

making disciples
growing disciples
being disciples



Christ Church
Homegroups
LENT 2018

Whether it is a trip to the dentist for a regular inspection, or to the doctors to make sure our blood pressure is what it should be, or taking the car for its MOT – in all these ways we are used to regular check-ups. And I guess that most of us at some time have been surprised by what was found. We thought that our teeth were fine, they weren't giving us any trouble, but below the surface things did not look so good! Or we thought that everything was OK with the car, but then were told that the tyres were almost worn out and the brake pipes were badly corroded!

We know that these check-ups, whilst not much fun at the time, can save us from much bigger problems later. And if we need those sort of checks on our health, or on our car, we need them on our spiritual life. Yet how often do we take the time to stop and look at our lives in that way?

Lent has always been a good time to do that, as we prepare to celebrate Easter. So this year through Lent we'll be carrying out a spiritual health-check on ourselves. Everyone will have received a copy of the booklet 'Spiritual Healthcheck', and to tie in with that our home-groups will be looking at 5 key areas which can highlight the state of our relationship with God. Looking at these things, and challenging one another in our groups about them, might be uncomfortable. You might prefer to bury your heads in the sand, keep your discussions at a bland level, and think that actually everything is OK.

But if you are ready to do more than that, you might find that things are not quite as OK as you thought. And that is always the first step towards things getting better. You never have a health-check just to tell you what is wrong – you do it so that the right treatment can help things improve.

HOMEGROUP PROGRAMME for Lent

w/b Mon 19th Feb Study 1 – LOVE
w/b Mon 26th Feb Study 2 – GRATITUDE
w/b Mon 5th March Study 3 – EXCITEMENT
w/b Mon 12th March Study 4 – COMMITMENT
w/b Mon 19th March Study 5 – GODLINESS

Thursday 29th March PASSOVER MEAL

1. LOVE

(are you in love with Jesus?)

WELCOME

Have you given up anything for Lent? Why or why not?

WORSHIP

In a world where the word 'love' is often used so casually, read 1 Corinthians 13:4-7. I said recently in a sermon that you could replace the word 'love' with the word 'Jesus', and that would give a picture of his perfect love for us. Spend some time thanking him for his love.

WORD

Last week we celebrated Valentines' Day, and society was full of red roses and champagne. Those are the things which traditionally go with being 'in love.' And so it might seem strange to talk about being 'in love' with Jesus.

Of course, love for Jesus has nothing to do with red roses and champagne. But maybe a good places to start as we think about our spiritual health is to ask just how we do feel about him. Do we love him? If so – what do we mean when we say that we do?

Read Mark 12:28-34

It is something we know so well. But it is also a huge challenge. To love the Lord with all your heart – which in the world of the Bible was the will – where your decisions are made. To love him with all your soul – with everything that makes you ‘you’. To love him with all mind – delighting to find out more about him in his word. To love him with all your strength. The Hebrew word that is used in Deuteronomy 6, which Jesus quotes here, is literally love the Lord your God with all your very muchness – with all that you have.

Love the Lord your God with total commitment, with your total self, to total excess.

- So – what would that look like in practice?
- What might stop us from loving him in that way?
- How do you feel you are doing in loving Jesus
 - with all your heart?
 - with all your soul?
 - with all your mind?
 - with all your strength?

Read Revelation 2:1-7

This is the key passage in chapter 2 of ‘Spiritual Healthcheck’, so this is a chance to share together how that has spoken to you.

- What good things were going on in the church in Ephesus?
- A couple of weeks ago I mentioned the ‘Mystery Worshipper’ who will visit churches and then write an online report. If he or she had visited this church, what do you think they would have said?
- What had gone wrong in the church?
- Why had it happened?

If I am struggling in my spiritual life, it is likely to be rooted in a dwindling of my love for Christ.

WORK

Read Ephesians 3:16-19

“If you feel loveless towards Jesus, don’t focus on your love for him – delight in his love for you.”

In what practical ways could you help each other to do that this week? How about giving each other verses of encouragement about Jesus’ love, so that each day there is something to help you remember him?
And – will you pray Ephesians 3:16-19 daily for each other by name?

2. GRATITUDE

(are you grateful for the cross?)

WELCOME

What is the best thing anyone has ever given you or done for you?

WORSHIP

How has praying for one another been this week? How has God been at work in response to your prayers? Thank him for what he has done for you.

WORD

In our last home-group series, we thought about the importance of thankfulness in our relationship with God. There are of course so many things we should be thankful for, because “every good and perfect gift is from above” (James 1:17). It is a good discipline to start each day by listing 5 things you are thankful to God for – as someone recently told me, no matter how bad things are or how low you feel, thinking of those 5 things won’t be difficult.

Even though all that we have is a gift from God, the one thing we should be most constantly thankful for is the Cross. But despite that, it is all too easy to forget how amazing what God did through the Cross really is.

Read Ephesians 2:1-3

In verses 1-3 Paul describes our state before we became Christians. What 3 words might you use to sum up what he said?

- a) (v.1)
- b) (v.2)
- c) (v.3)
- Do you find it easy to accept this as a description of yourself before becoming a Christian?
- Or of your non-Christian friends now?
- In verses 4-10, in contrast to the desperate fallen condition of human beings, what three things has God done for us?
- What motivated God to do all this for us?

C.S.Lewis wrote about the first time he seriously looked at his own life: *For the first time I examined myself with a seriously practical purpose. And there I found what appalled me: a zoo of lusts, a bedlam of ambitions, a nursery of fears, a harem of fondled hatreds.*

- Can you identify with what Lewis wrote?

Read Isaiah 53:1-12

What do each of these sections tell you about Jesus and about us:

- Isaiah 53:1-3
- Isaiah 53:4-6
- Isaiah 53:7-9
- Isaiah 53:10-12

Read 1 Peter 2:21-25

- Jesus bore our sins in his body on the cross. Why did he do that?

WORK

I think that sometimes those who have been Christians for years forget how significant the Cross really is. How can you encourage each other this week to remember the Cross and to be grateful for it?

Use the words of Isaiah 53 to pray for one another this week, asking that God will help the people you pray for to appreciate more how it applies to them.

3. EXCITEMENT

(are you excited about the new creation?)

WELCOME

What are you most looking forward to this year?

WORSHIP

How has praying for one another been this week? How has God been at work in response to your prayers? Thank him for what he has done for you.

WORD

A few years ago when I was running Christianity Explored, someone expressed surprise at something I said (which was taken from the course notes). It was that 99.9% of the blessings of the Christian life are in the world to come. Whilst the Christian now is a life of purpose, and it is a great joy to know Christ and his forgiveness, still 99.9% of the blessings in the Christian life are in the world to come.

I wonder how you respond to that. Is your mind fixed on what is to come, or are you more concerned with the here and now? Are you eagerly looking forward to being with Jesus, or more concerned with what you want him to be doing for you now?

Read 1 Peter 1:3-9

- What reasons does Peter give for praising God?
- How can we rejoice despite the suffering we go through (verse 6)?
- Has this been true for you?
- How about now – are you more aware of the difficulties you face, or of the future God has prepared for you?
- Are you “filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy” (verse 8) If not, what is stopping you?

Read Romans 8:18-39

This is the key passage in chapter 4 of the ‘Spiritual Healthcheck’ booklet, so again this is a chance to share together how that has spoken to you.

- What does life seem to have been like for Paul’s first readers (verse 18)?
- How does he encourage them in this?
- What signs do you see around you that the whole of creation is “subject to frustration” (verse 20)?

- How do you feel about the prospect of coming home to God as his child (verse 23)?
- How can the things listed in verses 38-39 tempt you to think that God’s purposes for you have been derailed?

Read Romans 13:8-14

- How should being excited about the future affect our lives now?
- What does it mean to ‘clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ’ (verse 14)?

How can you know you are eager about the new creation? Because your life would not make sense if there were no new creation.

WORK

Are any of you facing particular trials at the moment? How can you encourage each other in the coming week to have the joy which both Peter and Paul wrote about?

Use 1 Peter 1:3-9 to pray for each other individually through the coming week.

4. COMMITMENT

(are you committed to God's people?)

WELCOME

What is the best thing about being part of Christ Church?

WORSHIP

How has praying for one another been this week? How has God been at work in response to your prayers?
Thank him for what he has done for you.

WORD

I'm sure that most Christians would say that commitment to Christ has to be central to being a Christian, and that commitment to other Christians is an important part of the Christian life. But putting that into practice can be a challenge, because I think it would be fair to say that commitment is not something that our society as a whole could be noted for. We are familiar with the way relationships can so easily break down because people no longer want to work at them, but the same is true in other areas of life. And that reluctance can creep into our spiritual lives.

We might think that we are committed to the church fellowship, but that can easily slide into being committed to the parts of church life that we enjoy. When deciding whether to attend a certain event or service, our first thought is 'would

I enjoy it?' rather than 'will my being there be a blessing to others?'

Read Colossians 3:12-17

- What should we be clothing ourselves with?
- Which do you find the hardest to put on?
- What does it mean to "bear with each other" (verse 13)?
- What do you think it means to 'let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts'?
- And 'let the word of Christ dwell in you richly'?

Read John 15:9-15.

- How do we remain in Jesus love (verse 9-10)?
- What does this mean in practice?
- What does it mean to love one another (see verse 12-13)?
- In this context, what are the things that can work to prevent us from remaining in Jesus love?

Read 1 John 3:11-18, 4:7-11

In 1 John 4:8 & 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 and speech but with actions and in truth" (verse 18)?
- 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?

It is strikingly simple, and deeply challenging: our love for other believers is a Christ-given diagnostic tool for knowing if we truly love him.

WORK

What can you do this week to build up the fellowship in Christ Church? Is there someone you can encourage? Or thank? Are there those you find it difficult to "bear with" or to forgive? Pray about these situations, and then go on praying about them through the coming week.

5. GODLINESS

(are you pursuing godliness?)

WELCOME

In what ways have you changed in the last 5 years?

WORSHIP

How has praying for one another been this week? How has God been at work in response to your prayers?

Thank him for what he has done for you.

WORD

1 Peter 1:15-16 gives what has to be the most challenging instruction in the Bible: "But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: 'Be holy, because I am holy.'" How can we possibly be holy – we are far too well aware of our sin.

In 'The Message of Holiness' Derek Tidball writes: "We are all flawed masterpieces. In one way or another, and to one degree or another, the image of God in which we were formed has become marred and corrupted. Holiness is about the restoration of that image." Holiness is becoming more like God. It is godliness.

- So – how important is that to you? Honestly – is godliness your aim, or are you really too comfortable with your life now?

Read Exodus 34:1-7

In Exodus 33:18, Moses asked to see God’s glory. Then in Exodus 34 God reveals something of his nature to Moses.

- What does God say about himself?
- What would it mean for us to be like him?

Through the rest of the Bible we see God demonstrating his character. And amazingly we see that God’s determination to punish the guilty is something that God himself bears, as his Son went to the cross. Growing in godliness doesn’t mean punishing the guilty – because that has already been dealt with. But it does mean growing in the other characteristics we see here.

Read 1 Peter 2:18-25

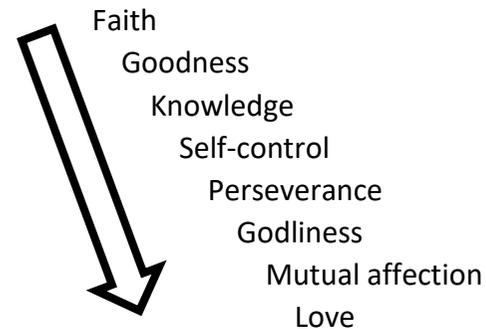
- What does Peter highlight about the example that Christ left for us?
- How should this example shape the way we behave to when we are mistreated?
- We probably usually think of Jesus’ death bringing us forgiveness for our sins. But what other result does

Peter see flowing from Jesus bearing our sins (verse 24)?

- What does it mean to ‘live for righteousness’ (verse 24)?
- How does Jesus’ death not only give us an example of how to live, but actually enables us to do it?

Read 2 Peter 1:1-9

- How has God given us everything we need for a godly life (verse 3)?
- And what has he promised us (verse 4)?
- How are the things mentioned in verses 5-7 linked?



- How do Peter’s words here motivate you to pursue godliness?

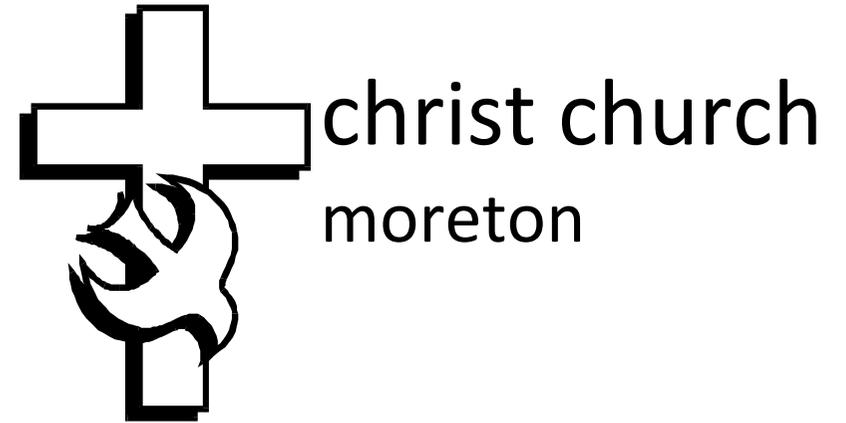
Remember, you are saved by Christ, not by your Christian life. You may need to change, but if you are trusting in Christ verses 3-4 are true of you.

WORK

Now that we have looked at these 5 diagnostic tools, what is your assessment of your spiritual health?

What do you need the rest of your home-group to do to help you become more spiritually healthy?

Will you commit to doing that for each other, not just for the next few days, but for the coming month?



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