

Who do we care about?

Icebreaker Question: Recall and share a time when you have given or received help from an unexpected source.

Context: The Good Samaritan story is part of a sequence where Luke records Jesus' teaching on discipleship. In addition to this teaching on our neighbour, others include the importance of spending time with Jesus and prayer to God.

Read Together Luke 10:25-37

Exploring the passage:

1. What might have been the lawyer's motivation in asking the question in v25? In what way was he seeking to test Jesus? How does his first question relate to his second in v29?
2. Note: Jesus' answer in v27, quoting Deuteronomy 25:5-6, is also used as his answer to testing questions in Matthew 22:35-40 and Mark 12:28-32.
3. What is the significance of the identities of those passing the beaten man? How might have Jesus' audience have felt about the three men's varying responses to the cry for help?
4. What attitudes prevent the priest (v31) and the Levite (v32) from helping the wounded man? Explore a few possibilities. To what extent are the attitudes you have identified still prevalent today?
5. List the detail of the Samaritan's neighbourly actions in verses 33-35. Why do you think Jesus gave such a full description?

Life in the Credit Crunch:

6. Who are our neighbours today? What makes them so?
7. In what way might the Credit Crunch changed our perspective on this? You might think of how inter-connected the global economic system has become.
8. These days, we have greatly improved information about those who are vulnerable to or exploited by global economic imbalances. How might we respond to this greater knowledge?

9. Tom Wright says: “no church, no Christian, can remain content with easy definitions which allow us to watch most of the world lying half-dead in the road”. How does this challenge us?

Crunch Point: In Christ, our family is no longer determined by our bloodline, but by His blood shed on the Cross for one and all.

For Prayer: Give thanks for Jesus’ revelation of what it means to be a good neighbour. Pray that he will reveal to us where our help is needed and that we will give it freely and in love, for his sake.

What's the most important thing?

Icebreaker Question: Do you keep a diary? How do you use it and what do you use it for?

Context: Jesus is travelling to Jerusalem when he stops at Bethany, a few miles away. The two sisters of Lazarus offer him hospitality. Luke's record of their interaction follows on from the Good Samaritan and, as well as carrying its message of listening to Jesus, challenged contemporary notions of a woman's role.

Read Together Luke 10:38-42

Exploring the passage:

1. Take time to savour the beautiful words of this familiar passage. You might like to try reading it silently two or three times over. Share which words jump out at you based on this reading. What makes them stand out?
2. Paul speaks of being 'brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel [rabbi]' (Acts 22:3 in NRSV). There are similarities with Mary's attitude to Jesus expressed in v39. What might they be?
3. In first century Palestine, there were strict cultural codes regarding a 'woman's place' in the home. To what extent might this explain Martha's anger with her sister in v40? What else might be involved?
4. What reaction did Martha expect from Jesus, based on v40? Describe the tone of Jesus's reply in v41.
5. To what extent do you think his words in v41 imply that Martha's work is not valid?

Life in the Credit Crunch:

6. We are told that the credit crunch :
 - o means that Brits are working the equivalent of an extra day each week (according to recruitment consultants Badenoch and Clark)
 - o means that 45% of Dads feel their 'hands on' role with their children has diminished as a result of resulting work pressures (an Airfix survey)How do we prioritise our time?
7. How would our lives change if we took more time to 'sit at the Lord's feet' listening to him? What would that involve?

8. Mary's actions have a sense of permanence whilst Martha's more of 'the daily grind'. Do you ever find yourself longing for the spiritual yet choosing the daily grind? What impact does this have?
9. What particular dangers does the current economic situation hold for us as those seeking to live lives that reflect the love of Jesus Christ? How might other forces be at work? You might want to reflect on this personally, or share your views in pairs.

Crunch Point: The story of Mary and Martha reminds us that God's love knows no bounds. No social, gender or role barriers should get in the way of our taking his outstretched hand.

For Prayer: Give thanks that we have a Lord Jesus Christ who gave his life that we might learn from him. That even when we get things wrong, he is still tender and guiding. Pray that we would always prioritise our time with Jesus and be watchful of the ways the world sucks us back into preoccupation with its concerns.

How much is it all worth?

Icebreaker Question: What do we most look forward to?

Context: Anxiety about wealth, job security, improving our possessions, financial security are at the heart of society's malaise. We are driven to want more and more and feel inadequate or dissatisfied when our expectations are not met. Jesus's teaching on the rich fool speaks to this situation directly.

Read Together Luke 12:13-21

Exploring the passage:

1. Disputes between brothers on shares of the family wealth were not uncommon in Jesus's time and a rabbi often mediated. Why does Jesus resist doing so and what motivation does he detect in the question (v13)?
2. The "good" crop received (v16) suggests blessing. What is the rich man's attitude to his harvest in v17?
3. The rich man seeks a life of wealth and self-indulgence as a "reward" for his efforts. To what extent would our 21st century society validate such a perspective?
4. Jesus response is abrupt and radical. The seeker of wealth will end up with an empty soul and an empty life. In contrast what might Jesus mean by those who are "rich towards God"?

Life in the Credit Crunch:

5. "A man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions" (v15). What then is a proper attitude to our possessions these days?
6. The pursuit of wealth is false religion. In what ways does it bear the characteristics of religion and how does it fail us?
7. Has modern capitalism been guilty of merely building "bigger barns" in search of wealth and pleasure? What sources of hope can you find in the current difficulties?
8. How can we personally be rich towards God? Spend some quiet time reflecting on what this might involve for us personally and share your thoughts with a neighbour or in the group.

Crunch Point: Being rich towards God is not just about our giving; it is about bringing God's priorities to bear on the greed-dominated world in which we live now.

For Prayer: Give thanks for the chance to show our love towards God here and now. Pray for all those that do not yet know Jesus and his message of love and salvation; for ourselves when we are less than we could be as a result of the manipulations of our world and its temptations. Thank God for his protection offered at these times.

What are we angry about?

Icebreaker Question: What has got you most annoyed about the credit crunch?

Context: Whilst the tone of Jesus in this passage may seem odd, even rude, to us today, his direct language on matters of religious observance would have been much more common in first century Palestine than it would be today. Nonetheless, his critique of the religious leadership of the time is a stunning rebuke.

Read Together Luke 11:37-54

Exploring the passage:

1. In verse 38, the Pharisee was surprised that Jesus did not wash before the meal, as would have been the ritual. What angers Jesus about the Pharisee's attitude in this initial exchange (to verse 41)?
2. Jesus continues with three specific accusations regarding Pharisee conduct (v42, 43 and 44). Suggest themes link them together? What differences do you note?
 - o *Note that Jesus's rebuke in verse 44 is particularly felt. This associates the Pharisees directly with death and uncleanness, and 'raises the stakes' many times over against the comment in v38.*
3. Why do you think the 'expert in the law', or scribe, comments as he does in v45?
4. What might the 'burdens' be in v46? What might Jesus have meant in the second part of v52?
 - o *Verses 47-51 contain accusations about the scribes' complicity in the murders of the prophets, whilst having also built tombs for them; this accusing them of the same disobedience to God as their ancestors.*

Life in the Credit Crunch:

5. The six woes diagnose objections to the Pharisees and scribes standards. They are guilty of pride, self-assurance, hypocrisy, injustice and more. Taking the converse view, what is Jesus saying, by implication, about how we should live?

6. In some ways, the Pharisees were more than religious leaders, but served as self-appointed guardians of public morality and standard in public life? Which groups play this role today? How might Jesus judge their effectiveness?
7. There is no doubt that the credit crunch has raised issues of lack of justice and double standards amongst leaders at all levels, sometimes expressed as anger. What is its source? Has this been well directed?
8. Today, what might Jesus's credit crunch message be for:
 - o Political and business leaders?
 - o Local religious and workplace leaders?
 - o Us personally?

Crunch Point: When we value religious observance (through pride and self-assurance) above the love of God and our neighbour, we too become lost in sin and remote from Jesus.

For Prayer: Give thanks for Jesus pointing the way about how we should live, and how we should not. Help us to find and hold a humble and faithful reliance on him in all things.

How do we deal with worry?

Icebreaker Question: What do we treasure?

Context: Jesus's advice on anxiety is linked to the parable of the rich fool in Luke's gospel (by the word 'so' in v22). The material concerns and sacrifices of the disciples may be different to those of today, but the issues of trust and kingdom are the same. Anxiety about the economic downturn is a major factor causing stress, anxiety and mental health problems. Jesus's message needs to be heard today.

Read Together Luke 12:22-34

Exploring the passage:

1. The original meaning of 'life' in v23 was perhaps 'soul', which together with 'body' represents the sum of who we are. What does Jesus tell us in this passage about where we can discover 'life' in all its fullness?
2. In Jesus's time, ravens (v24) were held to be unclean birds under Jewish law and tradition. Why does Jesus use them to illustrate his point in v24? Why are lilies and the grass of the field used in a similar way later in the passage?
3. Jesus asks his disciples to 'seek his kingdom' (v31). What might he mean by this? How would the disciples priorities differ from those of the world?
4. Verses 32-34 set up a tension between earthly possessions and treasure on heaven. Perhaps Jesus was directing these comments at a wider audience than the immediate disciples. Why is Jesus instructing that they are to 'sell their possessions and give to the poor'?

Life in the Credit Crunch:

5. What have been some of the human costs of the current economic downturn? What part has individual and collective anxiety had to play?
6. In what ways are treasures in heaven more secure than what we own on earth?
7. In what ways have you experienced God's provision for you and your family over the years?

8. Jesus is seeking the disciples' absolute commitment to following him and assuring them of God's provision and a share in his kingdom. What is he asking of us?
9. Read Psalm 37 together, or if time does not allow, read it on your own in private devotion. Let its words run over you, savour them, taste God's goodness and trust in his provision.

Crunch Point: Our treasure in heaven will not be stolen, decay or depreciate.

For Prayer: Praise God that he is our great provider and that we can trust in him. Pray that he will protect us from the negative forces of anxiety over the material, and that we will be nourished and seek goodness and eternity in him.

Are we ready for anything?

Icebreaker Question: What is the longest wait you have experienced?

Read Together Luke 12:35-48

Exploring the passage:

1. Why might the analogy, or mini-parable, in v35-36 be an appropriate one? How does Jesus convey a sense of watchfulness?
2. In Jewish tradition the third watch was the last one before dawn. Jesus is wanting us to remain expectant and ready even in the event of a long wait for his return. He promises an attentiveness to their needs in v37 that recalls John 13:4-5. What do you think Jesus was communicating here?
3. What aspects of stewardship does a 'faithful and wise manager' give attention to, beginning at v42? What is his reward?
4. Those who waste or abuse the master's resources are assigned a 'place with the unbelievers' (v46). Why? What clues does v48 give us in his regard?

Life in the Credit Crunch:

5. It is estimated that those addicted to web browsing develop attention spans of no more than 9 seconds. The same as a goldfish ! In our own relationship with Jesus what are the clues to remaining attentive, watchful and ready for him? What role does spiritual discipline play? What else can help?
6. Of what has Jesus left us in charge? What does he expect of our stewardship?
7. The image of service runs through this passage. Is serving others necessarily in conflict with the individualistic culture of post-Christian Britain? What does Jesus' life tell us about service?
8. Re-read the last sentence of v48. What strikes you about it? Do you find it encouraging, daunting, reassuring? ... put your response in your own words and discuss how it applies to you personally and HTC as a Church.

Crunch Point: Remaining attentive to Jesus is about keeping him at the front of our minds and our thoughts. Attending to him in our lives as our overriding priority.

For Prayer: Give thanks for Jesus's promise to return. Pray that we will be ready by holding him in our thoughts, prayers and deepest desires. That we will learn to appreciate God and his love through Jesus Christ in our lives on a daily basis.

Where are we heading?

Icebreaker Question: Have you ever been excluded from a party or event you really wanted to attend? How did it feel?

Read Together Luke 13:22-30

Exploring the passage:

1. What might be the man's motivation for his question in v23? What question does Jesus choose instead to answer? Why do you think he does this?
2. How many doors to the kingdom does Jesus think there are? Why does he describe it as narrow? Jesus clearly sees himself as 'the door' (John 14:6). What does it mean to go through it?
3. What is the scenario of v25 meant to represent? What truth does the owner's reply convey? Why does the appeal of v26 not change his verdict? What then does it mean to 'know' him?
4. Why are Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom, but not some of Jesus' listeners? (See Hebrews 11:8-21, Galatians 3:6-9 or Romans 4:13-25). Who are the people in v29, and what have they done to be saved?

Life in the Credit Crunch:

5. Is it possible to come to church for many years and yet fail to enter the kingdom? What might such a person have failed to do? Do our church services make clear how we can enter?
6. What sort of protestations would people in our society make, if they realized they were excluded? What do they have common with Jesus' listeners? What do they fail to understand or appreciate, which prevents them from responding until it is too late?
7. In the light of all this, what are the key messages we need to pass on to others who do not know Christ? What are the key misunderstandings we need to expose?
8. Why should v29 be an encouragement to us? How does it build on v18-21?

Crunch Point: Entering through the narrow door is the way to the kingdom. Pointing others to the door is the work of the kingdom.

For Prayer: Give thanks that Jesus made entry into the kingdom possible. Pray that we will be ever thankful for that and ever ready to point others to the kingdom and the king, through our prayers, words and actions.

What can we look forward to?

Icebreaker Question: What's the best banquet you've been to? What made it special?

Read Together Luke 14:15-24 (The Parable of the Great Banquet)

Exploring the passage:

1. The atmosphere at the dinner with the "prominent Pharisee" and guests will have been tense following Jesus' challenges in 14:5-14. Yet, in response to one guest's "icebreaker" (v15), Jesus' examination continues. How does he challenge the assumptions contained in the man's saying in verse 15?
2. It was normal at that time for second round invitations to be issued when a banquet was finally prepared. How genuine do the last minute excuses sound (vv 18-20)? On what evidence do you base your assessment?
3. God's kingdom being described as a feast or banquet is quite common within the bible. Read Isaiah 25:6-8, as a particular example. What are the characteristics of the banquet therein? How does it make you feel?
4. Who were those "men who were invited" in verse 24? How do they contrast with those in the "streets and alleys" (v21), the "poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame" (v21) and those in the "roads and country lanes" (v23). What is your interpretation of Jesus' meaning here? What is Jesus wanting the Pharisees to draw from these analogies?

Life in the Credit Crunch:

5. Life is full of invitations from credit card applications to charitable donations to dial-in voting. In a world where unimportant invitations can seek to dominate our attention, how can we keep alert to God's invitation, the only one that matters?
6. How do economic hard times present an extra challenge in accepting the invitation?
7. Jesus makes it clear in the parable that everything should take second place to accepting his invitation when it arrives. Our business dealings, our hobbies, our pleasures, even our most valued relationships. What is so special about his banquet that makes that order or priorities the right one?

8. How can we live faithfully in anticipation of this fulfillment?

Crunch Point: Jesus' makes it clear to the Pharisees that it is not enough to be invited to his banquet, one must choose to accept when it comes. Are you ready?

For Prayer: Pray that we will keep our ears open to Jesus' invitation, that we will be inspired by the promise of the great banquet and sustained by the hope of its fulfillment.

How much does it cost?

Icebreaker Question: Think of one of your greatest achievements. What sacrifices did you have to make to achieve it?

Read Together Luke 14:25-35

Exploring the passage:

1. What point is Jesus making in v26? What is he not saying? (See Matt 6:24 and Luke 12:49-53 for similar comments).
2. What does Jesus mean in v27? What light does Luke 9:23-26 shed on it?
3. Why do you think Jesus feels the need to make these points? What light is shed on this by the context of v25, and the warnings that follow (vs28-32)?
4. Jesus says “in the same way” in v33 because we need to make peace with God and submit to his terms. Jesus says that the terms are that we “give up everything”. What does he actually mean?
5. What can we conclude that following Jesus involves?

Life in the Credit Crunch:

6. What were the costs of discipleship that Jesus’ listeners would actually face in the years to come? What are the possible costs for us? In what situations might we have to choose God’s way over the wishes of family?
7. Do we tend to think of carrying our cross as a central element of the Christian life? If not, why not? Should we?
8. Do you think it is important to know what we are signing up for as Christians, as Jesus’ warnings of vs 28-32 suggest? Have you seen examples of the consequences of individuals not doing that? What were the consequences?
9. What positive messages do you think people need to hear to balance the warnings of this passage?

Crunch Point: Successful discipleship requires Jesus to be the most important thing in our life. These are the terms for peace that God has offered us.

For Prayer: Pray that we would fully grasp the costs of discipleship and invite God to enter and direct every area of our lives. Pray also that when there are costs to going his way, we would remember that he knows what is best.