

THE COMMUNITY OF ST CUTHBERT

ST CUTHBERT

Study Guide for
Spiritual Growth
Groups

SEPTEMBER 2021

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**WALK WITH ME AND
WORK WITH ME —
WATCH HOW I DO IT.
LEARN THE
UNFORCED RHYTHMS
OF GRACE**

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CONTENTS

**04 WELCOME
FROM THE
PRIOR**

**05 DEVELOPING
OUR LIVES
TOGETHER**

Notes for Leaders

**09 BIBLE
PASSAGES**

Deuteronomy 6:4-9 & Three
Gospel passages

12 STUDY 01

Loving God with all our heart and
soul and mind and strength

10 STUDY 02

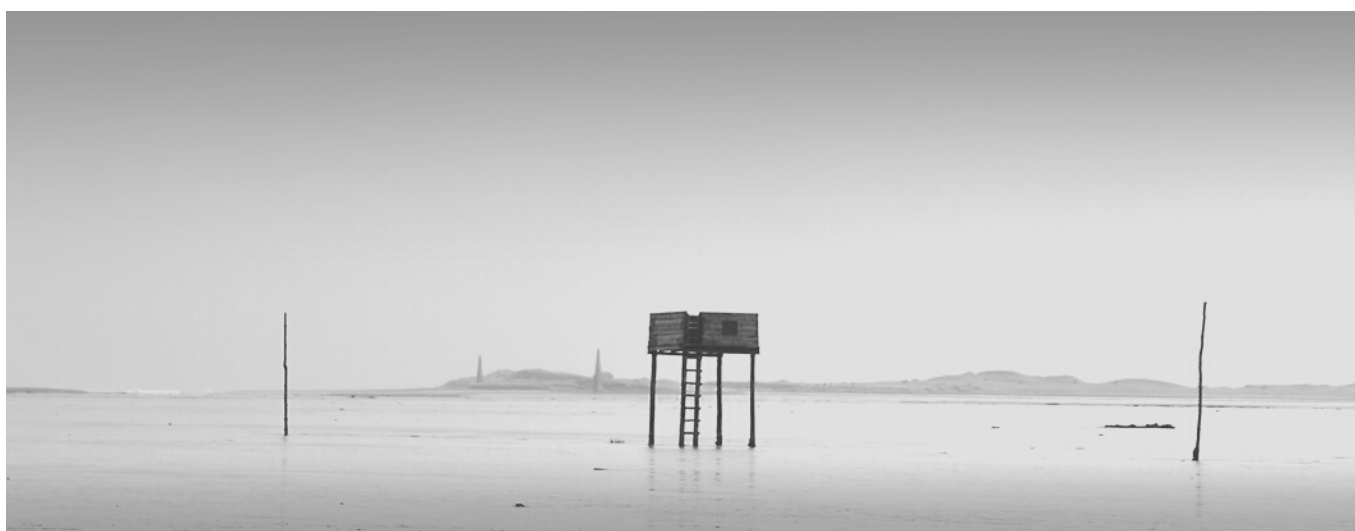
Worshipping God with all our
heart and soul and mind and
strength

11 STUDY 03

Keeping in Step with God with all
our heart and soul and mind and
strength

12 STUDY 04

Serving God with all our heart and
soul and mind and strength



WELCOME FROM THE PRIOR

**Rev Dr
Richard Briggs**



Welcome to our resource booklet for Sept 2021. Here you will find:

- a reminder of the focus of our life together as the Community of St Cuthbert
- suggestions for how to develop the rhythms of your group
- four studies to use through September

In this booklet we are celebrating the new season of life in and around Durham – the new school year, the emergence of post-lockdown routines, and the new time in our church life with several new ministries developing. A good initial focus for our Community at this time is Jesus' striking saying, which I summarise here as:

**Love the Lord your God
with all your heart and soul and mind and strength**

(This wording is based on Mark's gospel – see study no.1 to look at the actual words of this saying.)

In the Community of St Cuthbert we acknowledge that this action of ours – loving God – is a response to God's grace, which comes first. We talk of keeping in step with the rhythms of God's grace. I invite you to enjoy our next steps together in this great adventure.

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DEVELOPING OUR LIFE TOGETHER

Notes for Leaders
(but all are welcome to read!)

The life of St Cuthbert was a life marked by periods of solitary prayer, study and worship, but always called back to the company of others in the end. Our Community of St Cuthbert is designed to acknowledge that we need both personal time to be with God, and we need others to share in the rhythms of living lives of faithfulness together.

We therefore meet in **Spiritual Growth Groups** – the groups that make up the heart of the Community of St Cuthbert

Our Spiritual Growth Groups are committed to keeping in step with the rhythms of God's grace. Through 2021-22 we will be reflecting on and developing the way we express this. At the moment a convenient summary is this:

We seek to keep in step with the rhythms of God's grace in:
prayer and Bible study
worship and hospitality
service through justice and witness

Group Rhythms

What does this mean for a Cuthbert group? We encourage groups to meet weekly, but not necessarily to do the same thing every week. We aim to keep meetings to around an hour or 75 minutes. (Many groups will add social time too when face-to-face, but try to keep the group activity itself to 60-75 minutes.) One practical suggestion for a monthly pattern is this:

Week 1 – focus on Bible study (using the CSC notes in this book)

Week 2 – focus on worship with prayer for each other and for God's world

Week 3 – focus on Bible study

Week 4 – use the time together to engage in acts of service

(**Week 5** – be creative, perhaps make this a social time together)

The present booklet offers a way to start establishing this rhythm in September.

What can this look like in practice?

For Bible Study: follow one of the studies in the Community of St Cuthbert booklets. These are designed to help us reflect on living for God with heart and soul and mind and strength, in step with the rhythms of God's grace.

For worship and prayer: there is freedom to do this however works best for the group. The key is that we are all able to participate, and so bless each other.

You might include: sung worship, testimony, encouraging one another with reflections from personal Bible reading, prayers for each other, prayers for our world, prayers for our mission partners, prayers for the life of our church. Time for silent prayer may be valuable too.

Further resources: There is a St Nics prayer diary on our website at www.stnics.org.uk/prayer. With music, some groups will want to create their own time of sung worship using musicians. For many, listening or singing along to pre-recorded music may be a simpler option.

Acts of service: a Spiritual Growth Group is also outward-looking, seeking to live our lives in service to God's life-giving justice for all, especially those easily over-looked in today's world.

Service together as a group can open up possibilities that would defeat us if we tried to do it all alone.

You might want the group to think of an activity it could commit to – and review that every year as priorities change. The best ideas will be ones that the group has its own sense of call to pursue. Try something and see! (Further examples are on the next page)

Some examples of the kinds of ways groups can be active in service:

- join with one of our St Nics justice initiatives (these will be developed over the year)
- support one of our St Nics ministries in practical ways
- join with a local project (e.g. a foodbank, a homeless ministry, etc.)
- use group time to offer hospitality to those in need, or international arrivals in Durham (students, newcomers, refugees ...)
- arrange a schedule of visiting those who are alone, and offering practical help
- support an established charity through active involvement (e.g. letter writing)
- set up zoom links with a mission partner and use the time to learn about and encourage their ministry

None of these ideas are prescriptive, and some of them will not be new to us. But our opportunity here is to serve as a group.

It may be that on these weeks our normal meeting slot is not the right time to meet. A group might commit to helping someone in need in a practical way – and perhaps a Saturday afternoon is the obvious time to do it.

In all this we seek practical steps of faithfulness. Realistic commitments we can meet are better than great aspirations we fail to put into practice. Not every idea will work, but we will learn by experimenting how to be involved in practical acts of service.

September 2021

This booklet offers resources for the 4 weeks of September 2021.

Theme: **Loving God with all our heart + soul + mind + strength**

Week beginning:

5th Sept	—	Study 1 – focusing on Bible study
12th Sept	—	Study 2 – focusing on prayer and worship
19th Sept	—	Study 3 – focusing on Bible study
26th Sept	—	Study 4 – focusing on acts of service

There is no problem with taking longer than 4 weeks to work through the studies, and no pressure to ‘catch up’ if you end up taking longer.

In October 2021 our CSC booklet will have a theme of Climate Justice, in dialogue with the run-up to COP 26 (the UN Climate Change ‘Conference of the Parties’ that will be held in Glasgow beginning Oct 31st)

BIBLE PASSAGES

Taken from the NIV translations

Deut 6:4-9

4 Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one.* 5 Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. 6 These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. 7 Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. 8 Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. 9 Write them on the door-frames of your houses and on your gates.

(* or: Or The Lord our God is one Lord; or The Lord is our God, the Lord is one; or The Lord is our God, the Lord alone

**Matthew
22:37-38**

36 [Qn: which is the greatest commandment?]

37 Jesus replied,

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.”

38 This is the first and greatest commandment’
.

**Mark
12:29-31**

28 [Qn: which is the most important commandment?]

29 ‘The most important one’, answered Jesus, ‘is this: “Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one.

30 Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.”

There is no commandment greater than these.

**Luke
10:27**

25 [Qn: what must I do to inherit eternal life?]

26 [Jesus asks: what is written?]

27 He answered,

‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind”;

and “Love your neighbour as yourself.”

“

**WE SEEK TO KEEP
IN STEP WITH THE
RHYTHMS OF
GOD'S GRACE IN:
PRAYER AND
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”

LOVING GOD WITH ALL OUR HEART AND SOUL AND MIND AND STRENGTH

Deuteronomy 6:4-9

(1) Have one person read the passage out loud to the group, and then let everyone read it again silently to themselves.

Verses 4-5 are known as the 'Shema' (the Hebrew word for 'Hear!' that starts the passage), and are prayed every day in Jewish faith – effectively they hold the place that the Lord's prayer does in Christian faith

- Many Bibles offer different translation options for 'the Lord is one'. What do you think it means?
- Heart/soul/strength are not three separate parts of a person, but three ways of thinking about a person's life. What can it mean to love God in these ways?
- We probably do not tie these commandments to our foreheads or write them on our doorposts – but what are some ways we might similarly keep them in mind every day?

(2) Look at the three passages from the gospels where Jesus appeals to the Deuteronomy passage.

The different contexts suggest that Jesus said something like this many times. (e.g. in Luke 10 this is part of the introduction to the parable of the Good Samaritan).

- Compare the different wordings of what Jesus says, and discuss whether they make a difference to your understanding.
- Each talk about one way that Jesus' words encourage you to think in a new way about loving God.

WORSHIPPING GOD WITH ALL OUR HEART AND SOUL AND MIND AND STRENGTH

The group may like to begin with sung worship, or listening to worship music. Let the focus be on God's greatness – reflecting one understanding of 'the Lord is one' in Deuteronomy 6 as meaning that the Lord is unique/special/'in a class of one'.

Several great hymns and worship songs can help us here: Hymns and songs like 'How Great Thou Art,' 'Great Is Thy Faithfulness,' 'Unchanging (Raise Up Holy Hands),' or '10 000 Reasons (Bless the Lord)'
Feel free to make your own choices!

Look again at our passages from Deuteronomy 6 and from the gospels.

- How do these words help us think about worship and prayer?
- Jesus describes these words as 'the greatest commandment'. How is it helpful for us to think of being commanded to love God?
- Share in the group what most helps you to worship – and reflect together on how we can learn from each other here

Spend time this week in worship and prayer.

You might include: further sung worship, testimony, encouraging one another with reflections from personal Bible reading, prayers for each other, prayers for our world, prayers for our mission partners, prayers for the life of our church (see also stnics.org.uk/prayer). Time for silent prayer may be valuable too.

KEEPING IN STEP WITH GOD WITH ALL OUR HEART AND SOUL AND MIND AND STRENGTH

Look again at our passages from Deuteronomy 6 and from the gospels.

- Based on thinking about the first 4 books of the Bible before Deuteronomy, what does Israel already know about God before God gives this command to 'Love the Lord your God ...'?
- In what ways does it help us to think of our love for God as a response to God's love for us?

Think about the rhythms of grace in our Community of St Cuthbert.

- What can it mean to love God in prayer and Bible study? How are these responses to God's grace?
- What can it mean to engage in worship and hospitality together? How are these responses to God's grace?
- How is a life of service a response to God's grace? Talk about how commitments to justice and to witness – at home, in the family, on our street, in the workplace – can be part of loving God with all our heart and soul and mind and strength.

All our work can be service to God. Share and pray for one another in the work we do – whether our work is paid or unpaid, at home or online or in a workplace.

SERVING GOD WITH ALL OUR HEART AND SOUL AND MIND AND STRENGTH

Look again at our passages from Deuteronomy 6 and from the gospels.

Remind each other of what we have found most helpful so far in our reflections on these scriptural passages.

If you have not already done so, read the page(s) on 'Acts of Service' in this booklet, in the section on 'Developing our life together as a Cuthbert group'.

- In light of our study and prayer (and worship together) this month, explore the question of what sort of acts of service your group might want to engage with in the coming months.
- It may be helpful to pray as part of your discussion, and to agree on what to look into further as a group activity. Different people may want to explore different options as a group and report back the next time there is a focus on acts of service.

Close by rereading our Bible texts (Deuteronomy and the Gospels) and keeping silence together for a minute or two to reflect on what God may be saying to you as a group.