



St Neots & Huntingdon
Methodist Circuit



Advent Course 2017

Changing Culture:

Impacting Lives

1: A culture of seeking God: Reflecting who we love

In this Bible study, you will have the opportunity to think about the importance of seeking God and keeping him central while living a missional lifestyle.

Light a candle and keep a time of stillness inviting people to reflect on the words:

‘As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God.’ (Psalm 42:1)

Bring the time of quiet to an end with a prayer and then invite people to share any reactions they have to the opening words:

How true a reflection are they of your daily faith journey?

What helps them to ‘pant for God’?

What hinders them in this endeavour?

What does the image of living water communicate about mission?

In the life of a deer water serves to refresh, provide refuge and restore. In the same way a living relationship with God is essential for our well-being and mission. It is all about him. **‘For the local church, the presence of God is our passion and our validation –** God making himself known in our worship, our prayer, our ministry to one another and our mission...When the church community has sets its heart

on pursuing God’s presence, discipleship is set on its magnetic north.’¹

What place does pursuing God fill in your life and the life of your church? How is your answer reflected in the core activities of your church? What are the essential activities of your church?

Elsewhere the psalmist promises that God is our refuge and strength (Psalm 46:1) – ready to face every situation with us and equip us to live faithfully as channels of his good news. What he does not intend is that we hide behind closed doors retreating from the challenges of the day. The real test of resting in God is whether it leads us to be more loving. Do our times with God lead us to be transformed and more outward looking?

If we want God's help we need to trust ourselves into his hands but relying on God takes us out of the driving seat which doesn't always feel comfortable. What resources aside from God are we tempted to rely on? What areas of church/circuit life need God's renewing? How easy is it to let go and let God? What would our churches/circuit look like if we were to surrender our agendas for church growth and seek God's heart first?

'Life in God should be a daring adventure of love – a continuous journey of putting aside our securities to enter more profoundly into the uncharted depths of God.'² Where is the centre of your heart – 'in God' or 'in yourself'? God comes to us to set our hearts free, to kindle in us the fire of love and to transform us. Our responsibility is to be open to receiving him welcomingly, trusting and lovingly. There are times when in order to hear from God we need to be still.

It could be said that the church like children in a sweet shop can chase after the latest new initiative and in the process lose sight of the one who is necessary. What in your experience prevents this from happening? What encourages it?

How do we hold this statement alongside the words of Bishop Graham Cray, 'Who will never be reached if you only do what you're doing now?' As you think about the future for our circuit what are the experiments you would like to try?

God alone is our hope for the challenges of being church in the 21st century. It is God alone that we have to offer – all that we are and do needs to flow from communion with him. Relying on God reminds us that the mission is his – we are sent by the sending God but wherever we go God is before us. We do not take God anywhere that he is not already. We seek to discover what God is already doing and join in! In the adventure of loving Jesus and others there are doors which do not always open when we think they should and so seeking God's agenda first can save us from a lot of wasted energy and disappointment. Mission according to God's agenda also releases us from baggage that can sometimes be a stumbling block to others.³

Our going has to emerge out of our being with God. God's passionate longing for his church is that we realise his heart is for friendship with us.⁴ "God wants a world where we human beings live in harmony and friendship with God, with one another, and with the rest of

creation, co-operating with God wherever we are.”⁵ What does this dream look like in reality in your life individually, as a church, as a circuit?

Read Revelation 2:1 – 7. Over-focussing on doing can lead us to lose sight of our first love. What was John encouraging the Church at Ephesus to do in practice? We must not turn away from God under the pretext of being too busy serving that we have no time to be with Him – what we do as Christians matters but why we do it is just as important. Our doing needs to flow out of devotion as opposed to depleting it. John encourages the believers to keep on remembering how their lives are enriched by Jesus; repent of letting their relationship slip and repeat their first acts – prayer, meditation on God’s word, loving service, worship and fellowship. The more fully we abide in the presence of Jesus the more we become the people he created us to be and this will have an impact beyond ourselves. What helps you to remain close and connected to God as your first love?

Exercise: How would you define Gospel in 25 words or less using only non-religious/non-churchy language? This is an important exercise because it articulates what it means for us as we are to experience God. If we cannot put into words the difference that following Jesus makes in our lives why would we think anyone would be interested in listening to what we have to say? We become like who we worship and so without intimacy with Jesus we have nothing distinctive to offer. How does Jesus live in you, in your church, in your circuit?

Conclusion:

There is a story told of a lost ship whose crew was starving for water. When at last another ship came into sight the distressed crew signalled, 'Water, water; we are starving for water.' 'Let down your buckets where you are,' came back the surprising answer. But such an answer seemed nothing less than tasteless mockery to the crew so they signalled again, 'Water, water; we are starving for water.' Again, the same answer came back, 'Let down your buckets where you are.' At last they complied, not at all sure that anything would come of it, but with a slim hope that possibly they were not being mocked. And something did come of it. They found a measureless supply of fresh water that restored them to life. Unknown to them, they had been driven into the wide mouth of the Amazon, whose waters freshen the sea for many miles from the shore.