

## Vision Series – 4 Bible studies for Austinmer/Thirroul Growth Groups February 2021

Proverbs 29:18 'Where there is no vision, the people perish' KJB – Do you know Austinmer church's vision statement? **'We aspire to be a network of diverse communities of people who have been gripped by the love of Jesus and transformed by the Grace of God.'**

### Week of February 1<sup>st</sup> – Who are we? - His Church to His Glory

Read Matthew 5:13-16 – 'You are the light of the world'

1. Salt and light are no good if they are not used for the purpose for which they are designed. What according to these verses is our purpose as disciples of Jesus?

**v.16 – so to live for Jesus, that others may praise your Father**

2. How might we be in danger of not fulfilling our purpose?

**Encourage open, honest discussion allowing God's Spirit to convict, not condemning, not condoning!**

3. Take some time to discuss if there are things we could do as a group (try to come up with practical ideas) that might help us to fulfill our purpose this year?

A) as Individuals?

B) as a small group?

C) as a church? **(Do be prepared to give feedback to staff maybe via me for this one!)**

Read Ephesians 3:14-21- 'to him be glory in the church'

1. What does Paul pray for the church in Ephesus – v.16 **note this prayer is for the church not individual – that God may give spiritual strength**
2. What is the purpose of this request? – v.17a **So Christ indwells them**
3. What else does he pray for them? – vv.18-19a **that they'll have power to grasp and to know Christ's love for them**
4. What is the purpose of this knowledge? – v.19b **to be filled completely with God's love as much as God Himself loves**
5. What do these final verses suggest the ultimate goal of Paul's prayer is? – vv.20-21. **That by being filled with Christ and His love, by His Spirit powerfully working within us, in this way, that the church will bring God glory**
6. Can we make this our prayer?
7. Pray this prayer for each other, your group, your church, and the church worldwide including in Valencia where Jim and Tanya French are serving.
8. Are there things we can do this week that could help this prayer be answered? **People might consider praying together with and for each other during the week, spending time reflecting on Christ's character and love for them, any Christian book recommendations?**

**Week of February 8<sup>th</sup> – What drives us? - Being disciples, growing as disciples, making disciples.** Do you know Austinmer Church's mission statement and discipleship pathway? 'We exist to make growing disciples who will innovatively share the good news of Jesus to our neighbourhood, our networks and the nations.'

'Mission, Membership, Maturity, Ministry' or 'Believe, Belong, Grow, Give, Glorify God.'

What is helpful/unhelpful about this path picture? / where do you think you are on this pathway? Where do you think various church activities fit with this pathway?

Might be helpful for people to see eg. Growth Group is about maturing/growing...may highlight if some aspect is missing. Clearly this pathway is only a tool, many belong before they believe and most of us are simultaneously growing in all these steps, none complete!

**Read 2 Corinthians 5:14-15** – 'For Christ's love compels us'

1. According to these verses what difference does it make to our lives, knowing that Christ loved us so much that he died for us? (don't live for ourselves but for Christ)
2. How does this work out in our lives in practice? (may be helpful to consider what would be different in our lives if we weren't following Jesus)

**Read John 10:3-4, 7-18 and 27-30** – 'My sheep listen to my voice'

1. V.4 Why do sheep follow their own shepherd? (because they know they belong to him and he cares for them and they recognise his voice)
2. V.12-13 – Why does a man who looks after sheep for money, run away when the wolf comes? (Money not a strong enough motivation to risk life, only love)
3. V.14,15 What reasons does knowing that Jesus cares for his sheep give us to keep following him? (Confident he is good and will keep caring for us)
4. Vv14-16 If Jesus is our shepherd, what's involved in recognising and listening to his voice, so we follow faithfully as disciples? (Getting to know him through his word good to take the time to discuss how we are doing this, or what need to start/restart doing this?)

**Read Matthew 7:15, 24-29** – '...like a wise man who built his house on the rock.'

1. What would have amazed the Jewish crowds about these words? (the expectation that people should follow Jesus' words rather than Torah or explanations of Torah by the learned quoting other learned rabbis! Where is Jesus' authority from?)
2. This picture of building suggests that there is a process of growing as disciples who listen and follow. (we learn to be disciples by following, listening and putting into practice...it takes time!)  
What words of Jesus are you struggling to put into practice at the moment? (Give people time to think and share as far as they are willing, remind of commitment to confidentiality)
3. Can you think of anything that might help? (Might be particular passages to remember eg. humility – Phil.2:1-11 or patience 1 Cor.13:4-8. Or practical tools eg. 1<sup>st</sup> thing do in morning, post its on fridge etc.)
4. Pray for each other that our houses will not fall whatever storms come because we are building our lives on the rock.

**Week of February 15<sup>th</sup> – Unity in diversity...A corporate picture- Using our gifts to love and serve one another**

**Read John 13:1-17** – “you also should wash one another’s feet.”

1. What do you think Jesus meant when he said this to his disciples? (esp.vv15-16 if humble service rather than footwashing what sorts of activities might this include? Eg. pastoral care of one another)
2. What example are we called to follow when we serve one another? And what does this mean for the attitude in which we serve? (Jesus, slave like example, humility cf. Phil2:1-11, serving in ways others don’t want to serve, no status involved etc.)

**Read Romans 12:1-18** – ‘so in Christ, we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.’

1. V.5 cf.v.10 ‘This passage along with others like 1 Cor.12:12ff and Eph.4:15-16 emphasise that in Christ, we in the church, belong together as one body so this is the prime sphere for service. Do you agree? (Of course people might be using their gifts for work and outside the church to serve others, but cf. Gal6:10 ‘Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people especially to those who belong to the family of believers.’)
2. V1 (cf.6:13) In what ways might God be calling us to use our own eyes, ears, tongue, hands, feet, physical abilities, to serve Him? (Encourage concrete examples)
3. V.2 How are we obeying this command (don’t conform, be transformed)? (How does this world’s pattern, our local and wider Western culture shape our thoughts and actions especially regarding service eg. only serve if find satisfaction/fulfilment, and how are we enabling Scripture to reshape them? Possible to read Bible without this actually happening? Any areas not sure of his will in at the moment?)
4. Vv3-8 What gifts do you have? How are you/could you/would you like to be using these for the body? (Take the time here to help each other identify their gifts and where these might match some of the needs of the body we belong to in 2021. (Let people know that during service on Sunday February 28<sup>th</sup> there will be opportunity to sign up for a team might be interested to serve on this year. Also let each person say what they think their gifts might be and try to help them identify how they might be able to use these in the church.

Here are some questions to guide our thinking: (Give time for people to discuss these)

What are we passionate about?

Where would we really love to serve?

What causes us to hesitate?

What would be needed if we were to volunteer in this area?

5. Pray for our church and that we might know how he is calling us to love and serve one another this year. We are keen to build teams, where people feel genuinely called by God to love and serve, not just fill rosters!

**Week of February 22<sup>nd</sup> – Having the heart of a servant – giving sacrificially.**

**Read Luke 20:45 – 21:4** ‘she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on.’

1. What are some of the differences between the ministry of the teachers of the law and the gift giving of the wealthy compared with the giving of the widow?

(The first group are focussed on being appreciated and honoured by the people more than focus on God even when they pray and their giving is not sacrificial, they give because they are receiving something from their giving. (they are actually taking from the weak and vulnerable, not giving to them) The widow, in contrast, is looking completely to God, knows her contribution will not be valued by people but gives sacrificially to God nonetheless.)

2. When we think about giving and serving are our hearts more closely aligned with the teachers or the widow? Is there anything God might be saying to us through these verses?  
(Allow reflection time)

**Read John 21:15-22** – ‘do you truly love me...? Feed my lambs.’

1. Vv15-17 What was Jesus question, and what was his command to Peter? How are they related (the lambs belong to Jesus...love me, love my dog idea!) and How did Peter do this? (Acts 2:14,4:8-12, stood to speak for Jesus before a crowd risking arrest 40-41,pleaded out of love for the lost, 5:3, confronted deceit, 29,obeyed God rather than people, 41,rejoiced in suffering, 8:14-15,25, went to pray for and with those who were different from them and preached the gospel to them, 22,confronted wickedness praying for conversion, 9:32-43,visited and healed a bed-ridden paralytic, visited, prayed for and raised a dead poor widow, 10:9,prayed to the point of hunger,15,heard God speak, 19-21,reflected on and responded to God’s revelation, 23,showed hospitality to the outsider, 33-36,48, travelled to other cultures (unclean) and was prepared to let God change his prejudices even though it would cause him trouble, 11:2-4,18 explained graciously to authorities who criticised,enabling understanding and acceptance, 12:5,suffered imprisonment, 11gave glory to God for his work in his life, 1 Peter 1:1-2 wrote to encourage the church pointing to Jesus, modelling suffering, teaching truth, desiring grace in readers to glorify God– 2 Peter 3:17-18.

(You could get each person to look up one verse to feedback or just choose a couple of examples to give an idea of what might be involved in feeding, caring for Jesus’ lambs)

2. What did Peter’s obedience to this command cost him? (1 John 21:18-19 – tradition indicates Peter was crucified upside down, remaining faithful in face of persecution, not considering himself worthy to be crucified same way as His Lord)
3. Peter, was not just a disciple but an apostle and leader so, if we are not apostles or church leaders is there anything we can learn from these words of Jesus to Peter? **Read Jesus’ prayer in John 17:20-23.** (In this prayer Jesus desires all followers including those who will believe through apostles message = us, to be united in Him so the world may know God sent Jesus out of love for the world. This suggests that unity and life as one body which involves our love and service of one another is as important for us as for Peter. Not only leaders care for/teach one another.

If we, like Peter, want to show our love for Jesus, how might his call to feed and take care of his sheep change our attitudes and priorities in our church involvement, or change what we choose to do and how we do it?

Here are some examples to consider: Thanks for those who come prayerfully to church even when its hard to get kids along etc for the sake of encouraging others. Thanks for those who stay behind after the service to spray the chairs to ensure covid safety of others.Thanks for those who joyfully go out of their way to clean, sweep extra thoroughly after a church programme in consideration of others who will use the building next. Thanks for those who carefully take the time to look around for those who seem not to be part of a group during morning tea and choose to go and include them in a conversation. Are there other examples you might like to give thanks for and ask God to help us find ways to serve sacrificially with joy?