



lifeWORKS 30

knowing – growing – living



Following Jesus at Thornbury Baptist Church

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What You'll Find in this Book





There are three main sections:

Way Into

These pages introduce each of the lifeWORKS themes (lifeSOURCE; lifeSTREAMS; lifeSHAPES) to help you find your way into the daily readings that follow.

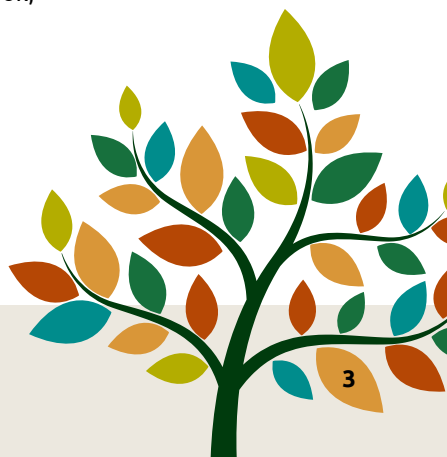
Thirty Days of Devotional Readings

The lifeWORKS themes are unpacked across 30 days. These are numbered in the book. Each day has the following sections:

-  **READ:** A Bible passage to read.
-  **REFLECT:** A note to help you think about the theme.
-  **RELATE:** Questions to help you think more deeply about the reading. You can either think about these yourself or, even better, chat about them with a friend or in your small group.
-  **RESPOND:** A practical suggestion for developing the day's theme.

Extras

There are seven short features spread through the book, unpacking themes related to the daily readings.





WAY INTO lifeSOURCE

Rooted in God

What's at the root of being a Christian? Reading the Bible? Praying? Going to church? All good things, but none of them are the main thing. The main thing is knowing God personally – Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The Christian life is rooted in an ever-deepening appreciation of all that God is, all he has done, and all he continues to do for us. Just as a plant's roots anchor it and provide it with nutrients, knowing God personally is the source of our stability and strength as Christians. A walking, talking friendship with God is the beating heart of true personal discipleship and the energising centre of a church community.

So, to live faithfully and fruitfully as Christians we need to stay rooted in God. We need to go deeper into his unconditional love. We need to listen to him. We need to revel in our status as his children. We need to experience his grace and kindness. We need to grow in awareness of his moment-by-moment presence in our lives.

The first set of readings are about being rooted in God, our lifeSOURCE.



***A walking,
talking
friendship
with God is
the beating
heart of true
personal
discipleship***

Day 1: Rooted in God our Father

God's Night Work

Read

Ephesians 2:1-10

Reflect

If you visit a large city in the very early morning, you might be surprised at how much is going on. While most of the city sleeps, streets are being cleaned, shops are receiving deliveries of fresh goods, buses are being moved to the right location for the next day. Through the night everything is being put in place to prepare for the new day.

Today's reading lifts the covers on God's night work. While we were spiritually dead asleep^(1,5), God was actively preparing everything for the moment when we would wake up to new life⁽⁵⁾. While we were trapped in our old lives^(2,3), God was preparing a new one⁽⁶⁾.

Why? Because he loves us⁽⁴⁾. The new life God has created for us⁽¹⁰⁾ is not a reward for our goodness but purely due to his mercy, grace and kindness^(5,7).

Rooted in a God who loved us even when we were spiritually dead and disobedient^(2,5), we have nothing to fear and nothing to prove as we get up to start each day.

Relate

- When you were 'dead' to God⁽¹⁾, what did that feel like, and how is life different now?
- Mercy is compassion or forgiveness shown towards someone who does not deserve it. Why is it good news for you that God is 'rich in mercy'⁽⁴⁾?

Respond

Draw four columns on a piece of paper. Head the first 'God is', the second, 'I was', the third, 'God has', and the fourth, 'I am'. Work slowly through today's passage and fill in the columns. Turn your discoveries into prayer.

“

While we were trapped in our old lives, God was preparing a new one

Day 2: Rooted in God our Father

Even Me?

Read: 

1 John 3:1-3

Reflect 

Were you ever part of that painful process at school where sports teams were picked by two team captains who took it in turn to select who they wanted on their team? Typically, the best players were chosen first until there were just a few left, whom neither team captain really wanted, but they had to choose anyway.

Sometimes there may be a risk that we think of our entry into faith a bit like that. God chose some star players – the pray-ers and preachers, the sinless and super-saints: and then reluctantly chose the rest of us as a sort of job-lot of no-hopers.

Not according to today's reading. God calls us *all*, his children! No superstars and stragglers, just all his children. We might all throw up our hands and say, 'Who even *me*?'

When our roots are planted firmly in our status as God's much-loved and chosen children, we realise we are never alone and never a 'nobody'. Rather, we have a source of identity and security that anchors and nourishes our daily lives.

“

...we are never alone and never a 'nobody'.

Relate 

- How does the truth that God has chosen you for 'adoption' make you feel?
- In everyday life, what difference does it make that you are God's child?
- How might your experience of your own parents affect the way in which you relate to God as your Father?

Respond 

Psalm 103:13 describes God as a compassionate Father. Take some time to read the Psalm slowly. What does it say about your heavenly Father's character, and how he relates to you? As you read it, turn your thoughts into prayer.

Day 3: Rooted in Jesus

Impostor Syndrome?

Read:

Romans 5:1-11

Reflect

Apparently, many of us experience Impostor Syndrome. It's the feeling that we are frauds, doing something which secretly we believe is really beyond us. It's very common apparently.

There is such a thing as Christian Impostor Syndrome. It's the nagging feeling that we're not living the Christian life well enough and one day others (or worse, God!) will find us out.

Today's reading is a great place to nail Christian Impostor Syndrome. It strips away any need to be good enough or to perform well enough to please God. How come?

Because Jesus has already done all that⁽¹⁾. His death (not my performance) has cleared the ground between me and God^(8,9). No obstacles remain. Simply by faith in Jesus, I am at peace with God⁽¹¹⁾.

If I try to measure my Christian life by my achievements, I will probably always feel an impostor. If I understand that I am rooted in God *solely* because of Jesus's achievements⁽²⁾ then I can relax and face life's struggles full of hope, and confident of God's love⁽⁵⁾.

Relate

- Are there elements of 'performance' as a Christian where you feel an impostor? What are they? Does today's reading help at all?
- How does the fact that Jesus died to give you peace with God make you feel?

Respond

'I have peace with God because of what Jesus Christ my Lord has done for me' (Rom 5:1 NLT adapted). Copy this verse and carry it around with you: maybe make it your screensaver. Live with it until it lives in you.

“

***Simply by
faith in
Jesus, I am
at peace
with God***

lifeSOURCE Extra:

The Cross of Jesus

Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, are unusual biographies of Jesus. Around one third of their content focuses on just one week, the week when Jesus died.

Jesus had predicted that he would be killed (Mark 8:31), but far from a meaningless execution, his death was to be full of purpose. Jesus' death was for the benefit of others, in fact it was for the benefit of everyone. His death would "take away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29).

Sin. It's not a popular word, but it is a universal problem to which the death of Jesus is the universal solution (Romans 3:23-25).

'Sin' describes a powerful force that controls our lives and leaves us feeling trapped and powerless to change (Romans 7:14).

'Sin' describes our personal moral failures that leave us feeling ashamed and guilty (Ephesians 2:1,2).

'Sin' creates an obstacle to a relationship with a holy God (Isaiah 59:2).

Trapped, guilty and alienated from God. It's not a pretty picture, but there is good news: when Jesus died, sin died with him. 'When he died, he died once to break the power of sin' so that we can be 'dead to the power of sin and alive to God through Christ Jesus' (Romans 6:10,11).

On the cross Jesus set humanity, and in fact all creation (Colossians 1:19,20), free from controlling powers, shame and guilt with the result that we can start life again, enjoying God's favour and friendship.

“

...when Jesus died, sin died with him.



Day 4: Rooted in Jesus

Jesus Calls: We Follow

Read:

Matthew 9:9-13

Reflect

If you asked Matthew why he was a follower of Jesus, how do you think he might answer?

According to today's reading, he was a follower primarily because Jesus took the initiative to reach out to him. Yes, Matthew responded, but it wasn't that Matthew 'found Jesus' but that Jesus found him (John 15:16).

This is such an important perspective for all of us who follow Jesus. He made the first move. He saw something in us that we couldn't see in ourselves. He loved us long before we loved him (1 John 4:19) and that love never stops.

Jesus knows each of his followers personally. Like Matthew, we are all called by name. There is nothing about us that is hidden from him, but despite that, he loves us enough to invite us to spend our lives with him!

Only when we know that we are rooted in that deeply personal call are we free to live a life of whole-hearted, and risky discipleship.

Relate

- How did you first hear Jesus' invitation to follow him? Why did you respond?
- Are you more likely to think that being a Christian is about looking for Jesus, or about him looking for you? Why is that?
- What impact does it have that Jesus knows you by name?

Respond

Imagine that you are in a crowded room. Jesus enters. Amazingly, he sees you, pushes through the crowd and comes to you. He looks into your eyes and warmly says, 'I've been looking for you: come with me'. How do you respond?

“
*Jesus knows
each of his
followers
personally*”

Day 5: Rooted in Jesus

Every Step You Take

Read: 

Matthew 11:25-30

Reflect 

Many surveys suggest our culture is not that great at doing life well. Measures of well-being and life satisfaction are all in decline, whilst recorded levels of anxiety and stress are rising.

We seem to be struggling to find the 'good life'. Far from generating satisfaction, our culture's way of life leaves increasing numbers of us feeling 'weary and burdened' ⁽²⁸⁾.

Jesus intimately knows the creator of life, his Father ⁽²⁷⁾, and based on that knowledge, he offers an alternative way to live. He has realistic expectations of us: he is 'gentle and humble' ⁽²⁹⁾ and rather than demanding anything of us, he offers us 'soul-rest' ⁽²⁹⁾. Sound good?

The path to soul-rest starts with an invitation to make a daily decision. Each morning we decide to keep in step with Jesus that day, as though we were actually yoked to him ⁽³⁰⁾. We turn deaf ears to the noise of our soul-destroying culture and listen for the gentle words of Jesus to guide us.

Jesus leads, we follow. Keeping in step with Jesus is the key to soul-rest.

“

Keeping in step with Jesus is the key to soul-rest.

Relate 

- How does the thought that *every step you take* is accompanied by Jesus make you feel? What does that tell you about your view of Jesus?
- Imagine you sensed Jesus nudging you in a direction you didn't want to go? How might you react?

Respond 

Think through your day. Where will you go? What decisions will you need to make? What will you do and who will you meet? What will it mean to take every single step 'yoked' to Jesus? Turn your thoughts into prayer.

lifeSOURCE Extra:

Believers' Baptism

Jesus' final instructions to his disciples in Matthew's Gospel were that they should 'go and make disciples of all the nations'. All new disciples, he instructed, should be baptised 'in (or into) the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit' (Matthew 28:19).

Baptism is the first step on the journey of following Jesus. It doesn't make you a Christian but is a sign that you have become one.

Baptism is*...

A Step Away

Baptism marks the first step of faith away from a life governed by our own ambitions and desires. Baptism is a symbol of dying to self-centred living, and a moment to experience God's forgiveness.

A Step Into

To be baptised 'into the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit' is a way of saying that we are being re-named. Our new 'God-name' means that we have stepped into a new identity, and we now live as people joined to God's love and given to God's purposes.

A Step Forward

Our baptism expresses the start of our new God-led life, in which he is our constant companion. Whatever our age we can start life over again, receiving God's power to step forward into our new identity.

(*See Romans 6:3-5)

“

Baptism is the first step on the journey of following Jesus.

You can find out more about baptism here, www.thornburybaptistchurch.org.uk/baptism. You could also arrange to speak with one of the elders or contact the office for a free booklet on the subject.



Day 6: Rooted in the Holy Spirit

Dead Man Walking

Read: 

John 3:1-10

Reflect 

Nicodemus was a smart guy. He was a member of Jerusalem's religious elite ⁽¹⁾, and so well-versed in his Bible that he qualified as a teacher for all Israel ⁽¹⁰⁾. Yet for all his God-seeking, God-serving passion, he fell short. He didn't know God's presence like Jesus did, and he couldn't do the God-things that Jesus could ⁽²⁾.

For all his intellect, he was a spiritually dead man walking. To truly live, he needed something so radical, that it was like being born again ⁽³⁾.

Jesus explained. No-one can experience the presence and power of God through religion: only a changed heart can do that. God's ancient promise (Ezekiel 36:25-27) was now coming true and all honest God-seekers could – indeed *must* ⁽⁶⁾ – experience this new birth.

Just as natural birth launches you into natural life, spiritual birth launches you into spiritual life. Spiritual rebirth is the start of knowing God personally, and of living the God-life. It's hard to pin down, or even define, but just like we know that the wind is blowing, we'll know that it's happened ⁽⁸⁾.

“

Spiritual rebirth is the start of knowing God personally

Relate 

- Using a weather condition, how would you describe your life in the Spirit? Gale force? Gusty? Moderate breeze? Flat calm?
- Has the apparent safety of 'religion' ever appealed to you more than the unpredictable life in the Spirit? Why was that?

Respond 

Can you identify with Nicodemus, knowing lots *about* God but not feeling you experience his presence? Or knowing what Jesus would do, but not able to do it? Why not ask God for the wind of the Spirit to blow again into your life?

lifeSOURCE Extra:

Life in the Spirit

The Holy Spirit is God's presence in us, enabling us to live the Jesus life. We cannot be a Christian without the Spirit's help and so God gives his Spirit to all his children! His presence gives us:

New Father

Just as Jesus knew God as 'Father', the Holy Spirit makes us inwardly aware of a new Father-child relationship with God (Romans 8:14,15).

New Desires

We find that we start to want different things from life. Some old habits we now want to leave behind and the things that Jesus wanted, begin to attract us too (Philippians 2:13).

New Abilities

We find that the Spirit gives us abilities that we didn't previously have. Like Jesus, for example, we may realise we are gifted to speak God's truth, to pray for others to be healed, or hear from God for other people. See Romans 12:4-8; 1 Corinthians 12:1-11 for other examples of gifts that the Holy Spirit may develop in us.

New Character

We realise that we develop the same character traits that marked Jesus. We become more loving, more joyful, more peaceful for example (Galatians 5:22-25).

New Courage

We discover we are willing to tell other people about our friendship with Jesus (more on this in tomorrow's reading).

We need to continually pray to be filled with the Spirit so that we become the mature Jesus-shaped people that God has called us to be.

“

The Holy Spirit is God's presence in us, enabling us to live the Jesus life.



Day 7: Rooted in the Holy Spirit

More Oomph Needed

Read: 

Acts 4:23-31

Reflect 

To play the tuba (I know you've always wondered) you need good technique, the ability to read music – and lots of oomph (technical term). Without the oomph you'll never play the oompah.

The disciples were in danger of running out of spiritual oomph. They knew how important it was to tell people about Jesus, but they'd experienced a knockback. The church's leaders, Peter and John, had been arrested and released, but on condition that they stopped speaking about Jesus (Acts 4:18).

You might as well tell a team of scientists not to speak about a new cancer-beating drug they'd just created!

Determined to let everyone know about the life-changing effect of Jesus, they prayed ⁽²⁴⁾. They didn't ask for the opposition to stop, or for a move to somewhere easier. They prayed for more oomph: the power to carry on speaking about Jesus ⁽³⁰⁾ and for the power of God to change broken lives ⁽³⁰⁾.

We can't generate this power, but we can't do without it. It is God-given. More courage. More miracles. More Holy Spirit oomph please Lord ⁽³¹⁾!

“

We can't generate this power, but we can't do without it.

Relate 

- Have you ever been knocked back when you've talked about Jesus?
What effect has it had on you?
- In what way is introducing Jesus to people like a team of scientists introducing a new medical breakthrough?
- How easy do you find it to believe for 'miraculous signs and wonders ⁽³⁰⁾' today?

Respond 

What might prevent you from talking about Jesus to non-Christian friends? Make a list of things that come to mind and pray through it. What is God saying to you as you pray?



WAY INTO lifeSTREAMS

Growing in God

The first part of this book has focused on the way in which our relationship with God is rooted in God's loving initiative towards us. Like all genuine relationships, our relationship with God grows and matures over time. So how does that deepening of relationship happen? How do the roots of God's love connect with our experience of living as followers of Jesus?

Thinking of the lifeWORKS tree image we can see that the fruit-bearing branches are joined to the roots by the trunk. A tree's trunk contains lots of channels which enable it to function as a sort of pipe, transporting nutrients from the roots to the shoots.

As Christians we too have a way of drawing on the goodness of our roots in God's love. These are our lifeSTREAMS and they include things like prayer, reading the Bible, being part of a Christian community and taking care to lead well-balanced lives.

These lifeSTREAMS are the focus of our next set of readings.

“

***...our
relationship
with God grows
and matures
over time.***

Day 8: Growing through prayer

Just Walk Away

Read: 

Mark 1:32-39

Reflect 

Jesus was busy. His hectic schedule included travel ^(16,21), preaching ⁽¹⁴⁾, evangelism ^(17,18), visiting the sick ⁽³¹⁾ and being sought by needy crowds ⁽³²⁻³³⁾. It's exhausting just reading about it!

The thing to do now was surely to have a good night's sleep then get up and do it all over again. That's what Jesus' friends clearly thought he'd do ^(36,37). But Jesus wasn't working to their timetable. Neither the disciples nor the needy crowds were driving his agenda. He knew that activity – however valuable it was – could become a distraction from what really mattered. So, he walked away from the crowds and listened to the one voice that mattered – his Father's ⁽³⁵⁾.

Jesus knew that making time to pray was not an optional spiritual 'bolt-on' to a busy life. We are told that he "often withdrew to lonely places and prayed" (Luke 5:16), meaning that his life was a beautiful balance of engaging with the world and withdrawing to talk with his Father.

Busy-ness should not be allowed to drive out prayer: rather, prayer must drive our business.

“

Jesus knew that making time to pray was not an optional spiritual 'bolt-on'

Relate 

- What would a 'good time of prayer' look like for you?
- What would a 'good time of prayer' look like from God's perspective?
- Is there a *time* and a *place* where you find it especially easy to pray? What can prevent you getting there?
How could you guard that space?

Respond 

Think of a Christian who you know (or suspect) prays regularly. Arrange to meet up with them to discuss your thoughts, questions and ambitions concerning prayer.

Day 9: Growing through prayer

The Prayer Manual

Read:

Matthew 6:5-8

Reflect

Today's reading is a sort of very brief Haynes Manual for maintaining and repairing our prayer lives.

Problems with finding the right words? Don't worry, they're not supposed to be impressive ⁽⁵⁾! No flowery or religious language is required. In fact, simple words from the heart are perfect ⁽⁷⁾.

Problems with making space to pray? We mustn't overcomplicate it. Find a quiet zone that fits daily life ⁽⁶⁾ – a corner of a room, a walk in the park, a layby on the way to work. Anywhere that we can literally, or figuratively, shut the door on busyness and distraction.

Problem with making a start? Well, we should just start talking naturally to our Father who was already waiting for us in our quiet zone ⁽⁶⁾. Prayer isn't a formal spiritual exercise, it is a heart-to-heart with God. We can say what is on our mind. He won't be shocked or surprised because he knows us anyway ⁽⁸⁾.

Problem with motivation? God has promised to 'reward' simple, faithful, honest prayer ⁽⁶⁾. Don't forfeit that promise by forgoing the prayer!

Relate

- Have you ever felt intimidated by the way other people pray? How does today's reading address that feeling?
- How does the fact that God already knows you completely affect the way you approach prayer?
- What other questions about prayer do you have? Who do you know who might help you?

Respond

Most people put important meetings in their diary so that they don't forget them. Why not do the same for meeting your heavenly Father in prayer? Sit down with your diary or planner, and schedule in some meetings for this coming month.

“

Prayer isn't a formal spiritual exercise, it is a heart-to-heart with God.

Day 10: Growing through the Bible

People of The Book

Read:

2 Timothy 3:14-17

Reflect

Being a Christian is not just about believing in a god. It's about believing in, and knowing, a *particular* God, the God of the Bible.

Working out who God is would be impossible for us unless he chose to reveal himself to us. The Bible is the 'God-breathed' (literally 'inspired' - ¹⁶) story of his self-revelation to us human beings. It is his priceless gift to us.

As we read it the Holy Spirit inspires us to hear God's voice in its pages. True, parts of it are not always easy to understand (that's why we need the help of the Holy Spirit, and of people in the Church who are gifted to teach), but its basic message is within everyone's grasp. At the centre of God's story, we read about Jesus and how to come to faith in him ⁽¹⁵⁾. As we follow Jesus, the Bible helps us distinguish right from wrong and equips us to please God in our everyday lives ^(16,17).

There's nothing else like the Bible, and nothing else that can do what it can do.



***There's
nothing else
like the Bible***

Relate

- How do you think of the Bible: God's rule book? God's history book? God's love letter? God's story? God's book of promises? What are the strengths and weaknesses of each of these descriptions?
- What advice would you give to someone wanting to get the most out of the Bible?

Respond

Find some different versions of the Bible: it's easy to do online at biblegateway.com. Read today's passage in a few different versions: try The Message, the New Living Translation (NLT) and the English Standard Version (ESV). What new insights come by using different versions?

Day 11: Growing through the Bible

It is Written

Read:

Matthew 4:1-11

Reflect

Jesus was having a tough time in the wilderness. His sense of identity, his understanding of God's character, and his calling to die for the salvation of the world were all being tested.

Jesus responded to each challenge with the words, "it is written" ^(4,7,10).

He brought to mind passages from his Bible (our Old Testament) where Israel was being tested in the wilderness ^(4,7,10), a test they had failed. Jesus knew that the only way for him to pass his own wilderness test was to stay true to what 'is written'.

For Jesus, the Bible, rightly understood, carried the authority of God. He allowed no other voice to shape his decisions, just the voice of God heard through the Bible with the Holy Spirit's help ⁽¹⁾.

Every day the voices of our culture, our upbringing, and our friends all want to influence our choices. The question is, 'Which voice will we listen to?'. Like Jesus, his followers will want to listen carefully to God's voice in the Bible and stay true to what is written there.

Relate

It's often helpful, particularly in bigger decisions, to ask some Christian friends to help us discern God's voice in the Bible.

- What is the value of doing that?
- What qualities would you look for in someone to help you discern God's voice?
- Who might you turn to for help?

Respond

Think of a decision you are facing. It could be about a small or large issue. Which 'voices' are influencing your thinking around that decision? How might the Bible become the main resource for your decision-making process?

“

For Jesus, the Bible carried the authority of God.

lifeSTREAMS Extra:

Hearing God Speak

God wants to have a conversational relationship with us, but how does he speak? He speaks...

Personally.

God knows us personally. He wants to speak with us about everything: our finances and families, our work and hobbies, our dreams and fears.

Quietly.

We may miss God's voice because we are expecting it to be something dramatic. In fact, it is very normal. Many people would describe it as something like an inner 'nudge', or a sudden and unexpected thought or impression. It doesn't have to be loud to be the Lord!

Regularly.

God may speak to us at any time during our day. It's not that God doesn't speak a lot, it's that we don't always pay attention! That's why it's important to regularly set aside time to meet God. It's likely that as we pray and read the Bible, or worship with others, God may nudge us by bringing an unexpected word or image to mind, or making a line from the Bible just 'jump out at us'.

Consistently.

What God might say to us today will be consistent with what he has said before in the Bible and through Jesus. If we feel God says something to us that jars with what he's said before we ought to question it. It is wise to check 'life-changing' words from God with a trusted Christian friend before acting on them!

Expecting God to speak is the first step in actually hearing him!

“

God wants to speak with us about everything

Day 12: Growing in community

Love is All You Need

Read:

John 13:34,35

Reflect

Jesus put love at the centre of what it means to be one of his followers. He commanded us to love God, our neighbour, our enemy (Matthew 22:37-39; 5:43,44) and in today's short reading, the other members of our Christian community ⁽³⁴⁾.

A church without love is a contradiction in terms since the defining mark of a Jesus-community is love ⁽³⁵⁾. Loving one another is, however, not about feelings but about serving. It is using all that God has given us (time, skills, money), to serve all that God wants for others.

The New Testament has many 'one-another' commands. Forgive one another (Ephesians 4:32). Show hospitality to one another (1 Peter 4:9). Bear one another's burdens (Galatians 6:2). Encourage one another (1 Thessalonians 5:11). Google them: there's lots more!

Each 'one another' is a way to outwork Jesus' new commandment to show love to one another. There is to be no holding back. He commands (not suggests) that we love one another *as he has loved us*. He set the bar high: he loved us enough to die for us.

Relate

- How do you react to Jesus *commanding* us to love one another?
- Jesus had just washed the feet of Judas, his betrayer. What does this say about loving others 'as Jesus has loved you'?
- When have you been shown 'one another' love? What difference did it make to you?

Respond

What has God given you (time, skills, money) that could be given to bless and encourage others in your Christian family at TBC? Pray and ask God to bring to mind someone who you might encourage in some way this week.

“

He set the bar high: he loved us enough to die for us.

Day 13: Growing in community

Space for Grace

Read:

Galatians 6:1-10

Reflect

We live in a very unforgiving culture. When someone famous is known to have failed morally, the news and social media are awash with condemnation. Judgment is everywhere: grace and mercy go into the shade.

What a different picture is painted in today's reading. Someone in the church has done something wrong ⁽¹⁾ but note that the knee-jerk reaction expected from the other church members was one of compassion, gentleness, and restorative support ⁽¹⁾. The temptation to point the finger or stand on higher moral ground ⁽³⁾ was to be resisted.

Taking their cue from Jesus ^(John 8:1-11), his family members spread grace and mercy everywhere, and put self-righteous judgment into the shade.

To be sure we all have personal responsibility for our lives ⁽⁴⁻⁶⁾, but when we fail it's so good to know that there is always a way back. As we support the person carrying burdens of shame and guilt ⁽²⁾ we open a stream of new life them. This is the healing power of 'loving one another'. This is the community of Jesus.

“

*...his family
members
spread grace
and mercy
everywhere*

Relate

- What are the emotions associated with personal moral failure? How can these be healed through sharing with others?
- How can TBC become a place where 'grace and mercy are spread everywhere'?
- How might 'bearing one another's burdens' spill over into life on your frontline (see p.37)?

Respond

Do you know anyone who might be suffering from a sense of failure: perhaps someone who has backed away from church because of it? What practical steps could you take to 'bear their burden' and help towards their restoration?

Day 14: Growing through worship

Encountering the One

Read:

Revelation 4:1-11 (and if you have time 5:1-14)

Reflect

Christians inhabit two worlds. On the one hand we live in the world of our daily reality, the earth. On the other hand, we live with one foot in the equally real world of spiritual reality that the Bible calls heaven. In today's reading John was invited to cross the threshold and enter heaven ⁽¹⁾.

The sight that captivated him was of a beautiful, majestic 'someone' sitting on a throne ⁽²⁻⁴⁾. This awesome vision of God was accompanied by the sound of countless worshippers praising both the One on the throne ⁽⁸⁻¹¹⁾, and Jesus 'the Lamb' ^(5:9-14).

It doesn't seem scripted or forced, but heaven's worship is a natural response to encountering God's character ^(8,11) and his work of salvation ^(5:9-10,12). It's a bit like when you see a beautiful sunset and you just find yourself saying, 'Wow, that's awesome'.

When we gather to worship at TBC, it's not about us, but about God. We too come to encounter the One on the throne. We too come to affirm his character and celebrate his work. No-one leaves that encounter unchanged!

Relate

- How do you prepare yourself before coming to worship, so that you arrive at the meeting ready to encounter God?
- During a service, what helps you worship and what hinders you? What can you do to reduce the hindrances?
- Has worship ever changed you? How?

Respond

Before you next gather with others to worship God, read these chapters again. Then, as you come to worship, let these biblical images of heaven's praise fill your heart and mind as you encounter the One on the throne.

“

***...worship
is a natural
response to
encountering
God's
character***

Day 15: Growing through worship

Wow!

Read: 

Matthew 14:22-33

Reflect 

Fishermen on a boat trip: what could go wrong? Well, a violent storm actually. Yet, it was in the storm that they encountered Jesus and in the boat that they worshipped him ⁽³³⁾.

The word 'worship' here literally means to 'show reverence by kissing the hand'. It's a gesture seen in films set in the medieval period, as people are invited into the presence of a king. It's a sign of respect and an acknowledgment of the king's status.

This perfectly describes the worship in the boat. The disciples' worship wasn't a lengthy time of singing, but a brief yet heartfelt acknowledgement that what had just happened had made them see that Jesus really was God's Son ⁽³³⁾.

Here's the thing: authentic worship can happen in our everyday world. As we encounter Jesus, perhaps in the kindness of a friend or an unexpected gift, our eyes are opened and we too can worship: 'Wow, Jesus you really are amazing'. By responding to these mini God-revelations, we become increasingly aware that Jesus is at work in all parts of our lives.

“

*...authentic
worship can
happen in
our everyday
world.*

Relate 

- What images and ideas does the word 'worship' bring to mind? How do these fit with today's reading and reflection?
- Where have you encountered the presence and activity of Jesus this week?
- How could you become more attentive to the presence and activity of Jesus in your everyday life?

Respond 

Filling your day with worship doesn't require access to sound equipment! Train your soul to worship as you look out for those sights, sounds and experiences that make you want to say 'Wow, Jesus you really are amazing'. See how many there are today.

lifeSTREAMS Extra:

Holy Communion

What is communion?

As the church gathers around the communion table, we are involved in an act of worship which is full of deep meaning.

When we take the bread and wine we are:

Remembering Jesus

The bread and wine are symbols of Jesus, reminding us of his life, sacrificial death, and his resurrection (Luke 22:19).

Encountering Jesus

As we take Communion our eyes are opened again to Jesus' presence with us: but more than that, we actually participate in all that the bread and wine represent (1 Corinthians 10:16).

Anticipating Jesus' Return

When we take bread and wine we look forward to the return of Jesus and the full and final triumph of God's kingdom (1 Corinthians 11:26).

Expressing Unity

When we take bread and wine, we affirm that we are part of one Christian family, symbolised by one loaf (1 Corinthians 10:17).

Celebrating with Jesus

When we take bread and wine we have a foretaste of the final joyful feast, where we will celebrate the healing of all creation. Taking communion should be serious, but not necessarily solemn (Revelation 19:6-9)!

Taking the bread and wine of Holy Communion is a powerful way to refresh our awareness of the streams of God's love. At TBC we take communion at least once a month in our Sunday meetings and sometimes in small groups. Anyone who affirms that Jesus is their Lord is welcome to take communion with us.

“

*The bread
and wine
are symbols
of Jesus*



Day 16: Growing through a balanced life

Distracted Soul

Read: 

Luke 10:38-42

Reflect 

Busy, busy, busy. Who can blame Martha? After all *Jesus* was the guest, so no amount of effort could be too much.

Or could it?

In her desire to serve she had become distracted ⁽⁴⁰⁾ and that had led her to become anxious and tetchy towards her sister – and towards Jesus ^(40,41). The Christian author Dallas Willard described ‘hurry’ as the ‘great enemy of spiritual life’, and perhaps Martha is a case in point as she quickly moves from busy to bossy to bitter!

Mary had chosen to sidestep Martha’s catering and cleaning frenzy and make time to learn from Jesus! It made her unpopular with her sister, but Jesus praised the choice ⁽⁴²⁾.

We shouldn’t mistake the lesson here. It’s not that Jesus wants all his followers to withdraw from the world of work and spend their time worshipping: but there is a balance to be struck between being *with* Jesus and doing things *for* Jesus. Our culture normalises busyness, so we need to work hard to balance that up and make time for what is better ⁽⁴²⁾.

“

...there is a balance to be struck between being with Jesus and doing things for Jesus

Relate 

- Martha’s imbalanced life resulted in anxiety and frustration with those around her. What are the signs that your life is out of balance?
- Saying ‘Yes’ to sitting with Jesus, means saying ‘No’ to many other things. Which distraction do you find it hardest to say ‘No’ to?

Respond 

Write ‘Martha’ and ‘Mary’ at the ends of a line on a piece of paper. Draw a cross to indicate where you are on the Mary-Martha Activity scale. Are you happy with your position? What could you do to move to a place of balance?

Day 17: Growing through a balanced life

Thanks for Nothing

Read: 

Mark 2:23-27

Reflect

The weekly Sabbath day was a gift from God to his people. On it they were to do nothing (Exodus 20:8-11). That's right, nothing, except rest and worship. For one day a week they could sit back from work and thank God that their security and status were not founded on their own productivity but on God's provision.

By Jesus' day the Sabbath day was valued so highly, that people had made up lots of laws to make sure it was kept properly. Jesus was caught breaking these religious laws ^(23,24). On the basis of an Old Testament story about King David (see 1 Samuel 21:1-6), Jesus asserted that it was his right as God's King to ignore the human Sabbath rules. After all, Sabbath was not a tortuous weekly test of faithfulness but God's generous gift to humanity ⁽²⁷⁾.

Keeping a weekly Sabbath day is *not* a law (Colossians 2:16) but it can still be received as God's gift. Maybe a weekly day for rest and worship is just what we need to rebalance life in our 24/7 culture.

Relate

- One of the meanings of the word Sabbath is 'to stop'. What would you enjoy stopping doing once a week?
- Sabbath is not about obeying other people's rules, but it can be helpful to work out your own guidelines for a restful Sabbath day. What might your guidelines include?

Respond

What do you think of keeping a weekly Sabbath day? Does it seem desirable? What would stand in the way of it happening? Which 24-hour period would work best for you? How might you safeguard that day in your schedule?

“

...a weekly Sabbath day can still be received as God's gift.

WAY INTO lifeSHAPES

Living for God

So far, we've thought about how our lives as followers of Jesus, are rooted in knowing God personally: he is our lifeSOURCE (Readings 1-7).

We then thought about how we grow in our relationship with God by developing spiritual habits that over time become our lifeSTREAMS (Readings 8-13).

It's time to turn now to the difference that all this makes in our daily lives, our lifeSHAPE.

Jesus clearly expected his followers to lead distinctive lives. Like lights in dark places, we'll be on show and make a positive difference (Matthew 5:13). The lifeSHAPES section identifies six Jesus-shaped values that will develop a distinctive Jesus-like flavour to our daily lives.

Two, **trust and obedience**, are about the way that our awareness of God's presence shapes our lives in the world.

Two, **contentment and gratitude**, are about how our inner attitudes add a distinctive and positive flavour to our dealings with others.

Two, **generosity and courage**, are outward-facing attitudes which transform the contexts in which we live.

These six lifeSHAPES are the subject of our next set of readings.

“

Jesus clearly expected his followers to lead distinctive lives.



Day 18: The trusting life

Take the leap

Read:

Hebrews 11:8-14

Reflect

Faith and trust are very closely linked in the Bible (in the original Greek they are in fact the same word). If there is a difference it is that 'faith' describes our belief that God is faithful, and trust is our decision to act on that belief. The two ideas belong together. It is never enough to say, 'I believe in God', if I don't live as though that was true (James 2:14-17).

Today's example of faith-trust is Abraham. His faith in God's character was so great, that when God told him to emigrate, he didn't ask 'Where to?', he just started walking ⁽⁸⁾. That's trust: faith in action.

Believing that your friend is reliable and will catch you if you jump from a burning building, is faith. Taking the leap requires trust.

Living a life of trust in our daily lives means that we refuse to follow the crowd. Rather, like Abraham, we take God at his word and step out into the unknown, trusting him alone.

Relate

- Trust is a response to hearing God's voice. Are there specific ways that God is calling you to trust him at the moment?
- If Abraham had chosen *not* to emigrate, what might have held him back? What does this tell you about possible obstacles to a life of trust?

Respond

Think of where you will be spending time this week. How will your *faith* lead you to trusting, Jesus-shaped action?

“

***That's trust:
faith in
action.***

Day 19: The trusting life

Walk like a Christian

Read: 

Hebrews 11:24-28

Reflect 

Moses was a Hebrew but was brought up in an Egyptian palace ⁽²⁴⁾. His dual identity presents him with a tough choice. Would he take the easy path and identify as an Egyptian, or make the tough choice and identify as a Hebrew ^(25,26)?

He took the costly route. He was willing to be disgraced and face the king's anger rather than hide his 'faith' and walk like an Egyptian (to coin a phrase).

What we learn from Moses, and from most of the characters in Hebrews 11, is that whilst 'believing' something may be easy, *acting out* our beliefs may cost us everything. Moses did the right thing and paid the price. The lost rewards of luxury, comfort and public approval were bearable because he *trusted God* to somehow reward him for his right choice ⁽²⁶⁾.

Every day, as we live out our faith, we face the Moses challenge. Which rewards do we most desire, those of our culture or those of God? Do we trust in God enough to walk like a Christian?

“

***...acting out
our beliefs
may cost us
everything.***

Relate 

Imagine that you were in a workplace that expected you to align yourself with values that you considered to be opposed to the values of God's Kingdom. What might you do and what could be the cost of trusting God in that situation?

Respond 

Do you know anyone who is experiencing hostility for choosing to trust God in their daily life? How can you be an encouragement to them? What might you do this week to offer them support?

Day 20: The obedient life

The Circle of Love

Read:

John 14:15-24

Reflect

Psychologists tell us that signs of being in love include racing hearts, sweaty palms, flushed cheeks, and feelings of passion. Jesus tells us that the single sign of loving him is that we keep his commandments ^(15, 21, 23).

Loving Jesus is shown in our life-choices not our heart-rate!

Fortunately, the commands of Jesus are few in number. Jesus commands us to love God, everyone we meet, our Christian family and even our enemies (Matthew 22:36-40; John 13:34, Matthew 5:44). Essentially just one command: Love!

But how hard can that be in everyday life?! Loving the overbearing boss, the rebellious child, the absentee parent and the gossiping church friend can seem almost impossible: however, help is at hand. God commits to stand especially close to those who commit to the costly path of love ^(16, 21, 23).

There is a kind of circle here: Jesus loves us. We love Jesus. We love everyone else as Jesus does. God moves close, and we become even more aware of his love. Then the cycle starts again!

Relate

- Think of a place where you spend significant time (work; home; social groups). What are the challenges for you of obeying the love command in these spaces?
- The example and motivation for loving others is Jesus' love for you (John 13:34). How do you keep your appreciation of his love real and fresh?

Respond

Set 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 as the screen-saver on your phone (or if you're less techy, just copy it onto paper and carry it with you). As you interact with people this week keep revisiting this famous 'love passage' and see how it shapes your behaviour.

“

***Loving Jesus
is shown
in our life-
choices not
our heart-
rate!***

Day 21: The obedient life

At the Next Junction, Turn Right.

Read: 

Acts 8:26-40

Reflect 

Satnavs are amazing, aren't they? They know exactly where we are and can tell us exactly how to get to where we want to go. We just have to listen to the voice and obey its directions.

Yesterday we considered Jesus' universal command to love. In today's reading we see something much more like the Satnav: a personalised word to a specific person. Philip is told to take a trip south ^(26,29). We are not told, but there is no indication that Philip had any idea when he got up in the morning that he'd end up leading someone to faith in the desert!

Obedying Jesus is not just a long-term decision to obey the love commands, but a day-by-day alertness to the voice of the Holy Spirit guiding us individually, sometimes in surprising ways.

God speaks in many ways, including an inner 'sense' nudging us to do something; a dream; a Bible verse; the words of a friend... the list could go on (see page 20). We just have to listen for his voice and obey its directions.

“

***We just have
to listen to
the voice
and obey its
directions.***

Relate 

- Jesus said that his 'sheep' would know his voice (John 10:4). How do you recognise the voice of Jesus?
- If you sensed a 'God-nudge', how might you test whether it was really from God?
- What advice would you give a new Christian who asked you how to hear God's voice?

Respond 

Start logging 'God-nudges' that you become aware of each day. Keep a list and at the end of a week, look back through the list. Which nudges did you respond to? Do any still seem to be God's voice? What will you do?

Day 22: The contented life

Enough is Enough

Read:

1 Timothy 6:6-11

Reflect

Contentment. It sounds such a wonderful thing! It's a sense that I am OK, that my whole life is lived in the shadow of God's presence, so whether I have a lot or a little, I need not stress. In any circumstances, I can be content.

Our society, however, works hard to make us *discontented*. The pressure is always on us to *get* more, *be* more, *experience* more. The underlying myth is that only when we achieve all that 'more', will we be content.

It's a lie. People can have it all and still be discontented ⁽¹⁰⁾. Who knew!?

Contentment is found between the poles of extreme poverty and excessive wealth. That way is defined by 'enough'. Enough food, enough clothing is, er... enough ⁽⁸⁾.

Christians, knowing that there is an endless life to come, need not be obsessed about having everything between the boundaries of birth and death ⁽⁷⁾. For now, enough is enough.

Amongst our discontented friends, how helpful might it be for us to add contentment to our faith ⁽⁶⁾, and model a life based on 'enough'?

Relate

- If you chose to live by the 'Rule of Enough', how might it affect your spending habits, your eating habits, your wardrobe and your hobbies?
- Some people might say that God wants to bless us, and that means having more than enough. How would you respond to that?

“

***For now,
enough is
enough.***

Respond

Think of your life. How much falls into the 'not enough' category, how much into the 'more than enough' category and how much into the 'enough' category? What might you do with your 'more than enough'? Who might help you with your 'not enough'?

Day 23: The contented life

God in the Mess

Read: 

Acts 16:22-34

Reflect 

A bad day just got worse. Having been stripped and flogged ⁽²²⁾ Paul and Silas find themselves chained in jail. This is the Paul who would later write that he had 'learned to be content' in *any* circumstances (Philippians 4:11). So, what lessons in contentment might he have learned while bruised and bleeding in a prison cell?

He learned that his circumstances were an unreliable guide to God's goodness. God can still be praised, even if our circumstances cannot be ⁽²⁵⁾.

He learned that the presence of pain doesn't mean the absence of God.

He learned that following Jesus doesn't make you immune from difficult and painful circumstances.

He learned that God can use us, even when it feels like our life is falling apart ⁽²⁹⁻³³⁾.

In summary, the lesson is that we *can* learn to be content in any circumstance, but *only* if we can look beyond the circumstances to God's presence in the mess. It may always seem difficult to 'sing in prison', but finding God *in* the mess is the key to surviving tough times.

“

...the presence of pain doesn't mean the absence of God.

Relate 

- When we find life unbearably hard, we need the support of others. How do you make yourself available to friends when they are struggling?
- How might you introduce the idea of 'finding God in the mess' to a friend in need, without sounding insensitive to their pain?

Respond 

The lifeSTREAMS of prayer, Scripture, worship, and fellowship keep us rooted in God. They are vital helps in being able to find contentment in difficult times. Review how your engagement with these vital practices is helping you at the moment.

Day 24: The grateful life

The Attitude of Gratitude

Read:

Psalm 103

Reflect

Psalm 103 is an outpouring of thanks to God. It starts and ends with an encouragement to bless God ^(1-2, 20-22). It acknowledges his dependability and the kindness of his character and actions.

Thanking God is such good soul-medicine. Giving thanks reminds us that our lives are a gift. As our thankful prayers express gratitude for God's kindness and care, our outlook changes from self-sufficiency to God-dependency.

It's so easy to take life's good things for granted and fail to see them as God's gifts to us. In Jesus' time Jewish believers said a prayer, three times a day, which contained the 'Eighteen Benedictions'. Each 'benediction' was a short burst of thanks, blessing God for who he is and what he has done. Every day was punctuated with thanks to God. That must have created quite an attitude of gratitude!

Learning the habit of gratitude changes us, and then it positively affects those around us (more on that tomorrow). So, let's take the Psalmist's advice, and give ourselves a good talking to: 'Come on my soul, bless the Lord!' ⁽¹⁾.

Relate

- How might developing an attitude of gratitude lead to you becoming more *content* (the theme of the last two days' readings)?
- Some things in life are impossible to thank God for because they do not originate from him (e.g. injustice or abuse). How might we pray in such circumstances?

Respond

Write your own list of Eighteen Benedictions. Each one starts with 'Bless you Lord for...' Use your list as part of you daily prayers for a while. Edit and amend it when you think of more things for which to thank God!

“

***Learning
the habit of
gratitude
changes us***

Day 25: The grateful life

The Power of Thanks

Read:

1 Thessalonians 5:11-18

Reflect

Giving thanks in all circumstances ⁽¹⁸⁾ is certainly, in the first place, an instruction to thank God for being with us, whatever our day brings. But perhaps it could also apply more widely to our daily dealings with those we meet, encouraging us to be habitual 'thanks - givers'.

Think of gratitude as a super-power. The two words 'Thank you' are two of the most powerful things we possess. When we give them away, they can change people, families and workplaces.

Expressing gratitude defuses tension. It encourages people and builds them up ⁽¹¹⁾. There's no one who does not appreciate receiving an honest 'Thank you'. Try giving some away this week.

Be specific and thank people for actual things you have appreciated (maybe things that others are taking for granted).

Be alert throughout the day. Look for people who deserve the power of Thank you (maybe people that others might overlook).

There are of course many ways to 'encourage one another' ⁽¹¹⁾, but 'thanks - giving' is so easy. Give it a go and see what happens!

“

Think of gratitude as a super-power.

Relate

- When someone thanks you for doing something, what effect does it have on you? What does their 'Thank you' release in you?
- When dealing with people we find difficult, how might things change if we found something to thank them for?

Respond

Saying 'Thank you' can be life changing, but the super-power is super-charged when written down. Who might you send a note or message to, showing your appreciation for them and what they do?

lifeSHAPES Extra:

Life on your frontline

At TBC we talk a lot about our 'frontlines'. Frontlines are the everyday places where we spend significant time with people who are not yet Christians.

Our frontlines embrace everything we do. The Bible says 'Whatever you do or say, do it as a representative of the Lord Jesus' (Colossians 3:17 NLT). That 'whatever'; carries a lot of freight! It includes every detail in our lives - words, actions - whatever!

Everyone has a frontline. It may be a workplace, or the street where we live. It may be a social club, dog walking circuit or sports team. For some it may be at home.

Encouraging distinctive Jesus-shaped living on our frontlines is a major focus of our mission strategy at TBC. Our mission partners are not just those people featured on our website. We are ALL TBC's missionaries, as we live all of every day for Jesus on our frontlines.

See more about life on your frontline on the TBC website:
www.thornburybaptistchurch.org.uk/frontline

The vision for Frontline discipleship is developed and supported by the London Institute for Contemporary Christianity (LICC.org.uk).

“

Our frontlines embrace everything we do.



Day 26: The courageous life

Right Place, Right Time.

Read:

Esther 4:5-14 (or read the whole book: it's an inspiring short story!)

Reflect

Esther was a refugee Jewish orphan girl. Despite being adopted by her caring cousin, Mordecai, she was later sex-trafficked into the harem of Xerxes, the king of Persia.

Not a great start in life! But her beauty caught the eye of the king, and she became his queen.

Shortly afterwards, Xerxes was duped into passing a law which authorised the ethnic cleansing of all Jewish people in his kingdom. What could Esther do for her people, in her vulnerable position on her unchosen and unexpected frontline? Her inclination was to duck the responsibility⁽¹¹⁾, but Mordecai challenged her to reconsider⁽¹⁴⁾. Maybe God had put her here for just this time. Plucking up all her courage, and with great wisdom she decided to act.

Like Esther, as people of faith, we may sometimes feel isolated and vulnerable in our frontline setting. We may fear the consequences of acting or speaking for Jesus there. We may not even want to be there! But who knows but that God has placed us in that position 'for such a time as this?'⁽¹⁴⁾.

“

*... 'for such
a time as
this?'*

Relate

- How might you use the story of Esther to encourage a Christian friend who feels stuck in a situation that they didn't choose?
- What do you think lies at the heart of the fear of standing out as a Christian?

Respond

Do you know anyone on your frontline who needs someone to stand up for them? Pray for the courage to act.

Day 27: The courageous life

Speak Up!

Read: 

Acts 1:6-9

Reflect 

As a man, Jesus' days on earth were done ⁽⁹⁾. Mission accomplished.

And yet although absent in body, he would remain present in the world in the form of the Holy Spirit, equipping his followers to be his witnesses on earth ⁽⁸⁾.

A witness is someone who sees or hears something and is willing to tell others about it. Being a witness of Jesus is really that simple. We don't have to be Bible experts, or to be able to 'explain' Jesus. We just have to have a relationship with Jesus and be willing to tell other people what that means for us (Acts 4:20).

As we live out our faith on our frontlines people may be intrigued and ask us to explain why we are the way we are (1 Peter 3:15). We listen carefully to their questions and provide a simple answer, based on our experience of knowing Jesus. We may not have all the answers, but we do have our story.

It may take courage, but it's that simple. Know Jesus. Live boldly. Listen carefully. Speak simply.

Relate 

- What have you personally 'seen or heard' as a follower of Jesus, that would form part of your testimony as a witness?
- If talking to other people about Jesus feels scary, why is that? What might you be afraid of? How could you overcome the fear?

Respond 

Pray for the opportunity to talk about Jesus with someone on your frontline this week. When the opportunity has presented itself, talk with a Christian friend about what happened and what you learned about being a witness.

“

We may not have all the answers, but we do have our story.

Day 28: The generous life

The Missing Mine

Read: 

Acts 4:32-37

Reflect 

What a few days it had been! Jesus had left 120 followers ^(1:15) in Jerusalem to wait for the Holy Spirit to arrive ^(1:4). His arrival was unmissable! Flames of fire, a gale-force wind, a riot of praise in unlearned languages, and in no time, 3,000 people joining the 120 ^(2:1-13, 41)! God's new multi-ethnic community, the church, had been born.

As the community took shape, something radical happened. Those with wealth took it on themselves to eradicate poverty in the community ^(34,35). With outstanding acts of generosity, the Spirit of God moved them to seek justice for those who did not have enough.

Amongst all his other activity, it appears that the Holy Spirit had sabotaged their dictionary. The word 'mine' had disappeared ⁽³²⁾! This kind of selfless Jesus-community, where 'there were no needy persons' ⁽³⁴⁾, so pleased God that he kept adding to their number ^(2:44-47)!

In our culture which focuses so much on the ownership of more and more 'stuff', how refreshing might it be to come across people governed by the urge to 'give' not 'get'?

“

...people governed by the urge to 'give'

Relate 

- Have you ever been the recipient of someone else's generosity? How did that feel? Did it change you in any way?
- How does it alter your relationship with your possessions, if you see them as on loan from God?

Respond 

Some people undertake an annual 'Stuff Audit'. They look through their belongings and consider giving away, or selling for charity, anything that hasn't been used in the last year. How about trying your own 'Stuff Audit'?

TBC has a Care Fund with the goal so that there might be 'no needy persons' in our church family. Donations, or requests for help, can be made at any time. Details from the office.

Day 29: The generous life

No Exceptions

Read: 

Luke 10:25-37

Reflect 

Important question: what does it mean get in on God's 'life without end' ^{(25)?} Jesus' answer centred on living a life of love ⁽²⁷⁾. Love for God and love for our neighbour are the essence of God's never-ending life.

Sounds simple, but the expert in the law wanted clarity. Who, *exactly*, constituted a 'neighbour' ^{(29)?} He was right to ask, because there is a twist in the tale.

Jews and Samaritans hated one another. So, when Jesus told a story about a Samaritan caring for a beaten-up Jew, he was pushing the boundaries. It's a bit like learning that a member of Hamas had stopped to care for a fallen citizen in Israel: shocking and unprecedented!

The Samaritan generously went out of his way, and sacrificially gave his time and money to care for his enemy-neighbour. Loving our neighbour, Jesus was saying, is to be ridiculously generous to *anyone* who needs it.

As citizens of God's new world order, we are called to lives of love, of unconditional generosity to all: no exceptions. *Anyone* on our frontline is our neighbour.

Relate 

- The Samaritan's neighbour-love cost him time, money, effort and maybe his reputation with his Samaritan friends. What might be the personal costs for you to be a 'Good Samaritan' on your frontline?
- How do you respond to the idea of being called to a life of unconditional generosity?

Respond 

Think around your daily life. Is there anyone on your frontline who maybe you find difficult, but who today's reading has shifted into the 'neighbour' category? What are their needs and what might it mean for you to love them?

“

***Anyone on
our frontline
is our
neighbour.***

Day 30: Knowing, Growing, Living

The God-Blessed Life

Read:

Jeremiah 17:7,8

Reflect

The reading describes the kind of life that God approves of and blesses ⁽⁷⁾. All three of the lifeWORKS elements are here ⁽⁸⁾.

Our lifeSOURCE: The God-blessed life is rooted in his provision

Our faith is secured by his grip on us ^(Psalm 63:8), his love for us ^(1 John 4:19) and his continual work in us ^(Philippians 2:13). Our confidence comes from being rooted in his work, not ours.

Our lifeSTREAMS: The God-blessed life draws strength from its roots

The lifeSTREAMS section of this book described our part in a growing relationship with God. These things that we do (prayer, worship etc), are how we draw strength from our roots in God. They position us to receive what only God can give.

Our lifeSHAPE: The God-blessed life is confident and fruitful

Rooted in a growing relationship with God, we can't help but live distinctive lives. The world around us will be changed for the better as our lives naturally overflow with the God-life that is filling us.

Knowing God; Growing in God; Living for God. That's the lifeWORKS vision!

“

*the kind of
life that God
approves*

Relate

Flick back through the book. What sticks in your mind,

- from the lifeSOURCE section (p.3-13)?
- from the lifeSTREAMS section (p.14-26)?
- from the lifeSOURCE section (p. 27-40)?

Is God speaking to you? What will you do in response?

Respond

Which of these three themes do you find most challenging at the moment? Visit the lifeWORKS section of the TBC website and dig around to find more resources to help you as you think further:

thornburybaptistchurch.org.uk/lifeworks

lifeWORKS Extra:

Belonging to the TBC family

Our vision at TBC is to be a church family shaped by Jesus' commands to love God, to love one another and to love our neighbour (Matthew 22: 37-40/ John 13:34). We want to grow in each of these dimensions of love.

We grow in love for God

as we commit ourselves to encountering him regularly through prayer, worship, fellowship, Scripture and service. We use our lifeWORKS framework to pay attention to developing our life in God.

We grow in love for one another

as we commit to encouraging and serving one another. Joining one of our small groups is a great way to do this.

We grow in love for our neighbours

as we each commit to live authentic Christian lives each day on our 'frontline'. For some, neighbour-love means serving in TBC's community outreach programmes.

We love it when people visit our church family. We also love it when people decide they share our vision and want to join us as family members! If you'd like to be welcomed as a member of the TBC family then arrange to chat with one of our elders (contact details are on the website).

“

We love it when people decide they want to join us as family members!

Like to know more?

For more on the life and work of the TBC family, go to: www.thornburybaptistchurch.org.uk

For more on **Joining the TBC Family**, go to: www.thornburybaptistchurch.org.uk/jointhefamily

For more on joining one of our **Small Groups**, go to: www.thornburybaptistchurch.org.uk/smallgroups



Introducing lifeWORKS

At Thornbury Baptist Church (TBC) we aim to be a community of people learning to live just like Jesus. Spending our money, just like Jesus would. Treating our families just like Jesus would. Running our businesses, just like Jesus would. Relating to other people, just like Jesus would: you get the idea!

Jesus' followers never stop learning how to live the Jesus-life. All of our lives are spent apprenticed to Jesus as life-long learners in the art of being fully human.

lifeWORKS is a guide for people on the way with Jesus, helping us get on track and stay on track as we live for and with him. lifeWORKS helps us keep three things in focus and in balance:

Knowing God – our lifeSOURCE

Growing in God – our lifeSTREAMS

Living for God – our lifeSHAPE

This devotional guide explores these three themes. It can be used alone or even better, with others.

More lifeWORKS resources can be accessed at
www.thornburybaptistchurch.org.uk/lifeworks

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www.barastudio.co.uk*

