

**MAKING
DISCIPLES**

APPRENTICESHIP TO JESUS

40 days of following and copying Jesus.

INTRO

Does your life look like that of Jesus? We are each invited to grow and mature in the likeness of Jesus but if you asked many of us we would admit we struggle to see ourselves doing so in the way we would hope. The Bible modeless discipleship as more like apprenticeship than simply being a learner. Discipleship in the way of Jesus isn't about learning what Jesus knew but is also about being like and doing the work of Jesus. Jesus called each of us into the Jesus movement where we each become bearers of his message and liver's of his power. If we were to look at the life of Jesus and then look at our lives how much would we recognise as being Christ like? We don't ask that to make any one of us feel guilty but to inspire us that Jesus has so much more for us. Imagine if in 40 days you looked back and saw dramatic growth and connection towards God? What if you were able to invest into your relationship with him and start to look, act and be like Jesus?

Why is it that so many old Sunday school teachers have this beautiful aroma of Jesus about them? Is it because they have spent so many years teaching the simplicity of the gospel? Is it because they too have learnt to come to Jesus like a child? Is it because over those years of investing into others they have marinated in Jesus' love? Is it because they are always working out what faith looks like on the ground?

The answer is probably all. If over time we repeat and invest into the relationship with Jesus and commit each day to looking like him then we will naturally become more like him.

40 days has always been a significant time to commit to God and God to commit to his people. Over these 40 daily topics and thoughts, lets discover practises that will unlock faith and life in abundance in each of us.

[DAY ONE] MAKE YOUR YES BE A YES.

Matthew 5:37 “All you need to say is simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one”.

As the musician Jack Johnson sings on his track '*Flake*', “It seems to me that ‘maybe’ pretty much always means no”. It seems that in recent years society has changed its definition of commitment. Divorce is not uncommon, people don't join a company for life but for a season, and people are much more likely to change their group affiliations depending on single issues.

One of the places this is most evident is Facebook.

If you are invited to an event on Facebook, you are given three options as a response: YES, NO and MAYBE. Clicking ‘maybe’ means there’s a possibility you may attend, but you are not fully committed and you retain the right to reassess closer to the time. Therefore, if you end up doing something else, you are not actually letting the inviter down because you never officially said ‘yes’ in the first place.

‘Maybe’ allows room for uncertainty and leaves people wondering if we are dependable.

‘Maybe’ feeds a personality that thrives on a ‘how do I feel on the night’ attitude.

Jesus says to simply be a ‘yes’ or ‘no’ person. As disciples we are challenged to show our cards, and ensure people know our strength of character through what we are involved in. Jesus calls us to make commitments. In commitment we love one another and therefore demonstrate God's commitment to others by playing our part in community life.

As we read in Romans 12:10: “Be devoted to one another in love. Honour one another above yourselves”. Let’s practise honouring others by making and keeping our commitments.

YES BUT HOW?

Make a pledge to practise not using the word ‘maybe’ or ‘perhaps’ or ‘possibly’. When an opportunity comes up where you need to make a commitment simply make your answer ‘yes’ or ‘no’. If you decide to say no but you feel that might change then saying “if anything changes I will let you know” keeps your intentions clear.

[DAY TWO] LIVING FOR JESUS NOT JUST READING OF JESUS

Matthew 13:23 “As for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it. He indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty”.

Seeds by themselves only have the potential of becoming something beautiful. It is the planting of and investing into them that helps them grow and produce fruit. The same can be said of the seeds of the gospel we find in the Bible. We should not just read the Bible but allow it to germinate and grow in us.

Franciscan Richard Rohr in his *Belief or Discipleship* blog writes that “...we do not think ourselves into a new way of living, but we live ourselves into a new way of thinking. I’m not suggesting that theory and theology are unimportant; but I believe that faith is more about how we live on a daily basis...my life’s work...has been trying to move heady doctrines and dogmas to the level of actual experience and lifestyles...”

Incorporating what we learn about Jesus into a living experience can be a challenge. Sometimes we might not see the connection between Jesus’ world and ours. In this moment, we may need to just take a step back and look at the big picture.

Jesus fed five thousand people - and though you might not ever experience handling a catering situation - you might have a ‘faith-needs-expanding’ situation. Every passage of the Bible has many applications because the Holy Spirit will reveal to each of us different truths that we require. There are several ways of activating the teaching of the Bible but the easiest is to simply pause and take a moment to pray. Ask the Holy Spirit to speak to you through the passage as you read it. Once you have done this ask yourself: ‘What is God showing me through this passage? What is jumping out to me?’

Many passages are simply stories with the principle to learn or activate in our lives is seeing humanity’s failings and God’s actions.

Some are direct teachings that simply need to be applied. Sometimes a passage is declaring a truth about God and the response is to allow this truth to shape how we see God and wonder at his power and might.

YES BUT HOW?

I live this out by reading a passage and asking myself: ‘What changes will I make today because I have read this passage? Is there something I can verbalise or change to activate this passage in my life? Does this passage require that I take action? If so, what action should I take?’

I then set a goal for the day to do, be or live this truth out. Why not try it?

[DAY THREE] DO YOU LOVE THE KIND OF PEOPLE JESUS LOVED?

Luke 10:25-37 *“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind’ and, ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’”*

Jesus was a beautiful storyteller. He had His own material, stories that He wrote Himself, but He also had a gift for putting a fresh twist on old tales.

There was a story told in Jesus’ time about a man travelling the narrow road running from Jericho to Jerusalem. The man gets attacked by bandits, beaten, and left for dead. Three people pass by the man. The first was a Priest, who, upon seeing the man believes he is dead, steps around him and walks on to ensure he remains ritually pure as a Priest. The second person to walk by was a Levite who served at the temple and also needed to remain pure in order to serve the priest. In the original story the third person who came upon the man was a normal Jewish man who was heading to Jerusalem to be led in worship. The Jew helped the man in the road and took him to a nearby home. This story amongst Jewish people was about knowing your place. Priests and Levites had their role in the temple but the normal regular Jew had his place too. Their role was to do the things the priests couldn’t do - love the poor, the abandoned or the needy.

Jesus took this story and added a new perspective. In His telling, the same people walk by until the third character. Jesus took the Jewish man and turned him into a Samaritan. Samaritans were deeply hated by the Jewish people at that time from a racist and religious prejudice. Jesus turned the story into a tool to highlight this, so that those listening would have been angered by His story. Jesus loved the Samaritans as much as the Jews, but until the Jews understood that Jesus was for all people, they would miss out on the beautiful wider perspective of God in the world.

YES BUT HOW?

Imagine Jesus telling you this story today. Who would He put into the place of the third character? Who would challenge you if Jesus put them in the story? You will only know this if you are completely honest.

Those you dislike or are prejudiced against are loved by God. God will never advocate your dislike of another person. Growing to appreciate someone you really struggle with is a hard journey and one that takes time, but always starts with us praying for God’s forgiveness and help. Take a moment to confess your struggles with a person or group of people and then ask for forgiveness.

“Father forgive my anger and hate towards _____. Please forgive me and lead me to see them the way you see them. Would I grow to love them like you love them. Amen.”

[DAY FOUR] HOW MUCH DO TRAGEDY AND INJUSTICE MOVE YOU TO ACTION?

Isaiah 41:17-18 “The poor and needy search for water, but there is none; their tongues are parched with thirst. But I the Lord will answer them; I, the God of Israel, will not forsake them. I will make rivers flow on barren heights, and springs within the valleys. I will turn the desert into pools of water, and the parched ground into springs”.

The greatest tragedy in the world today is not injustice but rather, the failure of all people to rise up against injustice and non greater than Christians.

As Jesus gets more of a grip on our lives we should find that we get a bigger grip on what's happening around us. Without Jesus we can fall into the trap of being so self absorbed that we miss what is happening all around us. As we allow Jesus to shape what we think, how we feel and what we notice we should start to see injustice in the world and not think its acceptable. Its too each to 'turn a blind eye' but we are meant to turn and act on what we see.

God has eyes to see the needy and promises to respond to their thirst. Are you willing to do the same? Are you willing to have open eyes towards injustice, need and problems? And then are you willing to be the answer, where possible, to the problem?

YES BUT HOW

Becoming more aware of injustice is about becoming more aware of the world around you. Take some simple steps to try to understand what is going on. If you don't read or watch the news it is very easy to simply be unaware of what is happening in the world. **Step one** would be watch the news or read a news website and simply pray for what you see and hear. **Step two** would be to spend time on the tearfund.org or Christianaid.org.uk and investigate what is happening in the world and see what the needs are. **Step three;** pray “break my heart for what breaks yours”. Do this regularly, inviting God to make you more aware and find one simple thing you can change that would make a difference, e.g., buy fair-trade, write to a MP go on a protest rally.

[DAY FIVE] JESUS CAN'T BE A HOBBY

The night before Jesus' crucifixion He had dinner with His disciples, who had followed Him for three years. As you read the passage notice the different titles Jesus is given.

Matthew 26:20-25

*“When evening came, Jesus was reclining at the table with the Twelve. And while they were eating, He said, “Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me.” They were very sad and began to say to Him one after the other, “Surely you don't mean me, **Lord?**” Jesus replied, “The one who has dipped his hand into the bowl with me will betray me. The Son of Man will go just as it is written about Him. But woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born.” Then Judas, the one who would betray Him, said, “Surely you don't mean me, **Rabbi?**”*

The Greek word for 'Lord' is *kurios* which means 'one who holds absolute ownership and rulership' and is a term of worship. The Greek word for 'Rabbi' is *rhabbi*, which is a person who is recognised by the Jewish public as a teacher of the faith.

What do you call Jesus? Is Jesus the Lord of your life or the moral teacher for your life? One gives full control and worship, whilst the other is given the position of teacher and instructor. Jesus wants to be the Lord of our lives and not just the teacher. Judas strayed because he respected Jesus but didn't give Jesus the worship of his heart.

E. Stanley Jones once said that

“Jesus is Lord of all or he is not Lord at all”. Ask yourself, where does Jesus sit in your life? Is it possible you have made Jesus a hobby, someone to engage with in your spare time? Jesus did not die to save you from your own destructive paths to be a religious hobby. Judas loved spending time with Jesus, he listened to His teaching and followed Him but what truly mattered is that Judas could not give Jesus his heart”.

Judas wanted Jesus' teaching but not His control... What about you?

YES BUT HOW?

How do you approach Jesus? Is He your Lord? Do you acknowledge and submit to His absolute authority in your life, or are you more comfortable seeing Him as a teacher? Jesus does not want to be with you only when you have time, He wants to be with you throughout every moment of your day.

Set an alarm on your phone or watch to beep every three hours. In that moment, whatever you are doing say to yourself '*Jesus is Lord*'.

This constant reminder of who Jesus is will become an ingrained rhythm of surrender if you allow it.

[DAY SIX] DON'T BE SPOON-FED, FIND OUT FOR YOURSELF. ALLOW THE BIBLE TO FORM YOU.

Acts 17:11 *“Now the Jews from Berean were of more noble character than those in Thessalonica, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.”*

When you were a child, someone will have taken a jar of baby food and helped you eat by spoon feeding. As you grew older you will have been shown how to feed yourself, and as an adult you are now able to not only eat but also provide for yourself. Growing in maturity also happens in your faith.

When you were a new Christian you will have needed spoon-feeding the details of your faith. When maturing we need to put in place a way of feeding ourselves. In the passage we see mature Christians reading the bible daily to see for themselves what it said. They didn't want to be spoon fed in their faith by Paul any longer. Many Christians think it their church's job to feed them. Is it time for you to start take initiative? This means finding a rhythm of reading the bible that works for you - perhaps listening to a podcast or YouTube sermon in your travel time to help to build up your faith.

YES BUT HOW?

Take a first step into daily reading of the Bible and follow it with a short moment of prayer.

DAILY RETREAT

Each day we need to stop and remind ourselves what is important. We can get so focused on the now that we forget to focus on the eternal. A daily six-minute retreat each will help build the relationship with God that will sustain us today and tomorrow.

THREE MINUTES: BIBLE

Take out your Bible – either paper or digital.

We suggest you go short, bit by bit and allow yourself to take it in. If this is your first time reading the Bible, we recommend starting with a Gospel and then the book of Acts. You could use a study guide to provide passages to read if you wished, or check out an annual Bible (for example, The Bible in One Year – NIV).

Take a short passage, read it, and ask yourself three questions.

1. What does this tell me about me?
2. What does this tell me about God?
3. What do I need to do to take the passage and live it?

TWO MINUTES: PRAY

God loves your voice. He loves to hear what you have to say. He loves to hear you cry, laugh and complain. Your prayers do not need to be clever. Simply say either in your mind or out loud what is happening in your life.

Share thanksgiving as well as your needs. Simply start by saying something like, hello God, Dear Father or God come and find me. Then just go for it.

ONE MINUTE: LISTEN

God wants to talk to you as well as listen. Take a moment to listen to him. Sometimes you might get a sense of what he is saying. Some people talk about a feeling; you might just feel his presence. This is all positive and part of knowing God. If you hear nothing, don't get stressed. Sit still with God. When you are ready, end by saying Amen (means 'so be it').

[DAY SEVEN] WHAT IS SHAPING YOU?

Isaiah 64:8 "Yet you, LORD, are our Father. We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand".

From a young age my kids loved playing with Play-doh. They would sit for many hours enjoying the bright colours and the silly things they could make. Many times they would make something that they wanted to keep. It would be placed on the mantelpiece and left to gather dust. The play-doh would be knocked or bumped and slowly the lovely model would fall into disrepair, easily reshaped by accidental damage.

Life will damage what we choose not to protect. Isaiah 64 refers to us a ball of clay which God wants to model and shape. There are many things in our lives that influence who you spend time with, how you use your resources and where you visit. Some influences are life-giving but some are not helpful.

Our minds can be unconsciously shaped by silent influences. We aren't born racist, prejudiced, cynical, or greedy etc. What we consume and who surrounds us will shape us.

As followers of Jesus we have to ask ourselves: Is He our main influence? Does the Bible have greater impact in our lives than Cosmopolitan magazine or the Daily Mail?

Who has the greatest influence over your way of thinking? Romans 12:2 reminds us as believers to "not be shaped by this world, but be transformed by the reshaping of your thinking, in this you will be able to work out what is God's will, His good and perfect will" (paraphrased by Cris Rogers).

YES BUT HOW?

1. AWARENESS Be honest with yourself. What do you watch, read or listen to that shapes your thinking? How does this compare to the amount of input from God? Being aware of what shapes you is the first step.

2. COURSE CORRECT "You are what you are and where you are because of what has gone into your mind. You can change what you are and where you are by changing what goes into your mind" - Zig Ziglar

Before you read any of the Bible always pray that the words would shape you. Presume every passage has something to say about the way you should think, act or behave.

3. SET A GOAL Right now why not take a moment to ask God how He wants to shape your thinking today. Ask for a practical thing He wants you to think differently about and then spend the day actively moving in that direction. Alongside God's guidance we need a willingness and courage to change - make sure you pray and ask God for his help and support.

[DAY EIGHT] SATNAVES AND ROADMAPS

Psalm 119:105 “Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path”.

My Dad and I are so different. He loves a classic street map and I love my Tom-Tom

Sat-Nav. If I want to get to somewhere I simply put in the postcode, switch off my brain and simply let the Australian accented voice direct me to my destination. My Dad on the other hand pores over the map book, working out his route and plotting his course. My tactic is has not worked well for me in the long run - years have now passed and I still don't know the names of the roads. Without my little box telling me what to do I would have no idea how to find my way to a destination. My Dad on the other hand has now learnt years of road structures and knows how to plot a course without the map book.

Which is the Bible like? A Sat-Nav or a street map?

The Bible is not meant to be something we switch off our brains with. It is there to wrestle with, enjoy and try to understand.

The Bible directs us and teaches us. It helps us navigate the landscape of a changing culture like a map and compass. The Bible doesn't talk about Atom Bombs but it does talk about the sanctity of all life. Scripture deals with being human, it deals with our humanity. And it directs us in our thinking around ethics, moral thinking, justice and choices we each make.

If you're not reading the Bible then what is directing your path and helping you navigate a morally changing world? As D.L. Moody once said - “The Bible was not given to increase our knowledge; it was given to change our lives.”

YES BUT HOW?

- **PLAN TIME TO READ IT** - The bible needs some attention. It doesn't want us to be spoon directed like the satnav. So make time to look at it.
- **FIND A QUIET PLACE** – Give it your full attention. Don't try to read it when your busy or surrounded with lots of things going on.
- **ASK GOD TO SPEAK TO YOU THROUGH IT** – give God permission to direct you in your thinking through it.
- **TAKE TIME TO CHEW ON IT, HOW DOES IT APPLY, WHAT DOES IT MEAN?** - Like a road map we need to give thought to what is being said and ask ourselves how this applies to our lives.
- **PRAY ABOUT WHAT YOU HAVE READ** – Ask God what he wants to say to you through it. He might say more than you imagine.
- **PUT INTO PRACTISE** – Once you know a good positive route through life's issues we now have to do it. Its

[DAY NINE] ACTIVATING DAILY PRAYER

Phillipians 4:6-7 “Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

I've yet to meet any Christian who when asked do you pray enough answers yes! So let's get that out there, most of us could pray more! And the truth is most of us know that prayer is something good; prayer is about us connecting with our heavenly father – just as we might do an earthly parent.

When my kids burst through the door after school they often want to unburden themselves of the highs and lows of the day and I want to know them. I want to hear what has made them laugh or cry. God is the same with us, He is waiting to hear what is on our heart, what we are worried about, what concerns us and what excites us.

So what can we do today that will help us move forward with prayer?

STARTER Do the 6minute Prayer Retreat... or what we call the **3-2-1**

- 3.** Put the kettle on and in the time it takes to boil, read the above passage for about 3 mins.
- 2.** Take 2 mins to pray for what is on your mind.
- 1.** Spend a minute in silence listening to see what God might bring to your mind or heart.

MIDDLE Try a new prayer technique. Instead of only giving God a list of things that are on your mind, use the Jesus prayer, which has been prayed by Christians for over 1500 years. Whenever you have a moment of space in your day – before reaching to your phone or TV or newspaper, stop and quietly say “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, Have Mercy on me” then repeat 4 or 5 times. There is something about the repetition of the words that allows us to focus on what they mean and connect us with the Almighty God.

FURTHER Try to do both the Starter and the Middle 5 times this week. See them as an opportunity to connect with God and see what difference that makes to you and the world around you.

[DAY TEN]

WOULD ANYONE NOTICE IF YOU WEREN'T A CHRISTIAN?

Matthew 4:13-16 “You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot.¹⁴ “You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden”

Socks and sandals? Check

Quiche for the bring and share? Check

Looks like you're all ready to go out into the world and be identified as a follower of Jesus. Ok so that's not how it works. It's all about the reusable coffee cup, beard just the right length (sorry ladies) and the ability to sing 'Oceans' by Hillsong in your sleep. Again, I joke.

And I think I start with some easy laughs because if I'm honest that question bothers me more than I want to admit. Would anyone notice if I wasn't a Christian? Would they though? What makes my faith so life changing that someone would notice if it wasn't there next week?

I challenge you to find a time today when you have 5 minutes to sit quietly and ask yourself that question and then sit in the silence and see what comes to mind.

Could you write down what would look different about your day to anyone else?

THANK GOD

Spend some time thanking God for the things that are already different, for the way he has changed your life on this journey you are on together.

ASK GOD

Now spend some time asking God to help you with those things you wish looked different, that you know have no place in the life of someone following the One who set you free. It might be a physical thing you do or a mindset you have. It might be an easy thing to start to change, or it might be something that is going to take a life time of journeying with Jesus.

[DAY ELEVEN] THE LIGHT

Psalm 119:105 “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.”

I knew the route well, but today it felt like I'd never walked it before. I thought the way was smooth and easy to follow, but today I was stumbling in circles. Tonight, I was trying to walk my path in the dark, and the darkness changes everything.

Doesn't life sometimes feel like a bumpy, dark path? That sudden turn of events that came out of nowhere, that relationship crisis that you were sure wasn't anywhere near, those mental health problems that leave you reeling. God's word, the Bible, is the light we need in these dark places. But notice that the light doesn't change the path, it just guides us home.

We want the Bible to be an instruction manual, we want reading it to make understanding life easy, to answer all our questions. But that's not what God's word does. It lights the way but we still have to walk the path. It shows us the next step, but we still have to trust him with the destination.

The Bible is not an instruction manual, it's an invitation to relationship. Because many years after these words were written, a man from Nazareth stood in Jerusalem and declared, 'I am the Light of the World' - Jesus.

The Bible lights the way because it shows us Jesus, the one we are walking with, the ultimate light for all our paths, the ultimate way home.

So read God's word, not with your questions demanding answers, but with all of life's worries and fears and uncertainties. Read expecting to get to know Jesus better, read trusting that God's word has the light we need to see us through to morning, however far off that might seem.

YES BUT HOW?

1. **READ REGULARLY** – This week set yourself a target to read something each day
2. **READ SMALL** – This is not about stuffing your head with information but about meeting Jesus
3. **READ IN A WAY THAT WORKS FOR YOU** – Out loud? Slowly? Repeating bits? Listening to an audio bible?

Read, pause, and ask: What is this passage of the Bible saying about God, your relationship with God, your life? What are you going to do differently today because of what you've read?

[DAY TWELVE] WITH US OR AGAINST US?

Mark 9:38-40 “John said to him, “Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us.” 39 But Jesus said, “Do not stop him, for no one who does a mighty work in my name will be able soon afterward to speak evil of me. 40 For the one who is not against us is for us.”

This story reflects how we sometimes speak to each other: ‘You say you’re following Jesus but...’ ‘If you were a real Christian you would...’ But Jesus tells us not to be so exclusive; to open ourselves to the thought that others might have wisdom, ability, and truth as well. We might not have God completely sorted out, therefore we could learn from someone else who sees things a little differently.

We read Jesus saying “*Whoever is not against us is for us*”, but if you flick back a few pages in your bible you will find Jesus saying this: “*Whoever is not with me is against me*” - **Matthew 12:30**. Is Jesus confused and contradicting Himself? Should we just give up and walk away? Is the Bible always this full of contradictions?

This point of uncertainty is when learning can really happen, if we’re willing to engage and tackle it. If we look more deeply at the passage in Matthew we can see that actually some people were dismissing Jesus’ work and saying it was the devil’s doing. Jesus is then emphasising that truth is found by holding on to Him.

The passage from **Mark** challenges us that just because we’re holding on to Jesus, it doesn’t mean we have all the answers ourselves. We need each other, we need other followers of Jesus who look, think, and act differently from us, because that helps us to see things differently, and to realise that we still have a lot to learn.

Much more could be said about these two verses, there is much more to wrestle with and learn. My point is that in being willing to go deeper and ask the tough questions, we become better at learning.

YES BUT HOW?

When the Bible gets tough, when you have questions in your faith, are you:

HOLDING ON TO JESUS? Jesus reveals a God of love who is for us, for everyone. Don’t settle for answers that aren’t rooted in Him

GOING DEEPER? Ask difficult questions, wrestle with possible answers, talk to someone you trust

LISTENING TO OTHERS? Talk to someone who might think differently to you, and really listen to them. If you read Christian books, maybe read a book you think you might disagree with, and be open to learning from it

[DAY THIRTEEN] WHAT IS SO IMPORTANT ABOUT CHURCH?

Acts 4:31-32 “After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly. All the believers were one in heart and mind.”

How important is being part of a church? We can meet with God and pray and worship by ourselves, right? So why bother investing in a church?

There are so many answers in response to this question - finding fellowship and family, serving your neighbours, learning from other followers of Jesus - but these verses in Acts point to one in particular.

When the believers joined together as a people, as a family, and cried out to God as one in prayer, the Holy Spirit was poured out on them. They were united by the Spirit, and equipped to go out and share the gospel with confidence.

We can certainly serve God as individuals. The hermit living alone in the mountains isn't invisible, or useless, to God. Personal prayer and communing with the Father alone is a huge part of building our relationship with Him.

But what these verses tell us is that when we as followers of Jesus come together in relationship, in the family called church, God moves amongst us, joins us as a family on a mission for Him, and gives us the tools to go out to serve Him and make disciples.

In **Matthew 18:20** Jesus says, “*For where two or three gather in my name, there I am with them.*” When we come to church on a Sunday, meet as small groups, help at Fern Street, Eden, or Little Cherubs - when we share the same space - praying, worshipping, learning, or serving together - the Bible says that God meets with us, by His Spirit. We give God the space to meet with us powerfully as a unit for Him.

We give God the opportunity to unite us in our differences - not that He wants to make us all the same in every way, but He wants us to be on the same page, with one mission, filled with the same spirit and passion. We allow God to equip us with exactly what we need to go out into our individual, day-to-day mission-orientated fields.

Church allows our Father to bring us together as a family, meet with us powerfully, and equip us to bring His Kingdom.

YES BUT HOW?

1. How involved are you with church? Do you think it's important?
2. How could you invest more in being part of your church community?

[DAY FOURTEEN] DOES READING THE BIBLE MAKE SENSE?

Psalm 42:1-2 “As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?”

Have you ever read the Bible and the passage didn't make sense to you? The answer is likely to be: Yes, and often. Why is it so complicated to understand the Bible? Does God not want us to understand His word? Is He a complicated God?

The Bible is sometimes complicated for us because it is a collation of different books, written for different occasions to people in completely different times and contexts! But this is the good news: You don't need to understand everything! It is completely understandable if a passage doesn't make sense to you. Why? It is less about knowledge and understanding everything and more about encountering God through the Bible.

Do you have any habits that are as important to you as it is necessary to eat food and drink water? Maybe listening to music in the shower, having a cup of tea in the morning, reading the newspaper, having a Twix after lunch or spending time on your favourite app.

Imagine if *reading the Bible* became an essential habit to you? This may be difficult if we think of reading the Bible simply as gaining knowledge but if reading the Bible speaks to our everyday life, touches our heart and makes our souls feel at home with God it becomes a worthy daily experience. God wants to nourish your soul and wants to speak into your personal life, struggles, thoughts and feelings through the Bible. Let's start reading the bible and experience this as a life-giving habit!

YES BUT HOW?

When you read the Bible, ask God to touch you and focus on what stands out for you – this might be God speaking to you.

These questions might help you:

1. What is **impressive** of the main person you are reading about?
2. Have you experienced or are you **experiencing something related** to the Bible passage?
3. What does the text tell you **about God** when you read between the lines?
4. Which **word** stands out for you?

We don't always get that 'lightbulb' moment when we read the Bible. But keep going and be sure: There will be some!

There are also devotional books that help in linking the reading to your everyday life. Speak to Christians in your life to see if they have any recommendations.

You may also find it helpful to share what you've experienced in reading the Bible with others.

[DAY FIFTEEN] YOUR HANDS ARE HIS HANDS, GET THEM DOING WHAT JESUS DID.

Matthew 8:3 “Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. “I am willing,” he said. “Be clean!” Immediately he was cleansed of his leprosy.”

The only thing considered filthier than contact with a leper was contact with a dead body. In this passage, Jesus had come down from teaching on the mountainside when a man with leprosy (an incurable disease in the ancient world) kneels before Him asking if He is willing to make him clean (v.1-4). The leper did not doubt Jesus’ power or ability to heal or make him clean; he only questioned whether Jesus would be willing to. Jesus responds by reaching out and touching him. Imagine what those looking on would have thought of this? Jesus didn’t have to touch the leper in order to heal him (He could have simply spoken a word) but how much more meaningful was it that Jesus was prepared to use His hands?

In the past, when I was working in situations that felt pretty hopeless and overwhelming, I had a David Orr quote in my work diary that said: “Hope is a verb with its sleeves rolled up.” Sometimes I think we need show God that we are ready and willing to be used by Him by putting our ‘hands’ in situations that may feel unclean, uncomfortable or not ‘cool’ (even if it may take a while for our hearts and minds to catch up sometimes).

YES BUT HOW

Who do you identify with in this passage? The leper? Broken, rejected and unclean, asking God if He could really be willing to heal you, make you clean and have a relationship with you? To you, Jesus says, “I am willing”. Or, are you one of the disciples/people in the crowd? To you, Jesus says that He has given you the same power (Romans 8:11, Ephesians 1:19) and if you’re willing, He is more than willing to use you in his Kingdom.

To help you reflect further you may like to take a moment to listen to a song by Tim Hughes called ‘May the Words of My Mouth’ which can easily be found on YouTube or Spotify (it’s an oldie, but a goodie).

[DAY SIXTEEN] CAN YOU SERVE LIKE JESUS

Philippians 2: 5-7

“In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to His own advantage; rather, He made Himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.”

In today's passage Paul is teaching the early Christian church in Philippi how to be united and love each other by pointing them to the example of Jesus; God who became man. In His humanity, Jesus showed us God's character and demonstrated humility in being willing to give up His rights in order to obey God and serve people. Paul is highlighting that if we say we follow Jesus, we should try and do likewise, by serving out of love for God and others. Whilst Jesus was recognised as a Rabbi, He spent much of His time with ordinary people, often with outcasts.

We have a choice about the mindset we take when facing the situations and people that we encounter. It is easy to live life motivated by pride - 'I'll do this kind thing so that people think I'm great' - or selfishness - 'Why can't I do/have exactly what I want?' - but Paul wants us to look to Jesus as an example of counter-cultural living. In the verses prior Paul encourages the Philippians to put each other's needs first, because ultimately, this leads to unity. If I consider you above me and you consider me above you, then a beautiful thing happens: we have a community where everyone is looked up to, and no one is looked down upon.

YES BUT HOW?

Aim today to do something that serves another person, but in such a way that they are unlikely to notice or thank you. It can be pretty fun.

As you reflect you may want to listen to the following song on You Tube...

- A. 'This is Our God' by Hillsong, reminds us that our God came to serve
or
- B. Graham Kendrick's 'Servant King' if you really wanted an 80s throwback.

[DAY SEVENTEEN] REPRESENTING JESUS

2 Corinthians 5: 18-20 *“All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God.”*

An ambassador is a representative of a country, their role is to be a permanent representative from one country to another. This means living in that country, engaging with the people and learning the language. The principle role of an ambassador however is to promote the interests and values of their country.

So what does it mean to be Christ’s ambassadors?

It means that we are sent out. We are permanent representatives of another Kingdom living in this world. Christ doesn’t command us to hide away from the world and not engage, neither does He tell us to totally assimilate.

As representatives of Christ to the world He wants us to live out His values to those around us. This passage says that Christ has given us a ministry of reconciliation. We are not the sort of ambassador who sit’s in their residence and preaches from a distance. No! We are the sort of ambassador who get’s our hands dirty. We go out and meet the people, we live out our Kingdom values in the presence of those around us. Christ commissions us to go out and be His hands, His mouth and His ears to a broken, hurting and lost world.

This quote from Teresa of Avila sums up this passage perfectly:

“Christ has no body now but yours. No hands, no feet on earth but yours. Yours are the eyes through which he looks compassion on this world. Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good. Yours are the hands through which he blesses all the world. Yours are the hands, yours are the feet, yours are the eyes, you are His body. Christ has no body now on earth but yours.”

YES BUT HOW?

It does sound a little terrifying, being representatives of Christ to the world. But you can start with small steps. Ask yourself today: is there one person I can show love to, is there someone who needs to hear today that they have a God who loves them? The Kingdom values are radical, they are attractive, as we try and live them out (aware of our failings and God’s immeasurable grace) people will be attracted to our message.

[DAY EIGHTEEN] A BIGGER WORLD

Psalm 67:6-7 “The land yields its harvest; God, our God, blesses us. May God bless us still, so that all the ends of the earth will fear him”.

Do you remember those W.W.J.D bracelets that people wore 15 or so years ago? They were big in the Christian world when I was a teenager. I not only had the ‘What would Jesus do’ fabric band on my wrist, but also the P.U.S.H (Pray until something happens) and F.R.O.G (Fully rely on God) bands just to make sure people knew I was taking my faith seriously. At my school you weren’t allowed to wear jewellery unless there was a religious reason for it and my friend and I were told to remove our bracelets as they went against the school uniform code. We took this as persecution of our faith and loudly stated how they were symbols of our Christian faith and we would not remove them...

A few years later I heard about Christians who were locked in shipping containers for their faith and the lack of sunlight made their hair and teeth fall out. I heard of others who were sent to forced labour camps, imprisoned without trial and even murdered.

Suddenly my W.W.J.D. bracelet didn’t seem that significant. I was learning about people all over the globe for whom declaring the name of Jesus could cost them everything and yet they still did it. They smuggled Bibles across borders, held secret services, baptised new believers and never gave up their faith in the face of death. And what was more captivating were the stories of God moving - how He would make border control guards almost blind so that they wouldn’t see a boot full of illegal Bibles, how He made prison doors open so captives could walk out of high security units and how He gave people supernatural strength to withstand terrible ordeals.

YES BUT HOW

Learning about Christians around the world and how life giving and sustaining their faith is in such circumstances encouraged and challenged me in mine. If you’ve never looked beyond your own church then why not check out Open Doors (www.opendoorsuk.org) and let your Jesus family around the world encourage and challenge you today. You might want to think about doing the following as a result:

Writing letters of encouragement to those who are persecuted <https://www.opendoorsuk.org/act/letter/>

Taking action to support those who are persecuted. Open Doors have a number of ways to do this <https://www.opendoorsuk.org/act/>

[DAY NINETEEN] THE PLACE WHERE WE ARE

Mark 13:11 *“Whenever you are arrested and brought to trial, do not worry beforehand about what to say. Just say whatever is given you at the time, for it is not you speaking, but the Holy Spirit”.*

Our lives can often seem mundane, boring, ordinary. At times it seems our lives are just coincidences; I just happen to be here.

The truth though is that we all have a call from God; to be those who share God’s story, God’s hope, God’s love in all the places we find ourselves. Our stories are not just coincidence, they are able to be used by God’s Spirit living in us to inspire change and transformation.

For the early church their story was one of persecution; dragged into court for saying they were Jesus-followers, their life determined not by a ‘call’ but by their chains. And yet in that place they knew what to say and how to act because the Spirit was with them. Paul in his letters says he sees being in prison as a great opportunity because he can now share Jesus with those around him there (Philippians 1:12-14)!

As a maths teacher it felt like I had no time to even think about God, let alone share my faith. Rushing from lesson to lesson to meetings to marking to preparation to crashing in tiredness at home. But I knew God had me there for a reason and looking back I see how the Holy Spirit was at work, guiding and using me in those places. As a witness to colleagues in the way I acted with grace and integrity, in conversations about faith with some of my muslim students, in having the courage to start a lunchtime group talking about Jesus with any students who wanted to come.

Whether you have chosen to be where you are or whether you feel you’ve just found yourself there, the Holy Spirit is at work, guiding and prompting you to be and act and speak as the light of Christ in that place.

YES BUT HOW?

- 1. PRAY.** Right now. Pray for those you will meet today, that God would help you to show Jesus’ love to them. If you can, take moments in the day to pray – being aware of God and those around you.
- 2. ACT.** Take the opportunities that come your way to share God’s love.
- 3. REFLECT.** Tonight, celebrate where you took an opportunity to share God’s love. Spot an opportunity missed as a chance for growth – ask God to help you next time.

[DAY TWENTY] FROM TENANTS TO OWNERS

Genesis 1:27-28 *“God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”*

When I first moved to London, I rented flats and homes with different friends over a number of years. I saw my share of poor, absent landlords and tenants who had left homes in a mess because they were moving on and didn't seem to care about who came next.

Sometimes as Christians we think we rent a room on planet earth and God, our landlord, isn't bothered about how we leave it so long as we pay our rent! Our 'real home' is in heaven we're told... So, we don't really worry about the state we leave our room in, we just do what we want with the world...

Destructive mass farming practices....over-production of single use plastics.....unhindered burning of fossil fuels in factories, cars, aeroplanes.

But these verses say humanity was created in the 'image of God' and asked to 'fill the earth.' The truth is we're already home; we aren't just renting but get to share in God's ownership of this world.

When we have a sense of ownership over the place we call 'home,' when we care about its condition, we are happy to invest time and money to make it a place of joy to live in. When we own the place we live in we have to deal with the problems nurturing and caring for a home involved; if we don't sort them out no-one else will!

We are called to 'subdue' and 'rule' creation, but as owners with God. Our 'ruling' is to share in His rule. And God's rule is ultimately made known to us in Jesus:

He loves so much He enters the world, coming to serve rather than be served, dying to bring life, flourishing and fullness, rising again to rule so that freedom might win.

God uses His power by becoming powerless, God rules through service. And we are made in His image; tied up in the essence of what it means to be human is to care and serve the world we are given. How can you care for creation?

YES BUT HOW?

NOTICE the world around; people, places, streets, buildings, life. Notice beauty and notice pain.

DREAM of what it would look like for these places to flourish. What might 'ruling' – caring, nurturing – look like here?

DO something practical to better love the place where you are.

[DAY TWENTYONE] YOUR DESIRES OR GOD'S DESIRES

Acts 13:22 *“After removing Saul, he made David their king. He testified concerning him: ‘I have found David son of Jesse a man after my own heart; he will do everything I want him to do.’”*

Very sadly a few months ago, one of my very close friends died from a massive heart attack. He didn't seem especially unwell and none of us realised that there were any problems with his heart at all because, well, it was inside him and we couldn't see it and it wasn't until it was too late that the doctors realised that all his arteries were blocked up. In the Bible when it refers to the heart it's talking about where our emotions, thoughts and intentions come from – it's sort of what we are REALLY like.

In this verse it says that God removed Saul. He was the King of Israel before David but his heart had become self-centred, arrogant and jealous. He stopped listening to what God was saying or caring about what God wanted and just did his own thing. So instead David was made King because his heart was beating in time with God's heart – he had the same priorities and values that God had – pleasing God was his main motivation. Now if you read the whole story of David you will notice that he is very far from perfect and made some very serious mistakes, in fact in Psalm 51 he prays a prayer for God to give him a clean heart as he had really messed up and God does – phew!

God sees our hearts even when they are invisible to everyone else. We get to know His heart as we read the Bible, listen to other followers of Jesus and ask God to show us where our hearts need to be changed.

YES BUT HOW?

Over the next few days take special notice of how your words, attitudes and actions demonstrate the state of your heart – the source of everything and ask God to be at work in you cleaning you up, healing you and helping you have a heart like his.

[DAY TWENTY TWO]

DO YOU INFLUENCE OR ARE YOU INFLUENCED?

Colossians 3:1-3 *“Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ² Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. ³ For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.”*

One of the key questions that I've ever been asked is simply this: “Are you a thermometer or a thermostat?” – just in case you're not sure what the difference is – a **thermometer** MEASURES the temperature that's already there; whether it's the fever that you've developed with your flu or the warmth of your living room. A **thermostat** on the other hand SETS the temperature – it decides (in some super technical way!) how cool or warm a space is going to be.

Some of us whether we are followers of Jesus or not definitely act more like thermometers – if everything around us is negative, cynical or critical then well, so are we – we just pick up the culture around us. We allow it to mould us and shape our thoughts and attitudes. We are called to be thermostats though – to take our attitudes and behaviour from what we read in the Bible and our decision to choose to set our minds on Jesus and the things that matter most to Him. Then we can begin to set the temperature, even change the temperature around us, in our homes, work spaces, leisure activities, on our streets and in our neighbourhoods. So because He is Truth – integrity and authenticity matter to us, because He is Love then treating everyone with respect and valuing each person matters to us, because He is Holy then living in a pure way that pleases God matters to us, because He is Faithful – being trustworthy, reliable and faithful in our relationships matters to us.

YES BUT HOW

Would you say you were more of a thermometer or a thermostat? Take time today to be aware of what is going on around you. Are you more influenced by those in the room or by Jesus?

Its worth asking yourself how can you begin to set a more “Jesus centred” temperature where you are?

[DAY TWENTY THREE] TOO NEEDY OR A LONE WOLF?

Proverbs 27:9 “Perfume and incense bring joy to the heart, and the pleasantness of a friend springs from their heartfelt advice”.

When did you last confide in someone? Bear all about a situation and ask for their advice? Actually listen to their advice? Or even choose to deal with the situation with that person instead of alone?

We live in an individualistic society, where social media and the likes of ‘#you do you #you are enough #just do you’ tell us that we are strong and independent and that we don’t need other people to be happy or to get us to a place of success. On the surface this sounds very empowering and encouraging. But in a society where up to 40% of us report feeling lonely very often, this also sounds very isolating. And it doesn’t fit well with the picture of creation that the Bible paints. Adam was joined by Eve to take care of Eden. Paul worked with Timothy. Jesus chose to work with people. Could Jesus have done miracles and preached the good news by Himself? Being God, yes He totally could have. But He chose to recruit the twelve disciples to work out His ministry with. A bunch of normal, broken, flawed, humans who probably slowed things down, asked annoying questions and got in the way sometimes (or a lot). The example Jesus sets is that it is better for us to work with other people. To go through life with other people. To serve and struggle and win and fail with other people. Jesus was not a lone wolf.

What would happen if we ignored social media and became more dependent on one another, talking, listening and collaborating more with our equally-broken brothers and sisters? God designed us for partnership, relationship, family. We don’t need to be lone wolves.

YES BUT HOW?

Do you have people in your life you can share your faith/questions/problems/victories with? Could you invite a friend this week to sit and talk, maybe over coffee? Why not take out your mobile and invite some to chat?

[DAY TWENTYFOUR] ROPE NOT STRING

Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 *“A chord of three strands is not easily broken”.*

This passage is often read at weddings because it encourages the couple to have God involved in the marriage. But this is not just for couples, it's about all relationships in the church.

Often when thinking about a passage in the Bible (New or Old Testament), it's useful to look at Jesus and see what He did or had to say about it. After all, He is God in human form, so for us humans, that's usually a good place to start!

Jesus surrounded Himself by a team, He didn't carry out His ministry alone - no He built a squad of 12 disciples so that together they would be stronger than just 13 random people. He built this team from mainly teenagers who were not well educated or high in society but normal people. This is great to keep in mind when we think about our role in the church, we're not just a random [teenager / average Joe / single parent / unemployed person], we're intertwined with something much more than that, and we have our part to play.

Elsewhere in the Bible we read about the church being 'one body', made up of several parts - we believe that as a church family we're stronger when all of us work together, rather than each of us as individuals.

So in our lives let's be rope, not string.

In our church serve with others, read the Bible with others, help others
TOGETHER.

In our work places find other Christian's to pray with or spend time with. Make community with others.

YES BUT HOW

Doing things alone is never fun and not how we were built to work. Remember that we are to be rope not string. This week why don't you try and do something with another Christian and ask God to do it with you.

[DAY TWENTYFIVE] YOUR BROTHER HAS BEEN BEATEN

John 15:20 “Remember the word that I said to you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours”.

Did you know that there are 2.4 billion Christians in the world?

Did you also know that 100 million Christians experience high, very high, or extreme persecution.

We can live our lives in a little bubble where we see our faith as part of our world and life. But if we were to take a step back and see what is happening with our global family we would be shocked. Imagine not being able to go to church in daylight. Imagine not being able to sing in church for fear of being heard. Imagine having to hide your Bible at home so it's never found. Imagine that for the safety of your family you denounce your faith so not to get caught. Imagine not even telling your family in case they found out. Imagine imprisonment for your faith.

Having spent time in Lebanon visiting the church in Syria I was amazed by the passion found in the persecuted church. One Syrian pastor said to me “You forget how beautiful the light is until your forced into the dark”. For many Christians the darkness has given them a great vision of the light of Jesus. This pastor went on to say, “The war was a gift, it made us wake up to the reality that humanity is lost without Jesus. I've seen many survive persecution but not many survive prosperity. Sadly in the west your more in love with life than you are with Jesus and it makes you unwilling to die for Him. The little daily distractions around you are killing your faith. You're distracted by the mundane and you miss the light all around you”.

How true are his comments. Let us make more of the freedom we have with our faith and let us not miss the work of Jesus around us. Let us pray for the persecuted Christians but lets also let them inspire us to be dedicated to Jesus.

YES BUT HOW?

Take time today to pray for the Christians in the top 10 most persecuted countries. Pray that they would remain strong and steadfast in the face of persecution. Pray, ‘Lord be real to them, give them what they need and may they know your presence’.

1. NORTH KOREA
2. AFGHANISTAN
3. SOMALIA
4. LIBYA
5. PAKISTAN

6. SUDAN
7. ERITREA
8. YEMEN
9. IRAN
10. INDIA

[DAY TWENTY SIX] IS CELEBRATING HEALTHY?

Exodus 31:16 *“The Israelites are to observe the Sabbath, celebrating it for the generations to come as a lasting covenant.”*

Do you think celebrating is healthy? Considering all the cakes, sweets, drinks, having a lot of exhausting preparation beforehand, being tired afterwards...It's easy to get the impression of it not being healthy at all!

But celebrating itself is actually very healthy...and even godly! God wants us to celebrate! The parties in the bible usually lasted for a week! It isn't about getting drunk, or spending a lot of money – celebrating is thanking God for the good things that He has given us and being happy for great moments. It is **ABOUT PAUSING AND ENJOYING WHAT IS THERE**. The bible tells us that God took a day of rest after creating the world and enjoyed what He had created. He clicked pause and celebrated.

It is healthy and godly to click pause and celebrate - daily, weekly and beyond. When you sit down exhausted from the day, finally having all of the children sleeping in bed, celebrate that you somehow managed to get through the day. Instead of trying to switch off by watching TV or scrolling through Instagram why don't you take a moment – maybe with a cup of tea – thank God for the great chat you had with a friend and for His guidance throughout the day. Pause, thank God and say “Well done” to yourself.

When you come home from work, celebrate the work you've got done over the day. Enjoy once again the joyful moment when the whole team was laughing and think back gratefully for the lunch break with the sun shining on your face. Take a moment to thank God for those experiences, saying “Well done” to yourself and rest.

Taking time for Sabbath is taking time to celebrate. It is clicking pause, looking back and enjoying what was good.

YES BUT HOW

Click pause and celebrate every day! You might want to put an alarm on your phone to remind yourself to celebrate time each day. ;-)

Why don't you put #celebratedmydayandmyGod when you next post a picture of how you've spent your day.

Take a day off every week to celebrate all the good moments of the week and to celebrate God's provision. Taking a day off is trusting in God's provision for us instead in our own works.

Let's celebrate!

[DAY TWENTY SEVEN] DON'T BE SHY IN YOUR PRAYERS!

John 14:13-14 Jesus said “And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father [God] may be glorified in the Son [Jesus]. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.”

My uncle and aunt live in India and told me the story of Akkhi and Akhriti (who were 8 and 10 years old). Both are sisters who live with their parents in a remote village. Their father was a drunkard who often spend his money drinking and gambling. He was also violent toward his wife and kids. Both these girls started to come to children’s church and began to pray. They asked God to change their father. Indeed God listened to their prayers and performed a miracle. The father changed his habits, he often asked the kids whom they were praying to and started listening to what they were saying about Jesus. Now the whole family is attending church.

Have you ever wondered if your prayers matter? I do quite often. I am wondering if my prayer really makes a difference. Stories like this remind me that our prayers matter! Such stories motivate me, build up new faith and strengthen trust in God.

If we could be sure that God will answer all our prayers, would we still pray for the same things as we do now? Would our prayers still be for a good day and nice weather or would it be more than that? We have a powerful, almighty God who is able to change evil hearts, turn situations upside down and heal people’s bodies and souls. He ensured us that our prayers to Him will make a difference in this world! So let’s pray today with trust in Him for the big things in our lives and other people’s lives!

ACTION: Get a pen and write down 2 things you would like to pray for everyday this week:

1. A **situation** in your life you would love to see changed _____
2. A **person** who is on your heart _____

Choose a **regular time** you want to pray. While eating breakfast, making a cuppa or in bed before you go to sleep. You can change your prayer points after a while if you like.

[DAY TWENTYEIGHT] ROCK BOTTOM

Psalm 94:17-19 *“Unless the Lord had given me help, I would soon have dwelt in the silence of death. When I said, ‘My foot is slipping,’ your unfailing love, Lord, supported me. When anxiety was great within me, your consolation brought me joy.”*

I have experienced in life, what many call a “Rock Bottom”. It’s interesting, for 13 years my family wanted me to do something that I didn’t want to do myself: to stop taking drugs. For those 13 years my mother prayed numerous times that God would intervene and prevent me from dying or going to jail. The more my mother prayed, the worse my situation became. I started to lose jobs, friends and in the end I nearly lost my soul. Pay attention to Psalm 94vs 19 when it says: “When anxiety was great within ME, your consolation brought me joy”. When it was great within ME, not with my mother or sister or partner. I needed to hit rock bottom to be able to surrender, and to accept God’s consolation.

There’s a story of a woman who was a recovering alcoholic and she went into a prison to share her journey on how she found recovery. Whilst sharing....

she said “If I could give you all the gifts of recovery, I wouldn’t do it”.

Upset, the inmates replied “why are you so mean?”.

Her response was “Because I wouldn’t rob you, of your journey”.

The personal journey is vital, I needed to experience pain and that pain became a motivating factor. That pain led me to a rock bottom, where I understood that I have lost power over addiction and therefore needed a Power Greater than that. That Power was Jesus. The people and places He placed in my life, such as 12 steps fellowships, have helped me to find freedom from addiction. My mother thought God wasn’t answering her prayers, but He was. By leading me to rock bottom, when I exhausted all the “good ideas” that I had, I became open to seek Him. He could do for me, what I now knew from personal experience, that I couldn’t do for myself.

YES BUT HOW?

Whatever your destructive behaviour might be, is it **BAD ENOUGH** for **YOU**?

What is the battle that you have lost that you need to admit so that God can then enter the ring to fight it for you? For you it most probably will not be drug related but we all have something wanting to control us. What is it for you, can you give this to God today?

[DAY TWENTYNINE] CHANGING YOUR HABITS TO LIVE IN SYNC WITH CREATION

Job 38:4-12 “Where were you when I laid the earth’s foundation? Tell me, if you understand. Who marked off its dimensions? Surely you know! Who stretched a measuring line across it? On what were its footings set, or who laid its cornerstone—while the morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy?

“Who shut up the sea behind doors when it burst forth from the womb, when I made the clouds its garment and wrapped it in thick darkness, when I fixed limits for it and set its doors and bars in place, when I said, ‘This far you may come and no farther; here is where your proud waves halt’?

“Have you ever given orders to the morning, or shown the dawn its place?”

It can be so easy to go about your day not lifting your thoughts beyond what you can see. The worst for me is commuting; it’s so busy that in the heat of the moment I lose sight of the beauty around me. I often cycle past Buckingham Palace but stare at traffic lights to make sure I don’t lose a second! However, this passage forcefully reminds me of the glory of the universe, and God’s sovereignty over it. Even a sunset over Bow’s imperfect skyline brings wonder and removes self-centredness. So, think of the depths of the ‘earth’s foundation’ or the power of the ocean’s ‘proud waves’. I am humbled, and like Job in a later chapter, quietly whisper “I am unworthy”. But the good news of the gospel is that we are not the centre of the universe – it’s much bigger and more beautiful than that – and the One who is its centre thinks we are worthy to be noticed, to be redeemed at great price, and to serve as His hands and feet.

God has given us responsibility to steward the earth: to preserve its beauty, reduce suffering and demonstrate God’s care to others. It’s hard to know how to individually help the environment. However, I believe building a habit of small, even seemingly insignificant actions towards a noble purpose cultivates a humble and grateful spirit within us.

YES BUT HOW?

Think about your daily life. What can you change to lessen your impact on the environment? Can you declare that there’s something more important than your convenience and comfort to yourself and those around you?

[DAY THIRTY] WHAT WOULD JESUS TWEET?

Isaiah 58: 6-7

“Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter— when you see the naked, to clothe them, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?”

As far as I know Jesus never signed an online petition, retweeted a news article or shared a Facebook meme to show He ‘really had read it and cared enough’. I mean, obviously Jesus didn’t do any of those things but my point is He didn’t react to tragedy and injustice by picking a response that looked good and maybe felt good but in reality didn’t really do a lot.

What Jesus did do was move into the neighbourhood. He hung out with people on the edges, Speaking with and touching those branded by the “newspapers” as benefit cheats, liars, thieves, those to be blamed for all of society’s problems. Not just for an afternoon either. Instead, He gave His three years of ministry to them.

The challenge for us on this journey of discipleship is to be moved to action beyond a social media post that’s forgotten about in a week. Jesus calls us to be moved in our very gut, to feel like we have no other choice than to give the best of our years to make a difference, face to face, hand to hand, with and alongside.

There are so many tragedies and injustices that we can’t give ourselves to all of them. But maybe this Lent you could think and pray about whether there is something that does get you in the gut like nothing else. Maybe it’s to do with the refugee crisis, homelessness, gender equality or climate change.

YES BUT HOW?

- ONE** Ditch the click and share (unless you feel it really will make a difference).
- TWO** Take time to think about what tragedy or injustice is getting you in the gut and research the issue, explore what a first step to getting involved might be.
- THREE** Pray as well for guidance towards a small step to take to make a difference.
- FOUR** And then do it! Who knows what might happen!

[DAY THIRTY ONE] GOD KNOWS YOU

Psalm 139:13 “For you created my inmost being”

We long to be fully known. We want people to know us and to like what they see. But this natural, God-given desire can be twisted in our culture. Posting pictures of ourselves online to share our experiences can turn into running after ‘likes’ and affection. And then we can get insecure if people don’t ‘like’ what they see.

This song that David wrote celebrates the fact that God created our inmost being. When God looks at you, He likes what He sees. God knows and celebrates you. He designed you, knows you by name and loves every part of you. Sometimes we forget that, and go chasing love in all the wrong places.

Are there any parts of our “inmost being” we are struggling with currently? Maybe certain desires are confusing you, or you hate part of your body? Maybe you’ve never even realised God loves every part of you, and that it is therefore right to love your self.

Talking to God about your struggles is a good first step. He will never be shocked by anything we say to Him in prayer. Secondly, we can talk to other people in God’s family. These might be Christians in church who you trust and respect.

Because imagine what life would look like if we lived every day remembering we are championed by God? What would our prayers sound like if we realised how well God knows us and how deeply He loves us?

YES BUT HOW?

Why not try one or more of these today:

READ Psalm 139 aloud to yourself.

WRITE bits of it on post-it notes, stick them somewhere you will see them.

CELEBRATE your body through exercise, dance or some other appropriate way.

REFRESH your mind by naming anything that is stopping you from loving yourself the way God loves you – talk to a trusted friend about this.

GET CREATIVE and try putting this psalm to music, or using a different art form.

[DAY THIRTYTWO] ARE YOU WILLING TO BE TAUGHT?

Luke 6:46-49 “Why do you call me, ‘Lord, Lord’, and do not do what I say? As for everyone who comes to me and hears my words and puts them into practice, I will show you what they are like. They are like a man building a house, who dug down deep and laid the foundation on rock. When a flood came, the torrent struck that house but could not shake it, because it was well built. But the one who hears my words and does not put them into practice is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. The moment the torrent struck that house, it collapsed and its destruction was complete.”

I had a student who sat in my classroom feeling sorry for themselves as I told them that I had reminded them many times before.....

“sending offensive messages on Whatsapp has real life consequences”.

The student nods at me, nursing their bruised face and pride, promising next time will be different. I remember feeling so frustrated. Why won't they listen? Can't they see my advice is for their own good?

However, the truth is many of us are exactly like this student. In the story of the wise and foolish builders, Jesus tells us clearly ' Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord' but do not do what I say?' We hear the good news, we look at what Jesus tells us in the Bible and we promise that life is going to change. But a week passes, life gets busy and we find ourselves building on sandy foundations once again.

Jesus is the ultimate teacher but will we listen? Do we sometimes believe deep down, like my students with me, that Jesus doesn't have our best interests at heart? We need honesty here, asking Jesus to speak to our hearts and help us understand He teaches us so we can know life to the full. And then we need to hear the word of God and put it in to practice. Willing to be taught and willing to change; replacing our shaky foundations with the unchanging truth of Jesus.

SO HOW CAN WE PUT GOD'S WORD INTO PRACTICE?

How willing are you to allow the teachings of Jesus to really change your life?

I find it really helpful to read a bible passage with someone else. We can then discuss what speaks to us and also one thing we might do more often or something we might change from our daily lives. We can then commit to praying for one another but also challenging each other as to whether we've put it into practice.

QUESTION What do you need to put into practise today because you read this passage?

[DAY THIRTY THREE] A LULLABY FOR WAR.

Psalm 91:1-4 “Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.

I will say of the Lord, “He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust.”

Surely he will save you from the fowler’s snare and from the deadly pestilence. He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart”.

Picture a full blown battle raging all around you. Shots fired, missiles flying, aircraft roaring. You are dodging bullets, fending off attacks and barrages of assault. Then, you stop. Desperate, you reach into your rucksack and pull out...

[pause]

What are you fighting? What’s your personal war? It could be work or family, mental health or physical pain or old wounds. But ultimately the bible suggests that there is a dark evil behind these things that distort and hurt us. Psalm 91 gives this opposition force many names but the church through the ages has simply called it The Enemy. We know Jesus’ love on the Cross is victorious (Rom 8:35-39) and there will be a day when the enemy is fully defeated, when Jesus will wipe away every tear (Rev 21:4) but for now there is still war.

[un-pause]

...you reach into your rucksack and pull a plastic mobile, the kind that you would hang over a baby’s cot. You hold it up, colours vivid against your dirty skin and the smokey air. You pull the string, a lullaby begins to play, somehow overcoming the sounds of war. You smile, curl up and fall fast asleep.

Psalm 91 is a lullaby for God’s army. A promise for protection amidst what might feel impossible to survive. Inviting us into a new way of existing in the fight; Rest. Whatever’s going on around you can rest in God, like a young bird nestling under your mother’s wing. Here we discover the best armour there is (Eph. 6:10-20).

YES BUT HOW?

Write down anything you are battling against on different pieces of paper. Add battles your church, neighbourhood, country, the world are facing. Arrange them on the floor somewhere private with space in the middle of them. Read through Psalm 91, giving them to God and declare your trust in Him.

[DAY THIRTY FOUR] MAKE IT LESS ABOUT YOU

Mark 10:45 “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many”.

A fatberg sat beneath our London streets, weighing the same as at least 11 double-decker buses, full of wipes, cooking oil and other ‘necessities’ that we had thrown down our toilets or waste disposal units. A strong smell for those who had to break it up but it also reeked of today’s consumer culture. We want it all and we want it quickly. Society tells us that the more we have the greater we will feel.

We often carry this attitude when we come to church. What will I get from church today? Is the talk giving me enough? This verse in Mark provides a huge challenge to our individualistic and often self-centered mindsets. We are told that even Jesus, God Himself, came to earth in order to serve others. He came to earth asking different questions, not what was He going to get but what was He going to give. But the verse takes this even further, we are told that Jesus came to serve but also to ‘give His life as a ransom for many’. Jesus came to give His life – the ultimate model of sacrificial love, so that we could be free.

Coming to church to be blessed and to hear God speak is not a bad thing and it is so important to experience God as part of a community of believers. But it is also about becoming more like Jesus. This verse tells us exactly what this looks like – we enter church and we enter our daily lives with an attitude of service.

What questions do you ask yourself when you come to church?

Will I like the worship songs? Will I enjoy the talk? Will the coffee be any good this week?

Notice the questions you ask yourself when you come to church; are they focussed on you?

Consider replacing them with one of the following questions this next week....

Could I get to know someone new today?

Is there someone on the edge who I could involve in a conversation?

Does anyone need help looking after their children?

Could I get someone a tea or coffee?

How can I help today?

[DAY THIRTY FIVE] WASHED CLEAN

Psalm 51:1-3 “Have mercy on me, o God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions and my sin is always before me.”

There was a man with great faith in God. During a flood, he was nearly drowning but when a fisherman approached and invited him to jump on his boat, he said “I don’t need you, I trust God alone.” The fisherman left and a helicopter passed by, and also offered help to the men who once again denied the help, saying he would trust God alone. The man drowned and ending up in heaven. He looked at God and said, “God, I am so disappointed with you, I have trusted you with all my heart, and look what happened to me.” God responded, “my son, I too am disappointed; I sent you a fisherman and a helicopter, what are you doing here?!”

In the past I struggled with porn addiction, and someone suggested that I install a blocker on all my electronic devices, to stop me using it when the obsession popped into my mind. I remember my response; “I don’t need this bro, I have God in my life”. In my arrogance, I was telling somebody who found freedom from it that I didn’t need their help, even though I was the one watching it multiple times a day. I carried on praying, expecting God to take the desire away, but it just got worse, I started to watch even more and feel worse and worse...

Sometime we can expect God to do everything for us without any personal effort. I wanted to be free, but when God sent the “fisherman” I said “no thanks”. It was only once I surrendered, went to the fisherman and asked for help, that God eventually lifted the obsession. God will wash away my iniquities, but I have a part to play.

YES BUT HOW

Think of where in your life you want God to wash you clean. What is the soap you might need to buy; what can you put in place today to avoid continuing to give in to bad habits and ways of life?

Hold out your hands before you. Imagine you have bad attitudes and behaviours in your hands. What attitudes do you not like about yourself? What behaviours do you have that you know God wants you get rid of?

Imagine washing your hands give these things to God. Confess and ask God to make you holy according to his love.

[DAY THIRTY SIX] PRAYING WITH OTHERS

Matthew 18:20

“For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them.”

For some of us praying in a group seems very easy – but for others it comes much harder. I remember my first time of praying out loud with others – I sat there tense, overwhelmed at how impressive other prayers sounded, how beautifully worded they were and how they seemed to think up some very holy things to pray. Eventually after a few weeks with these people I decided now was the time to pray out loud – I thought through the words in my head, practised them silently and before I could back out blurted them out quickly with a relieved Amen at the end. After some time I found it easier and easier, and worried less about what others would think and more about what I wanted to say to God.

But why do we pray in groups? Firstly because we copy and imitate Jesus and His followers and that was something that they did. Secondly thought is the reason that we are given in Matthew – God is with us when we pray with others. I don't think that means He isn't there when we pray alone – I think it talks more about us being aware of Him when we are with others. When we pray with others, we share the responsibility and burden of faith and prayer. When we don't believe for something, somebody else may; when we struggle with hope, someone else holds our hope; When we forget that we have prayed and seen answer to our prayers, somebody else is there to remind us.

We were never meant to walk the Christian journey on our own. Praying with others, whether two or three close friends, or attending a prayer meeting, helps build us in our faith. There is solidarity of a group praying together, whether out loud or in silence, for the same thing at the same time.

WHO COULD YOU PRAY WITH?

Look for an opportunity to pray with somebody else this week. Perhaps ask a friend or relative to pray with you about something or maybe attend a prayer meeting at church or be bold enough to pray out loud at your small group. It might be hard the first time, but remember, Jesus is right there with you!

[DAY THIRTY SEVEN]

THEREFORE GO

Matthew 28:19 “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”.

There are few things that I get asked about more by my fellow Christians than ‘how do I talk about my faith?’ It’s an area that we are often scared of and one that needs to be demystified. Although some are set apart with the specific gift of the evangelist, all who love Jesus, need to play their part in witnessing. Nothing will change in the UK if we’re dependent on the odd charismatic personality who can deliver a rousing talk. What we need is something very different. We require a mobilised Church, with every person playing their part and stepping into all that the Lord has for them. We all have colleagues, neighbours, friends that the Church may struggle to impact with the good news through any other means than us. God is doing great things and we need to play our part and join in with Him.

Yes! But how? Here are five quick tips to get us started...

1. **BE INTERESTED IN OTHERS & FIND THINGS IN COMMON**

We need to ask questions, show an interest in others and when eventually asked back, take that opportunity to talk about our faith. Alternatively start by trying to find a point of commonality (a shared hobby, place or something similar). Talk about that area first before bringing faith into things later on.

2. **REMEMBER THAT GOD IS WITH US**

As we seek to share our faith with others we are not alone and the Lord has often gone before us. Let’s also remember that the Holy Spirit is at work in people’s lives and we are often joining in with what he’s already up to.

3. **DON’T MEASURE SUCCESS BY INSTANT RESULTS**

We need to celebrate the impact we are making in the everyday not just the big decision moments.

4. **MAKE IT AN EVERYDAY THING**

Sharing your faith is like using a muscle. If it’s done often it becomes easier and normal. If not done then the muscle wears away. We need to make talking about Jesus as normal as anything else and do all we can to open our mouths and speak about our hope in Him.

5. **PRAY**

We can overestimate our actions and underestimate our prayers. Let’s be praying for those we want to witness to and for openings to do so.

Sharing our faith is not easy but is vital. How do we start... one word and prayer at a time!

[DAY THIRTY EIGHT]

NOT AN INDIVIDUAL EVENT

Acts 11:25-26 25 “So Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, 26 and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. For a whole year they met with the church and taught a great many people. And in Antioch the disciples were first called Christians.”

Have you ever watched the 100 metre sprint in the Olympics? I always notice how the athletes come out before the race – completely focused on their goal, they may as well be running completely alone. This is probably done to avoid engaging with anyone who might distract from their aim to run the fastest race.

But do we sometimes bring this attitude into church? Have you ever heard it said, ‘Just forget about everyone else and focus on Jesus?’ Devotion and commitment to Jesus is wonderful, but our spiritual life isn’t a competitive 100 metre sprint where all that matters is you doing the best you can do. We are also called to look out for, encourage and enable one another.

In this passage Barnabas really shows us what that means. Things were going really well for him in Antioch – he had built a reputation on being an amazing servant of God. But he remembered an old friend called Saul (see **Acts 9:27**), someone who he believed God had great plans for. He **took time out** and **journeyed to find** Saul (Antioch to Tarsus and back was circa 250 miles round trip) and brought him back to work with him and **encouraged him** to follow the path of what God had called him to become.

The rest of the story sees Saul (who we know as Paul) set off to spread the message of Jesus around the known world, as well as writing a large part of the New Testament. The impact that Barnabas had by believing in him and making sacrifices to help him flourish cannot be understated.

Jesus calls us into community; not to just personally run as fast as we can but to look around and see who we can help and raise up, who we can support and inspire.

WHO IS YOUR SAUL?

1. Think of someone you know who could do with encouragement, ask God to show you who you could help
2. Take time today to tell that person about the gifts and talents you see in them, about what they mean to you
3. Find a way this week to spend time with them and encourage or help them to follow Jesus better

[DAY THIRTY NINE]

LIFE TOGETHER WITHOUT SHAME OR GUILT

James 5:16 “Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.”

Through my life, I've done things that have led me to feel shame and guilt. I guess we all have done that in one form or another; in fact the bible reminds us that we have all done it...

“for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,” (Romans 3:23).

So really those who think they have no issues are fooling themselves and perhaps actually have the most issues after all.

In the verse above, it says to confess to **each other**, then **pray**. All too often though, because I suffer from ego and pride and don't like admitting my failures to others, I catch myself using the excuse that God knows it all anyway... But it's so important to have that **“each other”** person in our lives, to break my ego and pride that only keep me sick. I've had to realise that I wasn't keeping my secrets hostage, they were keeping me hostage....

So, the trick for me was, who is that **each other** person that I can talk to? It's very important to know who to talk to... speak about your debts to a “debt adviser”, speak to the dentist about your tooth ache, find someone you trust to share your secrets with. Usually it's important to find someone who has had an issue similar to ours, and would be able to give us their **experience** and not their **opinion**, often those are the people better able to help us and be less judgmental towards the issue as they had been through it themselves.

WHO IS YOUR EACH OTHER PERSON?

This is a tough one and can take a lot of boldness, but this week can you:

1. **IDENTIFY** someone you trust, maybe a friend or church leader, and possibly someone who may have struggled with similar things to them
2. **MAKE TIME** to speak to them and boldly share something that you have kept hidden, something you are struggling with
3. **PRAY** asking God to finish the job that you and the **each other** have started, remember, God can do for us, what we cannot do for ourselves.

[DAY FOURTY]

JESUS PREPARES OUR FEET FOR NEW WAYS OF WALKING

John 13:14-15

“You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet.”

When the Millennium Bridge, a new pedestrian bridge across the Thames, was opened it mysteriously began falling apart; despite the best work of the best engineers screws were coming loose but no one knew why. Until they worked out the original designers had calculated weight of people, footfall, extra load and more but hadn’t realised that when the bridge was busy people would begin to walk in step with each other. The result of this mass synchronisation created waves across the bridge, these waves were making all the screws come loose.

The world we live in is constantly pulling us to conform, to walk ‘in sync’ with it. We have power over our own choices but we don’t have power over the choices others make or the patterns that whole communities live by. But people’s choices and patterns of community behaviour are powerful. Sometimes we don’t even realise we are conforming to these destructive ways, like walking over the Millennium bridge in a crowd, we don’t even realise that we’re walking in sync.

Jesus washes away the way that the disciples walked in sync with the world to prepare their feet for a new way of walking; His way. He came to serve; to act humbly, to love mercy, to do justice (Micah 6:8), to seek and save the lost (Lk 19:10), teaching them not to conform (Rom 12:2). Do your feet need washing? Is God calling you to wash the feet of others? Jesus wants to prepare our feet for new, beautiful ways of walking that show the true pattern that the whole creation yearns to be in sync with. The life of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

HOW CAN I LET JESUS WASH MY FEET?

1. **ASK** God to show you ways you are wrongly conforming to the world. Any bad patterns you are following, and choices that are habitually destructive.
2. **WAIT** in silence and listen, perhaps set a 1,2,5-minute timer if it helps.
3. **WRITE** down what you think the Holy Spirit said, in words or pictures.
4. **ACT** on what you have heard to live differently as a result.