

A LIFE WORTH LIVING AND A CHURCH WORTH JOINING

HOMEGROUP PROGRAMME for this term

Wednesday 3 rd Jan.	Prayer Meeting
w/b Mon 8 th Jan	Home Groups restart – social evening
w/b Mon 15 th Jan	Study 1 – Dare to be different.
w/b Mon 22 nd Jan	Study 2 – Let your light shine
w/b Mon 29 th Jan	Study 3 – Relationships
Wednesday 7 th Feb	Prayer Meeting
w/b Mon 12 th Feb	Study 4 – Right Priorities
Wednesday 21 st Feb	ASH WEDNESDAY Holy Communion – 8.00 pm in the Parish Centre
w/b Mon 26 th Feb	Study 5 – Encourage one another
Wednesday 7 th Mar	Prayer Meeting
w/b Mon 12 th Mar	Study 6 – Support one another
w/b Mon 19 th Mar	Study 7 – Love one another
w/b Mon 26 th Mar	Study 8 – Listening to God
Thursday 5 th April	Passover Meal

Christ Church
Homegroups
Spring 2007

1. Dare to be different

Jesus said, ‘I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.’ (John 10:10)

WELCOME

If you could change one thing about yourself, what would it be?

WORSHIP

Psalm 145 talks about the faithfulness and dependability of God. Use the words of this psalm together, then continue by praising God for what he has done for you.

WORD

Jesus said, ‘I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.’ (John 10:10)

Living life to the full is one of the great dreams of modern western people, and most people have a fairly clear idea of what would constitute the ideal life – it would probably include wealth, health, popularity, and all the things that go along with them.

The Bible doesn't say that there is anything wrong with those things, but it does tell us that they are not sufficient to give us life to the full. In fact, in order to enjoy the life that Jesus came to give, we might have to turn some of those dreams upside down.

Read Matthew 5:1-12

- How does our normal description of the blessed or fortunate person compare with those Jesus considers blessed?

Although people often take the beatitudes as a series of unlinked statements, it is more likely that Jesus intended us to see a link between them.

To be ‘poor in spirit’ is to acknowledge our spiritual poverty, to admit that we have nothing with which we can deserve God’s favour.

- Why is this where we have to start if we want to receive the kingdom of heaven?

- Why do you think many people are reluctant to admit their spiritual poverty?

- Why would being poor in spirit lead us to mourn?

- How would having a true understanding of ourselves (that we are poor in spirit) lead us to be ‘meek’ – to have a gentle attitude to others?

- What do you think Jesus meant by ‘hunger and thirst for righteousness’?

- How does what has gone before lead to this?

- Jesus says that the merciful will be shown mercy. Why do you think our treatment of others will affect God’s treatment of us?

- Jesus says that we should be merciful, pure in heart, and peacemakers. Why would being like that earn the world’s persecution?

- Have you ever faced the persecution that Jesus talks about here?

The things Jesus said in the Beatitudes certainly turn the world’s values upside-down. But why would living this way make you ‘blessed’ – and enable you to live life to the full?

WORK

What aspect of the Beatitudes do you find hardest in your own life? How can you help each other to live the life which Jesus talks about here?

2. LET YOUR LIGHT SHINE

WELCOME

What person has most influenced you?

WORSHIP

Psalm 1 contrasts the lives of those who follow the Lord, and those who reject him. Use the psalm to lead you into praising God for those whom he has used to help you in your Christian life.

WORD

Many people in our society will never open a Bible. Yet they are forming impressions about God every time they meet a Christian. You may be the only Christian that some of your circle know – which means that you may be the only Bible they will read!

Read Matthew 5:13-16

Before refrigeration, salt was used to keep meat from rotting.

- *What does Jesus' statement 'You are the salt of the earth' tell us about society and the role of the church in society?*

- *Can you think of anything that has been in the news recently which shows that society is decaying?*

- *And what about more locally? Can you think of examples in your own neighbourhood / workplace where things are wrong? What would it mean practically to act as salt there?*

Jesus warns against losing our saltiness?

- *What might cause this?*

Jesus second statement is 'You are the light of the world.' As salt, we are called to prevent decay, the spread of sin in our society.

- *What do you think being called lights means we should also be doing?*
- *In what ways might we hide our light?*

- *According to Jesus, what will happen when people see our good deeds?*

Read Matthew 5:17-20

Straight after talking about salt and light, Jesus went on to highlight the importance of Scripture (the Law and the Prophets) Being salt and light highlight the practical aspects of being a Christian, whilst this emphasis on the Bible highlights the importance of paying attention to what God says.

- *How can paying attention to the Bible help us to be salt and light more effectively?*

- *How does Jesus emphasise his high view of the Old Testament Scriptures? How can Jesus' words strengthen our confidence on Scripture?*

The Pharisees and teachers of the law were passionate about keeping the Law – they calculated that the Law contained 248 commands of things they should do, and 365 commands concerning things they shouldn't do.

- *How can our righteousness possibly surpass theirs?*

Being salt and light can at times be costly – both in terms of time and money. At times standing against what society is doing can be costly in terms of popularity – it can lead to being persecuted.

- *So – why should we bother? Why is this an important part of 'living life to the full'?*

WORK

Are there members of your group who are active in being ‘salt and light’ in the community? How could you support them. Or is there anything that your group to do as a ‘salt and light’ project?

3. RELATIONSHIPS

WELCOME

Who would you most like to meet?

WORSHIP

Psalm 103 is a great hymn of praise for God's love. Use it to lead you into thanking God for the ways in which he has shown his love to you.

WORD

For almost everyone, our relationships form a big part of our lives. Even for those with little in the way of immediate family, there are friendships, work relationships, neighbours. Unless you are an absolute recluse, living life to the full will involve relationships.

And we should expect that. One of the important things about our belief in the Trinity is that relationship is at the heart of God, and that as people created in God's image, relationship is part of what it means to be human. We were created for relationship.

But at the same time, relationships can be a big source of heartache for many people. It sometimes seems that people are incapable of maintaining genuine relationships.

Read Matthew 18:21-35

- *What does this parable tell us about why it is so important to forgive one another?*

- *What would you say to someone who was finding it impossible to forgive someone who had hurt them in the past, and feared that because of that God would never forgive them?*

Read Matthew 5:21-30

- *Do you think that when Jesus compared anger with murder, he was trying to make a point by overstating the case, or is being angry with someone really as bad as murder?*

- *Why should it matter what we think about someone, as long as we don't physically harm them?*

- *What do verses 23-26 tell us about broken relationships?*

Although the context is slightly different, Jesus' instruction in v.23-24 lies behind the practice of 'Sharing the Peace' in the communion service. Before we come to the Lord's Table to remember Jesus death for us, we should make sure that all our

relationships are right. In the Communion Service in the Book of Common Prayer, the minister instructs the congregation to review their relationships before taking communion, and in the past, when a minister knew that members of his congregation were not ‘in love and charity’ with one another, he would refuse to administer the bread and wine to them.

- *Do we take the state of our relationships within Christ Church seriously enough?*

Jesus moves on from anger to lust.

- *What, according to him, is the full meaning of the commandment ‘Do not commit adultery’?*
- *Again, why should it matter what goes on in the privacy of our own minds, as long as we don’t get physically involved with someone? Why is this part of God’s recipe for living life to the full?*

WORK

Are there relationships that you struggle with? How could you as a group help in these situations?

4. RIGHT PRIORITIES

WELCOME

If you were to be stranded on a desert island, what luxury item and what book would you want to have with you?

WORSHIP

Jesus said, ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength, and love your neighbour as yourself.’ Thank the Lord for loving you so much, and ask for his forgiveness for times when you have failed to love him. Ask for his help to love him more.

WORD

Life today is more complex than it has ever been. Although we have labour saving devices that we have been undreamed of only a hundred years ago, we also have a sometimes overwhelming amount of things with which we can fill our time. Cars mean that we can go where we want when we want, TV and Internet clamour for our attention 24 hours a day. Leisure has at times become a curse – most of us probably end the day more worn out than my granddad, who used to work 12 hours a day in the mill. In the words of Timothy Dudley-Smith’s hymn ‘Lord for the years’, we are ‘spirits oppressed by pleasure, wealth and care.’

So – with all of these things to enjoy – how can we get our priorities right?

Read Matthew 19:16-30

There was a lot about this young man which was very good. But what, according to Jesus, was his big problem?

- *Why is it so difficult for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven (v.23)?*

It is generally agreed that what Jesus said to this man was not an instruction for all Christians at all times.

- *But how does what Jesus said then challenge us today?*

- *What might Jesus say you should get rid of in your life?*

Read Matthew 6:25-34

- *What are the sort of things that the people around us are running after at the moment (v.32)?*
- *How do you understand ‘the kingdom of God’? As something purely spiritual, or as something concerning the whole of life?*
- *What do you think it means to ‘seek first the kingdom of God’ (v.33)?*

- *Which of the following are your main leisure activities?*

- a) Cinema / Theatre etc.
- b) D.I.Y. / Gardening
- c) Eating / drinking
- d) Reading
- e) Music
- f) Sport
- g) Spending time with people
- h) Study
- i) Television

- *How important are they to you?*

- *Do you ever think about how God wants you to be spending your time? (Not just about how much of your time you should be spending on church activities, but about all of it.)*

- *Is church-going a leisure activity for you (well, O.K., you are bound to say it isn’t, but do stop and think. Everybody else in society thinks it is, and that you only go to church because you ‘enjoy’ it. How do we avoid being caught up with that view?)*

WORK

Pray for each other, for wisdom in using wisely all the wonderful opportunities for enjoyment and pleasure that God gives us.

Pray as well for others you know who are so busy enjoying themselves that they have no time for God, and no realisation of their need of him. How can you show them that putting Jesus first really is the best way to live?

5. ENCOURAGE ONE ANOTHER

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

A couple of weeks ago we were thinking about the importance of relationships. One of the main places for relationship for the Christian is 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.’

So – having spent the first half of this term thinking about the more personal aspects of living the life God has given us to the full, we will spend the rest of it thinking about the church.

What should Christ Church be like? How can we play our part in making it like that?

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?

Is there something specific you could do to encourage others? What about the people at Christ Church who you don’t really know? How could you build relationships with them and encourage them?

6. SUPPORT ONE ANOTHER

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?

7. LOVE ONE ANOTHER

WELCOME

What is your favourite meal?

WORSHIP

God is love’ (1 John 4:7& 16) Praise God for the love he has shown you – especially for any times when you have been particularly aware of his love. Especially thank God for Jesus – ‘This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him.’ (1 John 4:9)

WORD

The New Testament writers map out how our relationships within the church should look in a series of ‘one another’ statements. We’ve already seen ‘Encourage one another’ (Heb 10:25), and ‘Support one another (Galatians 6:2); there are also instructions to ‘Forgive one another’ (Colossians 3:13), and ‘Accept one another (Romans 15:7)

But fundamental to them all is Jesus’ instruction to his disciples; ‘Love one another’ (John 15:12)

Read John 13:1-17

- *How was Jesus going to show his love for his disciples? Do you think John was just referring to washing their feet, or to something more?*

Jesus expected that by washing his disciples' feet, he would be setting them an example that they would follow.

- *How does what Jesus did then act as an example to us – what sort of things might be our equivalent of 'foot-washing'?*

- *How does what Paul says in v.1-3 show the effects of gifts used without love?*

- *How can we know whether our own ministries are marked by love or by lovelessness?*

- *How does Paul define love? (v.4-7)*

- *Which of these aspects do you find most challenging?*

Read 1 Corinthians 13

It would be impossible to think about love without turning to one of the most famous chapters in the Bible. It is so often used as the Bible reading at Weddings – but, of course, it wasn't written about weddings, but about life in the church.

- *Why is love so important?*

1 Corinthians 13 is set in the context of what Paul is writing about gifts. In the 3 other major passages in the New Testament which deal with spiritual gifts, the need for love is also stressed (see Romans 12:9; 1 Peter 4:7-11; Ephesians 4:2)

- *Why do you think that Paul is so keen to stress the importance of love in the context of spiritual gifts?*

Read Colossians 3:12-14

- *Why does Paul say that love binds together all the other elements of our relationships as a church?*

- *How does this help us to understand what love means in practice?*

WORK

How can you serve the other members of Christ Church? Are there new things you could be doing?

8. LISTENING TO GOD

WELCOME

What makes a good listener?

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

We've been looking at what constitutes a church worth joining. We've seen that one of the most important things is our relationships – church has to be a place of encouragement, of support, and of love.

But how do we know that these are so important? We might answer that by saying that other churches which are growing make a priority of these things; that people today are looking for authentic relationships and so that is what we should be providing.

There may be some truth in this – but that isn't the main reason which we have found 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 worth joining, 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

Despite the Bible being God's main way of speaking, the New Testament also shows God speaking into specific situations through those who have the gift of prophecy. 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?*

- *Why should 'works of service' lead to spiritual maturity (v.12-13)?*
- *What is the role of each of these? (v.12)*
- *How might a specific word from God to a church help this to happen?*
- *How can the pastor-teachers help a church to discern whether a prophecy really is from the Lord?*

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

CHRIST CHURCH,
MORETON

We want to be a W^elcoming Church

Because Jesus welcomed all who came to him.

an E^vangelising 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^{ea}rning Church

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