

Holy Trinity Claygate

**ENCOUNTER, CELEBRATE, SHARE
GOD'S TRANSFORMING LOVE**

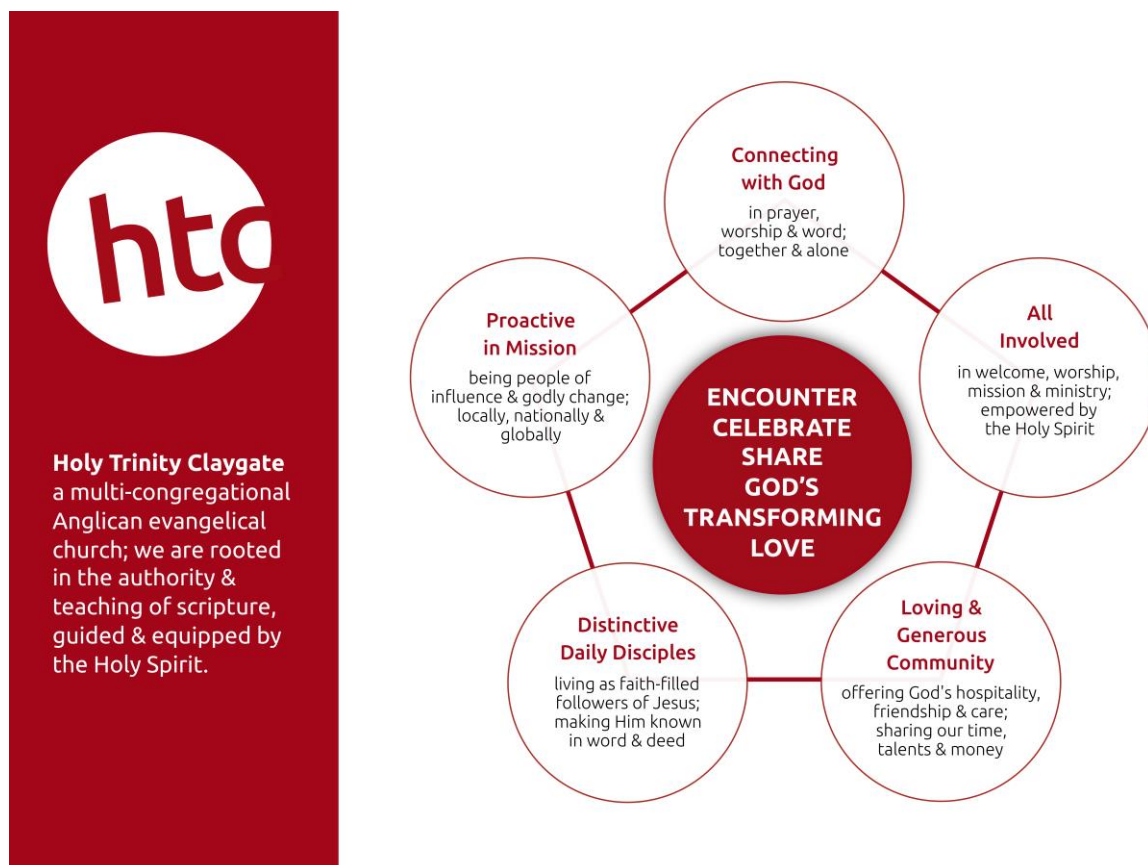


**Small Group Study Material
Spring 2019**

Introducing the Series

In this series we will be looking at HTC's new Purpose Statement – *Encounter, Celebrate, Share God's Transforming Love* – and the five values that surround it – *Connecting with God, All Involved, Loving & Generous Community, Distinctive Daily Disciples, and Proactive in Mission*.

The first six studies this term will focus in turn on the HTC purpose and the five values. Our hope is that, as you explore and learn about these values, alongside the passages from Scripture used, the purpose and values will take on a deeper meaning – helping us and others to come together and grow in confidence in living as followers of Jesus each and every day.



Each study will ask you to reflect on the particular purpose or value you have been exploring, and consider how you and your small group can embody, promote and live out that value together. Please ensure you leave enough time to do this.

In the final two sessions in this series we turn our focus to Lent, and the build up to remembering and celebrating the death and resurrection of Jesus at Easter. Like last year we also be encouraging groups to share a Passover Meal together with friends – watch out for more information about this later.

Richard Rugg

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Study 1: Purpose – Matthew 2:1-12

Way in

Share with one another what is the longest journey that you have ever been on: where were you going and why? Was it enjoyable or boring, hard or easy, or a mixture of all?

Opening the Bible

Read Matthew 2:1-12

The Bible does not give us much information about the wise men, we don't even know how many there were. The Bible does tell us a few things however, including that they came from the Eastern lands, and that they came carrying expensive and precious gifts. Christian tradition holds that they were men of high position from Parthia (near ancient Babylon), which is over 800 miles away from Jerusalem.

1. What purpose motivated the wise men to make such a long and arduous journey to Israel from their homeland?
2. Is there any significance that the wise men were not Jews and came from another nation and people group to find the Messiah? What does this tell us about the purpose of Jesus' mission?
3. What was the purpose in Herod's desire to find out where Jesus was born? How does this compare to the wise men's purpose in finding Jesus?
4. Was Herod's motivation to find Jesus obvious to the wise men when they met him? How did the wise men eventually find out about Herod's real desire?

5. The wise men knelt before Jesus and gave Him valuable gifts, even though He was in a house in the small town of Bethlehem, born to ordinary parents. They worshipped Jesus for who He was and gave Him their best. What does this tell us about what our own attitude before Jesus should be? Do we bring Him our best?

Small group reflection and prayer

- Turning now to think about ourselves and the church: how would you describe your purpose in life? Do your actions more closely follow the purpose of the wise men or of Herod? Do you intentionally bring your best to Jesus or spend time protecting and furthering your own status?
- Look again at the purpose statement of HTC: *Encounter, Celebrate, Share God's Transforming Love*. How do you think this statement will impact the community when it is lived out and put into action? Spend some time discussing and reflecting what this may look like. How might you overcome any barrier to living out this purpose?
- Further reflection: each day, read the verse below and spend some time reflecting on this incredible truth, and asking that God will make you aware of His purpose for you that day.

*For everything, absolutely everything, above and below, visible and invisible...
finds its purpose in Him. Col 1:16 (MSG)*

Study 2: Distinctive Daily Disciples – John 2:1-11

Way in

Do you enjoy going to weddings / parties? What do you like the most and the least about the celebration events that you have been to?

Opening the Bible

During the last session we focused on the idea of purpose: the Bible tells us that Jesus' mission - His purpose – was 'to seek and to save the lost' (Luke 19:12). During this session we are going to consider how Jesus' purpose can make an impact on, and relate to, our call to daily distinctive living – the first HTC value.

Read John 2:1-11

1. Is there significance in Jesus taking time out to attend a long social event such as a wedding? Does Jesus' attendance at this event surprise you?
2. What do you think prompted Mary to go to Jesus and ask for His help in this situation? (Consider both why she wanted help and why she went to Jesus)
3. What does Jesus' response to the request for help from His mother tell us about Him? (Please note that the term 'woman' v4 is not a disrespectful term in Aramaic)
4. Is a situation like this something you would bring to Jesus in prayer? What things motivate you to come to Jesus, and what things don't? Does reading this passage make any difference?

5. What was the result of the miracle, for the people at the wedding, and amongst Jesus' disciples?

Small group reflection and prayer

- The value we are looking at in this study is 'Distinctive Daily Disciples – living as faith-filled followers of Jesus, making Him known in word and deed'. How did Mary's attitude make this happen in the reading? What can we learn from it?

- Mary went to Jesus because she knew Jesus: she knew that Jesus was able to help and that if she spoke to Him about this, He would help in that situation. How could you make time to bring Jesus more into your day-to-day life? And how could you get to know Jesus better? Consider this individually and as a small group.

- Daily Challenge: set a daily reminder on your phone to pray at a certain time during the day where you wouldn't normally. Commit to praying at that moment and bringing whatever, whoever and wherever you are to Jesus, and trusting Him with it.

Study 3: Proactive in Mission – Luke 4:14-21

Way in

Have you ever heard someone say something so incredible that you couldn't believe it, but then they were able to prove it?

Opening the Bible

Read Luke 4:14-21

1. In Luke's Gospel, chapter 4 marks the beginning of Jesus' public ministry on earth. With this in mind, what is the significance of the Holy Spirit being mentioned in v14? What may this tell us about the desire of God?

2. Looking at vv14-17, what actions does it describe Jesus doing? What is the significance that Jesus is actively pursuing and taking the opportunities to make God's mission known? Should we have the same attitude?

3. In vv18-19 Jesus describes His mission in more detail, quoting Isaiah's prophecy about Him. It concerns the four areas listed below. Discuss and define what you think is distinctive about each area of mission mentioned.
 - i) Good news to the poor
 - ii) Release for captives
 - iii) Sight for the blind
 - iv) Freedom for the oppressed

4. Using your definitions above for the areas of mission, share with one another if there is a particular one which resonates with you, and which you have experienced most in your Christian life?

5. In v20 we are told, 'The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on Him' (NIV). This is because Jesus had proclaimed this incredible prophecy and power about Himself. How confident should we be in proclaiming and acting upon what we believe about Jesus? (c.f. Ephesians 5:15-17)

Small group reflection and prayer

- The value that we are focussing on in this study is 'Proactive in Mission – being people of influence and godly change, locally, nationally and globally.' How does this value link with the shape of Jesus' mission on earth? How should it shape our lives?
- What importance does Scripture play in the life and mission of Jesus? What importance should the Bible play in our daily life and mission?
- How proactive are you in being a person of influence & godly change in your daily life? What could you do to get better at this? How can your small group encourage and enable you to do this together?
- Each small group has been asked to have a missional aspect as part of its identity: either a project or emphasis. Spend some time praying and discussing how to grow and develop the missional focus.

Study 4: Loving and Generous Community – Luke 2:22-40

Way in

Think of a time when you had to wait a long time for something to happen (perhaps some of you are in that situation right now). How did it feel during the time of waiting? If / when the event you were waiting for eventually took place, how did you feel then?

Opening the Bible

Jesus is 40 days old when Joseph and Mary take Him to be presented in the temple in fulfilment of Jewish law (have a look at Leviticus 12 if you'd like to know about the background to this).

Read Luke 2:22-40

1. What does this episode tell you about Joseph and Mary's attitude to their Jewish faith, and the community of which they were a part?
2. How is Simeon described? What do we learn about his relationship with God and his attentiveness to the Holy Spirit? (vv25-28) How does this encourage or challenge us in our own walk with God?
3. How does Simeon describe Jesus, and the work that God plans to do through Him? How wide is the scope of this work – who is included? (vv29-35)
4. What part does Anna play in this story? Who does she speak to about Jesus? (vv36-38)

5. Looking through the whole passage, identify all the different individuals or groups who form part of the community that is described here. What overall picture of community life is built up? What can we learn from this to help shape our life as a church community in Claygate?

Small group reflection and prayer

- The value we are looking at in this study is titled 'Loving and Generous Community – offering God's hospitality, friendship & care, sharing our time, talents & money.' Where do we see hospitality, friendship and care in action in our small group, and in HTC? In what ways might God be calling us to grow in these areas?

- Which is the biggest challenge for you: sharing your time, talents or money? Consider each in turn, and discuss ways in which we can more effectively share these resources with one another – and how it might be possible to realistically do so in our busy lives.

- Identify one way in which you could show hospitality or care to someone, or share your time and skills with them this week. Commit to put this into action – and ask each other next week how it went!

Study 5: All Involved – Luke 5:1-11

Way in

How do you respond when someone asks you to do something and you are tired / in the middle of doing something else / what they are asking doesn't make sense? Does your answer depend on who makes the request?

Opening the Bible

Read Luke 5:1-11

1. How do you think Simon Peter felt when Jesus asked him to take Him onto the lake in his boat? Do you think he saw it as a privilege, or an interruption to his task of washing nets and preparing them for the next day?
2. Jesus then instructs Peter to let down the nets, despite the fact that they had fished all night to no avail. How do you interpret Peter's response?
3. What happens next? Who else is involved in the miraculous catch of fish? What role do they play?
4. Reflect on Jesus' call to Peter to 'put out into deep water' (v4). This has overtones of 'being out of your depth', possibly a scary and challenging place to be, or perhaps an opportunity to take a step of faith and trust God more. How does it make you feel? In what ways does this relate to your own walk with God?

5. How does Peter respond to this demonstration of Jesus' authority and power – i) in vv8-10? and ii) in v11? How does this challenge us to reflect on our own response to Jesus? Are there things that we might have to leave behind if we take seriously His call to us to follow Him?

Small group reflection and prayer

- The value we are looking at in this study is titled 'All Involved – in welcome, worship, mission & ministry; empowered by the Holy Spirit.' Reflect on your own involvement in welcome, worship, mission & ministry at HTC – how are you currently involved? Are there ways in which you would like to be more involved, or feel that God is calling you to do more? Is there anything stopping you from doing so?

- What difference does it make to know that we are 'empowered by the Holy Spirit' in the ways in which God calls us to get involved with His work? How can we help one another to be more aware of the Spirit's empowering in our lives? How does this affect our priorities and use of our time?

- Reflect for yourself on your gifts, skills, and experiences – if you find it difficult to identify your own gifts, why not chat to someone else who knows you well, perhaps your small group leader, and ask for their help? Spend time this week in prayer, asking God to show you ways in which you, as the unique individual He has created you to be, can be more involved in His work at HTC and beyond. Identify one next step, write it down in the space below this question – and commit to taking it!

Study 6: Connecting with God – Luke 5:17-26

Way in

What is the most wonderful answer to prayer that you have experienced, or heard or read about? What made it so amazing?

Opening the Bible

Read Luke 5:17-26

1. Describe the setting of this story in your own words – where does it take place? what is Jesus doing? who else is present?
2. How would you describe the actions of the friends who are carrying the paralysed man? What does this say about their attitude to Jesus, and to their friend?
3. How do the Pharisees interpret Jesus' statement that the man's sins are forgiven? How does Jesus respond? What does this tell us about i) the authority He has? and ii) His identity?
4. How do the man and the others who witness the miracle respond? What can we learn from this about our own response to God when we experience Him at work in our own lives?
5. It can feel easy to praise God when things go well, but much harder when things in our life are difficult and challenging. How can we encourage one another to keep connected with God even in the tough times of life?

Small group reflection and prayer

- The value we are looking at in this study is titled 'Connecting with God – in prayer, worship & word; together & alone.' Consider three areas in turn: prayer, worship and word (the Bible) – and discuss how easy or difficult you find it to connect with God in these ways, on your own and with others (eg at church or in your small group). How can we help each other to grow in these areas?
- Spend some time connecting with God in prayer silently on your own, listening for any ways in which God wants to speak to you today and bringing to Him anything that is particularly on your heart (make sure you listen as well as bringing requests!)
- Spend some time connecting with God in worship together as a group. You might like to sing a song or hymn together – one suggestion is the song 'Blessed be your name', for which the words are printed below, and you can find music to sing along to at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PnWKehtsOXu8>

1. Blessed be Your name in the land that is plentiful,
where Your streams of abundance flow, blessed be Your name.
Blessed be Your name when I'm found in the desert place,
though I walk through the wilderness, blessed be Your name.
Every blessing You pour out I'll turn back to praise.
When the darkness closes in, Lord, still I will say,

'Blessed be the name of the Lord, blessed be Your name.'
'Blessed be the name of the Lord, blessed be Your glorious name.'

2. Blessed be Your name when the sun's shining down on me,
when the world's 'all as it should be,' blessed be Your name.
Blessed be Your name on the road marked with suffering,
though there's pain in the offering, blessed be Your name.
Every blessing You pour out I'll turn back to praise.
When the darkness closes in, Lord, still I will say,

*(last time) You give and take away, You give and take away,
my heart will choose to say 'Lord, blessed be Your name.' (Repeat)*

Beth & Matt Redman

Study 7: Encounter God: in the desert – Luke 4:1-13

Way in

Go around the group and share what your favourite meal / food is. What is it about that meal that makes you like it so much?

Opening the Bible

Read Luke 4:1-13

1. The temptations of Jesus happened immediately after His being filled with the Holy Spirit. Why do you think Satan tried to tempt Jesus right at the start of His public ministry?
2. Have you ever had the experience of being excited about or setting off in a new area, to find yourself confronted with questions and doubts? How did you respond to these?
3. In vv3-12 there are three different temptations placed before Jesus. For each temptation decide and describe i) what desire Satan is appealing to, and ii) why the temptation would have been wrong to give in to.
4. How did Jesus resist temptation? Consider both the specific responses for each temptation, and also the similarities in His responses.

5. Temptation can happen at any time, often when we don't expect it. Jesus was tempted at the start of His ministry, but v13 tells us that Satan would come back at an opportune time. What do we learn about resisting temptation from Jesus that can be helpful to us?

Small group reflection and prayer

- In Christian tradition, Lent is a time when people have 'given up' something to focus on God. Is there anything in your life that is getting in the way of your relationship with God? What can you do to change and refocus?

- Jesus was tempted and was without sin. This means being tempted is not sinful and is different to sinning. What is the difference between temptation and sin? What should our attitude be to temptations in general?

- Personal challenge: Learn or relearn the encouraging verse below, from 1 Corinthians 10:13. It encourages us to know that there is always a way out of every situation that we face.

No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.

Study 8: Encounter God: when creating the right conditions for spiritual growth – Luke 13:1-9

Way in

Imagine you are teaching a child the difference between right and wrong – would you be more likely to use a 'carrot' approach (do this, then good things will happen...) or a 'stick' approach (don't do that, otherwise bad things will happen...)? Which approach would you prefer to be on the receiving end of?

Opening the Bible

Read Luke 13:1-9

In vv1-5, Jesus refers to two contemporary events which would have been familiar to His hearers. Firstly, Pilate had killed some Galileans as they were offering sacrifices in the temple, and secondly a tower (part of the wall surrounding Jerusalem) had fallen and killed eighteen people.

1. Look at Jesus' words in vv2-5. Is there a specific link between the sin of these individuals and the death they suffered at the hands of a human agent, or in a natural disaster? What more general lesson does Jesus draw out from these instances?
2. Have you come across people who suggest links between sin and suffering in some way in today's world? How does this passage help us to engage with these views?
3. The fig tree in vv6-9 is a symbol of the Jewish nation. Describe in your own words what point the parable is making. How do you think Jesus' Jewish hearers would have responded to this message?
4. In v8 time is given to dig and fertilise the fig tree to create opportunity for growth. What 'digging and fertilising' is available to us, to create opportunity for growth in our own lives? How can we make the most of these opportunities?

5. In what ways could we invest in the lives of others to 'dig and fertilise' and help them to grow spiritually? Is there someone who you could offer to draw alongside, to encourage or mentor them over a period of time? How could you go about this?

Small group reflection and prayer

- The fig tree in this passage is given a period of grace for one year only – there is a sense of urgency. How does this make us feel – not only for ourselves, but also for those in our lives who don't yet know God? How does this passage encourage us to share our faith with others? How can we help one another to do so with more confidence?

- Lent is a time when we are called to examine our own lives and repent of anything that is getting in the way of our relationship with God. Spend some time in prayer, bringing to mind those things you need to repent of, and (if you're brave enough to do so, remembering that everything shared in the group is confidential) sharing them with the group. Join together in a general prayer of confession, then be assured of God's forgiveness and thank Him – you might like to read aloud Romans 8:1-2:

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death.

- During the week: set aside some time to read slowly and carefully through 2 Peter 3:8-15, which reflects many of the same themes as today's passage. Allow God to speak to you and make your own response to Him in prayer.