



St John the Baptist
Burscough

Housegroup Notes	Walking with God
Themes	Leading, perseverance, renewal

Starting Point	
<p>In this series we will be looking at a number of different scriptures that teach us more of what it means to live as a Christian in the world today and help us to 'walk with God'.</p> <p>The sessions make up a series of three but can be used as stand alone sessions if required.</p> <p>As with any walk we need to have a purpose, a sense of direction, we need to know where we are going before we set off. When climbing in the mountains it is essential to have a map which helps to inform you of your current position but also helps to show the path to your destination. A map can literally lead the way. In this series we will look at how God leads/guides us.</p> <p>A second element to any walk is perseverance. There are times when we get tired and sometimes need to rest. There are times when we might even think about stopping or turning back. Paul, in his writings, reminds us of the need to persevere! The goal of any walk is to reach the destination. When climbing in the mountains the aim is to reach the top and then soak in the glorious views and blessings that follow. We need to persevere in our walk with God, in session two of this series we will focus on what it means to persevere in the Christian walk.</p> <p>When we arrive at our destination, it is usually for a specific purpose, the very reason for our walk in the first place! It is a fabulous feeling when we achieve something that we set out to do isn't it? The journey may even have changed us. In our walk with God, God wants us to continually grow and deepen in our relationship with him. He constantly wants to shape and change us on the journey so that we can become the people he wants us to be. He wants to renew our lives. In session three we will look at renewal.</p>	

Session 1:	Leading: How does God guide?
Proprietary reading:	Psalm 32:8, John 10: 1-15

Background

The picture of the shepherd is deeply woven into the language and imagery of the Bible.

The life of a Palestinian shepherd was very hard; indeed, it is still. There is little grass, and its growth - where it does appear - is seasonal. Flocks must be for ever on the move to find it. No flock may ever graze without a shepherd to watch it. The shepherd therefore was never off duty. His task was unremitting and dangerous: his sheep were prey to wolves, bears and lions in Bible times, to thieves and robbers, and in the wet season to flash floods and land slides.

At the end of the day shepherds would bring their flocks to a shared fold, an area with a stone wall boundary. The door of the sheepfold was a mere gap in one wall, no wider than a sheep, which the shepherd (or the gatekeeper) filled by standing or lying down in it himself. A sheep might leave the fold, or a wolf or thief enter it, only over the body of the shepherd. He was himself the door. In the morning, when the sheep were led out to pasture, the shepherds would stand some way off ranged in an arc around the "door" and begin calling their sheep by name. They would trot out one by one and gather round "their shepherd."

vs. 3-5: "The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers."

Introduction

Has there ever been a time when you have been completely lost and needed guidance? (share with the group)

Think about your life. Can you think of a person who has been particularly influential? What is it that makes that person so special to you? (share with the group)

What makes a good leader? As a group devise a list of good leadership qualities.

What makes a bad leader? Repeat above exercise.

Can you identify any of these qualities in yourself and in each other?

Themes and Application

Read through the passages together.

1. Why did Jesus paint the picture in verses 1 -6? What does it tell us?
Discuss
2. 'I am the gate for the sheep' (v.7) This is one of seven 'I am' sayings of Jesus in John's gospel. What did Jesus mean by this statement?
3. A shepherd calls his sheep and they follow. The shepherd has a responsibility to ensure the sheep are cared for and have all they need. In what ways does God act as a 'shepherd'?
4. Do all sheep follow the shepherds call? What does this say about us as humans and our relationship with God?
5. The sheep trust the shepherd and respond to his call. Do we trust God in all areas of life, or are there aspects of life which we find hard to trust God?
6. How does God guide or 'shepherd' us today?
7. Have there ever been any times when you feel God has specifically 'guided' you?
8. How can we seek/be open to more of God's guidance?

Action

Think about How God might guide us today; through scripture, through His Holy Spirit, through our own 'god given' common sense, the counsel of wise friends, circumstantial signs etc.

As a group how can you help each other to ensure that you are open to God's guidance?

Pray together for any specific areas where God's guidance is needed. Pray also for God to give wisdom in seeking his will.

Session 2:	Perseverance
Proprietary reading:	Philippians 3:12-21, James 1:1-5

Background

Paul knew he wasn't there yet. He knew he was far from perfect. But he kept pressing on, kept persevering in the Christian walk.

He uses the descriptive language of someone striving forward, pressing on, reaching out. You can picture a hiker trying to make it to the peak of a mountain. A runner trying to make it to the end of a marathon. A swimmer trying to cross the English channel. An Olympic cyclist trying to win the race.

Whatever illustration you keep in your mind, the words hold true: forget what lies behind. There is no bigger defeat than to dwell on what you've already past, how many miles you've already gone, how many steps you've already taken. Paul says that he was forgetting what lay behind and kept reaching forward.

But where are you doing now? You see, the past doesn't matter - it's already past. Are you growing in Christ now? Are you ministering now? Are you praying now? You can't rest on your laurels. What matters is where you're at in the Lord today.

The old saying goes, "Winners never quit, and quitters never win." If you're talking about a person living their life for Jesus Christ, it is absolutely true. Don't talk about what you did last year, ask yourself, "What am I doing this year?" Don't rest on the growth you experienced in the past. Ask yourself, "How much am I growing now?" Remember,

Phil. 1:6 ...He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.

God wants you to keep growing, to keep serving Him.

Introduction

Think about a time when you have been on a long journey? (Share stories with the group)

Has there ever been a time when you have had to persevere to reach a desired objective?

Think about your life as a journey, where are you on that journey? (Half way through, three quarters?)

Think about your Christian life, where are you on that journey? Is it hard work?

Themes and Application

1. Look at verse 12; what ideas does Paul's attitude give you that you might copy?
2. What should we do that Paul is doing?
3. Look again at verse 16, what is it we are to live up to?
4. Do you find it hard sometimes to keep persevering?
5. Verse 17, Paul refers to his 'example'. What do you think his example is?
6. Verse 19. How does Paul describe people who live like enemies of the cross of Christ? How does this make you feel?
7. 'Their mind is on earthly things' (v. 19) How much does this apply to you? Is it important to have an eye on earthly things or not?
8. As citizens of heaven, how do you need to be?
9. What difference does it make to know the change in your body that will happen?

Action

What can you do, as a group, to help each other on the Christian journey?

How can you help each other to press/persevere towards the goal?

Come up with some practical ways of supporting each other.

Session 3:	Refreshed, Revitalised & Renewed
Proprietary reading:	2 Corinthians 3: 17-18, Romans 8:28-39

Background

2 Corinthians

An interval of not much more than a year separates the two letters to the Corinthians. The second letter was probably written about AD56. 2 Corinthians is perhaps the most intensely personal of all Paul's letters. As we read this letter we feel for ourselves the weight of his burden of care for all the churches, the depth of his love for them and his concern for their spiritual progress. We see in personal terms the cost of his missionary programme; hardship, suffering, deprivation, humiliation, almost beyond human endurance. And we see unshakable faith shining through it all, transforming every circumstance. Paul's personal thoughts flow through this letter, almost unbroken at times and I encourage you to read it in its entirety when you get the chance. In chapters 3-6 past, present and future interweave, the old covenant has been replaced by the new life giving one. The present is an anomaly, on the one hand Paul is appointed the ambassador of God himself, charged with his amazing message to mankind, and on the other hand, he is subjected to every kind of human suffering. But the future, in all its glorious certainty eclipse any suffering the present can hold. Through looking to what is to come Paul is able to press on, renewed, revitalised and refreshed.

Romans 8

Romans take pride of place in the New Testament letters. The great theme of Romans is faith in Christ as the only ground for mankind's acceptance by God. In chapter 8 Paul teaches on the work of the Holy Spirit who is alive and actively at work in everyone who belongs to Christ. He helps us to keep God's law. It is his presence that convinces us we are God's children. He is our foretaste of glory to come – a living spring of hope within us. And he turns our innermost longings into prayer. It is God's intention that we should be like Christ in character and like him in glory –eventually. In other words God is re-creating us in his image. Every circumstance of life is worked into his overall purpose. There is no power in heaven or earth that can separate us from his love. So that whatever life may throw at us, we can win through. We can live a life certain of his love and faithfulness. Renewed, refreshed and revitalised.

Introduction

Talk about a time when you have felt totally alive, on top of the world. What factors helped to create this feeling?

Has there ever been a time when you have felt completely exhausted? How did you feel? (Discuss with group)

When you are feeling under pressure, stressed or stretched, what do you notice about yourself?

What helps you when you feel like this?

Themes and Application

1. Try to memorize Romans 8:28. What is so important about this verse so that many Christians quote this verse?
2. How does this verse make you feel 'Is God for us or against us' (Romans 8:31)?
3. What is the role of suffering in the life of a Christian?
4. How can we say God works all things together for good when my life is a mess?
5. Can I separate myself from the love of God?
6. Now look again at the 2 Corinthians passage. What is the Holy Spirit in the business of doing?
7. Share at least two changes you desire to take place in your life because of these verses
8. Can you share any experiences when the Lord has helped you, or renewed your strength?

Action

As a group is there something you could do together, perhaps a social event, to help you gel together as friends, but also to help you find a way of being refreshed, revitalised and renewed.

Are any members of the group struggling at the moment, what practical ways can you help?

Pray for each other.

Session :	Experiencing Pentecost Today
Proprietary reading:	Acts 2

Background

"When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly a sound came from heaven like the rush of a mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues as of fire, distributed and resting on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance." (Acts 2:1-4 RSV)

The event in the above verses describes what has commonly become known as the "birthday of the church" - the coming of the Holy Spirit, after the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, on a much more widely available basis than it had been in the Old Testament era.

Pentecost originated after the Exodus when it was variously called the Feast of First Fruits, the Feast of Weeks, or the Feast of Harvest (Leviticus 23:15-21, Deuteronomy 16:9-12). It was observed 50 days after the ceremonial cutting of the first grain offering after the Passover - hence the origin of the Greek word *Pentecost*, which means "fiftieth." By no coincidence, the New Testament Pentecost, as we read in the opening verses, occurred 50 days after the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the "first of the first fruits."

All of the Biblical Holy Days served a dual purpose, the earlier as symbols for what was to come later. Their observance, and fulfilment, occupy much of Bible History and Prophecy

The event of the first Pentecost encourages us to open ourselves once again to the Spirit that came that day, where all those present became aware of the new community to which they now belonged. Their new experience was shown in shared enthusiasm and in a sense of new identity and belonging to Christ and to one another in the power of the Spirit. They expressed this in different ways according to their own cultures and customs. The church was brought together in unity that day through the Holy Spirit, and it is sustained today through the presence and work of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit guides the church in the missionary endeavour throughout the world, and the Spirit nurtures the Body of Christ, the church, in truth and love.

Introduction

What is your understanding of Pentecost? What does it mean to you?

The Holy Spirit lives in the heart of every Christian. Share some individual stories of how the Holy Spirit has impacted your life.

What do you think it would be like if the Holy Spirit was suddenly withdrawn from the church?

Themes and Application

1. Picking up on the link between the Jewish festival of 'first fruits' and our understanding of Pentecost. Read (Romans 8:23 RSV) and (1Corinthians 15:20-23 RSV) and discuss what is meant by 'first fruits'.
2. What highlights would a reporter who was at this scene in Acts 2 on the day of Pentecost be likely to mention?
3. The power of the Holy Spirit transformed Peter. Scripture again, is the foundation of Peter's proclamation of truth. What message do the book of Joel and the psalms have for the bewildered crowd? (v17-35)
4. What reassurance(s) of Peter's message is most important to you as you consider your life as a Christian?
5. How have your life and ministry been affected by the gift of the Holy Spirit?
6. Look at the fellowship of believers in this chapter, describe their life together
7. How does the life and purpose of our church reflect this group of early Christians?
8. How do we need to change in order to experience the power of the Holy Spirit and to become a more effective witness.

Action

Discuss how we can receive more of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

Ask God to make the power of the Holy Spirit come alive in you and pray that he will use you through that power. Ask him to add to your number those who are being saved.

Session :	Experiencing Trinity Today
Proprietary reading:	John 16:12-21; Romans 5:1-5

Background

Trinity Sunday, is the Sunday after Pentecost, the celebration of the Holy Trinity. Unlike other festivals in the church's liturgical calendar, Trinity Sunday centers on a doctrine of the church rather than an event. It celebrates the unfathomable mystery of God's being as the Holy Trinity. It is a day of adoration and praise of the one, eternal, triune God.

The Trinity is one of the most fascinating - and controversial - Christian dogmas. The Trinity is a mystery. In this instance, the word mystery does not mean a riddle, but rather the Trinity is a reality above our human comprehension that we may begin to grasp, but ultimately must know through worship, symbol, and faith.

The Trinity is best described in the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed, commonly called the Nicene Creed, which we read together at our 9am Communion service each Sunday morning. Essentially the Trinity is the belief that God is one in essence (Greek *ousia*), but distinct in person (Greek *hypostasis*). Don't let the word "person" fool you. The Greek word for person means "that which stands on its own," or "individual reality," and does not mean the persons of the Trinity are three human persons. Therefore we believe that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are somehow distinct from one another (not divided though), yet completely united in will and essence. How can this be? Well, think of the sight of two eyes. The eyes are distinct, yet one and undivided in their sight. Another illustration to explain the Trinity is the musical chord. Think of a C-chord. The C, E, and G notes are all distinct notes, but joined together as one chord the sound is richer and more dynamic than had the notes been played individually. The chords are all equally important in producing the rich sound, and the sound is lacking and thin if one of the notes is left out.

The Son is said to be eternally *begotten* of the Father, while the Holy Spirit is said to *proceed* from the Father through the Son. Each member of the Trinity interpenetrates one another, and each has distinct roles in creation and redemption, which is called the Divine economy. For instance, God the Father created the world through the Son and the Holy Spirit hovered over the waters at creation.

Introduction

What do we understand the 'Trinity' to mean?

As a group try to explain the 'Trinity' in a way that someone else would understand?

Have you any stories to share of conversations on this subject?

Themes and Application

1. How does an understanding of the Trinity help us in our walk of faith?
2. How do you see the roles of the 'three persons' of the trinity played out?
3. What does the Trinity tell us about the Godhead? Read Genesis chapter 1:2 and Genesis 1:26
4. If we can grasp the idea that God is relational. Does this help us relate to him?
5. The relationship of the Trinity is based around love, because God is love. If we are made in God's image, what does this tell us about how we are to relate to others?
6. Ephesians 5:22-6:9. Paul talks about relationships. How does having an understanding of the relationship of the trinity help us in our everyday relationships?

Action

Are there any relationships in your life that need addressing. Would you like to have a better relationship with God? (Possible time of sharing and accountability).

Is there anyone you would like to be able to share God's message of love with. Pray together for these people. (Perhaps make a visual aid to prayer, something which you can use to help you pray regularly for these people).