

EASTER TO PENTECOST



**BOW
CHURCH
EASTER TO
PENTECOST**

Contents

Introduction

Overview

 How Should I Read This Guide

 How Should I Read The Bible

 Further Reading

Daily Bible Readings

Questions For Daily Reflection

Questions For Weekly Reflection

Cedar Group Questions

 Week 1 Joy

 Week 2 Peace

 Week 3 Seeing

 Week 4 Garden

 Week 5 Humility

 Week 6 Ascension

 Week 7 Pentecost

 Week 8 Trinity

Introduction

Overview

This guide offers a way for you to read the Bible daily and offers 8 sessions for Cedar Groups to do during the time following Easter. The sessions relate to themes preached about on the previous Sunday but it doesn't matter if you use them in a different week to the one recommended here.

The church marks the year with many celebrations and festivals that tell the Christian story. Some of them, like Christmas and Easter, are notorious in culture at large but many ignored. Think of it as a journey with some famous tourist spots to stop off at. The Grand Canyon is famous for good reason and obviously worth visiting but with a bit of care and knowledge you realise that the whole Church calendar is a landscape of treasures. Christians vary on how many and what route you should take but let's remind ourselves of the major features of the route.

- The Church's year begins at the end of November with **Advent** which literally means 'coming'. We gain hope by looking forward to Jesus' second coming whilst at the same time getting ready for the time when we remember his first coming: Christmas.
- At **Christmas**, when we peel back the wrapping paper and trimmings, we are left with the startling news that God's salvation has come not as a conquering army or as well meant advice but as one of us: born of Mary and lying in a manger.
- After Christmas comes **Epiphany**. This means "manifestation" or "revealed". We dwell on what it means that God has been revealed as a human.
- The mood changes at **Lent**. In one sense, what Advent is to Christmas, Lent is to Holy Week. We are trying to take stock of our lives and the world around us and create space to receive the work of the cross.
- **Holy Week**. Everything slows down for the most important events in human history, when God

himself is caught in the violence of sin, the corruption of religion and the madness of changeable crowds who cheer and jeer as the wind blows. As the day of his death comes closer, so does God's plan to start a new community on earth. He draws his disciples closer, even though they fail him. Then he dies. Only in retrospect can we see the cross as victory; at the time it was total defeat.

- **Easter Sunday.** Jesus didn't stay dead. With great joy we celebrate that the grave could not hold Jesus and he came back to life to begin the renewal of all things.

**WHAT
HAPPENED
AFTER
EASTER?**

That's what this guide is about. Easter Sunday is just the beginning. The Easter Season is actually 7 weeks long (this guide has an extra week for Trinity). And this guide takes us through it all. We stay very close to the stunned disciples who for 40 days experienced Jesus' resurrected body, before he ascended into heaven and poured out the Holy Spirit, kick-starting the church.

We will take time to feel the awe and amazement that resurrection brings to grief, the implications for our lives and the whole created world. We jump forward to see how the resurrection took root in the humility of the early church before cycling back round to the end of the 40 days of Jesus' appearing to consider what it means that he ascended into heaven. Now the plot changes. Jesus is not bodily on earth but has promised that he will be with us by his Spirit, so we wait.

The final landmark is Trinity Sunday. After the Holy Spirit fell on the church at Pentecost, the church spread throughout the whole world with the message of Jesus and the power that he gives through the Spirit. The God they had to share was so different to anything anyone had described so far: both 3 persons but one God. Father, Son and Holy Spirit together in one unity.

The Christian God is expansive and energetic and it takes an awful lot of words to even begin to explain. Primarily the church knows about this God through experience rather than concepts, through worship even more than through study. Therefore, it becomes necessary to find a word that is shorthand to hold all that we mean by God in place. That's what the word Trinity does. Imagine it's the end of a long story. It would start with Advent and conclude with something like "And in the end the followers were left amazed by God and wrote poems and sang songs worshipping Father, Son and Holy Spirit."

We will explore this remarkable story in three ways:

1. A schedule of daily readings with reflection questions for individual use.
2. Discussion questions for Cedar Groups to work through when they meet.
3. Sermons in Sunday services to dig into key themes and passages.

This is a guide for individual use and for Cedar groups.

HOW SHOULD I READ THIS GUIDE?

By yourself

Use the Daily Readings section to explore the main theme of the week in small, accessible chunks for eight weeks, starting on Monday the 10th April and ending on Trinity Sunday on the 4th June.

There are readings for six days of the week accompanied by reflection questions for you to think about on three topics: 'God', 'Self' and 'Response'. Overall, the reading and reflection should take between 10-15 mins.

One day a week there is a shorter section of Scripture to read with questions that allow for a more meditative approach known as 'Lectio Divina', an ancient monastic way of reading the Bible that Christians have used for over 1,500 years. In this guide we call it meditation. We suggest spending a minimum of 10 minutes on this practice but you could certainly take longer if you wanted.

If you are new to reading the Bible this guide will help you get started with regular reading and reflection. If you would like to go deeper into the text we are reading, check out the 'Further Reading' section at the end of this introduction.

In Cedar Groups

This guide contains eight studies with questions for Cedar Groups to use when they meet. If you'd like to join a Cedar Group then email hello@bow.church or call 07908416052.

How Should I Read the Bible?

Reading the Bible can be daunting, but over time and in community it is the source of unmatched wisdom and authority for the Christian life.

There are many ways to read the Bible. The assumption we start with here is that the Bible is a means of communion with God. Reading the Bible is about deepening a relationship with God and becoming more like Jesus.

So a good way to tell if we are reading the Bible well is if we notice our lives becoming more like Jesus through our reading. With this in mind, here is some advice for reading the Bible.

We need to approach the Bible humbly as the authoritative Scripture for the Christian faith, aware that our unique experiences of life will affect how we read and understand it.

We then need to recognise with curiosity that the Bible is from a very different world to our own and is a diverse

and rich collection of books, written and compiled over many different times.

The collision between our world and the Bible's is not an obstacle to communion with God but rather an invitation to wrestle with the text, ourselves and the Holy Spirit as we search for what God is saying.

As we try to apply the wisdom of the Bible to our lives today, it's good to ask if our interpretation of it leads us to greater love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, trustfulness, gentleness, and self-control: the fruits of the Spirit Paul sets out in Galatians 5:22-23.

This is the kind of person the Bible says we are meant to be if we are following the story. If our interpretation leads us to live this way then it is probably revealing some of the wisdom of the Spirit. If it doesn't then it is probably not of the Spirit.

Scripture was written in community, for community. It's important to read personally but also to receive preaching on a Sunday and to discuss and reflect in smaller groups. As we encounter scripture both personally and in community, we get greater clarity on

how the Holy Spirit is speaking to us today. This is why we suggest you join a Cedar Group as well as follow the daily reading guide.

Most importantly, have fun! Reading the Bible is not supposed to be a burden but an exciting adventure in your relationship with God, as you seek to plumb the depths of Scripture for the wisdom of the Spirit and the love of God for your life today.

FURTHER READING

More: How You Can Have More of the Spirit When You Already Have Everything in Christ - Simon Ponsonby

A helpful and accessible read on what the apostle Paul's phrase "being filled with the Spirit" means.

Experiencing the Trinity - Darrell W. Johnson

How do you put words to the indescribable beauty of the Trinity? A brave and very readable attempt.

All Things New - Pete Hughes

Pete, a good friend from King's Cross Church, gives us a powerful theological vision of how God is at work in the world seeking to restore and redeem all things and how we can participate.

Body: Biblical spirituality for the whole person - Paula Gooder

An important exploration of spirituality that affirms both the spiritual and the physical for a more transformative vision of how we may live as embodied persons in God's creation.

With Burning Hearts - Henri Nouwen

A deep meditation on what it means to be those who receive the 'eucharistic life' from Jesus and are called to share that life with others.

Just Living - Ruth Valerio

A wise book that helps us to understand how we can live with integrity and fairness in a world that is strongly gripped by exploitative consumerism, especially in relation to the climate crisis.

Seeing Differently: Franciscans and Creation - Br Samuel SSF

Living in West Ham and having preached at Bow Church, Br Samuel is a good friend who has written a book that helps us to more deeply explore our relationships with ourselves and creation as we seek to honour all that God has made.

Daily Bible Readings

WEEK 1 JOY

Mon 10th April – John 20:11–18 & Hosea 6:1–13

Tues 11th April – John 20:19–23 & Psalm 100

Wed 12th April – Luke 1:39–56 & Isaiah 12:1–3

Thurs 13th April – Luke 24:36–39 & Psalm 150

Fri 14th April – Luke 24:39–43 & Isaiah 40:1–2

Sat 15th April – Luke 24:44–49 & Psalm 16

Sun 16th April – John 20:19–20 (Meditation)

WEEK 2 PEACE

Mon 17th April – Psalm 23 & Colossians 1:15–17

Tues 18th April – Romans 12:9–21 & Psalm 4

Wed 19th April – Philippians 4:4–9 & Matthew 11:28–30

Thurs 20th April – John 16:31–33 & Psalm 27

Fri 21st April – John 20:19–23 & Colossians 1:15–20

Sat 22nd April – Luke 24:36–49 & 2 Thessalonians 3:16–18

Sat 23rd April – John 14:27 (Meditation)

WEEK 3 SEEING

Mon 24th April – Luke 24:13–35 & Isaiah 6:1–9

Tues 25th April – John 20:11–29 & Psalm 34

Wed 26th April – Mark 8:22–26 & Exodus 33:12–23

Thurs 27th April – Matthew 17:1–8 & 2 Corinthians 5:1–7

Fri 28th April – Luke 11:33–36 & 2 Corinthians 3:7–18

Sat 29th April – 1 Corinthians 13:9–13 & 1 John 1:1–4

Sun 30th April – Luke 24:30–31 (Meditation)

WEEK 4 GARDEN

Mon 1st May – Genesis 1 & Psalm 65

Tues 2nd May – Genesis 2 & Psalm 8

Wed 3rd May – Genesis 3 & Psalm 29

Thurs 4th May – Matthew 6:25–34 & Psalm 19

Fri 5th May – Romans 8:18–30 & Psalm 147

Sat 6th May – Revelation 21:1–8 & Isaiah 55:1–13

Sun 7th May – Romans 8:22–23 (Meditation)

WEEK 5 HUMILITY

Mon 8th May - John 13:1-9 & Philippians 2:1-11
Tues 9th May - John 13:9-17 & Philippians 2:12-18
Wed 10th May - Colossians 3:12-17 & Romans 12:3-8
Thurs 11th May - Mark 10:35-45 & Isaiah 52: 13-15,
Fri 12th May - Matthew 23:1-12 & Isaiah 53:1-12
Sat 13th May - Luke 14:7-11 & Ephesians 4:2-6
Sun 14th May - Philippians 2:3-4 (Meditation)

WEEK 6 ASCENSION

Mon 15th May - Luke 24: 44-53 & Acts 1:6-9
Tues 16th May - John 14:15-31 & Philippians 2:5-11
Wed 17th May - John 15: 26-27 & Psalm 110
Thurs 18th May - John 16:1-15 & Ephesians 1:15-23
Fri 19th May - Daniel 7:9-14 & Colossians 1:15-20
Sat 20th May - Revelation 1:9-20 & Psalm 93
Sun 21st May - Luke 24:51-53 (Meditation)

WEEK 7 PENTECOST

Mon 22nd May - Acts 1:1-11 & Ezekiel 36:24-28
Tues 23rd May - Acts 1:12-26 & Jeremiah 31:31-33
Wed 24th May - Acts 2:1-21 & Ezekiel 37:1-14
Thurs 25th May - Joel 2 & 1 Corinthians 12:1-11
Fri 26th May - Acts 11:19-30 & Ezekiel 47:1-12
Sat 27th May - Acts 19:1-10 & Isaiah 61:1-7
Sun 28th May - Galatians 5:22-23 (Meditation)

WEEK 8 TRINITY

Mon 29th May - Genesis 1:26-27 & Ephesians 1:15-23
Tues 30th May - Genesis 18: 1-15 & 1 Peter 1:1-2
Wed 31st May - Matthew 3:13-17 & Psalm 8
Thurs 1st June - John 14:23-26 & Isaiah 40: 12-end
Fri 2nd June - Matthew 28.16-end & Galatians 4:1-6
Sat 3rd June - Luke 1:26-38 & 2 Corinthians 13.11-end
Sun 4th June - 2 Corinthians 13: 14 (Meditation)

QUESTIONS FOR DAILY REFLECTION

Use these questions each day to reflect on the Daily Readings. You might like to use a journal to note down your thoughts and responses to the questions.

GOD

What do these passages show me about God?

SELF

What do these passages stir from within me?

RESPONSE

What will I now pray and do as a response?

QUESTIONS FOR WEEKLY REFLECTION

Take as long as you would like for this meditation. Try to start by spending at least two minutes on each section. This will give you a good foundation to build upon as a regular practice.

READ

Read the passage slowly and consider what sticks out to you: A word?

A phrase? A character? An image?

FOCUS

Choose one thing that stood out and read the passage again with that one thing in focus. Now take some time to ask God to reveal to you why that thing is standing out to you.

RESPOND

Read the passage again for a final time and ask God to guide you in response to the text. Your response might include praying for others, sitting in silence and focusing on God's presence, asking for forgiveness, or sharing what is on your heart with God.

CEDAR GROUP
SESSIONS

These group sessions are organised for Cedar Groups to use during their mid-week meetings. There are questions for each week to help your group to go a little deeper with the text in conversation together.

The questions will cover passages you've already read from the previous week around that week's theme. As we see from the expansive and diverse story of the Church, each theme is very broad so the questions within the Cedar Group sessions explore different dimensions of this theme. Your Cedar Group leader may not want to cover all of them in one session.

Be kind when sharing your views. Difference of opinion is vital for a healthy community: hold your views not as weapons for others to fear, but as gifts for others to receive with gladness.

HOW DO I JOIN A CEDAR GROUP?

If you are reading this and want to get involved in a Cedar Group but are not part of one yet, please email us at hello@bow.church or call 07908416052 and we will find one for you.

WEEK 1: JOY

Session Overview:

In this session, we explore how Jesus' resurrection life brings joy even in the midst of profound grief.

Pray: Stilling before God as we begin

*We praise you and we bless you, our risen Lord Jesus, King of glory,
for the love which drew Mary Magdalene to your tomb
to weep over your death.*

*As you broke into her grief with your death-shattering life,
so reach into our broken hearts with your promise of hope.*

*To you, Lord Jesus,
reaching into the deepest tombs of our despair,
be honour and glory, now and for ever.*

Amen.

Recap

- Any reflection on what was discussed at the previous session?
- What difference did it make to your life?

Discuss

Joy overcomes grief

Someone Reads Aloud: John 20:11-18

Someone Reads Aloud:

Mary is outside of Jesus' tomb in deep grief. Not only has she watched Jesus suffer and die in front of her but the body of Jesus has been taken away from his tomb and she doesn't know where it is. However, in the midst of this profound loss and confusion the risen Jesus appears to Mary revealing himself by saying her name personally. Mary then finally recognises Jesus with the affectionate "Rabboni!". Here we see that the reality of Jesus' resurrection transforms loss and grief.

Questions:

- If you feel able, go round as a group and each share an instance of grief or loss and ways you have managed to heal through it.
- Have you ever experienced moments of joy in times of grief?
- Notice how Jesus says "Mary". There is an intimacy in this encounter. Have you experienced this kind of intimacy with God in times of grief or pain?

Experiencing joy together

Someone Reads Aloud: John 20:19-23

Someone Reads Aloud:

In the midst of profound "fear" and confusion the risen Jesus appears to his disciples with words of peace that transform their state of being. Where they were once all experiencing immense sadness they are now all "overjoyed". There is something deeply powerful when the joy of Jesus is experienced in community, especially in difficult times.

Questions:

- How can we cultivate joy in times of hardship? What can help us to do this?
- How can we be generous with joy for those in difficult situations? How do we do this without overwhelming people?

Live

Optional Practice:

- Do you know someone who is grieving or in pain whom you could reach out to and support this week?
- People often find gratitude a vehicle to joy. Write a daily list of ten things you are grateful for (it could be as small as a good cup of tea).

**Pray: Bringing all that's been shared
and discussed to God.**

WEEK 2: PEACE

Session Overview:

In this session, we explore the Peace of the risen Christ. This is a peace that Jesus gives to his disciples when he appears to them after his resurrection. It is not just a peace of the mind but also of the body and soul. As we will see, because Jesus' resurrected body is a physical reality his peace is not just a concept but something we can experience in our bodies. Peace is not just a head trip.

Pray: Stilling before God as we begin

We praise you and we bless you, our risen Lord Jesus, King of glory,
for in your birth you were proclaimed the Prince of Peace,
and in your resurrection you breathe into your people
peace beyond this world's understanding.

Be present, Lord, this day
with those whose lives are disfigured by conflict
and those whose hearts know no peace.

To you, Lord Jesus,
true bringer of the peace of heaven,
be honour and glory, now and for ever

Amen

Recap

- Any reflection on the topics discussed at the previous session?
- What difference did it make to your life?

Discuss

Peace of body and soul not just mind

Someone Reads Aloud: Luke 24:36-49

Someone Reads Aloud:

When Jesus appears to his disciples after his death the first thing he says to them is 'Peace be with you' (Luke 24, John 20). In Luke, Jesus invites his disciples to look at his scarred hands and feet, to touch him and even to feed him! (Luke 24:38-43). Jesus states explicitly "a ghost does not have flesh and bones; as you see I have" (Luke 24: 39).

Someone Reads Aloud: John 20:19-27

Someone Reads Aloud:

In John's account, Jesus also shows his disciples his pierced hands and side saying to Thomas "put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side". Because Jesus' resurrected body is a physical reality that Thomas could touch, his peace is not just a concept but something we can experience in our bodies.

Question:

- Do you ever experience peace in chaotic circumstances?
- Is it possible to experience peace in your body but not in your mind?
- How can we cultivate peace?

Peace in uncertainty

Someone Reads Aloud:

In Luke, even when Jesus appears to his disciples and invites them to touch him and see he is risen they do not “believe because of joy and amazement” (Luke 24: 41). The disciples experience the fruits of Jesus’ peace even though they do not believe. The peace of Jesus is something we can experience even in the midst of uncertainty and unbelief. Jesus gives out peace lavishly and gracefully. This is truly the peace that the “world cannot give” as Jesus earlier says in John 14:27.

Question:

- Have you ever experienced peace unexpectedly?
- Do you think you have experienced the peace that the world cannot give?
- How can you share peace with others?

Live

Optional Practice:

If you don’t do this already, take at least five minutes each morning to sit in silence with God.

**Pray: Bringing all that’s been shared
and discussed to God.**

Week 3: SEEING

Session Overview:

This session explores the theme of spiritual 'seeing' in the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus. Knowing God means there is more going on than what we see at first with our physical eyes.

Pray: Stilling before God as we begin

We praise you and we bless you, our risen Lord Jesus, King of glory,
for you are with us,
even when our eyes are closed to your companionship.
Walk this day alongside the disconsolate and the despairing,
open their eyes to your gentle illumination,
and let their hearts burn within them at your invisible presence.
To you, Lord Jesus,
walking by our side,
be honour and glory, now and for ever.

Amen.

Recap

- Any reflection on the topics discussed at the previous session?
- What difference did it make to your life?

Discuss

Spiritual seeing is embodied

Someone Reads Aloud:

Responding to reports that Jesus has risen from the dead, Thomas says “unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe” (John 20:25). A week later Jesus reveals himself to Thomas and invites him to put his finger on his wounds to reveal he is physically risen.

What Thomas’ encounter with Jesus reveals is that truly ‘seeing’ Jesus is not primarily conceptual but deeply physical. Seeing with spiritual maturity means recognising that the spiritual and physical are not separate realities but deeply bound together. God works within and is revealed through physical reality.

Question:

- How do you find thinking of the spiritual and physical as bound together?
- What difference does it make to see the spiritual and physical as connected rather than separate?
- Do you have experience of seeing God manifested physically in the world? (i.e. healing diseases, the beauty of God in nature, etc)

God revealed in the ordinary

Someone Reads Aloud: Luke 24:13–35

Someone Reads Aloud:

On the Road to Emmaus we read that even though those Jesus is walking alongside are talking to him they are “kept from recognising him” (Luke 24:16). It is not until Jesus breaks bread that they finally recognise him.

God reveals himself through ordinary things like breaking bread. This is why Holy Communion is so important. In Holy Communion the ordinary becomes extraordinary as the invisible power of God works through the visible; bread and wine held by human hands, shared in community. This act on a Sunday is not the end of how God reveals himself to us through the ordinary but should shape us, giving us eyes to see a miraculous God who appears in the mundane, whether that’s at the bus stop or the bakery, a funeral or the theatre.

Question:

- How do you experience Holy Communion?
- Do you recognise Jesus working in your everyday life?

God is not limited by our understanding

Someone Reads Aloud: John 20:11–21

Someone Reads Aloud:

As soon as Jesus is recognised by the two men on the Road to Emmaus, “he disappears from their sight” (Luke 24:31). When Mary recognises the risen Jesus he says “don’t cling to me” (John 20:17).

These stories describe a God who reveals himself powerfully and personally but is never limited to our understanding and experience.

Question:

- Do you ever think of God as mysterious?
- What emotions does the idea of mystery bring up for you? Pain? Excitement? Fear? Joy?
- There is a famous line from physicist Albert Einstein, 'the more we know the less we understand'. How can we seek God without making our understanding of God a limitation?

Live

Optional Practice:

Write a list this week of all the ways you have noticed God manifest in the physical world this week. This could include the beauty of a sunset or the affection of a mother bird looking after her chicks.

Pray: Bringing all that's been shared and discussed to God.

Week 4: GARDEN

Session Overview:

Creation began with a garden named "Eden" (Genesis 1); new creation also began in a garden. When Jesus rose from the grave and appeared to Mary, she actually mistook him for a gardener (John 20:15). Gardens seem central to the story. What does the resurrection mean for the physical world around us? As Jesus has risen from the dead in new life so all of creation is on the same ultimate trajectory of transformation. This session explores the call at the heart of Christian faith to participate in God's plan to restore and renew all of creation.

Pray: Stilling before God as we begin

Glorious God,
the whole creation proclaims your marvellous work:
increase in us a capacity to wonder and delight in it,
that heaven's praise may echo in our hearts
and our lives be spent as good stewards of the earth,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen

Recap

- Any reflection on the topics discussed at the previous session?
- What difference did it make to your life?

Discuss

Restoration and creation care

Someone Reads Aloud: Romans 8:18–30, Revelation 21:1–5

Someone Reads Aloud:

The resurrection of Jesus as the “first-born of all creation” (Colossians 1:15, 18; Hebrews 1:6; 12:23; Revelation 1:5) is a foretaste of what God will ultimately do for the whole of creation.

In Romans we read that the whole of creation (including us) groans for its full redemption and liberation. The process of recreation has begun in the resurrection of Jesus but has clearly not yet been fulfilled – just look around at the world as it is! In the book of Revelation we read about what this fulfilment will look like. There will be a “new heaven and a new earth” and “He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away”.

As those who participate in the Body of Christ we are to live in a way that bears witness to this future reality. This means that creation care is not an optional add on to the Christian life but is central to it. To care for creation is to participate in the work of Christ.

Questions:

- Do you find it difficult to think of ‘a new heaven and a new earth’ as a physical reality?
- What signs of creative goodness have you seen in your week that remind you of God?
- What signs of human sinfulness have you seen in your week that remind you that we have dishonoured God’s world?
- In what ways can you help to care for creation?

The glory of God

Someone Reads aloud: Psalm 19: 1-6

Someone Reads Aloud:

Psalm 19 is a famous passage of Scripture about creation's constant praise, adoration and revelation of God's glory. The writer of the Psalm uses powerful imagery to communicate this fact such as referring to the sun as a "bridegroom coming out of his chamber, like a champion rejoicing to run his course" with God and for which God has "pitched a tent". It seems that often the reality of God's glory cannot be described with specific "words" or "sounds" but only through metaphor and poetry. As those who are part of God's creation we are to enjoy and reveal his glory.

Questions:

- Have you come across any powerful images or metaphors from the natural world that communicate the glory of God?
- What does it mean to praise God?
- What does it mean to adore God?
- What does it mean to reveal God?

Live

Optional Practice:

- Sign up as a Cedar Group to help out with a gardening session at St Leonard's Priory one Saturday.
- Make one carbon positive decision this week. This could include walking or cycling to work instead of taking public transport, deliberately eating a vegetarian meal, etc.

**Pray: Bringing all that's been shared
and discussed to God.**

Week 5: HUMILITY

Session Overview:

This session explores the humility of Jesus and what this means for our lives as his followers. Jesus makes a free decision not to grasp worldly power or status but to choose to put other people's interests before his own. This humility leads to the cross. As those who seek to follow him, we can learn not to grasp at needless self-promotion but to delight in the lives of others.

Pray: Stilling before God as we begin

Though he was in the form of God,
Jesus did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped.
He emptied himself,
taking the form of a servant,
being born in the likeness of men.
And being found in human form,
he humbled himself and became obedient unto death,
even death on a cross.
Therefore God has highly exalted him
and bestowed on him the name which is above every name,
that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

Amen

Recap

- Any reflection on the topics discussed at the previous session?
- What difference did it make to your life?

Discuss

Self-emptying

Someone Reads Aloud: Philippians 2:1-11

Someone Reads Aloud:

Paul describes the humility of Jesus through “making himself nothing”. The Greek word used for this phrase is *kenosis* which means ‘to empty’. Jesus is humble because he emptied himself of the need to grasp status and power so that he could fully serve and love humanity. This is shown by the fact that Jesus chose washing his disciples’ feet over using them as his servants and dying on a cross in weakness and self-sacrifice rather than winning a battle through domination and control. Emptying ourselves of the need to grasp power is at the heart of what it means to be truly humble.

Questions:

- In a world of competition and self-promotion (just think of social media), how can we choose another way not to assert ourselves as superior over others?
- In our culture we are more used to filling our minds and bodies with things (i.e. fast food, tv shows, music, etc) than emptying ourselves of things. With this in mind, how can we practise letting go of things that get in the way of attending to other people’s interests as Jesus does?
- The ability to serve without needing to take the credit for things is a hallmark of humility. Do you struggle with not gaining the credit for the things you have done?

Do everything without grumbling

Someone Reads Aloud: Philippians 2:11-18

Being truly humble is not just about the actions you perform but also *how* you perform those actions. Paul encourages the church in Philippi not to grumble or argue as they try to live out their faith. Instead, he calls them to be “blameless” and “pure” so that they might “shine like stars in the sky” and be an example of humble love to those around them. Humility is not just about the *what* but the *how*.

Questions

- How can we avoid grumbling and arguing with one another?
- What do you think Paul means when he calls Christians to be “pure” and “blameless” (2 Philippians 2:14)?

Live

Optional Practice:

Choose one way you could serve Bow church or your local community this week.

**Pray: Bringing all that’s been shared
and discussed to God.**

Week 6: ASCENSION

Session Overview:

Jesus rose and then spent 40 days appearing to his disciples (Acts 1:3), after which he ascended into heaven. In this session, we will be looking at what the Ascension means for us, in particular we will be looking at how the Ascension helps us to think about how the loss and absence of God that we sometimes feel in our own lives can actually bring deeper intimacy and experience of God's Presence. This is because it is in our moments of vulnerability and loss when we don't have the armour of our own agendas and ways of controlling things, that we are led to trust something or Someone beyond ourselves.

Pray: Stilling before God as we begin

Risen Christ,
you have raised our human nature to the throne of heaven:
help us to seek and serve you,
that we may join you at the Father's side,
where you reign with the Spirit in glory,
now and for ever.

Amen

Recap

- Any reflection on the topics discussed at the previous session?
- What difference did it make to your life?

Discuss

Loss brings intimacy

Someone Reads Aloud: John 15: 26-27, 16:1-15

Someone Reads Aloud:

Ascension invites us to find deeper intimacy with God in the midst of our feelings of loss and absence.

Before his ascension, Jesus says to his disciples “it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you” (John 16:7). The ‘Advocate’ that Jesus is talking about here is the Holy Spirit that is poured out at Pentecost in Acts 2. Jesus is indicating that there is a direct correlation between his bodily presence and the deeper intimacy of the Spirit. He must leave for the Spirit to dwell.

Question:

- When are the moments in your life when you have felt most intimacy with God? In times of loss? Gain? Both?
- Are there moments in your life when you have felt an absence of God?

Powerlessness is necessary

Someone Reads Aloud:

The powerlessness and “grief” that the disciples feel at Jesus’ words about his bodily leaving them in John 16 is not a failure on their part but is *required* for a deeper intimacy with God. This is because it is

only in realising their own powerlessness that they are able to realise that the power they have to “live and move and have their being” (Acts 17:28) is not their power but God’s.

Through emptiness, absence and loss we see that our own agendas and attempts at controlling our lives are false and illusory. As a result, emptiness allows us to let go of these things so that we can make space for and attend to the ever available Presence of God in the here and now. This is what Jesus means when he says the ‘Kingdom of God is at hand’ (Mark 1:15).

Question:

- The disciples experience a Power beyond themselves that is able to carry them in their times of powerlessness. Have you ever experienced a Power like this? Do you think it is possible?
- How do you feel about the idea that some level of powerlessness on our part is required for intimacy with God?

Live

Optional Practice:

Write a list of the areas of your life where you feel most powerless. Spend some time reflecting on where God might be in those areas.

Pray: Bringing all that’s been shared and discussed to God.

Week 7: PENTECOST

Session Overview:

In this session we explore the moment in history where God pours out his Holy Spirit on his first disciples, making his Presence accessible and universal for all time. The people of God are now temples of the Presence of God that dwells within them.

Pray: Stilling before God as we begin

Holy Spirit, sent by the Father,
ignite in us your holy fire;
strengthen your children with the gift of faith,
revive your Church with the breath of love,
and renew the face of the earth,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen

Recap

- Any reflections on the topics discussed at the previous session?
- What difference did it make to your life?

Discuss

Waiting in the present not the future

Someone Reads Aloud: Acts 1:6–9, Mark 13:32–37, Matthew 6: 25–34

Someone Reads Aloud:

When asked by his disciples whether he is now going to restore the kingdom of Israel, Jesus simply responds that it is not the place of the disciples to know such things (Acts 1:7).

Elsewhere Jesus says, concerning the signs of the end times, “about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father” (Mark 13:32). And in Matthew 6:34 “do not worry about tomorrow for tomorrow will worry about itself”. In fact, it seems that whenever Jesus mentions the future in the entire New Testament he is always telling his listeners not to worry about it. Instead, he tells them to be present to what is happening right now because it is in the present moment that God’s Presence is found.

Questions:

- Do you find it easy or difficult to be present to the moment?
- How often do you find yourself ruminating about the future?
- In what ways can we be present to God’s Presence right now?

You are temples of the Holy Spirit: God's presence within

Someone Reads Aloud: Acts 2:1-4, 1 Corinthians 3:16-17, 6:19.

Someone Reads Aloud:

At Pentecost, the disciples hear “a sound like the blowing of a violent wind from heaven” and see “what seem to be tongues of fire” resting on each of them.

These two images of wind and fire are powerful images from the Old Testament for God's Presence. At Pentecost we see God's Spirit is now available, resting on and even *within* his people. They are now His temple as Paul says in 1 Corinthians. God is not confined to a particular space or place.

Question:

- Often it can be easier to think of God as outside of us rather than within us. How can we get into a way of seeing God within us rather than just outside of us?
- Have you ever felt an awareness of the Presence of God within you? What was it like and what did it do?

Witnessing can look strange

Someone Reads Aloud: Acts 2: 5-13

Someone Reads Aloud:

When the Holy Spirit is poured out on Jesus' disciples at Pentecost, many observers are so confused by what is going on that some think the disciples are drunk. Interestingly, the people who think the Spirit-filled disciples are drunk are described as 'God-fearing' (Acts 2:5) meaning those devoted to God.

Perhaps this shows that it is not just those who do not have faith in God who can be confused by the movement of the Spirit but even those who do.

Question:

- Obedience to the work of the Spirit makes the disciples look strange. Have you ever looked strange to other people when you have tried to be obedient to the Spirit?
- There is something unexpected and uncontrollable about the Spirit. Does this frighten or excite you? Have you ever experienced the Holy Spirit in unexpected ways?
- What expectations do you have about the movement of the Spirit in your own life?

Live

Optional Practice:

You might commit to praying for each other to be filled with the Spirit in your session and then at an agreed time daily.

**Pray: Bringing all that's been shared
and discussed to God.**

Week 8: TRINITY

Session Overview:

In this session, we explore the idea of God as Trinity, a dance of infinite love between Father, Son and Spirit, and how this affects us as those made in the image of this God.

Pray: Stilling before God as we begin

Holy God,
faithful and unchanging:
enlarge our minds with the knowledge of your truth,
and draw us more deeply into the mystery of your love,
that we may truly worship you,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

Amen.

Recap

- Any reflections on the topics discussed at the previous session?
- What difference did it make to your life?

Discuss

Relating to God in different ways

Someone Reads Aloud: 2 Corinthians 13:11-14

Someone Reads Aloud:

At the end of his second letter to the church in Corinth, Paul describes God in three different yet unifying ways. He prays that the church may experience “the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit” all at the same time. God, it seems, is three in one.

Questions

- Which part of the Trinity (Father, Son and Spirit) do you find it easiest to pray to and why?
- In your life right now do you find yourself longing more for the ‘grace of the Lord Jesus Christ’, the ‘love of God’ or the ‘fellowship of the Holy Spirit’?

The Trinity is for worship

Someone Reads Aloud: Matthew 28: 16-20

Someone Reads Aloud:

Jesus calls his disciples to go and make more disciples in every nation, to baptise them and to teach them to live out all of his commandments. In a word, he calls his disciples to go and spread the worship of God. Crucially, Jesus says to do this “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”.

Early church theologians came up with the word ‘Trinity’ to try to

describe and understand the God of the Bible so that they could worship with integrity.

In particular, St John of Damascus described the life of the Trinity as a *perichoresis* (meaning 'to make space around'). In this understanding, Father, Son, and Spirit make room for one another in a sort of "dance" about and "with" one another showing deep love and interconnection while still maintaining space for each other.

As those who claim to love and follow this trinitarian God, we are invited as our primary goal in life to live and participate in this divine dance.

Questions:

- What patterns of worship have most helped you to engage with the Trinity?
- How do you find thinking about the Trinity as a divine dance?
- Outside of personal prayer and worship, what does it mean to participate in the divine dance in the wider world?

Made in the image of a relational God

Someone Reads Aloud: Genesis 1:1-2, 26-27

Someone Reads Aloud:

In Genesis, we read that humanity is made in the image of a God who is a plurality - "let us create humankind in our image". The wisdom of the Old Testament puts theological language to what we know on a social and psychological level is always true: we are deeply relational beings. We are made in the image of a God who is community itself. Therefore we long for community and need

community to flourish. Community is not just something we receive but something we are part of because we are called to give ourselves to one another in love just as the three members of the Trinity give to each other.

Questions:

- In what ways do you find community with others easy? In what ways do you find it difficult?
- The Trinity is unity and diversity. How can we build communities in the image of the Trinity that are different yet unified?

Live

Optional Practice:

Try dancing with some friends this week (in any place and to any music you like) and try to imagine that this is always what the life of God is like **or** ask a local community you are part of (i.e. family, sports team, Cedar Group) if there is one way you can give to that group this week that would bless and support them.

**Pray: Bringing all that's been shared
and discussed to God.**

Contact details

Email : hello@bow.church

Call : 07908416052

