

1. Introduction

Last Christmas Day, my parents were staying with us in Claygate, and my Father gave my Mother (both well into their 80s) a special gold ring. Later on Christmas morning, she declared it lost. Steps were retraced, the house turned upside down, the manager of Somerfield grilled (the bread sauce had run out that day!). No result. My Mother was bitterly disappointed; I think it also shook their confidence and their frustration at some of challenges of becoming older seemed to increase.

My son, Thomas, found the ring in the bathroom a few weeks ago, quite accidentally, and ran downstairs to phone my Mum and Dad to let them know. Their joy was unconfined, the gaps were filled, the confidence restored, and a new star was born!

The ring had been thought to be lost forever, and now it was found.

2. A Biblical Portrait

Read Luke Ch 14

The three stories in Chapter 14 have some common themes. Discuss what these themes might be and their significance?

What do you feel to be the central message of these stories?

Why is this message important for followers of Jesus today?

3. Losing Something Important

Encourage Group members to think of a time they lost something very important to them and describe how they felt. By what process did they search? How did they feel when the "something" was found or never retrieved?

How does God feel about those who don't know Him? How is He searching for them?

4. Finding God's Treasure

Who does the Group know that is lost and does not know Christ's love? Is there some way that you can become part of the "search party"?

What can the members of the group do to help with this search process?

You may wish to reflect on the following questions:

- *How deeply concerned do I feel over those who I know are lost? Is their urgency in my wishes for them?*
- *What am I doing in my life to make sure I am inclusive of all sorts of people, and to show them how much they matter to God?*

5. For Group Reflection

God wants all of His children to come home, to be forgiven and to be immersed in His love. Through His Spirit, we, as a Church family, are a potentially important means by which God identifies, seeks and restores those who are lost.

Claygate needs this mission. How can we truly rise to this challenge in a sophisticated and self-serving world?

1. Introduction

All roles and activities tend to carry expectations about the person performing them. Take it in turns to say out loud some of the characteristics that come to mind when you think of a librarian, a ballet dancer, a car salesperson, a rugby player....and you will soon see what is meant!!

What are the positive and negative associations you have with "an evangelist". Take some time to recall these and discuss them briefly with each other.

In fact, the Bible contains many very varied styles of sharing God's message. This session is intended to reintroduce you to those and help you consider what God intends for you.

2. A Biblical Portrait

Share out the some of the following passages between the Group and ask members to read them, consider and "report back" on their responses to the questions below:

....Acts 17:16-34....Acts 2:14,40....John 9:1-12.....Luke 5:27-32.....John 4:1-26.....Acts 9:37-43

- Try to characterise the style of evangelism in each passage in a single word or phrase
- Which of these words best describes its style (Serving, Interpersonal, Confrontational, Intellectual, Invitational, Testimonial)? What other words come straight to mind?
- How effective is it in the situation, and why?

3. Discovering your personal style

You probably don't think of yourself as an "evangelist", based on the associations that might have for us. Perhaps, you would rather leave "outreach" to the specialists! Equally, as Christians, we all create impressions and touch others with our words, actions and lives. In other words, we are all sending messages to non-Christians, for much of the time.

Encourage Group members to discuss which of the styles above most closely mirrors their own, and why they feel that?

4. Being Who We Are

God gives us permission to be who we are. This is how He loves us. In any event, most of us can't change personality to fit conditions, and we are not being asked to.

Nonetheless, the worst type of evangelism is an unprepared message being delivered to the "unready" recipient ! So, conversely, some preparation (or thinking through) and consideration of the "ready" heart will help.

In what type of situation is your style most likely to prove effective?
How can you put yourself in these type of situations more regularly?

5. For Personal Reflection

Who do you know whose heart might become "ready" for Jesus' message?
How might they like to hear/experience God's message through you?
What support might you need from other members of your small group?

**Vision Aim Two: Deeper Followers of Jesus
Continuing the Walk**

**Study 3: Talking with God (Matt
6:1-18)**

1. Introduction

Our culture places huge emphasis on public approval and popularity. It seems that nearly everyone is seeking their "15 minutes of fame". By way of contrast, can you think of individuals who have inspired you with their pursuit of what is right, despite public opinion and criticism? Name them and discuss what you found inspirational about their lives.

2. A Biblical Portrait

Read Matthew 6: 1-18

Jesus clearly calls us to seek to please God and not men. Nonetheless, even when we try to do just that, we often seem to fall into the trap of seeking the approval or others, of trying to impress them.

What specific warnings does Jesus give in this passage? Why do you think His warning seems so strong?

3. Performing for Others

In this passage from Matthew, Jesus mentions our giving, prayer and fasting as potential areas where ostentation may be a risk. In what other areas are we as Christians also prone to "perform" for others, rather than God?

Think of one area where this has been true for yourself.

In relation to Giving, Prayer and Fasting, Jesus says three times (Matthew 6:2,5 and 16) that "they have received their reward in full". How does this speak to us today about the dangers of "performing for others"?

As a supporting reference, read 1 Samuel 16:7 together.

4. The "Feel Good" Fallacy

Our culture encourages us to bolster our self-esteem as an important goal for well-being. Some seek this through work, through relationships, through physical appearance. However, this can be full of risks; for example, in becoming dependent on those things, or those people, that make us feel good about ourselves. We can end up in idolatrous relationships with those components. For example, according to the Institute for Personnel Development, 38% of those working long hours do so because it raises their self-esteem. In other words, it makes them feel important.

Why does the approval of others frequently seem so important to us? What needs does it seem to serve?

What rewards might we gain if we were to seek only to secretly please God? (see 1 Thes 2:4)

5. For Personal or Group reflection:

How can we ensure that our growth as disciples is sought through our personal relationship with God? How can we reject the temptation to seek approval from other sources?

1. Introduction

Separate surveys of the world's Top 5 worries amongst children and seniors in the US and the UK produced very different responses; from the environment to neighbourhood crime, from terrorism to pensions, from AIDS to education. Split into pairs, and privately discuss which worries tend to preoccupy us most? What drives us to worry?

2. A Biblical Portrait

Read Matthew 6:25-34

In this section of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is clearly saying that He will meet our needs. What in the passage indicates this to us?

In Matthew 6, what aspects of creation does Christ use to illustrate the depth of His care for us? How does this make us feel about His protective power?

3. Why (We) Worry?

In the light of Jesus' assurances in the passage, what drives us to spend so much time worrying about our physical well-being and other aspects of appearance?

As a group, list some of the harmful effects of anxiety to yourselves and others close to you. Think in terms of the emotional, spiritual, physical and relational impact.

4. God Meets our Needs

Christ says that God will meet our needs. How do we determine The distinction between our "needs" and our "wants"?

How have you experienced God meeting your needs over the past year? Have we personally experienced how our faith in God has helped to remove or to reduce worry in our lives?

Where do you see God act in the lives of those who experience suffering and unmet physical needs? What is the role of humankind in those situations?

5. For Personal or Group reflection:

What would it mean for you to "seek first the Kingdom of God" in your life in the coming days? What practical steps could you take? Read the extract below. What role can prayer play?

"Prayer is a radical conversation of all our mental processes because in prayer we move away from ourselves, our worries, preoccupations, and self-gratification – and direct all that we recognise as ours to God in the simple trust that through His love all will be made new".

Henri Nouwen from "Clowning in Rome" (1979)

1. Introduction

The leader of the Taizé Community in France, the late Brother Roger, wrote in 1985 of the importance of Community.

"Whoever is following Christ, whoever is bold enough to say yes, is choosing love. Even when the incomprehensible happens, such a person consents not to hold back. Stepping back would perhaps mean suffering less. But in every case that means protecting ourselves and letting other people make themselves vulnerable.

Why would a relationship with Christ in isolation, without the communion of his Body, the Church, lead believers to turn in on themselves and become individualistic, either on their own or with a few other people?

Through his own life, Christ allows us to perceive an answer to that question. It bears the name of holiness. He came for everyone, not just for a privileged few."

2. A Biblical Portrait

Paul's letter to the Philippians was written from prison in about AD61. It is one of his most joyful expressions of finding himself in Christ's love. In it, he re-commissions his beloved Christians in Philippi to seek joy in suffering, giving, believing and serving in the name of Christ. Read Philippians 2:1-11...

What is the core of Paul's advice regarding serving each other?

Referring to verses 5-8, how is Jesus' life an example of serving others, and of the cost of doing so?

3. Living and Serving as a Community

Why is our role as a community for Christ so important? What does it mean to you?

What does it mean to : be like-minded, have the same love, be one in Spirit and purpose, humbly consider others better than yourself?

Why is the idea of serving each other critical for sustaining a Christ-like community? How have you witnessed this happening in Claygate?

What are some of the main challenges of being such a Community, personally and corporately? Consider these in the light of this quotation: **"We must learn to see others as Christ sees them" (Alister McGrath)**. How can we overcome the challenges highlighted in 3 and model a Community of Faith in Claygate?

4. For Group or Personal Reflection

Christ showed us that living in Faith involves being a part of a greater Christian Community, where we serve others and are also served by them. Through these sacrifices, commitment and inclusion, God is glorified.

Our relationship with God is also, however, a personal one of individual Discipleship. This will also involve quiet times alone with God, in prayer, reading and just being with Him. Where we can, for a time, be cut off from others and in a different type of communion.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer once wrote: *"Let him who cannot be alone beware of community. Let him who is not in community beware of being alone."* How can we be alone as Disciples and together as a Church family? Which do you need to focus most on now?

1. Introduction

Teamwork is a vital component in growing the Kingdom of God. We all have individual gifts and talents which when combined become a powerful force for Christ. Think of a time in your life when you have seen, or even been a part of, a team that has been particularly effective. Where the whole has exceeded the sum of the parts. Why was it special and what marked it out for you?

2. A Biblical Portrait

Read Romans 12:3-8

Why do you think Paul begins this passage with a reminder of the importance of humility?

What is the relevance of the physical body as an analogy for the "Body of Christ"?

Take time to list the gifts referred to in the passage, as a Group. It is by no means an exhaustive list, and others are referred to elsewhere in the Bible. What others might we want to include?

3. Group Exercise

Prepare a "post it" note (or similar) for each member of the Group. Pass them round and invite members to contribute the gifts they perceive for each individual.

Privately read the contributions from others, and share if you wish.

4. A note on Growing as Leaders

Not all of us would see ourselves as leaders, but we all do things which can and do influence others. The "Growing Leaders" course we are currently running includes material which guides every one of us in the exercising of our gifts.

- Remember that our gifts are God-given
- Gifts are not about status, but service
- We are dependent on God always – his gifts, his grace for his strength
- Focus on the common good – and building the Community of Faith
- Function as a body – we are interconnected, don't downplay or deny gifts in yourself and others, but use them well

5. For Group and Personal Reflection

In terms of our gifts, how can you use them to benefit the body of Christ? What one thing would you most like to do to please God?

What do you plan to do as a result?

Exercising our God-given gifts is part of our responsibility to God and his Community. In doing so, our relationship with Him is strengthened. What thoughts have occurred to you today about your own gifts? Seek guidance in prayerfulness about the part you can play in building the Body of Christ.