



4th February 2007

THE WEEK AHEAD

Monday 5th

3.30pm Climbers
6.00pm Basecamp
7.30pm Alpha Meal
7.45pm Freedom in Christ

Tuesday 6th

6.00pm Explorers
7.45pm Ladies Society

Wednesday 7th

9.30am Prampushers
11.00am Holy Communion

Thursday 8th

9.30am Prampushers
6.30pm Thirst
8.00pm PCC Meeting
8.00pm Youth Cell

Sunday 10th

8.00am Early Communion
9.15am Parish Communion
10.30am Kids Church *'Ignite'*
10.45am Morning Praise
7.30pm N:Counter

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OUR PURPOSE STATEMENT

To bring people to Jesus and membership in his family, develop them to Christ-like maturity, and equip them for their ministry in the church and life mission in the world, in order to magnify God's name, make his kingdom a reality and transform our community.

GOING DEEPER

A fresh focus

Last Sunday I was preaching about God creating and redeeming us so that we might become like Jesus. To fulfil that central divine purpose, Jesus invites us to follow him and become his disciples, to join his master class of life. He wants us to become like him and do the things he does. It is precisely that process of discipleship, spiritual formation or transformation into the likeness of Jesus that is going to be our primary focus for the next season of church life.

'The really good news for humanity is that Jesus is now taking students in the master class of life.' Dallas Willard in *'The Divine Conspiracy'*

A renewed passion

As I have read and preached around this subject, I have experienced God giving me a fresh clarity about and renewed passion for the transformation that he wants to do in my life. I want to be a good husband, father, grandfather, friend and church leader. But more than anything, I want people to be able to see the life of Jesus being lived in me and want that life for themselves. As I think of and pray for my children and, now, my grandchildren, I want desperately for them to look at my life and want to be like their dad or granddad because of Jesus. My family's greatest need and my church family's greatest need is for my personal holiness – for Christ to be formed in me. Might that be true for you too? We recognise the need for discipline and training in almost every other aspect of life, and yet we often leave the process of discipleship to chance. It is too important for that. We have to take more seriously the invitation of Jesus to learn from him. This world so desperately needs the kind of people Jesus is seeking to reproduce through his master class of life. I am inviting and challenging you to join a small group where you will be inspired and challenged to grow spiritually.



"You were created to become like him" - Rick Warren

Life Groups

We are going to call these groups – **Life Groups**. Ideally they would be groups of 3 or 4 people of the same sex. Experience shows that this increases safety, vulnerability and accountability. The group determines the frequency of its meeting, weekly, monthly or whatever. However, we are going to encourage groups to start on a weekly basis for the period of Lent. The group meets for 60 – 90 minutes at any time of the day that is convenient – before breakfast, over lunch, when the kids have gone to bed.

Those who attended the leaders' conference at Rydal Hall experienced something of the challenging, indeed life-changing dynamic of small spiritual formation groups and many have expressed a desire to continue the process. For many this will happen during the regular cell time as cells break into smaller, single sex groups. But this is also an opportunity for many others to experience more of what the New Testament means by *koinonia* – fellowship.

Change of date!

I want to encourage as many of you as possible, all those who want to be better disciples, to come to a short gathering on **Sunday 18th Feb from 6-7 in the Lifecentre**. Bring the children if it makes it easier! We hope this will be a time of inspiration and encouragement as we learn more about the values and workings of such groups.

LOVING GOD COMPLETELY

The God we are worshipping today, the God of the Bible, the God many of us have come to know personally through putting our trust in Jesus is infinite, personal and triune, a community of three persons. He is love and he is a relational being. One of his purposes in creating us is to display the glory of his character so that we can respond to his loving initiatives. Despite our rebellion against his character and authority, Christ bore the awesome price of our guilt and opened up 'a new and living way' (Heb 10:20). Because he loves us, he wants us to grow in an intimate relationship with him. We were created to know, love, enjoy and honour this glorious Lord of all.

It's incredible! – us humans being loved by God and able to love him back. We are such a contradiction. We bear the image of God but we are ensnared in sin. We are capable of harnessing the forces of nature but are unable to control our tongues. We are the most wonderful and creative of beings on this planet but also the most violent and cruel.

David praises the majesty of this amazing Creator God in Psalm 8. **O Lord, our Lord, the majesty of your name fills the earth! Your glory is higher than the heavens. v.1 O Lord, our Lord, the majesty of your name fills the earth! v.9**

He looks up into the night sky and sees the glory of God. **When I look at the night sky and see the work of your fingers - the moon and the stars you have set in place. v.3**

On the clearest night, David would have seen only a few thousand stars, but he is in awe. We now know that our galaxy has more than 200,000,000,000 stars. Light takes 8 minutes to reach us from the sun but it takes 100,000 years to get from one side of the galaxy to the other. And it maybe that there are 100,000,000,000 galaxies! Could it be that our God is too small? Isaiah challenges us:

Look up into the heavens. Who created all the stars? He brings them out one after another, calling each by its name. And he counts them to see that none are lost or have strayed away. Isaiah 40:26

God's wisdom, beauty, power and dominion are so beyond our wildest imagination! David goes on to ask: Psalm 8:4 **'what are mortals that you should think of us, mere humans that you should care for us?'** 'What is man that you are mindful of him?' A good question! What is man? And yet this God seeks intimacy with people on this puny planet. **'You crowned us with glory and honour.'** God has given us great dignity and destiny. He has also given us authority, dominion, which we have so abused.

This is the God who loves us. We often sing about that love. We read about it in the Bible and hear about it in sermons but, if we are honest, to many of us the truth seems remote and unreal. It certainly doesn't grip our minds, emotions and wills. So how do we move in the direction of experiencing God's love and then, in response, learn to love him completely? Sir Richard of Chichester (1197-1253) expressed that desire in a beautiful prayer that cuts to the heart of what the Christian life is all about! It begins with thanksgiving and wonder.

Thanks be to thee, O Lord Jesus Christ, for all the benefits thou hast given us; for all the pains and insults which thou hast borne for us. O most merciful Redeemer, Friend and Brother, may we know thee more clearly, love thee more dearly, and follow thee more nearly; for thine own sake.

Loving God completely must involve our whole personality – our intellect, emotions, will and body. If we really want to love God, then first we need to know him as he really is

And the better we come to know God, the more we will love him (*love thee more dearly*). And the more we love him, the greater will be our willingness to trust him and obey him in all the things he calls us to do (*follow thee more nearly*).

May we know thee more clearly

Read Paul's prayers in his letters to the Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians, and see how they reveal Paul's deep desire that his readers grow in their knowledge of Jesus Christ. He is not thinking about an intellectual knowledge about Jesus, but rather a personal knowledge of Jesus. He prayed that the Lord would give them a spirit of wisdom and of revelation, that their hearts would be flooded with light, and that they would know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge.

Christianity is not a religion but a relationship with the God who is love. When Thomas Aquinas was asked why he had stopped working on his great work of systematic theology *Summa Theologica*, he said, "All that I have written seems like straw compared to what has now been revealed to me." Tradition says that Aquinas had a vision in which he heard the Lord say, "Thomas, you have written well of me: what shall be your reward?" His reply was, "No reward but yourself." Our greatest achievements are as straw compared with one glimpse of the living God. Paul had come to the same conclusion when he wrote these words:

I once thought all these things were so very important, but now I consider them worthless because of what Christ has done. Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the priceless gain of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage, so that I may have Christ and become one with him. Philippians 3:7-8

(*May we know thee more clearly*).

The Lord invites us to the highest

calling of all – to intimacy with him – and day after day, we decline the offer, preferring instead to fill our stomachs with the pods of short-lived pleasures and prospects. So what does it take to know God more clearly? The two essential ingredients are time and obedience. It takes time to cultivate a relationship, and unless we set aside consistent time for disciplines such as prayer, silence and reading the Scriptures, we will never become intimate with the Lord. Obedience is also essential because it is our personal expression of trust in the promises of the Person we are getting to know. The more we are impressed by him, the less we will be impressed by people, power and possessions.

Love thee more dearly

To know God is to love him, because the more we grasp – not merely with our minds but also in our experience – who he is and what he has done for us, the more our hearts will respond in love and gratitude. John puts it plainly. **We love because he first loved us.** 1 John 4:19

When we discover that the Creator of time, space, matter and energy has, for some incomprehensible reason, chosen to love us to the point of infinite sacrifice, we begin to embrace the unconditional security we have longed for all our lives.

God's love for us is spontaneous, free, and undeserved; He loved us because he chose to love us. In Romans 5 Paul makes it clear:

God's love is causeless

Nothing in us merited his love. He did not set his love on us because we were lovable, beautiful or clever. The truth is that in our sin we were unlovable, ugly and foolish. Indeed, Christ died for us **while we were still his enemies.**

God's love is measureless

God's love is off the scale when we try to compare it with anything humans would do. **Someone might be willing to die... but God showed his great love for us by sending Christ...**

God's love is ceaseless

We have already experienced God's love but we will go on experiencing it for all eternity. **We will certainly be delivered from eternal punishment by his life.**

Many of us fear that others would reject us if they knew what we were really like on the inside. But what about this holy God who *does* know every dark secret and still offers us his unconditional love. It seems too good to be true, especially if we have experienced the pain of conditional love. But it is true, and to help us believe he has given us this special faith-building memorial meal for those who are 'friends of God'.

Follow thee more nearly

As we grow to know and love God, we learn that we can trust his character and his promises. When he asks us to avoid something, it is because he knows it is not in our best interests. And whenever he asks us to do something, it is always because it will lead to a greater good. It is only as we grasp the wonder of our acceptance in Christ who loved us and gave himself for us that we realise God is not the enemy of our joy. He is the source of our joy. If we are committed to following hard after God, we respond to his love by doing the things he tells us to do. Radical obedience often doesn't make sense and is certainly counter-cultural. But it is the way we express our love and become the people he has called us to be. Our priorities and passions will be transformed, and we will be challenged to look again at how we use our time, our talents and our resources. When you obey me, you remain in my love, just as I obey my Father and remain in his love. John 15:10 Our great task is to want to do his will, to love the things he loves and to choose the things he sets before us for our good.

CELL NOTES

Welcome

Icebreaker question: When are you most in awe of God? How does that make you feel?

Worship & Word

Each person brings a word of scripture that speaks to them of God's greatness. Then express your awe and love in a time of praise and adoration. Discuss what practical steps can you take to get to know God better and how can cell encourage you in this. Are you willing to be accountable?

Witness

What practical difference to the way you live does (and should) loving God make? How will your friends and family observe this love in action? What impact will it have on them? Pray for them.

Wind

Romans 5:5 - Offer prayer ministry, asking God to pour his love into our hearts. End with the prayer of Richard of Chichester.

BAPTISM INVITATION

George Theo Warburton is being baptised next Sunday 11th February in an informal ceremony in church. If you're around and would like to come, we'd love to see you. It starts with coffee and cake at 2.30pm and is followed by a 30 minute service, finishing by about 3.30pm. *Clare and Mark*

N: COUNTER STARTS TONIGHT!

Learning the unforced rhythms"

"Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly." *(Matthew 11: 28-30 The Message)*

If these verses strike into your heart, then come taste and see what **N:Counter** has to offer and what you add to this exciting new service. It starts tonight with donuts and coffee 7.30pm for 8.00pm. This new meeting is a place where we will experiment in what we do and how we do it. It will be a great time to press in to God and receive what he has for us so that we can give it away..... See you there!!!! Joe Pienaar

ANNE ATKINS IN ROMILEY

'L IS FOR LOVE'

A Valentine's Celebration of lasting passion, love & marriage through music, poetry and interviews. Activate and Christian Vision for Men have joined forces to present what will prove to be a very entertaining evening out. The audience will not only hear about the highest in human love but also about God's love in a way that is relevant to them.

The Forum Theatre Romiley Friday 9th February 7.30pm. Special guest Anne Atkins (author and broadcaster). Tickets £7.50 each available from Ann Green 0161 439 6629) or from the Theatre Box Office 0870 777 873 . **This is an outreach evening so please bring some friends along.**



ART GROUP

The Thursday Art Group has started again. The cost is £1 per hour and you may arrive and leave as you please. Though everyone of whatever ability is very very welcome, this class is very much geared towards those who think they cannot draw or paint and have been convinced by others that they will always be 'rubbish' at art. Maggie will guarantee to show you otherwise!

A great range of art techniques is on offer and you can choose exactly what you want to do whilst having great fun and fellowship and experiencing a very therapeutic activity. To help those who cannot attend on Thursday mornings, one of the Thursdays will be swapped for a Saturday morning each month, starting with Saturday February 17th which will replace Thursday February 15th. So come on down – see if you like us and take the plunge. If you just want to turn up, bring paper, HB pencil and, to settle your nerves, a rubber. For further information ring Maggie on 427 5182. Leave a message and Maggie will get back to you.

NEW WINE WOMEN'S DAY

31st March 9.30am –4pm at the International Conference Centre Harrogate. With Anne Coles, Nadine Parkinson, Nicole Brown and special guest Elaine Storkey. Cost £20 (£18 on line) www.new-wine.org. Leaflets available in the Guywood Centre, Church and Church Office. **Come...and enjoy!**

CORRIDOR CREW

Corridor Crew is a new initiative piloted with Werneth School. The youth team currently assist teachers by acting as a distraction to pupils who might normally be causing trouble. This means that we hang out on the corridors at lunchtime chatting and having fun with the pupils, taking opportunities as they arise to talk about our faith and prayer walk the school. Teachers and pupils alike have noticed the effect our presence is having on the corridors at lunchtime.

Although this is already showing signs of fruit, it could become a burden with only a handful of people doing this. We would therefore appreciate offers from anyone who feels they could regularly contribute time to this ministry. Any offers will be followed up with an informal chat and on the job training, as well as permission to wear our funky t-shirts!! Please contact Joe Pienaar 406 1147 if you would like to get involved or have any further questions.

a new teaching series at 9.15 & 10.45

From Grabbers to Givers

- developing a Relational Spirituality

As a community of three persons, God is a relational being. He has chosen us in love to have a personal relationship with himself, and our great privilege is to respond to his loving initiatives. By loving God completely, we discover who and whose we are and come to see ourselves as God sees us. In this way, we become secure enough to become others-centred rather than self-centred, and this enables us to become givers rather than grabbers.

- ❑ Feb 4th Loving God Completely
- ❑ Feb 11th Loving Ourselves Correctly
- ❑ Feb 18th Loving Others Compassionately