

# THE LENT PROJECT

STUDIES, ENCOURAGEMENT & IDEAS  
FOR EFFECTIVE DISCIPLESHIP



Catherine Hutton

# Contents for Being a Disciple “Follow Me”



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## Extra Readings for Good Friday, Easter Day & The Weeks After Easter

### Good Friday

Simon of Cyrene: “Carrying His Cross”      Luke 23:26-34 & 23:44-49

### Easter Sunday

Mary & Joanna: “Look and Listen”      Luke 24:1-12

### Sundays after Easter

1. Cleopas finds his way Home      Luke 24:13-35

2. For His friends when they wobble      Luke 24:36-39

# The Lent Project

I have been challenged by the notion of a 'Lent Course' for a good while now. The period where Jesus actively moves towards the cross could be so much more than a time of introspection for his followers. In the period where Jesus travels towards Jerusalem, we find Him teaching and encouraging his followers to enter into discipleship. It is with this in mind that I have prepared the Lent Project as this year's study guide.

Jesus often commands those taking an interest in Him to, "Follow Me!" Following is so much more than a notion. It requires decision and action. In order to make the project 'personal' and feel accessible, we will walk together through Luke's Gospel, eventually taking the route into Jerusalem as we travel. We will meet with Simon, Andrew and the fishermen, Levi, Mary and Martha. In each of these encounters, we examine how a deeper level of discipleship is drawn from them as they are challenged and ultimately transformed by following Jesus.

We will listen to Jesus' teaching about the importance of trusting God, we will look into the eyes of the Rich Young Ruler and learn about the discipline of self-denial. As we move into Jerusalem, we will consider the witness of the Crowd and what might be learned from a discipline of joining in.

In all these areas, we will have tasks to accomplish. We will push ourselves to undertake areas of service which we may feel are beyond us. I have tried to make these projects inclusive for all ages, phases of life and stages of faith. Some things we will need to work hard to be good at, and in other areas, we will find it easy! Celebrate having a go!! Our obedience is in doing that which Jesus asks of us – even if our efforts are not well-received, so long as we have proceeded with grace and kindness, we have done what was asked of us.

My prayer is that The Lent Project galvanises the church into missional activity. That we truly follow Jesus and serve God's purposes by becoming effective disciples.

Be blessed and encouraged this Lent. God has a purpose for His Church and for you as a beloved son or daughter within his Church. You are loved and so valuable as you take steps of faith to Follow Jesus.

There are prayers and ideas for worship as well as a Holy Week Meditation to help you.

Love, 

# If You Say So!

## Gathering

When did you try something you were sceptical about, but it worked out a lot better than you expected?

What was it you tried and who advised that you do it differently?

## Prayer & Worship

**See Page 26**

Read Luke 5:1-11

## Engaging

*In which the thinking begins in earnest and progress is made.*

Pick up your Bible, a highlighter and a notebook. Keeping your Bible open, we see how this passage begins with Jesus talking about God where the people are, in this case it is by the lake. (5:1)

Discipleship begins outside in the open air. Consider where Jesus would be meeting with people in your locality. The shopping centre, the coffee shop or pub; maybe the leisure centre or train station.

Why might meeting with others in public spaces to talk about matters of faith be invigorating?



Think about the sorts of stories you tell or conversations you have where people are really listening and interacting. They may be conversations about family, sport or topics at school, pieces of gossip or reminiscences about 'old times'. What is it that makes the way you interact with your subject so engaging?

Jesus looks around for what he needs. In this case, it is a 'pulpit' or 'preaching platform' and Simon's boat will give him space to sit and teach the people from where he is. He asks the community for help with what he needs.

Jesus asks for what he needs to fulfil his mission. He sees the boats and asks them to help him to use one of them. Our faith conversations should be wherever we find ourselves. Jesus is teaching the whole crowd, but it is Simon who is singled out and named by Luke.

What do you make of Jesus focussing in on Simon - do you think it is fair?

Imagine yourself in the crowd as Jesus takes Simon's boat onto the lake after the teaching time is over. You are watching him encourage Simon to go

**back out in the middle of the morning with all of his nets. Would you want to be on the boat or are you happy to watch from a distance?**

**Are you annoyed that Jesus didn't invite everyone along or are you content to see what the outcomes are for Simon?**

Jesus meets and speaks to everyone within their own cultural context. It is their lake-side meeting place, it is the place of Simon's work. Jesus begins among them and in time, is drawn out onto the boat. In his book *Mission Matters*, Tim Chester addresses the importance of acknowledging the culture around us. He writes;

*Culture is the air we breathe. It shapes our attitudes, speech, thinking, priorities, behaviour and relationships. Yet most of the time we are unaware of its influence. It is often the encounter with a different culture that first alerts us to many aspects of our own. To add to the confusion, we also need to recognise that cultures are always changing – especially through interaction with other cultures. This process of change is being accelerated by globalization. So if you want to understand a culture, you must know its history, but you must also recognise that it is changing. P 106*

**Ponder how your own culture or the culture of your group or church has changed over the past 5-10 years (depending on your age!)**

**Adding Jesus into the cultural context makes a difference. What difference does it make for Simon, the others in the boat and the gathered community?**

Chester makes an interesting observation when trying to pin down the essence of culture on page 117. He puts the view that;

*Culture can be defined as the rules (usually unwritten and often sub-conscious) that determine how people within social groups behave and think. It's what makes you a stranger when you're away from home.*

**'Home' can be the place where we live, or any of those places that we go to where we feel like we belong. Where are the places that you call home? Are any of them based in your community?**

Jesus was an influencer of the culture he inhabited. He brought the Kingdom of God near to people in a way that they could receive and be transformed by the presence and power of God. When he is on the boat with Simon, he challenges Simon's perception of having failed to catch fish. Despite Simon's scepticism (verse 5), Jesus persuades Simon to cast his nets at Jesus' direction. It is when Jesus calls us to do something unusual that we might

respond, both with our uncertainty... 'I've tried the way I'm supposed to and there has been no joy' and our willingness to 'nevertheless' engage with new and unusual techniques, activities, places just as Simon did; "*but because you say so, I will...*" verse 5.

Take time to pause and to pray this week. Be deliberate in watching and listening for the ways that Jesus is calling you into a new way of viewing your relationship with him. A fresh understanding of your role in his mission. A fresh insight into how to engage with your local community.

## **The Project Part 1: Natural Faith Sharing**

*In which you take up the challenge and risk becoming an effective disciple.*

Josh Selfe, our Mission and Outreach Pastor offers us this simple pattern for sharing our faith:

*When sharing your faith, no one is expecting you to be Billy Graham! You don't need to be eloquent, or theologically minded, or well-trained. If you are able to tell people about your favourite film, or how well your children are doing at school, then you can talk about your faith.*

### **When sharing your faith with someone...**

... be **attentive**. No one cares how much you know, until they know how much you care. Listen more than you speak. Find out what a person's values, passions, fears and joys are, and find common ground, and they will, naturally want to then hear yours. Show people the love of God, before you tell them about the love of God. Don't be a know-it-all!

... be **authentic**. Be yourself and be honest! Don't say what you feel you ought to say, but share, honestly, why you hold the faith you hold - in your own words. Avoid church jargon! Talk about why you go to church and what Jesus means to you. Don't be afraid to share your doubts and struggles as well, in doing so, you give people permission to come to Christ with their own.

... be **assured**. It is not all down to you! When you talk to someone about your faith, you can be sure that God has been working in their lives long before you ever had that conversation, and He will be working in their lives long after! Your input is just one link in a chain.

*There is no magic formula, or 'proper' way of sharing your faith, just as there is no one prescribed way of finding Christ. Everyone's journey is different. There are people out there for whom your unique story, and way of looking at faith, will be a hundred times more compelling than even the greatest of evangelists. Just tell your story!*

Josh gives us some great advice.

*This week's project is to use what you have thought about in this session to share something of your faith with a friend in a non-church context.*

# “Tax Collectors & Sinners”

## Gathering

What does it mean to you to be included in an invitation to an event or occasion? What makes an invitation special? Do you better love the giving or the receiving of invitations?

## Prayer & Worship      See Page 26

Read Luke 5:27-32

## Engaging

*In which the thinking begins in earnest and progress is made.*

It is worth setting this piece with Levi in the context of the previous story Luke recounts in 5:17-26 and the conversation about Jesus forgiving the sins of the paralysed man. Howard Marshall describes the story of Levi's calling;

*[Jesus] is shown welcoming sinners and (it is implied) bestowing upon them a forgiveness expressed symbolically in fellowship at table... P 217*

Jesus enters into the pain of Levi's situation of shame, loneliness and scorn to offer new life and hope in two simple words; “Follow me”. These are words that elicit change in the one who takes them to heart. It is Jesus' nature to offer healing for the souls and lives of the people he meets. The encounter with Jesus offers transformation of the inner and the outer life.

There can be a tendency to assume that those who have a ‘faith history’ have things sorted with regard to living close to God and pursuing righteous living. The Pharisees ‘and other teachers of the law’ in verse 30 complain about Jesus' engagement with the people they have judged as unworthy.

**Consider Jesus' activities. What is the scope of his ministry? Ponder on whether your attitude towards your group, local church or church leader is exclusively for the people who are inside the church or open for anyone who needs them.**

**Who is your local church for?**

**Does it take ages for people to feel comfortable in your church or group? What are the barriers to belonging?**

**How does Jesus reconcile people for whom rejection is the norm?**

Levi's response to the offer of discipleship is seen in verse 28; *"and Levi got up, left everything and followed him."* This is the same response and the same immediacy as the fishermen on Gennesaret in Luke 5:11; *"So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him."* The fishermen left a respectable trade behind to follow Jesus. The life that Levi was leaving behind was scorned by all and even though he would enter a new life, his role as tax-collector was all the people around could see.

In John Wesley's 12 rules for 'helpers' - being those preachers and others who assisted in the missional task, he states in number 11:

*You have nothing to do but to save souls. Therefore spend and be spent in this work. And go always, not only to those that want you, but to those that want you most.*

Look at how this rule patterns Jesus' method of mission. The 'want' is about lack and the level of need. 'That shirt wants a wash', 'the dog wants feeding' rather than 'I want a Ferrari' which is more about 'fancy' than need.

Levi wanted to be in community and Jesus offers him an encounter that transforms his whole life. His want drives him to leave his post and wealth for a life of following Jesus.

**What does Jesus 'call to repentance' (verse 32) look like in Jesus' words and in Levi's response?**

**What has the 'call to repentance' entailed in your life. How is that call still at work? Do you feel that you have done everything you need to in order to effectively and wholeheartedly 'follow Jesus'**

Levi's response was to use his wealth to hold a feast whereby he could invite all the people he knew in order that they might meet Jesus. It is an opportunity for them all to meet the Jesus he has met and to experience the life-transforming gift of repentance and restoration. Levi is so restored that Jesus will eat at his table, in community with him and as his disciple. The comment about whom Jesus calls to repentance is a moment of division. There will be people who recognise their need for Jesus and those who describe themselves as righteous. Later in the Gospel; Luke 6:37, Jesus will talk about the inadvisability of sitting as judge. Levi invites everyone to meet Jesus, but those who already consider themselves to be righteous will not be looking for that which Levi knew he needed. The ones who considered themselves as already 'righteous' were complaining about Jesus' behaviour to his disciples - see 5:30. Jesus takes responsibility for his activities and throws a challenge - which Wesley has picked up on in his 'Rules for helpers';

*Luke 5:31-32 NIV*

*31 Jesus answered them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. 32 I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."*

Sometimes it is our own state of heart and soul that needs to be challenged and transformed by Jesus. Those who are truly righteous do not need or want for the Saviour's transforming love. Where is your heart today?

## **The Project Part 2: Beyond Your Comfort Zone**

*In which you take up the challenge and risk becoming an effective disciple.*

When did you last deliberately choose to do something different? When did you last ask for a new hairstyle or choose spectacles that are a million miles from the last ones you picked and wore for 10+ years? When did you try a new food or take up a new hobby for the joy of doing something fresh?

We can take the same principle and apply it to our faith. When did you last challenge yourself to step into a different place in life or take on a different role in church? If you are new to your current place of worship, have you dared to share your skills and gifts with your new worshipping community?

Levi was stuck. Jesus called him out of his unhappy rootedness and he was glad to go.

Levi invited everyone who knew him to a feast so that they could meet Jesus, even though he knew that many of them openly despised him, which would make it a difficult time.

***This week's project is to do something that is different from your norm. The object of the exercise is to be brave in your faith. Maybe there is someone God is wanting you to share your faith story with. Maybe there is someone God wants you to offer to pray with (remember that they may say no - and that's okay!) Maybe you've been away from church for awhile and it's time to reconnect through joining a group or coming to a service.***

***Pray and ask God what you will do this week.***



# “Only One Thing”

## Gathering

Pop the TV on and be sending some texts or making a phone call, reading emails or the newspaper.

Where is your attention? How easily are you distracted?

## Prayer & Worship

**See Page 26**

Read Luke 10:38-42

## Engaging

*In which the thinking begins in earnest and progress is made.*

Our Lord Jesus entering into the home of Mary and Martha has become a much loved story in the churches. Often, people declare themselves as a ‘Mary’ or as a ‘Martha’. There is a little more to this account than simply whether we are more content being busy or more content being contemplative.

**Take up your Bible and a highlighter and really look at the passage, asking God to be able to see through to the message Jesus is teaching.**

Jesus is en-route with his disciples between Jerusalem and the area around the Jordan. Along the way, there are stories that show Jesus living and how he brings the kingdom of God near. It is whilst on that route that he drops in on a household where we are invited to sit with him and listen to his teaching.

**Whose home is it that Jesus and his disciples go into? Think about whether you warm to her.**

In Geldenhuis’ commentary on Luke, he points out that;

*Luke does not mention the name of the village, neither does he state whether Lazarus or the disciples were also there. This is because he wishes to concentrate full attention upon the occurrence itself and upon Jesus’ words on that occasion. P 315*

This focus on Jesus makes the point for the whole encounter. We see Martha being ‘sulky’ and, to continue with Geldenhuis we find her;

*Being so dissatisfied that she wants to instruct the Saviour what He should do, namely to command Mary to help her. In this way she disturbed the harmony herself and her sister and between herself and the Lord through her unbalanced zeal to entertain Jesus as lavishly as possible. P 316*

Jesus is not condemning Martha for her wish to look after him well. It is that she is distracted from the importance of his presence by the preparations. Think about times when you are able to listen and be busy and times when you need to give Jesus your full attention. *For example, driving and praying may be compatible whereas following a complex recipe and being immersed in prayer may not...*

How we demonstrate our faith matters. How we live among other people with respect to their relationship with Jesus also matters. Luke has focussed attention on this meeting in a home, where Jesus' presence was hugely valued by the sisters. One was missing the moment by going over the top with the level of fussiness she was displaying, making it impossible for an atmosphere of peace and teaching to prevail due to her busy attitude.



Look at the different attitudes in verses 39 and 40. Consider the difference between good hospitality and being overly concerned with the hospitality that it becomes the sole focus.

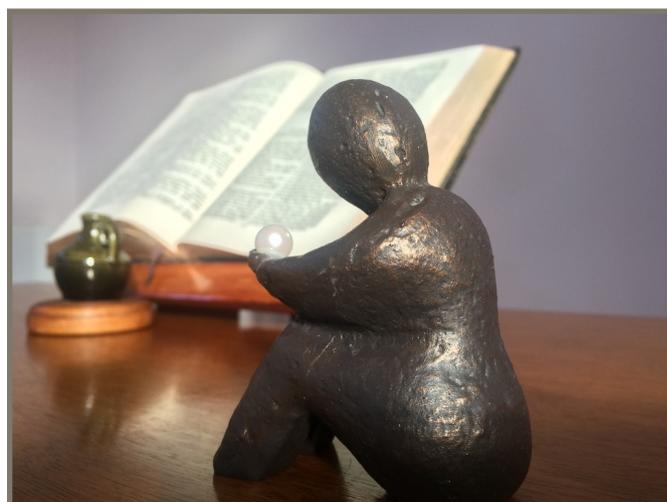
When might focus on the task become a hindrance to the reason why the task is being done? *For example, Martha wanted to honour Jesus, but her obsession with the 'preparations' meant that she was missing the opportunity of spending time with Jesus.*

In the late 1980s, Mother Teresa sent a message to the Maranatha Community based in Manchester, to remind and instruct us all. In the spirit of James Chapter 2, she said; *If you pray without serving, your prayers are in vain; if you serve without praying, your service is in vain.*

Why are prayer and action so closely linked in the every day life of the ordinary disciple?

When might your activity require the touch of the re-set button of being in Jesus' presence, with your sole focus on him?

Martha was seeking to destroy Mary's focus on Jesus because she was too frenetic and busy in her activities to truly see and appreciate Jesus and the unique opportunity of listening to the words he would teach in her own household. Luke positions us to note that Martha is offended by her sister's



attitude at Jesus' feet. Taking offence in this way, she is distancing herself from her sister and her Lord.

**\*Consider ways by which you remove yourself from holy interactions, either intentionally or accidentally. How might you move to repair these relationships? \***This might be something to think about on your own if you are looking at this with a group.

What might Jesus be wanting to say to you today?

## **The Project: Part 3**

*In which you take up the challenge and risk becoming an effective disciple.*

### **To Prayer-Walk: Stepping out of your door with Holy Intent**



We can all prayer-walk!

I have been on many different types of prayer-walk over the years. From being part of a group looking to bless the neighbourhood to being one of a 'posse' who set out to restore the spiritual equilibrium of a place. Mostly, my practice has been to walk around my neighbourhood in order to mull over an issue with God and to let Him direct my thoughts as I pray.

Sometimes, I pop my earphones in and have some worship music playing as I walk in order that the route I walk becomes a place of worship.

Sometimes I simply set out 'with holy intent' and ask Jesus to show me what he would like me to see, and to understand the world from His point of view. On these days, there may be conversations with strangers or 'chance meetings' with friends.

Sometimes, I have been equipped with a small spray bottle of water, salt, oil and a drop of red wine. This has been used as a sign of Jesus' presence in a place and to physically remind the area that we are the salt of the earth, Jesus is the water of life, the oil of the Holy Spirit is for healing and anointing and the wine of the New Covenant is Jesus' blood.

Always, I have access to Scripture and to worship. This is now stored in my phone which is the filled briefcase of the 21st Century minister! I am always amazed at the way God will pop fragments or phrases of Scripture into my mind as I walk... but then again, because I stepped out 'with holy intent', this shouldn't be ever so surprising. Prayer-walking is interaction with God, so pausing to read His Word as he prompts you - and the thought of it is your prompt, to be guided to Scriptures makes perfect sense. Similarly with worship, there are those of you who have a HUGE repertoire of songs and hymns to God in your memory, complete with organ backing track or band arrangements! Let them play! Others love to have music playing on headphones. Give the worship songs and hymns a free rein. Let them gallop wildly from song to song as you walk the area, sit on the park bench or stand to take in the view. Give voice to the ones that you want to— even hum or whistle... I'm going to declare right here that this is all worship!

***“I would love to prayer walk, but it's the walking part I can't manage.”***

I don't believe for a nano-second that God would ignore your Holy Intentions of being out and about with Him in mind just because you are doing it differently. Your scooter, bus or lift are all ways by which you move around the area. Setting out, shutting the door behind you and choosing to use the journey as prayer time is your Prayer Walk. The same principles apply for listening for God's prompts.

I have friends who set great store by the 'prayer-drive.' Choosing a route and putting worship music on the stereo as careful attention is paid to traffic, junctions, stops and starts, other road users, corners and open roads along the route.

There is no great mystery to prayer-walking. It begins when you set out with a Holy Intention; that God might meet with you in His wider world and in your community. But for those for whom closing the door behind you and setting off anywhere is impossible, those who are home and can't leave because of time of life or of being unwell, I offer you the Prayer-Nap. To sit with your Bible and Hymn Book close by, dedicate the time to God, read or sing your hymns, let Him guide your thoughts through Scriptures and settle you to prayer. To know that if you remain awake or drift into sleep, it is a time of choosing blessing, choosing God and allowing Him to choose you and rest with you.

***This week's project is to get out and deliberately choose to walk in the presence and company of Jesus around your area in a way that is Holy and full of the intention of bringing the Kingdom of God close through your prayer and worship.***

***And the project for those who don't get out, is to deliberately choose to sit with God as described above and put the routine of intentional prayer and worship into the heart of your day.***

# “Listen to Jesus”

## Gathering

Make sure you have some spring flowers or bulbs in your house this week, or ensure there is a favourite painting where you can see it as you engage with this session.



## Prayer & Worship See Page 26

Read Luke 12:22-34

## Engaging

*In which the thinking begins in earnest and progress is made.*

“Life is more...” verse 23. Our society is full of influences that have the expressed intention of making us want more... There is a feeding of discontent done through advertising and the newer method of advertising known as ‘influencing’ which is done through social media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram and YouTube.

Take out your highlighter and Bible to pay close attention to how Jesus take us into a deeper understanding of how our ‘enough’ or ‘plenty’ is found in God’s provision.

**Spend a while listing your favourite flowers or the birds you see in your garden. Why do these ones appeal to you?**

Writing in 1981, David Watson in his book “Discipleship” addresses the issue of worry and having too great a focus on the worldly concerns around us. He asks the question; **are we robust enough in our faith to resist the anxious pull to safeguard our idea of plenty?** The sister passage to Luke 12:22-34 is found in Matthew 6:25-34. Watson observes;

*When Jesus tells us in Matthew 6:25-34 ‘do not be anxious’, he is asking us another crucial and penetrating question: Whom or what do you really trust? What is the clear object of your faith? Again, the logic is compelling, for we have to face up to the alternative: either we are trusting our heavenly Father for everything; or we are ultimately trusting in some form of earthly securities. Material possessions often create anxiety. P 216*

Over 40 years later, and Watsons observations are more poignant than ever. We are experiencing a new world that is wounded by the effects of the Covid 19 pandemic. These wounds are evident in the relationships in our churches, the way our groups function and in the finances that people have to fund their costs

of living. The war that Russia has waged against Ukraine and the knock-on effects of this on fuel and grain prices have exacerbated an already depressed financial situation. The soaring prices of mortgages and the inability to save is making home-ownership difficult for the rising generation. There is a growing crisis in mental health. There is a lot we can worry about.

*Perhaps you might like to pause here and pray for particular people you know who are having a hard time, or if that is you, then to create some space for Jesus to speak to your heart.*

Consider the ways by which faith in Jesus might take priority over seeking satisfaction in our worldly needs and wants.

**Look at Luke 12:25-26:**

*Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to your life? Since you cannot do this very little thing, why do you worry about the rest?*

**What is Jesus encouraging you to do? How might you practise this?**

There are other verses which point to the futility of worry and the faithful provision of God, our heavenly and perfect Father. Note them below:

Jesus desires the disciple to know the life that God has for his people. In Luke 12:31-32 NIV, Jesus tells his disciples:

*But seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well. "Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. If we listen to Jesus on this, we will find our thirst for 'more' quenched as we have satisfaction through being in His presence and trusting His grace. Jesus notices and addresses the human condition of fear.*

In the later writings of the apostles, John is able to put words to what this entails. Look at these couple of verses from 1 John 4:18-19;

*There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love. We love because he first loved us.*

**Look at the process in the verses above.** Fear is a consequence of the world being broken, or 'sinful'. Sin is that which keeps us from fully relying on God - so fear is part of the suite of things we term 'sin'. In 1 John 4:16, John reminds us that "God is love". When we fully live in the love of Jesus, it becomes impossible to have the fearfulness which John describes in these verses and which Jesus addresses in Luke 12:22-34.

Draw a diagram of how you currently relate to the things you need, your concerns and your faith in Jesus. What simple things could you do to change the relationship to a more healthy one where “perfect love drives out fear”. Make a diagram to represent that also:



Figure 1



Figure 2

We will see how the Kingdom of God breaking into the disciples lives at Pentecost as they receive the Holy Spirit will indeed set them free from the fear that has kept them quiet about their relationship with Jesus and also kept them locked away for fear of punishment for their association with Him. Their ‘treasure’ – which Jesus names in 12:34 has been their freedom or maybe their reputation. Our so-called treasures can add to the poverty of our faith.

**What might your treasures be? How might you give them less control over you and your life? Maybe you can write them or draw them on slips of paper and put them into a drawing of a cross or the name “Jesus” on a piece of paper. We are reminded of the promise in Isaiah 53:4-5 NIV:**

*Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.*

## **The Project Part 4**

*In which you take up the challenge and risk becoming an effective disciple.*

**You are a Disciple, you have a Mission!**

Your purpose on earth is to worship, pray and serve. Maybe you also have a family and a career, or a hectic retirement to manage. Maybe you are battling a disease in your body, and have many things going on in your home-life.

This week, we have a couple of projects for you. One is for those of you who have ‘seen many winters’ and are wondering what you could possibly offer into the category of ‘mission’ now that you can’t ‘do what you used to!’

The second project is for everyone. It is about breaking down barriers between generations and ‘groups’.

**Let us begin with with the task for our long-lived people!** Firstly, congratulations!! You have so much to offer the church and community. There are so many adversities that you have overcome, so much sight and experience of a society that is ever-evolving and transforming. You are able to adapt to new ideas and innovations, experiences and expectations. You are valuable.

So too is your experience of faith. Maybe you remember when you were made to come to church 3 times on a Sunday and when Sunday School numbered 100s of children when you attended or taught there. I remember my grandparents speaking of vast numbers of children in their Sunday School for which they were Superintendent in Sunderland.

**Your stories matter.** They are not simply a reflection of the Social History of Church in this country, but they contain messages of love and of hope which the current generations of Children, young people and their leaders need to hear.

Told with a heart for today rather than a begrudging loss of a perceived 'golden age', the stories and the passion for children and young people to experience encounters with Jesus, transformed lives and hopeful ministries of the current generations of teachers are part of the soil, the ground in which Church continues to grow. Our current children's work on Sunday is so new, it feels the lack of generational continuity. There is no group of 'established big ones' to look up to and take the cues from. We have to develop a suite of 'favourite' songs and there are no tales to tell of what it 'was like'. You are the cloud of witnesses, the cheerleaders for them! Be noisy in your encouragement, be loving in your delight to leaders and children alike – appropriately, obviously!

**There is mission in your story-telling. There is mission in your encouragement. There is mission in your joining a committee for a defined period and speaking hope and possibility into the church today.**

**The Second Project is for our younger people, claim your inheritance within the church community. Pick a mentor, and listen to their stories willingly. Volunteer your skills and time to the church's mission.**

We need the full body of believers working well and efficiently in every area. People who have skills in administration, caring, music. People who are quick to learn and able to apply themselves to managing a camera or pressing buttons for the computer to bring up words - I think our tech-team is the most generationally diverse with people from 14 through to 70+ offering their time and passion to the church in this way. People with an eye to detail, managerial skills, leadership, financial acumen, hospitality: We need you all. Artists, bakers, visionaries, pray-ers, parents, tinies. Together, we are Christ's body and we all have a valuable part to play in today's church.

Please don't ever think that you are too old or too young, too tired or too unwell to be without a useful purpose in the mission of the church. It may have changed over the years, and you may have fulfilled many rôles.

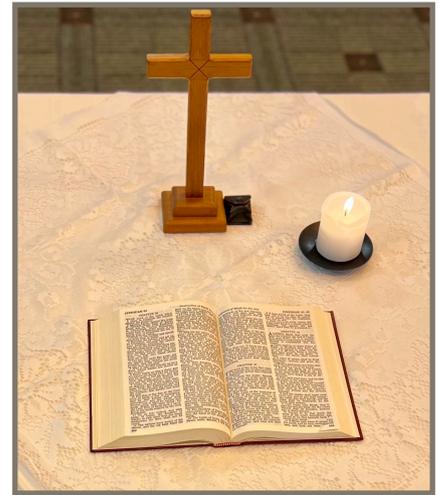
**How is God equipping you Now?**

**How will you offer service today?**

# “Then Come, Follow Me”

## Gathering

Make sure you have some spring flowers or bulbs in your house this week, or ensure there is a favourite painting where you can see it as you engage with this session.



## Prayer & Worship See Page 26

Read Luke 18:18-30

## Engaging

*In which the thinking begins in earnest and progress is made.*

Treasure in heaven is a repeated phrase in Luke’s middle chapters.

Have a look at Luke 12:33-34 NIV;

*Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will never fail, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*

Now take a look at earlier in Luke 12:21, as Jesus address the issues of being too focussed on amassing and maintaining wealth;

*“This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God.”*

These, and other passages in Luke (see 8:14; 11:41; 12:13-14; 16) address both the way to live in God’s Kingdom and the attitude of the disciples towards wealth. Jesus picks up and really emphasises his teaching on this matter with regard to the earnest young man who asks him clearly in Luke 18:18; “*Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?*” Howard Marshall makes the comment that;

*Its purpose is to reinforce this earlier teaching that the way to the kingdom is by loving God and one’s neighbour, by showing concretely that this is realised by obedience to the commandments and limitless charity. P 683*

Jesus’ challenge to the ‘rich young ruler’ was one that saw through to the thing that he loved most: his wealth and status. These would have a greater pull on his affections than the pull of the Kingdom of God and the joy and peace of reconciliation with God through Jesus.

In a time of prayer, ask God to bring to mind the things which are your ‘treasures’. These may be your people, or your home, your wealth or your

holidays or objects, skills or abilities. Silently, take each one to the cross and ask Jesus to take care of them for you. If you are able to have a pile of pebbles for people to quietly pick up and place around the cross, it may help to feel that 'something has moved'. You can of course do this on your own with a paper and pen, or a cross and some screwed up bits of paper.

You are shifting your focus from your place in the world, to your place in God's Kingdom.

There is often an inner shift that we must make in order that our willing obedience to follow Jesus comes without hindrance. Jesus makes the point that when we see him as 'Only God' - the one who is truly good, we will be glad to pursue the life he offers above all else. The 21st Century world and the church today are filled with distractions that would keep us from truly following Jesus. Even in the Methodist Church, there can be a preponderance of initiatives that have little to do with transformed hearts and lives at the gracious invitation of Jesus.

Jesus makes the point to the young man that if he truly saw Jesus as who he is, the questions of whether or not to give up the worldly wealth and its attendant status would be irrelevant. Instead, we see the young man seeing Jesus as "Good Teacher" in verse 18. For those for whom Jesus remains 'teacher' and never progresses through to 'saviour', there might be a take it or leave it attitude. Like so much else, Jesus teaching might be the move towards salvation or an opportunity to accumulate knowledge and the worthy feelings of knowing that you are doing well – a little like getting 96% in an exam... It is an excellent accumulation and use of knowledge, but it remains frustratingly imperfect! So close to a perfect result and yet it has fallen short.

**Spend a few moments bemoaning the times when 'you ought to have had a perfect score/cake/result' but you were 'robbed!'**

**Why is it we might dwell on the loss of wealth or status rather than 'leaving all to follow Jesus'?**

God only asks for full obedience from his followers. The Covenant relationship with His people throughout Scripture has had a focus on the benefit of obedience and the disaster that comes from disobedience. Our focus on Jesus as The New Covenant reminds us that our obedience is to His command for our full and perfect satisfaction. During Lent, we practise the spiritual disciplines of asceticism or 'self denial'. David Watson in his book; "Disciple" offers this observation;

*Most of us would like to arrive at a happy compromise. Of course we want to seek first the kingdom of God; but earthly treasures continue to attract, tug away at the heart, cause anxiety and lessen our faith. We may not want to be extravagantly wealthy providing we have clear financial security. However, in*

wanting the best of both worlds we lose the transforming power of the kingdom of God. P 217

After spending a while contemplating the dichotomy of personal satisfaction and reputation against absolute obedience to Jesus, look at how holy satisfaction is found in allowing personal wants and perceived needs to give way to leaving all to follow Jesus.

## **The Project Part 5**

*In which you take up the challenge and risk becoming an effective disciple.*

### **Prayer and Fasting for Everyone**

Once again, a holy intention is required for entering into this discipleship discipline. If our main intention is to benefit our earthly selves rather than to be more fully attentive to God, then we set out with wrong motives and it lacks the correct focus. Saving money, having more time or losing weight might be by-products of your self-denial but they are NOT your purpose.

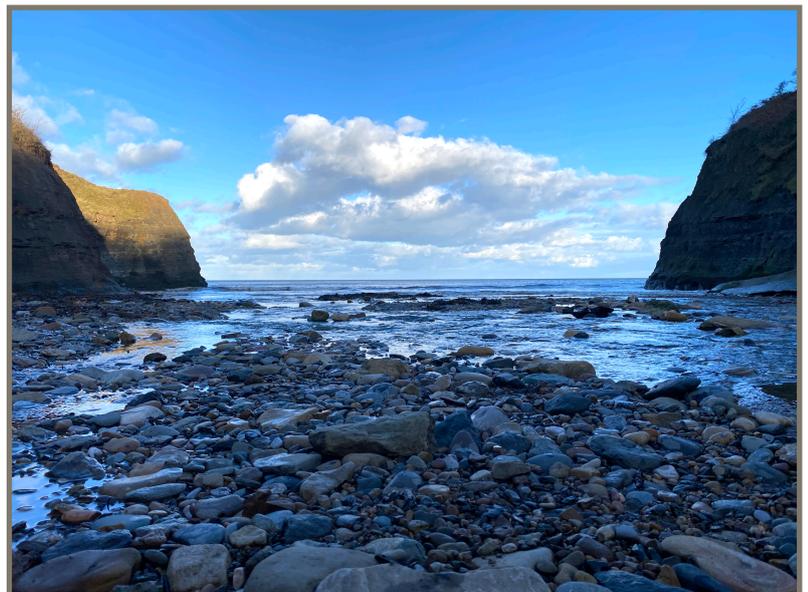
*1 John 2:15-17 NIV*

*[15] Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. [16] For everything in the world---the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life---comes not from the Father but from the world. [17] The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever.*

The project this week is to:

Spend awhile asking God to show you a specific area of your life where you can usefully exercise 'self-denial' in pursuit of a deeper relationship with God in Christ.

Note it here:



## Pray and consider how you will go about your task of self denial ...

Remember this is not necessarily about food, although for some it may be. For some it may be how you use your time. For some it may be how you use your money. For some it may be about choosing prayerful meditation in a busy and complex day.

In his book, “The Hidden Power of Prayer and Fasting”, Mahesh Chavda makes 9 statements about the benefits of fasting. I want to draw attention to two of them;



*We fast to overcome temptations in areas that keep us from moving into God's power.*

If the anointing is not flowing freely through you, that is a good sign that you need to fast and pray. It is time to clear the channel so God's Spirit can flow through you... According to Luke chapter 4, Jesus came out of a wilderness of temptation *in the power of the Spirit*. If you want the same, then do what he did...

P 38

*We fast to become weak before God so God's power can be strong.*

Fasting is a choice for God *and against the flesh*. When you fast, you are making a conscious inward choice demonstrated by an outward act that you want God's power to flow through you, not your own. You want God's answer, not yours. P 41

I have chosen these two points because they are easy to take on board and see their impact in our lives. Temptations lose their power when God is near. God's power increases in our lives when we choose Him above other things.

**Make more room for God and allow his grace to fill the available space with his power.**

**Choose to resist the pull of temptation by consciously deciding to look to God for your needs rather than choosing to rely on your own tenacity and self-sufficiency.**

**How might these points be evidenced in the 'self-denial' or 'fasting' you will undertake?**

**Consider who you can pray with about your chosen area of 'self-denial' and who will support you to do this well?**

# “Because Everyone Is”

## Gathering

I'm sure some of you resist the idea of 'crowds', but this is a festival atmosphere, with everyone focussed on the Journey to Jerusalem – so in *that* spirit, have a think about whereabouts in the crowd you prefer... Are you a front row person, a firmly in the middle or a hanger-out at the back? Have a ponder on why that may be... and if you are with a group, perhaps make a crowd of plasticine people so that you can act out the scenes together!



## Prayer & Worship See Page 26

Read Luke 19:28-40

## Engaging

*In which the thinking begins in earnest and progress is made.*

Jesus progresses his ministry towards its earthly conclusion in Jerusalem. He has passed through Jericho, being entertained by Zacchaeus for 'tea' in Luke 19:5. Jesus' emphasis along his journey is 'to seek and save the lost' (19:10). Jesus eats and converses with people who would not normally have any social currency. He welcomes children into his presence in 18:15-17 and makes the Kingdom of God the focus of his teaching and every encounter.

Have a look through Luke chapters 13-19 to see the way he treats people and teaches them. Who does he engage with? About whom does he tell parables? What do you learn as you 'travel with him' through these accounts?

Jesus deliberately changes his mode of transport in Luke 19:35. The disciples had been sent to obtain the donkey's colt, requiring an act of faith to follow Jesus' instructions in verses 30-34.

The festival atmosphere is apparent from verse 35 as the crowd honours Jesus.

Using the 'hill', draw the scene with Jesus and disciples.

Where are you putting yourself?

Might that change as the journey progresses?

Do you get nearer Jesus or further away as you approach Jerusalem.

Mull over your response.



It is easier to be a disciple in a crowd, following the way of Jesus ‘because everyone is’. We need these time to buoy us up in times of dismay. The crowd, arriving at their Holy City of Jerusalem, were in buoyant mood with their praises and acclamations of delight in being in Jesus’ presence. **Recall times of faith being exciting and full of expectation and hope. How have they fuelled your discipleship in leaner times? How would you offer encouragement to someone who is feeling that ‘faith is difficult’?**

Churches are often best accessed through joining a congregation and a small group for close fellowship and learning about the Bible, Mission and Discipleship— this might be called a cell group or house group or Micro-Church. The congregation is the driving force for mission and their small groups are the local church’s missional units of action and effectiveness.

Note how, alongside the buzz of excitement in the arrival of the Messiah into Jerusalem, there are the ‘miserable squad’. I love Geldenhuys’ description of verse 39;

*Apart from the great multitude of disciples now accompanying Jesus, there are naturally also many other Jews, among whom are some of the Pharisees. The latter are exceedingly annoyed at the Messianic reverence shown to the Nazarene against whom most of them have long ago taken sides... P 481*

Geldenhuys goes on to point out that they were likely fearful of Pilate sending armed forces into the crowd to impose silence and order. Jesus, on this occasion rejects the call to quieten his followers. This day though belongs to exultant crowds who joyfully and rightly follow their Messiah into the Holy City.

**How might you respond to people who struggle to understand the need for celebratory worship?**

**There are times for being carefully quiet and there are times to let down the reservations and rejoice with every fibre of your being. This was such a time.**

**Have you attended a rally or demonstration for a cause you were passionate about?**

**Have you been on a ‘March for Jesus’ where you were able to sing as you walked or another open-air faith event?**

**What is it like being purposeful in a crowd?**

Jesus has deliberately chosen this day and this procession to be of eternal significance. We celebrate the day and call it “Palm Sunday”, waving palm crosses and sharing in a celebratory service together in our church.

Do we continue to honour and celebrate Jesus once the crowds have dispersed and we are back to the ordinary things of life?

How can you encourage one another in your faith? How would you appreciate being encouraged? Talk this through with a friend or leader at your church or in your group.

## **The Project Part 6**

*In which you take up the challenge and risk becoming an effective disciple.*

### **Joining In - Even You!**

It can be all too easy to occupy the role of spectator in any aspect of our life. Maybe it is even easier to be a spectator in church life – I can almost see the eye-rolls and hear the gasps of horror from all of you stewards, secretaries, visitors, rota-makers out there!! But stay with me for a while on this! Please!!

We looked at how faith is more than the doing of jobs to ‘honour Jesus’ and that he will teach us a new way of living and serving. Our service, the jobs that we do are an overflow of the love we have for Jesus and the ‘working out’ of our salvation - as opposed to the ‘working to achieve our salvation’.

The church in the UK largely ground to a halt during COVID-19 and the long road back to meeting for worship and unmasked singing! In that time, the fear of ‘togetherness’ which the Government had instilled to protect people from deadly infection had taken root. Like unearthing a dandelion root, where when even the smallest amount remains, it can grow back and flourish, fear of being together has rooted in our churches. There is a shortage of volunteers to help accomplish mission in every area. Yet, confidence is returning.

The ones closest to Jesus began the celebratory shouts on the day of Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem. They recognised the Messiah and the importance of the day. Luke 19:35-37 shows how the disciples caught the vision for what Jesus was about to do and introduced the expectation of honour and praise as they spread their own cloaks on the colt.

**The Project for this Easter Season is to join in!**

**Fill in the card on the next page, indicating where you can serve. Then cut it out and pop it into the collection plate in your church or send it to your church leader or minister.**

The Lent project is about building up and releasing God’s people into the fulness of discipleship to which Jesus calls us and for which He equips us. We are all, each of us, included in that call to salvation and service. This has always looked like Good News. Even now, the call to be on Jesus’ Team and finding your

place to use the talents God has gifted you with is ringing out like a trumpet calling you to rally!

We have been on a journey with Jesus as he has made his way from Galilee with the call to the first disciples - Simon overcoming his 'natural inclinations and knowledge' to trust Jesus and follow both his commands and person into an adventure of discipleship. We have seen how we can go overboard in 'getting the process right' rather than listening closely to and spending time with Jesus. We have been challenged to let go of our fear of being unwelcome or unworthy to be in Jesus' presence and to receive the fullness of Salvation which he comes and brings to us. We have been challenged to let go of our hang-ups about prayer, fasting, insecurity, age or situation and to be The Disciple, even today that Jesus has called us and equipped us to be.

The Church is not a meeting place, a hub or a community centre - it is not even a 'place of worship'. That is our address and the place where the church meets. The Church, your church, my church, the Church belonging firstly to Jesus, is the people belonging to God in Christ Jesus. Ones who seek him first and live out our Salvation in faith and righteousness.

### You are a Disciple, and Jesus has a project for you!



Your name here

## AREAS OF SERVICE

- Welcome Team
- Families' Team
- Youth Team
- Children's Team
- Seniors' Team
- 'Connect' Team
- Tech Team (AV)
- Hospitality Team
- Finance Team
- Facilities Projects Team
- Prayer Group
  - Leader / Member
- House Group
  - Leader / Member
- Micro-Church
  - Leader / Member

- Getting involved with new projects
- Community Outreach
- Messy Church
- Eco Team
- Cleaning Team
- Flowers Rota
- Coffee Shop
- Leadership
- Other:



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*\*All volunteering is subject to 'Safer Recruiting'*

# Prayer & Worship

## A Prayer for Lent

*Loving Jesus, call me by my name and show me your kingdom! I have worked hard and am despondent. Sit alongside me wherever I am, and let me be willing to listen attentively for your voice. Teach me your ways. Set me aright within my soul so that I might honour and serve you without arguing whether you know what is good and right! Forgive my selfishness and wilfulness. Loving Jesus, please gift me with the assurance of Salvation and a Purposeful Discipleship which longs to show and share your love in my own community and wherever you may send me. Always with love. Amen.*

## Songs for Worship

*Great is the Darkness* (Noel Richards)  
*O Praise the Name* (Hillsong Music)  
*The Servant King* (Graham Kendrick)  
*Blessè Assurance* (Fanny Crosby)  
*When I Survey the Wondrous Cross* (Isaac Watts)  
*Love Divine, All Loves Excelling* (Charles Wesley)  
*Thine Be the Glory!* (Edmond Budry)  
*See What A Morning* (Keith & Kristyn Getty)  
*Behold the Lamb!* (Passion & Kristian Stanfill)  
*Greater Still* (Brandon Lake & Essential Worship)  
*This is Our God* (Phil Wickham)

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Josh Selfe wrote the article on *Natural Faith Sharing* see page 6  
The Maranatha Community, 102 Irlam Rd, Flixton, M41 6JT see page 11

## I Would Be There

Waving branches so high  
We sing for the King,  
I have no doubt as I shout -  
As I honour Him!  
And I would run up the road  
I would be there in the crowd  
Following Jesus to Jerusalem.

He is angry now  
In the House of Prayer.  
Then I'm watching her bless him  
With her oil-soaked hair.  
And I would be there on the road  
I would be in the crowd  
Following Jesus around Jerusalem.

He is crying for His loss  
At Lazarus' death  
Who's then recalled from  
death's tomb  
With restored Life & Breath.  
And I would be there on the road  
I would be amazed in the crowd,  
Watching Jesus in Jerusalem.

The Passover Lamb  
His Body and Blood  
Bread, Wine and Betrayal  
He is not understood.  
And I would be there on the road  
I would follow their path  
As they go down to the  
valley in Jerusalem.

He leaves them to watch  
As he goes onward to pray  
prayers of blood, anguish and tears  
He commits to the Way.  
And I would be there in the trees  
Watching and sleeping  
As the betrayer arrives in Jerusalem.

A kiss given, a sword brandished  
Then denied by his own;  
A dark night of trial.  
He's abandoned. Alone.  
And I would be there in the shadows  
I would be safely hidden  
Escaping all notice in Jerusalem.

And now, they cry "Crucify!"  
Simon carries His cross  
The shame brought on Jesus,  
Thorns, nails, sin, borne for us.  
And I would be there in the crowd  
Hear His words from the cross  
As Jesus is killed in Jerusalem

The King of the Jews!  
"IT IS FINISHED" he cries  
Tastes vinegar wine  
Breathes his last. Dies.  
And I would be there with his mother  
My hands holding hers  
As darkness falls over Jerusalem.

A spear stabs his side  
He's laid in Joseph's new tomb  
Rolled the stone, set the guard  
For a night of deep gloom.  
And I would be there, shut away  
For fear and for shame  
Late Friday Night in Jerusalem

And darkness stood thick  
And the Temple curtain was torn  
And the dead left their graves  
And the day did not come.  
And I would be there  
As my heart broke for Him  
In Jerusalem.

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# THE LENT PROJECT



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