



A
WELL
Church?

CHRIST CHURCH
HOME-GROUPS
Summer 2010

The diary for this term looks like this:

Wednesday 5th May

PRAYER MEETING

Week beginning 10th May

Home-Group session 1

Week beginning 17th May

Home Group session 2

Week beginning 24th May

Home Group session 3

Wednesday 2nd June

PRAYER MEETING

Week beginning 7th June

Home Group session 4

Week beginning 14th June

Home Group session 5

Week beginning 21st June

Home Group session 6

Week beginning 28th June

Home Group session 7

Wednesday 7th July

PRAYER MEETING

Week beginning 12th July

Home Group session 8

CHRIST CHURCH, MORETON

We want to be a **W**elcoming Church

Because Jesus welcomed all who came to him

an **E**vangelsing Church

*Because we believe that everyone has the right to hear the
Good News of Jesus*

a **L**oving Church

*Because Jesus commanded his followers to love one
another*

a **L**earning Church

*Because we are in the business of making disciples, and
disciples must always be learners*

A WELL Church?

It is something that every car owner will know about – the MOT. The series of tests carried out on a car to make sure that it is in good working condition.

But cars aren't the only thing which need that sort of check up. It is good now and again to look at the church, to make sure that it is running as it should.

Back in 2002 Christ Church took up the vision of being a WELL Church – Welcoming, Evangelising, Loving & Learning. Since then, we have been working at each of these things – and now, 8 years on, it seems a good time to give ourselves an MOT; to look again at each of those things, to ask why they are important, to see how well we are putting them into practice, and to think about how we can move forwards in this vision.

So – over the 8 sessions of our summer 2010 home-group series, we will spend 2 weeks looking again at each in turn.

Being a WELL Church

1. Welcoming (i)

WELCOME

What is the least enjoyable place or event you have been to? What was so wrong about it?

WORSHIP

God welcomes us into his family not because we are special, but because he loves us unconditionally. Spend some time praising God for accepting you and making you part of his family.

WORD

Think of a time when you went into a new situation for the first time. It might have been the first day at a new job, or a visit to a club, or to a hospital, or to church.

What was the worst thing about it?

The first of our 4 characteristics for Christ Church is that we should be a welcoming church. In what ways do you think that Christ Church is welcoming? Are there ways in which we are not welcoming?

One of our main motivations for being a welcoming church is that Jesus himself welcomed people. Look at the following passages from Luke's gospel, and see what they tell you about Jesus attitude to other people.

Luke 5:1-11

Luke 5:27-32

Luke 7:36-39

Luke 19:1-10

As a church we should aim to be like Jesus. What can each of these passages tell us about what it means to be welcoming?

Jesus didn't just act in a welcoming way. Some of his parables also point to the importance of welcome.

Look at:

Luke 15:1-2, 11-32

Luke 18:9-14

Being a WELL Church

2. Welcoming (ii)

What do these tell you about Jesus' attitude to people?

What do they tell you about being a welcoming community?

Imagine that you were coming to Christ Church for the first time (maybe to a service, maybe to something in the Parish Centre). What sort of things would make you feel welcomed? What sort of things would make you less likely to come again?

WORK

- 1) Pray about how we as a church can be more like Jesus in our welcome to others.
- 2) What will you do over the next few weeks to make us a more welcoming community? Share this with each other, and then pray for each other.

WELCOME

Who do you most enjoy being with? Why?

WORSHIP

Psalm 62 & 63 are great hymns of dependence on God. Use them to lead you into praising God for the times he has helped and encouraged you.

WORD

We are continuing thinking about what it means to be a welcoming church. Although I have met people who think that they can be Christians without being involved in a church, this is certainly not how Jesus or the writers of the New Testament saw it. Although becoming a Christian involves a personal individual commitment, it also involves you becoming a part of the church – as John Stott has said, 'Christianity that doesn't start with the individual, doesn't start. Christianity that ends with the individual, ends.'

Every Christian should be part of a church. But that means that as a church we must be ready to welcome new people – not just those who aren't yet Christians, but also those who have maybe moved into the area, and are looking for a church to be part of, or those

who for whatever reason have become disillusioned with church. And one of the key ways in which we can be welcoming is to be a church where people find encouragement.

Read Hebrews 10:19-23

- *How is it possible for us to draw near to God? What has Jesus done to make it possible?*

- *How can we have full assurance of faith?*

- *Why should realising this make us want to 'spur one another on towards love and good deeds'?*

- *Why should looking forwards to the return of the Lord Jesus (the Day, v.25) make us want to meet together and encourage one another?*

- *What would you say to a Christian who said that they don't go to church because they don't get anything out of it?*

- *Do you find times of meeting with other Christians encouraging? What should be involved in being an encouraging community?*

Read 1 Thessalonians 2:10-12

It is important to understand 'encouraging' in the right way. It isn't a bland being nice to everyone all the time, but at times it could involve challenging someone about something they are doing.

- *Why was it important for Paul to be able to say that he, Silas and Timothy had lived 'holy, righteous and blameless' lives when they were in Thessalonica?*

- *How can our individual lifestyles act as an encouragement for others?*

- *How might the way we live become a source of discouragement for others?*

WORK

'Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another.' What could you do to make sure that our services on Sunday are times of encouragement, for both regular members, and for newcomers?

What about the people at Christ Church who you don't really know? How could you build relationships with them and encourage them?

Being a WELL Church

3. Evangelising (i)

WELCOME

What do you get most enthusiastic about?

WORSHIP

At its most basic evangelism is sharing with others what God has done for you. Spend some time thinking about what God has done for you, and then praise him for it.

WORD

How do you respond to the word 'evangelism'? With enthusiasm? Or anxiety? Why do you feel like this?

How would you define 'evangelism'?

Why is it so important?

Read Acts 2:42-47

The church just after Pentecost was growing rapidly. What was it that was bringing new converts into the church daily?

Read Acts 8:26-40

How did Philip get the opportunity to share the gospel with the Ethiopian?

It seems that in the early church it was the lifestyle of the Christian community that prompted others to want to find out about Jesus, but that also the Christians were ready to take any opportunity to share their faith.

Read Matthew 9:35-38

Hopefully you will have recognised our theme verse for 2010 there!

What was it that aroused Jesus' compassion for the people?

What would it mean for us to have a similar compassion for the people of Moreton?

Jesus seems to have recognised that his people wouldn't naturally go out and tell others about him – he literally told the disciples to pray that the Lord would 'thrust out' workers. Only God can give his people the motivation to take the risk of sharing the good news with others.

Why are we so often reluctant to tell others about Jesus?

In **1 Peter 3:10**, Peter writes: *But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.*

What reasons might your friends and family have for asking you that question?

How would you answer them?

Tell the others in the group something about what it means to you to be a Christian (if you can't tell other Christians, it will be very difficult to tell non-Christian friends!)

WORK

'Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.' Take some time to do that! Pray not only that the Lord will send out others into his harvest field, but also that he will motivate you to be part of that.

Hopefully we will again be running 'Christianity Explored' in the autumn. Although that might seem a long way off, now is the time to start thinking and praying about who you might bring to it.

And don't forget that next week we meet as a church to pray – please plan to be there.

Being a WELL Church

4. Evangelising (ii)

WELCOME

This is the time of year when gardens begin to come to life. If you had green fingers (and an ideal climate!), and could grow anything you wanted to, what would you have in your garden?

WORSHIP

Psalm 145 begins *I will exalt you, my God the King, I will praise your name for ever and ever. Every day I will praise you and extol your name for ever and ever.* The psalm then goes on to give many reasons why we should praise the Lord. Use verses from the psalm to praise God.

WORD

There have been times when I have heard an evangelist speak, and they have explained the gospel so clearly, and have called for a response so sensitively, that I have been sure that any non-Christian listening is bound to be convinced, and would want to respond. But more often than not, they don't. I know people who have heard the good news so many times, and yet still have ignored the message.

I guess that all of us doing this study will have family or friends who we would love to become Christians. Maybe we have had

opportunities to speak to them about Jesus, but with no response at all.

Why is it that some people can hear the good news, and respond, whilst for others it just seems to go in one ear and out the other? Why do some people respond joyfully to the message of Jesus, whilst others seem completely resistant to it?

Read Mark 4:1-20

The parable of the sower is one of Jesus' best known parables. In v.12, the disciples ask Jesus about the parables. How would you summarise Jesus' answer?

We usually expect preachers to speak in a way which will make things clearer (whether they succeed or not is another matter!) But Jesus seems to say that he used parables to keep things hidden. How do parables like this one help Jesus' followers to understand his kingdom, but hinder the understanding of those who do not follow him?

Jesus tells the disciples that the seed is "the word" (v.14) What does that mean?

Who do you think is the farmer?

In his explanation of parables, Jesus quotes the book of Isaiah. The quotation is taken from Isaiah 6, where Isaiah is first of all commissioned by God as a prophet, and then told that even though he will speak God's words, the people will not listen. If God knew that they wouldn't listen, why did he give Isaiah the job of speaking?

In quoting from Isaiah, Jesus seems to be saying that the purpose of the parables is to prevent people from turning and being forgiven. What do you think he means?

Look through Jesus explanation of the parable in verses 14-20. What kind of people are described by the four different types of soil?

Do you know people like these?

You should never try to make every element in a parable stand for something – it is the general thrust of the story which is important. However, maybe there is something significant in the fact that the farmer sows the seed on bad soil as well as good – presumably with the exception of the path he wouldn't know beforehand which was the good soil, and which had weeds in it, or rocks under it.

How might this influence the way in which we share the gospel with others?

Read Mark 4:21-35

Given what Jesus has just said in the parable of the sower, what do you think he means when he talks of people who hide their light under a bowl?

How might we be tempted to do this?

What encouragements do the parables of the growing seed and the mustard seed (v.26-34) give us about the growth of God's kingdom?

WORK

In Ephesians 6:19, Paul says *Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel.* Are there people who you would like to share the good news with? Pray for opportunities, and pray that when those opportunities arise, God will enable you to use them wisely.

Being a WELL Church

5. Loving (i)

WELCOME

What makes a good friend?

WORSHIP

One of the most amazing things the Bible tells us is that God loves us. Either sing, read, or listen to Stuart Townend's song 'How deep the Father's love for us.'

WORD

How important are relationships to you? Are you naturally someone who makes lots of friends, or only a few?

How about Christ Church? Do you find loving and supportive relationships within the church? If you do, how important are they to you?

Do you think that Christ Church could be called a loving church? In what ways are we good, in what ways have we still got things to learn?

Read 1 John 3:11-20 and 1 John 4:7-12

How do these passages describe love?

Why is love so important in the church?

What things might stop us from loving one another?

Someone once said '*Jesus did not die just so that we would tolerate each other.*' How does thinking about what Jesus has done for you affect the way you feel about other Christians?

In 1 John 4:16, John makes one of the great statements of the Bible – *God is love*. Usually we read this as a description of what God is like. But it can just as easily tell us what real love is like. From what the Bible tells us about God, what sort of characteristics should Christian love have?

What do you think John means when he says we shouldn't love each other *with words or tongue*?

And what does it mean to love *in actions and in truth*?

Do you find it easy to put this into practice with your friends?

How about with the other members of your home-group?

And what about with people you just don't get on with?

Why is it important to love not only our friends, but all the other members of Christ Church?

I have heard it said *I might have to love someone, but that doesn't mean I have to like them*. Do you think that this is an adequate Christian response?

WORK

Talk of a loving church can be very vague! Try to come up with 2 or 3 practical suggestions as to how we can love one another 'in actions and in truth'.

There is always a big temptation to think about how we can love those who we get on well with. But there is a close connection between being a loving church and being a welcoming church – especially in the way we respond to new people and build relationships with them. Is there someone who you could make an effort to build a relationship with this week?

Being a WELL Church

6. Loving (ii)

WELCOME

What do you think is the most useful thing in the world?

WORSHIP

Psalm 68:19 says 'Praise be to the Lord, to God our Saviour, who daily bears our burdens. Praise God for the times in which you have been aware of him supporting you.'

WORD

One of my least-favourite poems of all time is W.E.Henley's '*Invictus*'

*Out of the night that covers me,
black as the pit from pole to pole,
I thank whatever gods may be
For my unconquerable soul*

*It matters not how strait the gate,
How charged with punishments the scroll,
I am the master of my fate:
I am the captain of my soul.*

What rubbish! It might be nice to think that we are big enough to cope with anything that life throws at us – but it is much more realistic to admit that there are times when all of us need help.

The Bible is, as usual, much more realistic about life. We do need support – and the church is the place where we should be able to find it.

Read Galatians 5:16-6:10

Galatians 5:19-21 gives us a list of ‘the acts of the sinful nature’. Although very few people do all these things, so often one or another of us do fail in one or another of these areas.

- *How should we respond if we find another Christian sinning?*

- *Should we respond differently to things which are often considered to be ‘big’ issues like sexual immorality as opposed to ‘everyday’ issues like selfishness or jealousy?*

- *What do you think Paul means by saying that we should be gentle? Does it mean we should be soft on sin?*

- *And how might this lead us into temptation? How can we protect ourselves (and one another) from temptation?*

In 6:2, Paul tells us to ‘carry one another’s burdens.’

- *What sort of burdens might people within Christ Church have which they can’t carry alone?*

- *What might carrying those burdens mean in practice?*

- *How can we make sure that we don’t become ‘weary in doing good’? When faced with others who need help, how do we keep ourselves from burning out?*

Remember that we are not just talking about what we can do in our own strength. Psalm 68:19 says, *Praise be to the Lord, to God our Saviour, who daily bears our burdens.* When we support one another, we are sharing in the Lord’s work.

WORK

Do you know of anyone in Christ Church who needs support at the moment? How might you give that support?

And what about people in the wider church? Around the world millions of Christians face poverty, starvation, persecution. How could you support them?

Being a WELL Church

7. Learning (i)

WELCOME

What is your happiest memory of your school days?

WORSHIP

Psalm 19 is a great song of praise to God, but also a song about how precious God's word is. Either read the psalm together, or use songs based on it to thank God for his word.

WORD

What is the most exciting thing you have learned about God since becoming a Christian?

Where did you learn it?

What is the most surprising thing you have learned in the last year about being a Christian?

Again, where did you learn it?

Read Romans 12:1-8

Why do you think Paul says that we need to have our minds renewed (v.2)?

How do you think this happens?

What might some of the differences be between 'the pattern of this world' and 'God's good, pleasing and perfect will'?

How can we help each other to allow God's word to influence not only the obviously 'spiritual' areas of our lives, but everything we do?

In what areas of your life are you most aware of needing to learn to apply your faith?

Learning is never an end in itself – in fact I think that as a Christian you haven't really learn something unless you have started to put it into practice. It has been said that God will only teach us as far as we are willing to obey.

Has there ever been a time in your life where you have found it difficult to obey what you have learned?

Read 2 Peter 3:14-18

The Bible isn't always easy to understand – even Peter found Paul's writings 'hard to understand' (v.16)! I think that we all need help to understand the Bible and to apply it to every area of our lives – I know I do.

When the Bible was first translated into English around 500 years ago, many people learned to read just so they would be able to read the Bible. Compared with them, we have many resources for 'growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ' (v.18)

What things might stop us from being enthusiastic to learn more?

How can we encourage each other to want to learn more?

WORK

In what ways can you encourage one another to 'grow in your knowledge and love of God'? Have there been things which have helped you, which you can pass on to others?

In a world where there is so much to occupy us, we will only learn the things of God if he gives us a hunger. Pray that he will make you hungry to know more of him through his word.

Being a WELL Church

8. Learning (ii)

WELCOME

What makes a good listener?

WORSHIP

Psalm 119 is a reminder of the value of God's word – every one of its 176 verses refers in some way to God's words. I'm not suggesting that you read the whole psalm together, but find some verses which express what you want to say in praise to God, and in thanks for his word.

WORD

We've been looking at being a WELL church. But how do we know that welcoming, evangelising, loving and learning are so important?

We might answer that by saying that other churches which are growing make a priority of these things. There may be some truth in this – but that isn't the main reason we have for aiming to do these things. Each week we have explored these things by looking at the Bible – because if we want to be a church which pleases the Lord, we need to be modelling ourselves on what God says to us, rather than on what other people tell us. The most important thing for any church, as for any individual Christian, is listening to God.

Read 2 Timothy 3:1-4:5

- *Do you think that what Paul says in v.1-5 is a good description of people today?*
- *Are there any of the things he says which aren't true of our society?*
- *How can the church show itself to be different from this without seeming to be irrelevant?*
- *In this context, why is the Bible so important?*
- *Have there been situations in your life where the Bible has:*
 - *taught you?*
 - *rebuked you?*
 - *corrected you*
 - *helped you live a more Christ-like life (which is what I think 'training in righteousness' means)*

Paul sees the work of the preacher as being to enable the word of God to have this effect in people's lives (4:2)

- *How can you encourage our preaching team at Christ Church to be increasingly effective in doing this?*

The New Testament writers see Scripture as being the main way in which God speaks to us. Do you spend enough time listening to what God has to say in the Bible?

Read Ephesians 4:7-16

In Ephesians 4:11 Paul lists 4 ministries which God has given to the church (v.11-12). There is some uncertainty about what exactly these ministries involve, but the general idea seems to be:

- ❖ APOSTLES – Witnesses of the resurrection, and the authority behind the books of the New Testament. It follows that there can be no apostles in the New Testament sense of the word today.
- ❖ PROPHETS – Those who speak God's words to others or to the church.
- ❖ EVANGELISTS – Those who are able to explain the gospel in such a way as to bring others to repentance and faith.
- ❖ PASTORS & TEACHERS – Those who help others understand and apply what the Bible says.
- *Why is each of these important? (v.12)*
- *Why should 'works of service' lead to spiritual maturity (v.12-13)?*
- *How might each of these ministries build up the church?*

Finally – read Matthew 7:24-27

It's one of Jesus' best known parables, and applies specifically to what has gone before in the Sermon on the Mount. But I think it is legitimate to apply it to all that we read in the Bible, which is 'the Word of the Lord.'

Both the wise and foolish builders heard the word, but only one did anything about it. In what ways might we be tempted to hear the word but not put it into practice?

The effect of doing this is disastrous. I know several people who know a lot about the Bible, and who sometimes seem to know more about the Christian faith than some Christians do! But they have done nothing with that knowledge. As we come to the end of this series, are there things that you need to stop just hearing and start acting on?

'Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says!'

James 1:22