cause thinking Christians of all denominations and theological hues to think and pray very hard. As you read them, try to come to them open to new insights from God, not simply to read in a lifetime's worth of dogma.

Mark 7: 24 – 30 John 4: 1 – 42

⇒ Some scholars say that the story in Mark shows a shift in Jesus' approach towards people of other races. What do you think?

⇒ What might either of these stories say about inclusion of foreigners, women, those who live with partners, those who question our views?

Matthew 8: 5 – 13

⇒ Scholars have noted that the word translated 'servant' in this passage has three valid meanings in Greek: (i) (the most common) a child, (ii) a servant and (iii) a homosexual lover. How might each of these justifiable readings of the text speak to us about inclusion? How do we avoid either ignoring as 'clearly not intended' the translation that may trouble us at one extreme or extrapolating from 'healing a sick person' to 'condoning lifestyles' at the other?

Shades of Grey or a Beautiful Rainbow?

One of the difficult tasks we face when we try to be inclusive is that we can become so worried that something might not include everybody that we end up with a very bland 'lowest common denominator' approach that at best pleases no one and at worst offends everybody equally. The classical example of this has been the development of ecumenical worship patterns which include a bit of liturgy, but not too much, an old hymn and a new worship song, a symbol, a responsive reading or prayer and absolutely no shared communion. Only in more recent years have churches learned to enjoy and celebrate their diversity as part of a beautiful rainbow rather than the murky grey sludge that arises from mixing colours together.

How can we as a community of Jesus' disciples avoid the greyness and become a rainbow in our own right? What might this say about our services? In answering the questions, begin at the moment you reach the building in which the service is held and end at the moment you leave. Identify practical things, such as access and costs, and people factors, such as welcome and language, as well as the style or format of the service.

⇒ What elements are essential for you to feel included?

⇒ What makes you feel left out? How could this be made better?

⇒ What aspects of the service might seem strange to someone who was not used to church?

⇒ We all struggle with some individuals and people groups. Be brave and honest – whose presence would spoil church for you? What might this say about you/us? How could you go about including them in our fellowship?

⇒ How inclusive do you think we are as a fellowship? How might we do even better?

What Might it Mean for Us to be an Inclusive Community?

In this study we have thought quite hard about inclusion and realised that it is far from a simple topic to address. We have seen examples from the life of Jesus that say something about inclusion and exclusion. We have also recognised that being included and having everything we might desire are not the same thing. As we think about being an inclusive community, what might it mean in reality? Here we are trying to move from 'talking' and 'thinking' to 'being' and 'doing' – it gets harder!

Some questions to start off with include:

1. Despite our best efforts, some individuals and people groups will feel excluded from our church, who are they and why?
2. Is it ever right for churches to exclude people? On what basis?
3. How do we find a balance between a meaningless 'lowest common denominator' approach to worship and one that is skewed to suit only 'people like us'?
4. What is the balance between being inclusive and standing firm in our views on issues of faith and morality? How can this be done in a Christ like way?

What else?

We cannot do everything or be everything but we can all commit to keep listening and learning as disciples of Jesus. What is ONE thing you have learned from this study that will affect your discipleship?

A Prophetic Community

To begin:

What is a Prophet?

What does it mean to be Prophetic?

What Might a Prophetic Community Be or Do?

These are all good questions and it is hoped that this study might help you to think about them. There are no answers given, because it is the thinking, praying, discussion and sharing that will help you to uncover a response.

If you don't understand any of the words or ideas, don't worry, you won't be alone! It is a complex topic and we can only scratch the surface of it.

⇒ When you hear the word 'prophet' what comes to mind? Note down any words or phrases that you think of.

⇒ Note down the names of some prophets (Biblical or other) that you can think of

To ponder:

A quotation

'The supreme compliment that the church can pay a [person] at the present moment is neither to wrap Episcopal gaiters round [their] legs nor a doctoral hood around [their] neck but to attach the magic adjective 'prophet' to [their] name.'

Question: What do you think about this assertion? Why do you think this?

Trying to Identify a True Prophet

Many Christian scholars and theologians have wrestled with what it means to be a prophet and how a 'true' prophet might be distinguished from a 'false' prophet. The idea of a prophet as someone who 'foretells the future' is common but not accurate – when we read the Bible we find a very different picture emerges; although prophets may foretell events, these are usually conditional: 'if you carry on like this then that will happen.' The real task of the prophet is to 'forth tell', that is, to speak for God in a specific situation – hence the frequent use by some of them of the phrase 'thus says the Lord'. The trouble is, even a false prophet could (and did) use such expressions, so how do you tell them apart?

Below are given two suggestions of tests that might be used in this process of discernment. Look at them carefully and see if there is anything you want to question, add or remove, then try to apply them to a suggested Bible passage to see if they make sense.

Morris' Five Questions of Prophetic Authenticity

Colin Morris in his paper on what it means to be a prophet identifies five questions ALL of which must be answered in the quest to determine whether or not a prophet is true.

1. False prophets look to the Bible for answers, true prophets allow it to pose questions
2. The false prophet is a moralist – tells the world how it ought to be; the true prophet is a realist – tells the world how things really are.
3. False prophets offer easy harmonies, true prophets confront them with hard choices
4. False prophets speak a simple word of promise or judgement; true prophets speak a paradoxical word of promise and judgement
5. False prophets are content to speak; true prophets also act

⇒ Choose one or more of these passages and see (with the possible exception of item 1) how it matches up to the questions...

Amos 5 Hosea 11 Isaiah 55 Jeremiah 18 & 19

Eaton's Psalmic Indicators (and Bruggeman's typology of Psalms)

John Eaton is a Biblical scholar who has studied the Psalms extensively and believes that it is possible to find indications of prophecy within them. Walter Bruggeman identifies three types of psalm, or characteristics with them, which are not entirely dissimilar.

Eaton sees in the Psalms the following hints of a prophetic voice:

1. God's advent in victory and salvation – celebration
2. God's address to his covenanted people – exhortation
3. Dialogue of God and congregation – lament and answer
4. Visions of Davidic rule – hope

Bruggeman identified three types of Psalmic material:

1. Orientation – affirmation of God and praise
2. Disorientation – lament, sadness, anger and confession
3. Re-orientation - (or new orientation) future hope and/or resolution

⇒ Choose one or more of these passages and see how it matches up to the Eaton's indicators...

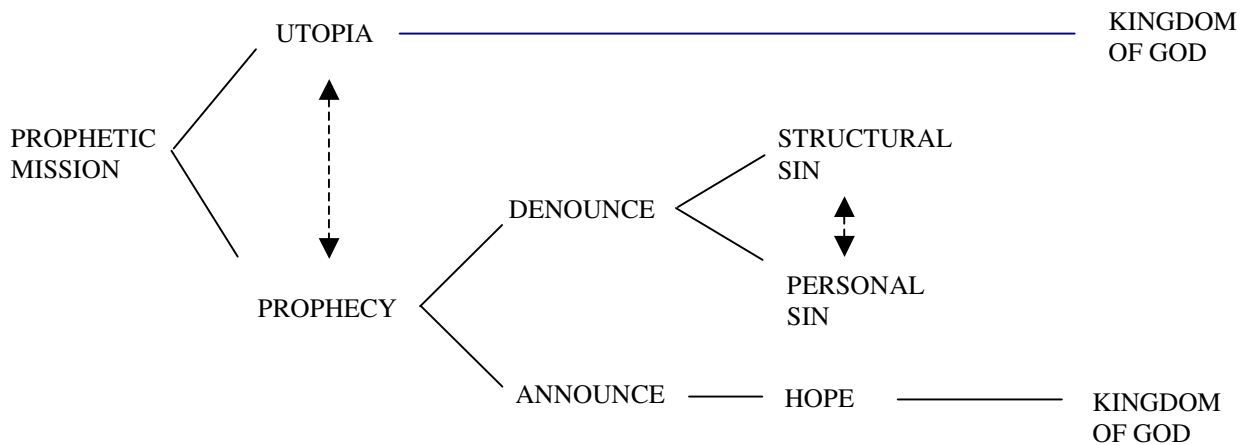
Psalm 8 Psalm 51 Psalm 139 Luke 1: 46 – 55 Luke 1: 67 - 79

Being a Prophetic Community

So far we have concentrated on trying to identify true and false prophets at an individual level, or to find hints of a prophetic voice in scriptural writing. What we need to do is to see how the insights we have gained, along with others, might help us to be a prophetic COMMUNITY. We begin by looking at another model, which looks more at the prophetic task than how to test its authenticity.

A Model from Liberation Theology

South American liberation theology emerged during times of great civil unrest when many Christians found themselves in fear of their lives. The model outlined below was presented by a college student from El Salvador, who had lived through severe atrocities. Inherent in Salvadorian liberation theology is the idea of communities working things out together, so the idea of an individual person being a prophet is less important.



Spend some time thinking about this model and working out what you think it is trying to say about (a) the world as a whole (b) people in the world and (c) the role of the church as a prophetic community. What questions do you want to ask about it?

⇒ Read John 2: 12 – 25

⇒ Based on the ideas we have been thinking about, what did Jesus *say* and *do* that might be judged as prophetic?

⇒ Can you think of other New Testament Bible stories where there is prophetic element to what is said and done?

What Might it Mean for Us to be a Prophetic Community?

In this study we have thought quite hard about what a true prophet might be like, and seen an example of Jesus behaving in a way that may be prophetic. As we think about being a prophetic community, what might it mean in reality? Here we are trying to move from 'talking' and 'thinking' to 'being' and 'doing' – it gets harder!

Some questions to start off with include:

5. How might we approach reading, interpreting and using the Bible? For example, what is the place of 'proof texts'?
6. How might we respond to issues in the wider world? For example, by making moral judgements or by trying to understand the complexity of issues?
7. What might be a constructive and Godly voice for us to have in this community? For example, what issues affecting this community should we get involved with and why?

What else?

We cannot do everything or be everything but we can all commit to keep listening and learning as disciples of Jesus. What is ONE thing you have learned from this study that will affect your discipleship?

A Missionary Community

To begin:

What is mission?

What does it mean to be missionary?

What might a Missionary Community be like?

These are all good questions and it is hoped that this study might help you to think about them. There are no answers given, because it is the thinking, praying, discussion and sharing that will help you to uncover a response.

If you there are things you don't understand, or ideas you disagree with, don't worry, you won't be alone!

⇒ When you hear the word 'mission' what comes to mind? Note down any words or phrases that you think of.

⇒ What is a missionary? Can you think of any missionaries? What do you know about them? Note the names of two or three missionaries and anything you know about their work.

⇒ Here are some definitions of 'mission' used in Christian circles:

- The sending of missionaries to a designated territory
- The activities undertaken by missionaries
- The geographical area where missionaries are active
- The agency that sends missionaries
- The non-Christian world or 'mission field'
- The centre from which missionaries operate in the 'mission field'
- A local congregation without its own minister, still dependent on the support of an older church
- A series of services to spread or deepen Christian faith
- Propagation of faith
- Expansion of the reign of God
- Conversion of the heathen
- Founding of new churches

(Transforming Mission, Paradigm Shifts in the Theology of Mission by David Bosch, 1991, page 1)

Are there any you want to add or change? Is it easy to define what we mean by 'mission' or 'missionary' – note down your responses.

Mission in the Bible

This section will focus very much on the Gospels, but with some reference to New Testament letters. The themes are adapted from the book *Transforming Mission*, which is generally accepted as one of the most important 20th century works on the subject of mission. David Bosch was, until his tragic death in a car accident, an eminent South African scholar in the study of mission. It might be worth pondering briefly the social and religious background to his work – for example the relation of the Dutch Reformed Church to Apartheid, and the silent complicity of other denominations, including Baptists. He knew first hand about the potential mismatch between Sunday and the rest of the week, between what Jesus preached and what the church did.

Matthew: Mission as Disciple Making

Read Matthew 28: 16-20. It may come as a surprise to know that this little passage was for centuries largely overlooked by Biblical scholars and only in the last half a century have people begun to analyse it seriously. Some scholars think that it was added on to the original gospel (which is feasible if you look at how verse 15 could be an ending and/or compare it with the shorter ending of Mark). What is then interesting, and important, is why the early church may have felt that it needed to add this extra information – why did they need to record this commission to what they told others about Jesus? What important truth was God inspiring them to pass on to a future generation?

⇒ As you read the passage again, become aware of the elements of the commission and note down what you think it might mean in practical terms:

- Go
- Make disciples
- All nations
- Baptising
- Teaching
- Obedience to everything I have commanded

⇒ What are some of the things recorded in Matthew's gospel that Jesus commanded of his followers? (Remember that when the Gospels were first written, a local church would probably only have one of them, the Bible did not appear for several centuries)

⇒ What is a disciple? What is needed if 'disciple making' is to be part of mission?

Luke/Acts: Mission as Practising Forgiveness and Solidarity with the Poor

The Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles are generally accepted as having been written by the same person (it may surprise you to know that Biblical scholars work very hard in trying to establish claims that books were written by the same person because in the first century people often wrote books under someone else's name!).

We find two key links to mission, which are different from those in Matthew.

Read Luke 4:16-21 and then Acts 1: 6-8

⇒ The two passages are related but not the same. Key features of the Luke passage are listed, note down next to them the equivalents in Acts, and add the extra ideas you find.

- The Holy Spirit has anointed Jesus for service
- To preach Good News
- To the poor
- Freedom for prisoners
- Recovery of sight for the blind
- To proclaim the year of the Lord's favour

⇒ What are some examples in Luke's gospel of Jesus exercising this kind of mission?

⇒ Is there a danger of 'over spiritualising' so that we equate prisoners with sinfulness or blindness with spiritual poverty? Is there a danger of reducing the gospel to 'good works', denying the spiritual aspects? How is a balance found?

⇒ In Acts, Jesus' followers are called to be 'witnesses,' which is the English translation of the Greek word from which we our word 'martyr.' How can we be witnesses (or martyrs) for the gospel?

⇒ Acts starts mission 'here' and moves out to embrace the whole world. If mission has the practical edge suggested at Nazareth what might that mean for us?

⇒ If mission involves solidarity with the poor, prisoners, blind and so on, what is needed to bring it to reality?

Mission according to Paul: An Invitation to Join a Community of Hope

We first meet Saul of Tarsus in Acts 7:58 where he is present at the stoning of Stephen – a disciple of Jesus and witness to the gospel executed for his faith. In Acts 9, we read how Saul underwent a dramatic conversion experience, which marked the beginning of his life-long mission as ‘the apostle to the Gentiles’ as he is often called.

Again, as we follow Paul’s story, we find another emphasis in mission.

⇒ Flick through the book of Acts (or if your Bible has maps look at those of Paul’s journeys) and identify some of the places he visited. What did he do there? What did he preach?

Read Acts 17: 16-27

⇒ Athens was place where intelligent people loved to meet to discuss new ideas; it was place of great spiritual searching as we can see from all the altars and deities Paul found there. There was even a synagogue (verse 17). For all this Paul was dismayed – why? What did he speak about to the people?

Now read 1 Corinthians 2: 1 - 5

⇒ What is the centre of Paul’s message? What is the hope that inspires him?

⇒ What do we know that Paul did as part of his mission? Here are some ideas, what else can you add?

- He planted churches
- He was an evangelist (in our modern meaning of the word)
- He wrote letters

⇒ If mission involves evangelism church planting, teaching, disciplining and soon (as Paul did), how do we bring that to reality?

What Might it Mean for Us to be an Missionary Community?

In this study we have thought about three views of mission that can be seen in the New Testament. It is a mistake to think that we can pick one model and say ‘this is mission’ or even to think that this brief study had covered all the main models – David Bosch identified at least thirteen contemporary models of mission, and others are being offered all the time. He also offered the helpful phrase ‘mission in many modes.’ While he adds the note of caution that not everything is mission, there is a risk in trying to define mission too narrowly.

Some questions to start off with include:

1. Of the three models of mission we have explored, which feels most ‘natural’ for you? Why is this?
2. If we are a missionary community, composed of people with natural leanings to different aspects of mission, what might this say about our life as a church?
3. Mission (in many modes) is not an optional extra for Christians, we are all called to be disciples and sent to be witnesses in some shape or form. How high in your priorities is mission?
4. How might we as a community of God’s people balance the ‘making of disciples,’ ‘solidarity with the poor’ and building ‘communities of hope’? Which areas are we better and worse at? What positive steps are you taking to address the weaknesses and build on the strengths?

What else?

We cannot do everything or be everything but we can all commit to keep listening and learning as disciples of Jesus. What is ONE thing you have learned from this study that will affect your discipleship?

A Worshipping Community

To begin:

What is worship?

What does it mean to be worshipping?

What might a Worshipping Community be like?

These are all good questions and it is hoped that this study might help you to think about them. There are no answers given, because it is the thinking, praying, discussion and sharing that will help you to uncover a response.

If you there are things you don't understand, or ideas you disagree with, don't worry, you won't be alone!

⇒ When you hear the word 'worship' what comes to mind? Note down any words or phrases that you think of.

For a lot of people, the word 'worship' is something that immediately makes them think of what happens at church on Sunday – what is often called 'an act of worship'. For some people, it even refers to a very specific part of that – the singing of contemporary songs, usually at the start of the service, hence the expression 'a time of worship.' Either of these could be worship, but equally, the former could simply be a group of people sharing in familiar rituals or the latter a group of people having a jolly good sing. Whilst these things may – and should – arise out of worship for God, they are not automatically so.

The worship comes from an old word, worthship, which means the act or process of expressing the worth of someone or something.

In the old marriage vows, the woman promised to obey her husband, but he had first promised to worship her – to show her, every day, in all he did, how much she meant to him.

⇒ How can you show someone how much they mean to you? Note down three everyday things, and three special things you might do.

Christian worship is centred on the triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. How can we show how much we value God? Note down four or five different things, at least one of which is *not* pray, read the Bible or sing hymns/songs

Public and Private Worship

Worship is something that has both public and private aspects to it. There are things that we do on our own – not even with marriage partners – that are simply between us and God. There are also things that we do in families, small groups, congregations and massive assemblies.

⇒ Note down some ideas of ways in which people can worship God

- On their own

- With a close friend or in a small group

- In a congregation or a large assembly

Private Worship

Read Matthew 6: 5-8 and Luke 18: 9-14

⇒ What do these two readings say to us about the place of private/personal prayer?

⇒ What might they say about the risks faced by those who lead our public prayers?

Must I read the Bible every day? If so, how much must I read? How do I go about it?

It may surprise you to know that nowhere in the Bible does it say that you must read it every day. What it does do is suggest that the regular study of scripture is a good thing, and that there is benefit to be had from doing this daily.

⇒ Look up these verses in the Psalms and see what they say

- Psalm 1: 1-2
- Psalm 119: 1-5
- Psalm 119: 148

Some practical thoughts about Bible reading & personal prayer:

- Find a place and time that work for you – you need to be comfortable and alert to get the best from it
- Use Bible notes that work for you; there are many different styles available. If you have been using one scheme for many years, try something new to get a fresh emphasis. Some people find it helpful to keep a notebook to jot down ideas.
- Try using prayer diaries and/or published prayer guides (e.g. *Celtic Daily Prayer*, (Northumbria Community) or *Common Worship* (C of E)) to help give structure and content to your prayers. Again, some people like to keep a notebook to write or draw prayers, perhaps noting outcomes as well as requests.
- Don't feel guilty if you miss a day or if your mind drifts off sometimes. Just keep trying. It does get easier to keep up the patterns, but everyone is allowed an off day (or even an off week) once in a while.

Good Order in Public Worship

Public worship needs to be orderly – and even if you go to most ‘spirit led’ Charismatic service you will find after a few weeks that there is a rhythm and predictability about the format.

⇒ Below is an outline for a service typical for Baptists and other protestant non-conformists. Think about how each of these elements (a) offers worship to God and (b) can be done creatively – we don’t always have to use words!

Gathering and Approach

Gathering of the people and call to worship
Expression of praise, adoration and thanksgiving
Confession of sins and affirmation of forgiveness

“Breaking of the Word”

Reading(s) from the Bible
Exploration and/or exposition – this can occur, in part, before and between readings as well as afterwards.

Response

Response to the Word – hymn/song, prayer, activity
Intercession – prayers for the world, the community the Church and ourselves
Offering

“Breaking of Bread”

Communion

Blessing and Dismissal

Prayer of blessing and commitment
The people scatter to live out and share the Good News

⇒ Think of some special services, what extra elements do they include? How can these be seen as worship? E.g. weddings, baptisms, harvest festival, induction, funeral, anniversary, etc, etc. Note down your thoughts.

Worship in the Ordinary Things of life

So far we have focussed on worship as the thing that are part of our devotional life. Can the everyday be worship too? Yes it can!

Brother Lawrence was a lay brother who did the cooking in a monastery. His little book *The Practice of the Presence of God* picks up precisely this theme. Practice here does not mean 'rehearse' but something more like what a lawyer or doctor does when they 'practice' their skills.

It is the awareness of always being in God's presence that shapes behaviour.

He wrote this:

"And it is not necessary to have great things to do. I turn my little omelette in the pan for the love of God... When I cannot do anything else, it is enough for me to have lifted a straw from the earth for the love of God.

"People seek for methods of learning to love God... is it not much shorter and more direct to do everything for the love of God, to make use of all the labours of one's state in life to show Him that love, and to maintain His presence within us by this communion of our hearts with His? There is no finesse about it; one has only to do it generously and simply."

"Completely immersed in my understanding of God's majesty, I used to shut myself up in the kitchen. There alone, after having done everything that was necessary for my work, I would devote myself to prayer in all the time that was left.

Something similar was noted in a BUGB magazine ((March/April 2007):

"Worship is more than singing songs. Worship God in everything you do from doing your job to the washing up."

⇒ What difference would it make to your everyday life to make a point of being aware that it is lived in the presence of God?

⇒ What everyday tasks can you offer to God as part of your worship?

Read Romans 12: 1-21, noting especially verse 1.

⇒ What does this say to you about life as worship?

What Might it Mean for Us to be a Worshipping Community?

In this study we thought about what the word 'worship' means, about the public and private aspects of the devotional part of worship and about how ordinary life can include an expression of worship.

Some questions to think about include

- ⇒ When we think about our public, congregational worship, what difference might it make if we see setting out chairs or making tea as worship?
- ⇒ Are there any new or creative ways of expressing our worship for God apart from songs, spoken prayers or a sermon?
- ⇒ How is the rest of our life as a church – the meetings, the midweek activities, the outreach, the administration and the financial considerations - part of our worship?
- ⇒ How do the other four core values – prophetic, missionary, sacrificial and inclusive – form part of our worship?

What else?

We cannot do everything or be everything but we can all commit to keep listening and learning as disciples of Jesus. What is ONE thing you have learned from this study that will affect your discipleship?

A Sacrificial Community

To begin:

What is a sacrifice?

What does it mean to be sacrificial?

What might a Sacrificial Community be like?

These are all good questions and it is hoped that this study might help you to think about them. There are no answers given, because it is the thinking, praying, discussion and sharing that will help you to uncover a response.

If you there are things you don't understand, or ideas you disagree with, don't worry, you won't be alone!

⇒ When you hear the word 'sacrifice' what comes to mind? Note down any words or phrases that you think of.

⇒ Do you feel you have ever had make sacrifices? If so, note down what they were and why you made them.

⇒ Can you think of examples of sacrifices made by other people that have been beneficial for you? What were they? How did you know that a sacrifice had been made? How does it make you feel when you think about it?

How much do you really know about the sacrifices in the Bible and why they were made? Who made sacrifices? Why did they make sacrifices? When were they made?

In the Old Testament we can find many different types of sacrifices, made for different reasons, at different times and in different places.

Food Offerings

At various times people were required to bring offerings of food – usually grain – to God. Often these offerings were of a celebratory nature, and the people actually shared in eating the food that was brought to God. Far from being individual acts of devotion to God, these were often part of wider communal celebrations; feasting and joy were very much part of the experience.

Whole Burned Offerings – Holocausts

In our generation the word ‘holocaust’ has become associated with acts of genocide, especially that in Nazi Germany. This is a travesty, because the word actually means a whole (holo - as is ‘holistic’) burned (caust - as in caustic) offering. The holocausts made by the Jews were complete animals burned as an offering to God (as distinct from some of the food offerings where people were allowed to eat parts of the animals)

Sin/Guilt/Purification Offerings

The third type of sacrifice made was associated with being made right with God – either repentance from sin or purification from ceremonial uncleanness (such as child birth or illness). These sacrifices notably involved the spilling of blood. We need to realise that in early societies the link between ‘blood’ and ‘life’ was deeply significant. Far from being a fluid that carried oxygen and nutrients and kept the body at a safe temperature, blood was actually seen as the very source of life: to shed blood, or pour it out, had enormous significance, killing an animal for meat was far from a functional act (something that can still be seen in the Halal rituals which can seem distasteful to western views on animal slaughter).

⇒ Open a Bible at the start of Leviticus and flick through the first 7 chapters. What types of offerings or sacrifices are mentioned in the headings? If you have a concordance, you might like to look up other references for Grain Offering, Wave Offering, Whole Burned Offering or Holocaust to see what else is said about them.

⇒ Are there other types of sacrifice or offering mentioned?

⇒ As you look at these different types of sacrifices what do they say to you about people’s understanding of God? For example, what was their aim in making sacrifices?

⇒ People who study religions, especially ancient religion where sacrifice was normal, say that people expected their offerings to ‘work’ – they had some faith in what they were doing. How do you think that Old Testament sacrifices ‘worked?’

Red Heifers, Scapegoats and Paschal Lambs

Lots of people are unaware of the different animal sacrifices, and offerings that are made in the Old Testament, with many, wrongly, thinking that the Passover Lamb (the Paschal Lamb) was a sin offering – when we shall see it was actually something very different.

The Red Heifer

The red heifer ritual is one of the largely forgotten aspects of the story of the Exodus, appearing in Numbers 19, a book that is rarely read. It is a cleansing ritual (and parallels with some views of the water used for Baptism can be seen) that involves the slaughter a very specific animal – a young, perfect heifer is burned and the ashes used as a part of ritual cleansing from sin

⇒ Read Numbers 19: 1 – 10. Think about the selection of the heifer and the consequences of slaughtering and burning her. For example, how many calves might a person reasonably expect to be able to produce from a healthy cow? What else can you think of?

⇒ How does sacrificing the heifer bring about cleansing from sin? In what ways is the red heifer like Jesus? How does it differ?

The Scapegoat

The word scapegoat is part of our everyday language, and we know that it means someone either taking the blame for something that they did not do or one person suffering the consequences as an example to others. What less people know is that it is actually something that comes straight from the pages of the Old Testament, and a story that involves two goats and a bull!

⇒ Read Leviticus 16. We know that the red heifer was carefully selected as a particularly fine specimen. What do we know about the bull and the goats?

⇒ Which of the two goats is the one that takes away the sins (makes atonement)? Does this surprise you? How do you feel about the goat abandoned in the wilderness – what does this signify about forgiveness?

⇒ In what ways is the scapegoat (not the one that is slaughtered) like Jesus? How does it differ?

Paschal Lambs

The story of the Exodus is quite well known, but perhaps we do well to be reminded of the story of the Passover. Read Exodus 15 carefully, and see what the role of the lamb is within the story.

- ⇒ The lamb here is not concerned with removal of sin from the Israelites. Does this surprise you? What is the purpose of the killing the lamb and using its blood to mark the doorposts?

- ⇒ What happens to the flesh of the Passover Lamb? How does this compare with the views of sacrifice and sin offerings we have already looked at? Can feasting or even celebration be part of a sacrificial understanding? Does this connect in any way with your thoughts about Communion?

- ⇒ How is the Passover lamb like Jesus? How does it differ?

Jesus and Sacrifice

So far the Bible readings have all been Old Testament and have looked at the link between sacrifice and atonement. This is deliberate, because this relationship is at the heart of our understanding of Jesus – the cross is all about the restoration of humanity to God achieved through Jesus' willing offering of himself at Calvary. However, we are mistaken if we fall into the trap of thinking that Jesus was born just to die – if that was so, God would hardly have inspired people to record stories of his life and ministry. The sacrificial theme runs right through Jesus life.

- ⇒ Just for a few moments, try to imagine Jesus at the age of around 25. He is an adult and we know nothing about what his life was like. In your mind, create a world for him – a family, friends, employment, a synagogue that he attends, people he meets and listens to. Begin to imagine what it then meant for him to accept God's call on his life. Note down any thoughts.

- ⇒ What events in Jesus' life indicate a willingness to offer the very best of everything to God? What evidence is there that this was costly or even painful for him?

- ⇒ What sacrifices have you made to God? Do you offer God the first fruits of your labours, your 'prize animals', or the leftovers, the 'weak and diseased'? Is sacrifice something you approach joyfully or grudgingly? Does the celebration side of sacrifice ever feature in your experience? Be honest with yourself.

What Might it Mean for Us to be an Sacrificial Community?

In this study we have thought a lot about sacrifice as it is seen in the Old Testament and in the life of Jesus. We have seen how it has come to be associated with sin and atonement, which perhaps gives us a distorted view as we forget about the joy and thankfulness, which was also meant to lead people to make offerings to God. We have only been able to scratch the surface of a very complex topic, but it reminds us that how we understand it will affect our life as a community of God's people.

Some questions to start off with include:

1. At a personal level, how can you respond to God's love, grace and mercy revealed for you in Jesus Christ? What thank offering (sacrifice) is appropriate?
2. The red heifer was someone's prized animal; she offered immense potential, yet she was given for the greater good of the community. What is the prized possession we are clinging on to that could be given to serve God's purposes in this community?
3. What are the dangers of becoming so focussed on the atonement achieved by Christ that we forget the sacrificial life of Jesus during his earthly life? How do we keep a healthy balance?
4. Biblical sacrifice often involves death – the spilling of life – for the good of self or others. What might it mean for us as a community to be a sacrifice?

What else?

We cannot do everything or be everything but we can all commit to keep listening and learning as disciples of Jesus. What is ONE thing you have learned from this study that will affect your discipleship?

Putting It Together

Being the People We Are Called To Be. I/we will commit to the following as part of this Gospel Community

1

2

3

Signed by:

Prophetic

Missionary

Sacrificial

Inclusive

Worshipping