



Small Community Notes

Introduction

Jesus says 'I will build my church...' We recognise that building the church is primarily the work of Jesus and that he invites us to play our part in this work, as living stones being built into a spiritual house.

1 Peter 2:4-5

⁴ As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him— ⁵ you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

These notes are designed primarily for small communities and include many invitations to share conversation with others as we explore how, together, we play our part in Jesus' work of building the Church of tomorrow. If you would like to join a small community, please get in touch with us at office@ccweb.org.uk.

We, as the people who are Christ Church, exist for the heavenly transformation of people and culture in Bristol. We do this by helping people find Jesus and follow him wholeheartedly. And we work this out through our values of Encounter plus Family plus Generosity which leads to Transformation. The aim of this series and these notes is to

equip us as increasingly wholehearted disciples of Jesus in playing our part in building the church as Jesus leads us by the Holy Spirit.

We've been participating in the Big New Wine Read, exploring together, *The Church of Tomorrow* by John McGinley. We've shared conversations about the 8 biblical principles presented in the book. The church of tomorrow is:

1. a church that honours Jesus as Lord
2. dependent on the Holy Spirit
3. confident in the gospel
4. a disciple making community
5. a church that plants churches
6. a church that has a diverse leadership
7. a holy people
8. a church that prioritises prayer

As we've explored these principles we have recognised that the way we have been church in the past needs to change to enable us to more effectively play our part in God's mission here in Bristol. Over the coming months we will look specifically at how we can be the church God is calling us to be. We will explore the specific practical things that we need to do to be that church. We will look at how each of the biblical principles mentioned above can shape and direct the way we are the church God is calling us to be.

Additional resources are available at www.ccweb.org.uk/build.

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| Week 1: | 10 th to 16 th September |
| Week 2: | 17 th to 23 rd September |
| Week 3: | 24 th to 30 th September |
| Week 4: | 1 st to 7 th October |
| Week 5: | 8 th to 14 th October |
| Week 6: | 15 th to 21 st October |
| Week 7: | 22 nd to 28 th October |
| Week 8: | 29 th October to 4 th November |
| Week 9: | 5 th to 11 th November |
| Week 10: | 12 th to 18 th November |
| Week 11: | 19 th to 25 th November |
| Week 12: | 26 th November to 2 nd December |
| Week 13: | 3 rd to 9 th December |

Week 1, Building a Community Where Jesus is Lord

Introduction

As followers of Jesus we are adopted as children of God (Romans 8:14–17). We are made citizens of the kingdom of God (Ephesians 2:19). The church is not the building we meet in or the gatherings we attend—the church is all the children of God. We are a particular community of believers in a city with many other communities of believers. Each is church and we are called to work together for God’s kingdom. As church we embody the kingdom of God here on earth. Therefore, when Jesus speaks about the kingdom of God, we need to pay close attention for he is speaking to us about how we should be church. Jesus had much to say about the kingdom of God...

Matthew 13:31–33, 44–46

³¹ He told them another parable: ‘The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. ³² Though it is the smallest of all seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds come and perch in its branches.’

³³ He told them still another parable: ‘The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into about thirty kilograms of flour until it worked all through the dough.’

⁴⁴ ‘The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.’

⁴⁵ ‘Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. ⁴⁶ When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.’

Notes

The kingdom of heaven starts from small beginnings, yet grows to become the largest kingdom. Jesus called 12 disciples and at the time of his ascension there were only a small number of followers, yet 2000 years on there are 2.5 billion people who call themselves Christian. In a similar sense, the work we are called to do may seem small and insignificant, yet, as we respond in obedient action to the call of the Holy Spirit we

are playing our part in establishing something much greater—the kingdom of God. Our small acts of obedience to the Holy Spirit enable the kingdom of God to permeate and transform every area of society and culture.

The parables Jesus tells about hidden treasure and fine pearls remind us how precious it is to be citizens of the kingdom of God. We are brought face to face with the question, “is Jesus number one in our church, in my life?” Our answer to that question is reflected in our obedience to the Holy Spirit. We aim to be people who seek to make Jesus number one in all our decisions, words and actions, knowing that we won’t always manage to do this. We also know that we follow Jesus, not in our own strength, but in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Now we’re getting closer to what it means to be church. It is being a people who are seeking, together, to make Jesus number one in everything, and consequently, being obedient to everything the Holy Spirit asks of us. We seek to be this people in the whole of our lives. That includes when we are:

- alone
- with a few followers of Jesus (e.g. small communities)
- with many followers of Jesus (e.g. gatherings, conferences)
- with those who don’t know Jesus (e.g. work, school, local community, leisure)

In all these contexts the Holy Spirit is always with us, dwelling within us and leading us daily into all truth. God transforms us day by day into the likeness of Christ through the power of his Holy Spirit; not in isolation but rather in community with our brothers and sisters in Christ. God works in us and through us, by the power of his Spirit, to bring transformation in us, those around us, and our wider society and culture. To be church, then, is to be intentionally in community with other followers of Jesus, encouraging and strengthening each other as the Holy Spirit leads and together reaching out to those who don’t know Jesus and sharing with them the gospel—the good news of the living lord Jesus, through whom we can become citizens of the kingdom of God, enjoy his presence and live for his glory for eternity.

Questions

- In which contexts do you find it easy to follow Jesus?
- In which contexts do you find it hard to follow Jesus?
- In what specific ways can you encourage each other to make Jesus number one in everything?

 **Application**

- Make a list of all the people known to your group who don't yet know Jesus.
- As a group, ask the Holy Spirit which of these people you should be praying for in this season.
- Commit to praying specifically for these people individually and as a group.
- As we approach Christmas what can your group do to begin sharing the good news of Jesus with these people?

Week 2, Building a Community Where Jesus is Lord

Hebrews 10:19–25

¹⁹ Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, ²⁰ by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, ²¹ and since we have a great priest over the house of God, ²² let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. ²³ Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. ²⁴ And let us consider how we may spur one another on towards love and good deeds, ²⁵ not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another – and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

Notes

In Hebrews 10 we find a summary of the gospel. You can sense the author's excitement and awe at the privilege we now have in Jesus. We can enter the 'Most Holy Place,' we are invited into close relationship with God as his children. Because of Jesus, referred to here as the 'great priest', we are encouraged to 'draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings.' There is a certainty in all of this. Our faith brings assurance and sincerity. There's an expectation in the author's encouragement to 'hold unswervingly to the hope we profess.' This is our responsibility as children of God to both profess the hope we have in Jesus and to hold to it without deviating. Professing this hope requires us to tell others about our faith in Jesus. Holding unswervingly to that hope requires us to put Jesus first in every decision, word and action. These are not individual things. The writer connects them with 'spurring one another on towards love and good deeds, and not giving up on meeting together.' Being a community of followers of Jesus is intentionally focused on that community acting together for each other.

In practice this relates to every occasion when we meet together, whether that is in twos, tens or hundreds. We come to these occasions asking the Holy Spirit, "who would you like me to encourage or spur on towards love and good deeds?" and "who will you ask to encourage me and spur me on towards love and good deeds?" We come expectant that we will interact with others and that through these interactions in the presence and power of the Holy Spirit God will continue his work of transformation in us.

Questions

- Why do you come to the particular church gatherings that you do?
- How do you prepare for being at these gatherings?
- What do you expect to give and receive at these gatherings?
- In what ways do you encourage other people at these gatherings and spur them on towards love and good works?

Application

- Set a reminder to take time to pray before you attend a weekly church gathering.
- Ask the Holy Spirit to highlight areas where you need to be equipped for the week ahead.
- Ask the Holy Spirit to show you how you can play your part in equipping others.
- At the gathering be open to conversations with others through which you and they might both be equipped for the week ahead.

Week 3, Building a community of disciples

Introduction

To be a disciple making community we must first be disciples of Jesus. That doesn't mean we have to be perfect disciples. It does mean that we have to choose to put Jesus first, allow him to transform us and be seeking to live day by day in response to the leading of the Holy Spirit. We do this alongside other disciples of Jesus, providing encouragement and help to each other in our discipleship to Jesus.

John 6:60–69 (esp. vv. 68–69)

⁶⁰ On hearing it, many of his disciples said, 'This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?'

⁶¹ Aware that his disciples were grumbling about this, Jesus said to them, 'Does this offend you? ⁶² Then what if you see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before! ⁶³ The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you – they are full of the Spirit and life. ⁶⁴ Yet there are some of you who do not believe.' For Jesus had known from the beginning which of them did not believe and who would betray him. ⁶⁵ He went on to say, 'This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled them.' ⁶⁶ From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him.

⁶⁷ 'You do not want to leave too, do you?' Jesus asked the Twelve.

⁶⁸ Simon Peter answered him, 'Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. ⁶⁹ We have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God.'

Matthew 16:24–27

²⁴ Then Jesus said to his disciples, ‘Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. ²⁵ For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it. ²⁶ What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? ²⁷ For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father’s glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what they have done.

Notes

Jesus has been speaking to people about who he is. He describes himself as ‘the bread of life’ (John 6:35, 48). Those Jews who were hostile towards Jesus take issue with him. In response, Jesus reasserts his identity and purpose as the one who is the way to the Father and eternal life. Speaking to disciples about what he had said, Jesus asks them ‘Does this offend you?’ (v. 61) Jesus further expounds the nature of these matters from God’s kingdom perspective—‘The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you — they are full of the Spirit and life.’ (v. 63)

The life Jesus invites us to is a work of the Holy Spirit. It is not something we can achieve by our own work and merit. We are invited to acknowledge Jesus as Lord and live our lives in willing submission to him through the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. This does not mean that we are passive in the transformation Jesus brings to our lives, far from it. Our active role is to choose to follow Jesus, to choose to put him first in everything, to choose to submit to his will above our own. This act of choosing Jesus looks something like this:

“Jesus, I choose to put you first in my life. Holy Spirit, would you do whatever is needed in my inner being to enable me to put Jesus first this day.”

And the next day we repeat and so on. We actively give the Holy Spirit permission to change us in our inner being that we may be able to follow Jesus.

Many heard Jesus’ words and decided it was too hard to follow him. Peter sums up the truth when he declares, ‘Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God’ (verses 68–69)

This sounds like an individual thing and of course it is deeply personal. However, we are not meant to do this alone, nor can we. We grow as disciples of Jesus with the support and encouragement of fellow disciples of Jesus. This needs to be more than providing a little bit of advice and encouragement to each other—it is more about sharing life together and creating a healthy learning environment. There are various contexts in which this can take place:

- In small communities where we build deepen relationships and provide mutual support and encouragement.
- In one to one mentoring relationships where we seek support and encouragement from someone who has been a disciple of Jesus for longer than we have.
- Similar to the previous point, where we are the one providing support and encouragement.
- In large gatherings where corporate worship, prayer ministry and sharing of stories play their part in our spiritual growth.

Questions

- Who is providing support and encouragement for you in being a disciple of Jesus?
- Is there someone who is walking alongside you in being a disciple of Jesus? What's it like to give and receive support in this way?

Application

- Pray about who you could ask to support and encourage you as you seek to follow Jesus wholeheartedly.
- Write down the names of a few people who you could ask.
- Ask these people. They might say no, and that's ok. If you are finding it difficult to find people do get in touch with us at office@ccweb.org.uk and we'll see what we can do to help.

Week 4, Building a community of disciples

James 5:7–20

⁷ Be patient, then, brothers and sisters, until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop, patiently waiting for the autumn and spring rains. ⁸ You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near. ⁹ Don't grumble against one another, brothers and sisters, or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door!

¹⁰ Brothers and sisters, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. ¹¹ As you know, we count as blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.

¹² Above all, my brothers and sisters, do not swear – not by heaven or by earth or by anything else. All you need to say is a simple 'Yes' or 'No'. Otherwise you will be condemned.

¹³ Is anyone among you in trouble? Let them pray. Is anyone happy? Let them sing songs of praise. ¹⁴ Is anyone among you ill? Let them call the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord. ¹⁵ And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise them up. If they have sinned, they will be forgiven. ¹⁶ Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.

¹⁷ Elijah was a human being, even as we are. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. ¹⁸ Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops.

¹⁹ My brothers and sisters, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring that person back, ²⁰ remember this: whoever turns a sinner from the error of their way will save them from death and cover over a multitude of sins.

Notes

James give us a picture of a healthy church community who are sharing life together and committed to being, and helping each other be, disciples of Jesus. He reminds us that being a disciple of Jesus is a long, steady journey of faithful following requiring patience and the willingness to stand firm. Good, healthy relationships in our church community are an essential aspect of our patience and standing firm.

Look at how the community is called to be present with each other (vv. 13–16). There is vulnerability, encouragement, standing alongside, prayer, praise, confession. God designed us to be in community with one another. Each of these communities needs to be a safe place for people, a place shaped by God's love, righteousness, truth, justice, peace and grace. It is a place where we are equipped to become increasingly wholehearted followers of Jesus, confident in sharing the gospel and introducing other people to Jesus, and able to walk alongside others as they become increasingly wholehearted disciples of Jesus.

This depth of community will be found in smaller gatherings of people. At Christ Church, small communities are great environments to deepen relationship with others.

Questions

- In what practical ways are you deepening relationships with the people in your small community?
- How well is that working in your group? What other ways could you build relational connection?
- How are you encouraging spiritual growth in each other?

Application

- As a small community, write down questions you will ask each other about how your walk with Jesus is. For example:
 - When have you felt close to Jesus in the last week?
 - What have you found most challenging in following Jesus in the last week?
- Each time you gather, begin by asking those questions, either as a whole group or in twos and threes.

Week 5, Building a community of disciples

Acts 18:18–28

¹⁸ Paul stayed on in Corinth for some time. Then he left the brothers and sisters and sailed for Syria, accompanied by Priscilla and Aquila. Before he sailed, he had his hair cut off at Cenchreae because of a vow he had taken. ¹⁹ They arrived at Ephesus, where Paul left Priscilla and Aquila. He himself went into the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews. ²⁰ When they asked him to spend more time with them, he declined. ²¹ But as he left, he promised, 'I will come back if it is God's will.' Then he set sail from Ephesus. ²² When he landed at Caesarea, he went up to Jerusalem and greeted the church and then went down to Antioch.

²³ After spending some time in Antioch, Paul set out from there and travelled from place to place throughout the region of Galatia and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples.

²⁴ Meanwhile a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was a learned man, with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures. ²⁵ He had been instructed in the way of the Lord, and he spoke with great fervour and taught about Jesus accurately, though he knew only the baptism of John. ²⁶ He began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately.

²⁷ When Apollos wanted to go to Achaia, the brothers and sisters encouraged him and wrote to the disciples there to welcome him. When he arrived, he was a great help to those who by grace had believed. ²⁸ For he vigorously refuted his Jewish opponents in public debate, proving from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Messiah.

Notes

Acts provides wonderfully helpful insights into the first small communities of believers. Here we see how Priscilla and Aquila accompanied Paul and mentored Apollos. We then hear of Apollos being a great help to the believers in Achaia. The flow of the narrative implies that this is a result of the mentoring he received from Priscilla and Aquila. They are not mentioned in verses 27 and 28 and only Apollos is praised. This is typical of the way God's kingdom works. We mentor others that they might become increasingly

wholehearted disciples of Jesus, as we see here with Apollos. This is for God's glory, not our own. Therefore we do not seek credit for ourselves, instead we praise God for his work of transformation in others and the privilege of playing our part in it. Priscilla and Aquila are mentioned in the books of Romans, 1 Corinthians, and 2 Timothy. Always with warm and appreciation. They are present in the background, leading a church, travelling to other areas of the region, quietly responding with obedience to the Holy Spirit.

We live in a society that prizes individual achievement and celebrity. People do things to receive accolades, fame, popularity and for many other reasons. As disciples of Jesus we are invited to be part of God's kingdom. Here we find a culture that is different to that of the society we live in. A culture where every individual is valued, loved by God, invited into relationship with Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit. Our focus is relationship with Jesus and with those he has called us into community with. We seek to follow Jesus wholeheartedly ourselves and to help others follow Jesus wholeheartedly.

Questions

- Have you sensed the Holy Spirit saying anything to you recently? Take time to share this with those in your small community.
- How can you help each other grow in confidence in hearing the Holy Spirit and responding in obedience?
- Wait in the presence of the Holy Spirit, listen to him, and pray for each other.

Application

- Set aside a specific amount of time each week to pray for each of the people in your small community and ask the Holy Spirit for specific encouragement for each person.
- If the Holy Spirit has given you specific encouragements then share them when you gather.

Week 6, Building a community that is dependent on the Holy Spirit

Introduction

On who or what do we place our dependence? Over the last two thousand years there has been a shift to depend less on faith and discipleship and increasingly on our own expertise in rational thinking, logic and reason. This is a double edged sword. Intellectual engagement with the Bible has produced much of our systematic understanding of who God is, the nature of creation, humanity, salvation and many other important aspects of doctrinal understanding. However, it has also brought about self-dependence and been a catalyst for relativism in place of absolute truth. In a society that is increasingly adrift from absolutes, how can we know what we should do or say in any situation? Our response to this must involve faith and reason. Reason will take us some of the way. God has created us as people with freewill, reason and understanding and invites us to study scripture. This is a healthy pursuit when done in submission to the sovereignty of God and the truth of his word. However, it often doesn't take us beyond the abstract general response. Specific action requires dependence on the Holy Spirit.

Take prayer, for example. We will each have many more people and situations that we could pray for than we have time for in any one day. We could create a system to pray for a planned set of people and situations each day. But what if Robert needs prayer now and we hadn't planned to pray for him until next week? Planned approaches to prayer are good, and it is very helpful to set aside specific times to pray. But, if we are to play our part in God's mission then our prayer also needs to be guided by the Holy Spirit, so that he can direct us to pray for people and situations at the times when our prayers are needed.

Or think about sharing the gospel. How will we know how to share the gospel with people in any situation? We can design systems and strategies that will help us (we will be introducing some of these in the coming weeks). But we can also be open to the Holy Spirit giving us specific directions. For example the Holy Spirit may give us a word, picture or sense and lead us to a specific person to share that with. That might be a work colleague on a Monday morning. Only the Holy Spirit can do that.

As disciples of Jesus, those who are choosing each day to follow Jesus, we are called into a life of complete dependence on the Holy Spirit. To allow the Holy Spirit to lead and guide us through our days, through our interactions with others, through the choices we make. Over the next few weeks we will explore together what this looks like in practice and how we can help and encourage each other to be increasingly dependent on the Holy Spirit.

+ Acts 16:6–40

⁶ Paul and his companions travelled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia. ⁷ When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to. ⁸ So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas. ⁹ During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, ‘Come over to Macedonia and help us.’ ¹⁰ After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

¹¹ From Troas we put out to sea and sailed straight for Samothrace, and the next day we went on to Neapolis. ¹² From there we travelled to Philippi, a Roman colony and the leading city of that district of Macedonia. And we stayed there several days.

¹³ On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there. ¹⁴ One of those listening was a woman from the city of Thyatira named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth. She was a worshipper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul’s message. ¹⁵ When she and the members of her household were baptised, she invited us to her home. ‘If you consider me a believer in the Lord,’ she said, ‘come and stay at my house.’ And she persuaded us.

¹⁶ Once when we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a female slave who had a spirit by which she predicted the future. She earned a great deal of money for her owners by fortune-telling. ¹⁷ She followed Paul and the rest of us, shouting, ‘These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved.’ ¹⁸ She kept this up for many days. Finally Paul became so annoyed that he turned round and said to the spirit, ‘In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her!’ At that moment the spirit left her.

¹⁹ When her owners realised that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the market-place to face the authorities. ²⁰ They brought them before the magistrates and said, ‘These men are Jews, and are throwing our city into an uproar ²¹ by advocating customs unlawful for us Romans to accept or practice.’

²² The crowd joined in the attack against Paul and Silas, and the magistrates ordered them to be stripped and beaten with rods. ²³ After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully. ²⁴ When he received these orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks.

²⁵ About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. ²⁶ Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everyone's chains came loose. ²⁷ The jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped. ²⁸ But Paul shouted, 'Don't harm yourself! We are all here!' ²⁹ The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. ³⁰ He then brought them out and asked, 'Sirs, what must I do to be saved?'

³¹ They replied, 'Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved – you and your household.' ³² Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. ³³ At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his household were baptised. ³⁴ The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God – he and his whole household.

³⁵ When it was daylight, the magistrates sent their officers to the jailer with the order: 'Release those men.' ³⁶ The jailer told Paul, 'The magistrates have ordered that you and Silas be released. Now you can leave. Go in peace.' ³⁷ But Paul said to the officers: 'They beat us publicly without a trial, even though we are Roman citizens, and threw us into prison. And now do they want to get rid of us quietly? No! Let them come themselves and escort us out.'

³⁸ The officers reported this to the magistrates, and when they heard that Paul and Silas were Roman citizens, they were alarmed. ³⁹ They came to appease them and escorted them from the prison, requesting them to leave the city. ⁴⁰ After Paul and Silas came out of the prison, they went to Lydia's house, where they met with the brothers and sisters and encouraged them. Then they left.

Notes

Throughout this passage we see that the Holy Spirit was leading Paul and his companions in God's mission. They were 'kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia (v. 6). Prevented by the Holy Spirit from entering Bythnia (v. 7). Then led by the Holy Spirit, through a vision, to travel to Macedonia (vv. 9–10). As we read the rest of the account we see how all the different parts fit together. Paul and Silas would not have seen this at the time. They would not have known that delivering the slave girl from the spirit that possessed her would lead to them being put in jail, which would in turn lead to them sharing the gospel with the jailer and his household who would choose to follow Jesus. All this happened as a result of God working through them, and that required that they responded in obedience to what the Holy Spirit asked of them.

How do we grow in our relationship with the Holy Spirit? Jesus is clear in his parting words to his disciples that he will send the Holy Spirit who will be with them and in them and teach them everything, guiding them into all truth (John 14:16–17, 26; 16:13–14). The biblical norm for disciples of Jesus is to be led by the Holy Spirit. Our first step is therefore to listen to him. It's evident from the account in Acts above that the Holy Spirit speaks in a way that Paul and his companions were confident that it was the Holy Spirit. We're not told the actual method (audible speech, speech in Paul's mind, dream, vision Paul saw with his eyes), but we can be confident that the method the Holy Spirit chose got Paul's attention. The Holy Spirit speaks to us in many different ways. There is not space here to look at all the different ways attested in the Bible, but do have a look through the Bible at some of the many different ways God has communicated with people, for example: Genesis 12:1–6; Exodus 3:1–15; Numbers 22:28–35; 2 Samuel 5:23–25; 1 Kings 19:4–16; Daniel 10:2–21; Mark 1:9–13; Acts 2:1–41; Acts 18:9–11; Revelation 1:1–2 What is clear is that we have to learn to recognise when the Holy Spirit is speaking to us. The young Samuel provides a good example of this process. Encouraged by Eli, he learns to recognise the voice of the Holy Spirit (1 Samuel 3). When we are learning, we have to ask the question, "could this be the Holy Spirit speaking?" Some tests we can apply are:

- Does what we're hearing agree with scripture? God's word is truth and he will not contradict it. This is the primary test out of which all others flow.
- Is it confirmed by others? Seek council from godly people you trust on what you're hearing
- Do you have peace about what the Holy Spirit is saying to you or asking of you?
- Is God glorified in what you're hearing and through any words and actions you would say or do in response?
- Is it a word of strengthening, encouragement and comfort?

Questions

- What do you think about the Holy Spirit speaking to you?
- What's your experience of the Holy Spirit speaking to you?
- How can you encourage each other in hearing the Holy Spirit?

Application

- Set aside a time each week to share what's on your heart with the Holy Spirit and keep a record of what you share.
- After you've shared, wait for the Holy Spirit to respond and keep a record of what the Holy Spirit is saying to you.

Week 7, Building a community that is dependent on the Holy Spirit

Acts 4:1–12

¹ The priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to Peter and John while they were speaking to the people. ² They were greatly disturbed because the apostles were teaching the people, proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead. ³ They seized Peter and John and, because it was evening, they put them in jail until the next day. ⁴ But many who heard the message believed; so the number of men who believed grew to about five thousand.

⁵ The next day the rulers, the elders and the teachers of the law met in Jerusalem. ⁶ Annas the high priest was there, and so were Caiaphas, John, Alexander and others of the high priest's family. ⁷ They had Peter and John brought before them and began to question them: 'By what power or what name did you do this?'

⁸ Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: 'Rulers and elders of the people! ⁹ If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a man who was lame and are being asked how he was healed, ¹⁰ then know this, you and all the people of Israel: it is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. ¹¹ Jesus is

“the stone you builders rejected,
which has become the cornerstone.”

¹² Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.'

Notes

This account gives us specific insight into Peter's dependence on the Holy Spirit. He and John are facing strong persecution for 'teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead.' In the face of this, their concern is not for their own safety. Rather it is to be obedient to the Holy Spirit. The questioning they receive from Annas, Caiaphas and others is not a warm conversation that they might find out more. This is an

attack; Peter and John are being challenged on their actions. Peter could have tried speaking only from his own experience, wisdom and intellect, but he doesn't. He is open to the presence of the Holy Spirit. The specific mention of Peter being filled with the Holy Spirit indicates that this was necessary for the words Peter then spoke.

Perhaps this account feels too far removed from the society we live in today and the types of situations we may face. However, even without the threat of being locked up, we are likely to find ourselves in situations where we are at a loss to know how to respond. In these situations we can retreat to responding out of our own experience, wisdom and intellect, or we can depend on the Holy Spirit to give us the words we need. God's knowledge is incomparably greater than ours and the Holy Spirit can lead us to saying the right words rather than just sharing some good words. The question we must face is, "are we willing to let the Holy Spirit lead in these situations?" This could be a conversation with a work colleague, a member of your family, a friend, a stranger.

Questions

- Have you been in a situation when you have depended on the Holy Spirit for the words to respond to someone? What was it like?
- How do you feel about letting the Holy Spirit guide you in these situations rather than relying on your own skills?
- Pray for each other to have courage to allow the Holy Spirit to lead you in conversations about Jesus.

Application

- In week 1 we made a list of people connected to your group who don't yet know Jesus.
- As you continue to pray for these people, ask God to provide opportunities to share with them about your relationship with Jesus.
- Begin each day by asking God to lead you to those opportunities today and to give you the courage to speak the words the Holy Spirit gives you.

Week 8, Building a community that is dependent on the Holy Spirit

Acts 9:10–20

¹⁰ In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, ‘Ananias!’

‘Yes, Lord,’ he answered.

¹¹ The Lord told him, ‘Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. ¹² In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight.’ ¹³ ‘Lord,’ Ananias answered, ‘I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your holy people in Jerusalem. ¹⁴ And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name.’

¹⁵ But the Lord said to Ananias, ‘Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel. ¹⁶ I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.’

¹⁷ Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, ‘Brother Saul, the Lord – Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here – has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.’ ¹⁸ Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul’s eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptised, ¹⁹ and after taking some food, he regained his strength. Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus. ²⁰ At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God.

Notes

The risk that Ananias took in going to see Saul becomes evident in what he says in verse 13 & 14. Saul represented a real threat to Ananias’ personal safety. Ananias doesn’t know that the Lord has already been at work bringing a mighty transformation in Saul’s life. Similarly we don’t know what the Holy Spirit has already been doing in the people he leads us to. So we should note the role of the Holy Spirit in what unfolds. Firstly, when we read that the ‘Lord told him’ we should understand this as the Holy Spirit telling him. Jesus makes this crystal clear in his final teaching to his disciples that he will ascend and

will send the Holy Spirit who will lead them. Next, we need to pay attention to the nature of the interaction between Ananias and the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit calls to him in a vision. This is not a dream and Ananias is evidently fully conscious in this interaction. He responds to the Holy Spirit and a two way conversation takes place. Note the clarity of the exchange. Ananias raises an objection. This could be seen as rejecting the Holy Spirit's wisdom, but he is not rebuked. Rather, he is given more information by the Holy Spirit so that he can understand more of God's plan. Ananias responds to this conversation with obedient action. He prays for Saul to see and to be filled with the Holy Spirit. Notice the two parts of Ananias' prayer. Saul could not have done the work God was calling him to without being filled with the Holy Spirit.

We're seeing God at work here equipping Saul for mission and involving Ananias in the process. Two thousand years later we should expect things to be no different. There are several billion people in the world who don't know Jesus and therefore there is much still to do. In Bristol there are just over 470000 people of which about 150000 have indicated their religious affiliation as Christian in the latest census. Sadly, we cannot assume that all who ticked that box will have a living relationship with Jesus. Whichever way we look at it, there is a huge mission field all around us. If we are to play our part in reaching these people we will need to learn to hear the Holy Spirit, engage in conversation with the Holy Spirit and respond in obedient action. We'll need to help, encourage and support each other as we learn together to do this.

Questions

- Have you had a conversation with the Holy Spirit? Share your experience of this with your small community.
- How might we learn to hear and share conversation with the Holy Spirit?
- How could you help, support and encourage each other in this?

Application

- Make a regular habit of meeting with a few people from your small community (in person or on video call) to pray together, specifically taking time to ask the Holy Spirit to speak to you.
- Share with each other what you sense the Holy Spirit is saying

Week 9, Building a community that is dependent on the Holy Spirit

Acts 9:31–43

³¹ Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace and was strengthened. Living in the fear of the Lord and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it increased in numbers.

³² As Peter travelled about the country, he went to visit the Lord's people who lived in Lydda. ³³ There he found a man named Aeneas, who was paralysed and had been bedridden for eight years. ³⁴ 'Aeneas,' Peter said to him, 'Jesus Christ heals you. Get up and roll up your mat.' Immediately Aeneas got up. ³⁵ All those who lived in Lydda and Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord.

³⁶ In Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (in Greek her name is Dorcas); she was always doing good and helping the poor. ³⁷ About that time she became ill and died, and her body was washed and placed in an upstairs room. ³⁸ Lydda was near Joppa; so when the disciples heard that Peter was in Lydda, they sent two men to him and urged him, 'Please come at once!'

³⁹ Peter went with them, and when he arrived he was taken upstairs to the room. All the widows stood round him, crying and showing him the robes and other clothing that Dorcas had made while she was still with them.

⁴⁰ Peter sent them all out of the room; then he got down on his knees and prayed. Turning towards the dead woman, he said, 'Tabitha, get up.' She opened her eyes, and seeing Peter she sat up. ⁴¹ He took her by the hand and helped her to her feet. Then he called for the believers, especially the widows, and presented her to them alive. ⁴² This became known all over Joppa, and many people believed in the Lord. ⁴³ Peter stayed in Joppa for some time with a tanner named Simon.

Notes

Here in Acts 9 we find an account of ministry during a time of peace for the Church. Notice that the followers of Jesus were ‘living in the fear of the Lord and [being] encouraged by the Holy Spirit.’ The Holy Spirit is still active during peaceful times and as a result the church increases in numbers. Peter is travelling around the country and ministering to people. We’re not explicitly told of the Holy Spirit’s interaction with Peter, but we can be confident that Peter’s actions are initiated and led by the Holy Spirit. Peter prays for Aeneas who is healed. Note the simplicity, confidence and directness of his prayer. Peter then goes to Joppa in response to a request from two men, Peter is now walking into a situation he would have no human way of knowing how to handle. He finds a dead woman surrounded by grieving relatives and friends—and Peter has been summoned to do something! Peter’s first action is to pray. We’re not told what he prays, perhaps it was something like “Lord help me, what shall I do?” The Holy Spirit leads Peter simply to tell Tabitha to ‘get up.’

There is much to take note of here:

- The Lord’s power to heal.
- The involvement of Peter, a follower of Jesus, in the Lord’s work of healing Aeneas and raising Tabitha from the dead.
- The simplicity of Peter’s prayers.
- Peter’s dependence on speaking first to the Holy Spirit before taking action.
- The miracles of healing that are present in the work God has called Peter to.

Two thousand years later we might think that things have changed and that these types of encounters are no longer needed. As we learnt last week, the mission field in this city alone is vast and many of the people in this city who don’t know Jesus are hurting, or sick, or troubled with anxiety. The Lord has not changed, he is still working through his children in the power of the Holy Spirit and the name of Jesus to heal people, to forgive them, and to invite them into life with Jesus.

Questions

- What do you think Luke and his fellow believers meant by 'living in the fear of the Lord' (verse 31)?
- How do you think that 'living in the fear of the Lord and [being] encouraged by the Holy Spirit' lead to the growth of the church?
- What might this look like for you as you seek to follow Jesus wholeheartedly?
- How can you encourage each other to be expectant that miracles will be a normal part of our work as we respond in obedience to the Holy Spirit?

Application

- Read Ephesians 3:14–21 daily and make it your own prayer.
- Ask God to do 'immeasurably more than all you ask or imagine' (verse 20) in and through you in the lives of those you are already praying for.

Week 10, Building a community that is confident in the gospel

Introduction

In week 9 we read in Acts 9:31 that as the followers of Jesus were ‘living in the fear of the Lord and encouraged by the Holy Spirit’ the church increased in numbers. A key part of becoming increasingly wholehearted disciples of Jesus is that we will become increasingly confident in the gospel. That is, we will know Jesus more deeply and be more ready and equipped to share our stories of encounter with him with those who don’t yet know him.

Telling people about our relationship with Jesus is not an optional extra in our lives. Neither is it exclusively the work of those followers of Jesus who are gifted in evangelism. It is something we are all invited to do as a natural part of our relationship with Jesus and our desire that other people would come to know Jesus as we do. God’s kingdom grows and is established here on earth through every follower of Jesus speaking to people about Jesus.

Some of us will feel more confident in this work, others less so. As a community, we help each other grow in confidence in this work. Over the next few weeks we will deepen our understanding of the gospel, become more confident in sharing our stories of encounter, and seek God’s wisdom, through the Holy Spirit, about who to share our stories with.

Philemon 1:1–7

¹ Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother,

To Philemon our dear friend and fellow worker – ² also to Apphia our sister and Archippus our fellow soldier – and to the church that meets in your home:

³ Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

⁴ I always thank my God as I remember you in my prayers, ⁵ because I hear about your love for all his holy people and your faith in the Lord Jesus. ⁶ I pray that your partnership with us in the faith may be effective in deepening your understanding of every good thing we share for the sake of Christ. ⁷ Your love has given me great joy and encouragement, because you, brother, have refreshed the hearts of the Lord’s people.

Notes

Paul writes such encouraging words to Philemon, Apphia, Archippus and the church that meets in their home. Paul highlights the following things in his encouragement.

- their love for all God's holy people
- their faith in the Lord Jesus
- their work refreshing the hearts of the Lord's people

We see here a practical outworking of Jesus' summary of the law:

Matthew 22:37–39

³⁷ “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ ³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹ And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’”

In addition to encouraging them for their love for and work with the Lord's people, Paul also prays for them. He prays that they will have a deepening understanding of ‘every good thing we share for the sake of Christ.’ Not only a deepening understanding of the gospel, but a deepening understanding of the gift of living their lives for Jesus. This deepening understanding is the basis for ‘bearing fruit in every good work’

Colossians 1:9–10

⁹ For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you. We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives, ¹⁰ so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God

This is an active, whole-of-life, kind of knowledge. Knowledge of the gospel and action flowing out of it are inseparable. The more we understand who Jesus is and get to know him through the Holy Spirit, the more we desire to serve him in every area of our lives. Throughout our lives as followers of Jesus this is a day by day process. As we walk with Jesus, we grow closer to him, know him more deeply and serve him more wholeheartedly.

Questions

- How would you describe the gospel?
 - Work together in conversation to describe all that is offered through Jesus.
- How are you, together, 'deepening your understanding of every good thing we share for the sake of Christ?'

Application

- Read Mark's Gospel through, in one sitting if you can.
- Write your own brief account of the gospel.

Week 11, Building a community that is confident in the gospel

Romans 1:1–17

¹ Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God – ² the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures ³ regarding his Son, who as to his earthly life was a descendant of David, ⁴ and who through the Spirit of holiness was appointed the Son of God in power by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord. ⁵ Through him we received grace and apostleship to call all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith for his name's sake. ⁶ And you also are among those Gentiles who are called to belong to Jesus Christ.

⁷ To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be his holy people: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

⁸ First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is being reported all over the world. ⁹ God, whom I serve in my spirit in preaching the gospel of his Son, is my witness how constantly I remember you ¹⁰ in my prayers at all times; and I pray that now at last by God's will the way may be opened for me to come to you.

¹¹ I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong – ¹² that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith. ¹³ I do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, that I planned many times to come to you (but have been prevented from doing so until now) in order that I might have a harvest among you, just as I have had among the other Gentiles. ¹⁴ I am a debtor both to Greeks and non-Greeks, both to the wise and the foolish. ¹⁵ That is why I am so eager to preach the gospel also to you who are in Rome.

¹⁶ For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile. ¹⁷ For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed – a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: 'The righteous will live by faith.'

Notes

In this passage, Paul begins by summarising the gospel. We catch something of his passion to share the gospel with others and his commitment to the truth of who Jesus is and what he has done for us. Paul frequently refers to the followers of Jesus as God's holy people. This reminds us that, in Christ, we are set apart. We are meant to be different, distinguishable from the society and culture in which we live.

Paul thanks God for the followers of Jesus in Rome *because* their faith is reported all over the world. His reassurance that they are holding fast to their faith in Jesus is that others are aware of their faith. Not just others in their community, but people across the world. Even with this reassurance he still longs to see them so that he 'may impart to [them] some spiritual gift to make [them] strong.' It's important to notice that Paul's hope here is that they would be 'mutually encouraged by each other's faith.' We see in these words the importance of being a community where each person is active in sharing their faith with each other. Being a follower of Jesus is not a solitary walk, rather, it is intentionally and necessarily a life of community with other followers of Jesus. Our faith is strengthened through hearing each other share about our faith in Jesus.

Just in case we were not certain of Paul's confidence in the gospel he declares plainly, 'I am not ashamed of the gospel.' We see his confidence in the gospel outworked throughout Paul's ministry as he endures persecution for the sake of the gospel. Our actions are the indication of how confident we are in the gospel. If we are willing to declare, as Paul does, 'I am not ashamed of the gospel,' then we must also be willing to share with others our accounts of what Jesus has done for us and how our lives are transformed through being his followers.

Questions

- How does Paul's summary of the gospel in Romans 1:1–6 compare with your own summary from last week?
 - Does Paul's account prompt you to add details to your account?
- How confident are you in the gospel? In what ways is this demonstrated in your actions?
- Share with each other and pray for each other to have greater confidence.

 **Application**

- Write down a brief account of how you became a follower of Jesus.
- Share your story with the other members of your small community.
- Pray for opportunities to share your story with those who don't yet know Jesus.

There are several resources listed at the end of these notes. These are tools and practical approaches that will help equip us to be confident in the gospel and in sharing it with those who don't yet know Jesus.

Week 12, Building a community that is confident in the gospel

Mark 9:1–10

¹ And he said to them, ‘Truly I tell you, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see that the kingdom of God has come with power.’

² After six days Jesus took Peter, James and John with him and led them up a high mountain, where they were all alone. There he was transfigured before them. ³ His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them. ⁴ And there appeared before them Elijah and Moses, who were talking with Jesus.

⁵ Peter said to Jesus, ‘Rabbi, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters – one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.’ ⁶ (He did not know what to say, they were so frightened.)

⁷ Then a cloud appeared and covered them, and a voice came from the cloud: ‘This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!’

⁸ Suddenly, when they looked around, they no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus.

⁹ As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus gave them orders not to tell anyone what they had seen until the Son of Man had risen from the dead. ¹⁰ They kept the matter to themselves, discussing what ‘rising from the dead’ meant.

Notes

Peter, James and John had an encounter with Jesus that was beyond anything they had witnessed up to that point. They witnessed something of Jesus’ divinity and sovereignty. This is beyond rational explanation, we simply don’t have earthly words or categories with which we can begin to understand the full impact of this encounter on these disciples. Evidently, Peter was also struggling to make sense of it and in his fear and uncertainty he suggested putting up shelters – as if they needed them! How are we to make sense of this? Through our own encounter with Jesus, which, according to Jesus (read John 14

and 16) is through our encounter with the Holy Spirit. Like Peter, James and John, our encounter with the Holy Spirit is at times likely to be beyond rational explanation. We might experience an undeniable sense of God's presence, or an inner sense to pray for or with someone, or see images or visions that we just know are from the Holy Spirit, or feel a prompting to focus on a specific passage of scripture. If someone were to ask us how we know this we might find ourselves saying something like 'I'm not sure how, but I just know.' This is faith in action. Our faith in the risen Lord Jesus.

Jesus instructs Peter, James and John 'not to tell anyone what they had seen until the Son of Man had risen from the dead.' We know that at some point they shared what they had witnessed as it's recorded in the gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, and in 2 Peter. Our encounters with the Holy Spirit do not have to be kept secret. Far from it! We should be ready to share with others the day to day reality of living our lives with the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit.

Questions

- Share stories with each other of times you have encountered Jesus in ways that have been significant for you.
- What is your day to day experience of encounter with the Holy Spirit?
- How would you share a story of encounter with the Holy Spirit with someone who doesn't yet know Jesus?

Application

- Think about your most recent encounter with the Holy Spirit and write down:
 - a sentence or two about the encounter
 - a sentence or two about how the encounter has changed you
- Share your story with someone

Week 13, Building a community that is confident in the gospel

1 Peter 2:4–10

⁴ As you come to him, the living Stone – rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him – ⁵ you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. ⁶ For in Scripture it says:

‘See, I lay a stone in Zion,
a chosen and precious cornerstone,
and the one who trusts in him
will never be put to shame.’

⁷ Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe,

‘The stone the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone,’

⁸ and,

‘A stone that causes people to stumble
and a rock that makes them fall.’

They stumble because they disobey the message – which is also what they were destined for.

⁹ But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. ¹⁰ Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

Notes

Jesus builds his church by building us into ‘a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood.’ Not bricks and mortar, but living stones. The buildings in which we meet are just buildings. We, as followers of Jesus, are his church wherever, whenever, and in whatever numbers we gather. Jesus is the precious cornerstone on which we are built, the one in whom we trust. This truth helps us to understand what it looks like for us to be church.

Historically we may have heard phrases such as “I go to church,” “church was good today,” “I heard a great talk at church this morning.” This type of language is built around the mindset that church is a service in a special building. Jesus invites us into a far more exciting reality that requires both our language about church and our actions as church to shift. Our primary focus becomes obedience to Jesus. Our words and actions become those which move us and help move others toward increasing obedience to Jesus.

Obedience to Jesus includes being sent out by him. Jesus sent out his twelve disciples (Luke 9:1–6) and his seventy two disciples (Luke 10:1–17). His instructions to them were ‘to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal the sick’ (Luke 9:2) and to ‘heal the sick who are there and tell them, “The kingdom of God has come near to you.”’ (Luke 10:9). This is what it looks like for Jesus to build his church through his disciples. We are his disciples today and we play our part in similar ways. As the Holy Spirit leads us, we are to heal the sick in Jesus’ name and proclaim the kingdom of God.

In verse 9 we read about our identity as followers of Jesus. We ‘are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession.’ As this people we are to ‘declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.’ Here, to declare means to tell out or to make known by praising or proclaiming.

What does this look like in our daily lives? As a community we share with each other our excitement, joy, confidence and hope in Jesus. And we allow this excitement, joy, confidence and hope to fill us and overflow from our community to those who don’t yet know Jesus. We go out in twos, or in greater numbers, and share our stories of encounter with those who have yet to encounter Jesus.

Questions

- How do you feel about being a living stone being built by Jesus into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood?
- How do you find sharing your stories of encounter with those who have not yet encountered Jesus?
- Jesus sends his disciples out in twos. How can you work together in proclaiming the gospel?

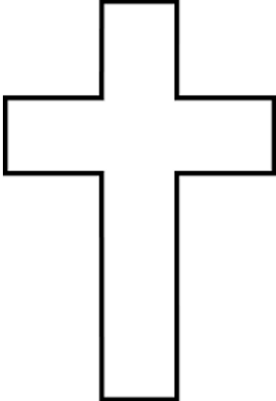
Application

- Meet with one or two other people and ask the Holy Spirit who you should share your stories of encounter with.
- Work out how you can help each other share with these people.
- Share your stories of encounter with these people.

Resources

Six word Stories

Six word stories are a useful tool to help us tell our stories of encounter with Jesus in a way that is brief and easy to understand. The template below will help you construct one.

| | | |
|---|--|--|
| | Two words about how you connected with Jesus _____ _____ | |
| Two words about your life before Jesus brought transformation _____ _____ |  | Two words about how Jesus has transformed your life. _____ _____ |

Here's an example

| Two words about your life before Jesus brought transformation | Two words about how you connected with Jesus | Two words about how Jesus has transformed your life |
|--|---|--|
| Lonely | Love | Exciting |
| Hopeless | Courage | Joy-filled |

And here's a story using those words:

There was a time in my life when I felt **lonely** and **hopeless**, but I met Jesus and he showed me **love** and gave me **courage** so that now I live an **exciting** and **joy-filled** life. Do you have a story like that?

Evangelism Tennis

The term 'evangelism tennis' was defined by Lawrence Singlehurst. It is a really helpful way to think about how we share conversations about Jesus with people.

Think of these conversations like a game of tennis and ask the question, "who's got the ball?" Wait until the ball is in your court before returning it.

Imagine that you are chatting to a friend or colleague on a Monday morning and they ask, "how was your weekend?"

They have just hit the ball into your court. If you have met with other followers of Jesus over the weekend, this is an opportunity to say something about that and about your relationship with Jesus. You might respond,

"I had a great time with friends, we prayed for each other and I felt aware of the presence of Jesus."

You have now returned the ball to their court. If they take the conversation somewhere else then that is a signal that it's not time to say more about Jesus. Perhaps they respond,

"Oh, that's nice for you. I really enjoyed a trip to the beach, the waves were huge.

The ball is back in your court, but, allow the other person to lead the conversation. You could respond with,

"Sounds cool, tell me more about your trip"

If, however, they responded with something related to what you had shared about prayer and Jesus. Perhaps something like,

"What do you mean, you felt aware of the presence of Jesus?"

Then, they have returned the ball to your court and given you permission to say a little more about your relationship with Jesus.

The key to all of this is to leave people positive for their next interaction with the Holy Spirit. We speak to them about Jesus in response to the level of interest they show.

It may feel scary to say something about our relationship with Jesus. However, if Jesus is the person we are following with our lives then talking about our relationship with him is important.

Evangelical Alliance: Talking Jesus

The Evangelical Alliance have produced an excellent series called Talking Jesus.

The material can be found on their website, www.eauk.org/news-and-views/series/talking-jesus-what-does-the-research-mean-for-evangelism.

They introduce the series as follows:

Welcome to our blog series exploring the new Talking Jesus research and what it means for evangelism today. We pray it freshly encourages and challenges you to talk about Jesus more confidently and intentionally than ever. Let's get talking Jesus!

As you engage with this series, members of the Evangelical Alliance staff team will set out some of the key findings from the Talking Jesus research and answer the question, what does this mean for us as God's people?

We are passionate about this research because we know that facts can change people's understanding and behaviour. This research can bring confidence to the church and to all of us who follow Jesus and who long to see others come to faith.

Alpha

Alpha is a great tool for enabling people of no faith, some faith, or different faith to share conversations about Jesus. The approach taken in Alpha is to encourage people to ask questions and to share conversation together about what they think and feel. It can be an effective tool for small communities to use to engage with people who don't yet know Jesus.

Information and resources are available at alpha.org/