



Following Jesus Today: *Series Discussion Notes*

Series Introduction and Overview

In April and May, we're asking the question, "What does it look like to follow Jesus in every area of your life?". We'll be reflecting on what the Bible says around important areas of life including money, community, relationships, and witness.

Money Talks

What is your relationship with money like? How can we cultivate positive attitudes towards money and healthy financial practices?

- **14th April:** Generosity
- **21st April:** Debt & Stewardship

Connected Community

God's plan from the very beginning was for us to work together in unity and harmony, looking after each other and the world we live in. How can we build thriving communities and feel connected to one another?

- **28th April:** Creation Care
- **5th May:** Christian Community
- **12th May:** Holy Relationships

Discipleship & The Spirit

Are you walking in step with the Spirit? What does it look like to be bold and confident in your witness as a follower of Jesus?

- **19th May:** Baptism in the Spirit (Pentecost)
- **26th May:** Witnesses

Money Talks

14th April: Generosity

Read 2 Corinthians 8 & 9, Psalm 37: 21,26, Luke 16:10-15 and Matthew 10:8.

1. Freely you have received, freely give. How would you describe the 'economy of the kingdom of God'?
2. What is the link between spiritual receiving and financial generosity?
3. What does it mean to be generous **to** God? Check out these references. (Proverbs 19:17), **worship** (like Mary in John 12) **His people** (Matthew 25:40, 2 Cor 8:13).
4. Generosity **from** God. Where we are in receipt of bounty and blessing, is it for us for ourselves, or for us to bless others?
5. What do you think about the long established principle of tithing? (Malachi 3:6-12)
6. What does our financial giving say about the condition of our hear towards God, to ourselves and to others?

How much does anxiety have to do with a lack of generosity and what does Jesus say about that?

What does it mean to give financially in local Church life?

21st April: Debt & Stewardship

Read 1 Corinthians 16:2, Deuteronomy 15 and Romans 13:8.

Debt and Stewardship are flip sides of one another. Wise stewardship of resources may protect one from debt. In the bible forgiveness, and release from debt are often equivalents.

1. How do we manage money in an instant credit society, in a debt ridden culture and in a divided world?
2. The bible discourages getting into debt. It was written in a pre-capitalist society. What has the bible to say to western capitalism? How should we handle (say) a mortgage? Is having a 'good credit rating' an issue of debate for Christians?
3. What does the jubilee tradition of Deuteronomy 15 have to say to us today in terms of undermining 'the rich get richer' and growing economic divides in the world?
4. What does stewardship look like? How can we be wise about managing our money and assets? Is investment biblically sound (Matthew 25:26-27?)
5. What good financial habits are there for us to manage debt AND stewardship? (1 Corinthians 16:2). What are the discipleship tensions between good financial planning and disciplines, and trusting in God?

Connected Community

28th April: Creation Care

Read Genesis 1, 2:15 and Colossians 1:15-17.

We are intimately and vitally **connected to 'creation'**, to the natural world of plants, creatures and a climatic system and environment that has allowed life to develop and thrive. For most of human history human beings have lived as though our planet was an infinite source for us to develop and exploit, despite human intervention leading to species extinction and re-shaping of our landscapes over centuries.

Colossians asserts that all of creation was made by God and for God, for the display of his glory as the psalmist often proclaims. As such it should be held in reverence as a way in which aspects of God are revealed to us. The creation order needs to be stewarded by mankind, not exploited, for a fruitfulness that blesses all of creation not just human beings.

1. How do the primary needs of a growing human population get met alongside other environmental concerns?
2. How great is the threat of our massive human intervention on the fundamental systems that allow thriving for the earth and all that are in it?
3. How should Christians be involved in Creation Care and how should we live out our discipleship for the good of the poorest and the planet?
4. What are three ways each of us good adopt to care for creation better in our daily lives?

5th May: Christian Community

Read John 15:9-17 and Acts 4:27-37.

In the New Testament there are 59 'One anothers'. Christianity is a 'one another' lifestyle. We are **connected in community**. It is not just an individual relationship with God, but something we work out with one another as a Kingdom Community. (Feel free to explore some of these 'one anothers')

1. Traditional community has been eroded in the industrialised world, but people need it. What are the hallmarks of genuine Christian Community? How can we go from being a crowd to a deeply committed and discipling Church?
2. How do we handle the tension of our need for depth of relationship, with inclusion for the many seeking to belong?
3. Woodlands Community Houses have been a visible sign of 'community'? How can community be something everyone has the opportunity to experience whatever their living conditions? What does being in community look like for someone living on their own, or in a conventional home?

How can our expressions of Christian community positively affect and serve the wider 'secular' communities of which we are a part?

12th May: Holy Relationships

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:1-12 and 1 Corinthians 4 & 5.

1 Peter 2: 9 calls the Church 'A holy nation'. Our relationships are holy. This call to live out our discipleship in ways that reflect and honour our calling to be visibly a 'Holy people' is the subject of much of the New Testament epistles. Just as we reverence the image of God in creation, we reverence the image of God in His Church, in His community, 'the body of Christ' **connected to one another**.

1. What are the two main meanings of the word Holy?
2. The bible looks at 'Holy Relationships' in the family, in the work place, in community and in human sexuality. In what way does Holiness apply to those very different areas of relationship?
3. What are the main challenges to Holy sexual and romantic relationships in our C21 culture? Is the traditional teaching of the Church on sexuality helpful, viable or not?
4. In 1 Corinthians 11:17-34 Paul challenges the Church on their lack of unity/holiness which means when they come to a place where they should recognise 'the body of Christ' (11v 29/12:27) they are so un-whole the effect is a negative one for them.

How does Holy Communion help us keep holy relationships?

Discipleship & The Spirit

19th May: Baptism in the Spirit (Pentecost)

Read Acts 1:1-5 and Acts 2.

Jesus promised his disciples they would receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, another comforter, not to leave them as orphans. (John 14: 15-18). This happened on the day of Pentecost, what Jesus called 'Baptism in the Holy Spirit'.

The hallmark of the Baptism of the Spirit is 'power', the power that Jesus demonstrated in His life.

This power is given most readily for people who know they need it, and are not trusting in their own resources.

The book of Acts stresses the inclusivity of the gift of the Spirit for all believers, and describes how the Church responded if people had not received the full benefit of Pentecost Acts 8:14-17/Acts 19:1-7.

1. Paul asks 'Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed' (Acts 19). Did you? Can you tell your story about this?
2. In what ways does the Holy Spirit help you to live the Christian life?
3. What aspects of the work of the Holy Spirit should be noticeable in ALL Christians?
4. Have you been baptised in the Spirit? Do you need a re-filling and refreshing? How would you go about getting that re-fill?

26th May: Witnesses

Read Acts 1:7-9, Luke 24:45-49 and Acts 4:20.

The primary purpose of the Baptism of the Spirit is that we might be witnesses! The power of the Spirit is linked to our own experience (Acts 4:20). It produces boldness and confidence, and it is self-authenticating. There is demonstration as well as proclamation.

1. What is the difference between 'witness' and 'argument'?
2. St Paul loved to tell his story. It is recorded at least three times in the book of Acts and clearly was part of his practice. In a post modern world how can we use the power of our story?
3. What are the biggest things that inhibit us from being witnesses?
4. Can you practice telling your story as to why you believe in and follow Jesus, in under 5 minutes?

