



ST CUTHBERT

Study Guide for Spiritual Growth Groups

FEBRUARY 2022

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Welcome

Welcome to our resource booklet for February 2022, which will take us up to Lent. Here you will find

- a reminder of how we are developing the rhythms of our SGG groups
- five sessions to use through February/early March

These studies follow our Sunday morning sermon series on Luke's gospel (based on the Lectionary) – but they are designed to make sense and be useful whether or not you have heard one of the sermons.

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The Community of St Cuthbert based at St Nic's Church, Durham

–loving God with all our heart and soul and mind and strength–

–living our lives in step with the **rhythms of God's grace**–

Walk with me and work with me—watch
how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms
of grace.

Words of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew (11:29)
the Message translation

We follow in the steps of St Cuthbert, the 7th century Bishop of Lindisfarne, who lived a life deeply rooted in God, both personally and with others, and sought a life of service that embodied God's life-giving justice for all.

So we meet in Spiritual Growth Groups (SGGs)

and seek to keep in step with

7 key rhythms of God's grace, in:

prayer and **Bible study**

worship and **hospitality**

service and **justice**

rest

Developing our Life Together as a SGG

(see also the longer note in the September 2021 guide)

We encourage groups to meet weekly, but not necessarily to do the same thing every week. Our normal monthly pattern follows the suggestion of (1) Bible study (2) worship and prayer (3) Bible study (4) acts of service, with occasional (5) social times.

Do review our ‘Rhythm of Life’ statement for 2022 on the website

The suggested pattern for this period is:

- (1) 31 Jan – 4 Feb Bible Study
- (2) 7 – 11 Feb Worship and Prayer
- (3) 14 – 18 Feb Bible Study
- (4) 21 – 25 Feb Acts of Service
- (5) 28 Feb – 4 Mar Bible Study*

*Wed 2 March is Ash Wednesday, signalling the beginning of

Lent. Some groups may want to mark that in some way.

As always there is no problem with taking more time to work through the studies, and no pressure to ‘catch up’ if you end up taking longer. At present we anticipate a **Lent Course** of some kind will be running for the church through Lent, and there will probably be no separate CSC study booklet.

Session 1 – Welcoming the ‘Light to the Gentiles’ (study)

Luke 2:22-40

2 February is traditionally the celebration of ‘The Presentation of Christ in the Temple’, which we read about in this passage. Those who heard Richard’s sermon on Sunday will have seen why it is also called ‘Candlemas’ – celebrating the Light of the World that shines in and through us, to the ‘Gentiles’ – the whole world.

- (If the group finds it helpful) – Look up some of the Old Testament passages that explain *why* Joseph and Mary are presenting Christ in the temple. (vv.22-24, 39) See especially Leviticus 12. Share what strikes you as significant.
 - (Note: ‘clean’ / ‘unclean’ were mainly ritual categories in the Old Testament, not to be confused with ‘holy’ and ‘unholy’ that relate to the absence or presence of sin. See Lev 10:10 where both pairs of terms are seen to be important, but not the same.)
- What do people find helpful about the story of Simeon, and his praise and prayer (vv.25-35)
- ‘My eyes have seen your salvation’ (v.30). What have we seen, in this passage or in any other reflections recently, that might lead us to praise God?
- What do people find helpful about the brief portrait of Anna? (vv.36-38)

What other questions about the passage do people in the group have? For those who heard the sermon on it this past Sunday, discuss any insights or reflections.

Session 2 – Rejoicing Faithfully (prayer and worship)

Luke 5:1-11

Brief reflection on the passage: Jesus' teaching – between verses 3 and 4 – is not recorded by Luke. Perhaps Luke would say that the whole gospel records for us what Jesus was teaching. The focus here is instead on the response. For brief reflection as a group:

- How are the original disciples portrayed in this passage?
- What does it mean that they will 'fish for people' (v.10)?
- How do we fit into this story? Are we some of the people they fished for? And/or are we fishers too?

What other questions about the passage do people in the group have?

For those who heard the sermon on it this past Sunday, discuss any insights or reflections.

Praise

Spend some time giving thanks for the ways that we have been brought in to the 'astonishing catch of fish' (see v.9) of God's kingdom.

Prayer

Share prayer requests together, including perhaps especially focusing our prayers on those we would still love to see brought in to God's kingdom.

Include the use of music to worship, or to accompany prayers, if it would help the group.

Session 3 – Jesus’ Sermon (study)

Luke 6:17-26

This passage is parallel to the famous ‘Sermon on the Mount’ in Matthew 5–7. It takes place ‘on a level place’ (v.17), perhaps a level place somewhere high up on the mount? It is sometimes called ‘the Sermon on the Plain’.

- Who is Jesus’ teaching intended for in this passage: ‘disciples’ or everyone (including disciples)? How might it be heard differently by disciples and by others?
 - Discuss whether you have experienced any of the blessings described in vv.20-22.
 - What do we think it means to be blessed in this way by Jesus?
 - Discuss whether you have experienced any of the woes described in vv.24-26.
 - What do we think it means to have Jesus pronounce woe over us?

What other questions about the passage do people in the group have? For those who heard the sermon on it this past Sunday, discuss any insights or reflections.

Session 4 – Acts of Service

Take the group time to review possible ways you could be serving as a Spiritual Growth Group. (Some groups may choose not to meet at their normal time for this activity.)

- Note that we have just had **Racial Justice Sunday**, when St Nics held a service that was broadcast on BBC Radio 4's 'Sunday Worship' programme. One option for your group could be to listen to this recording, and talk about how to respond in practical ways. (See <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b006qnds>)

Here is a reminder of some of the other ways our groups have been thinking about engaging in acts of service and pursuing justice:

- *join with one of our St Nics justice initiatives*
- *support one of our St Nics ministries in practical ways*
- *join with a local project – e.g. foodbank, homeless ministry, ...*
- *use group time to offer hospitality to those in need, or new arrivals in Durham (students, newcomers, refugees ...)*
- *visit those who are alone, and offer practical help*
- *support an established charity through active involvement*
 - *set up zoom links with a mission partner and use the time to learn about and encourage their ministry*
- *help to staff our open church 'prayer times'*
- *serve tea and coffee after a service, as a SGG group*
- *offer to steward a Sunday service as a SGG group ...*

Our prior, Richard Briggs, is gradually meeting with all the SGG leaders and talking about these ideas, and encouraging others. Do join in the conversation in your group.

Session 5 – Transfiguration ... and Preparing for Lent (study)

Luke 9:28-36

Lent begins with Ash Wednesday on 2nd March 2022. This study includes options for reflecting on Lent as well as the passage.

- What are some of the ways we can describe what Jesus experiences in this passage?
- Why Moses and Elijah? (v.30) – note: *there may be several possible answers to this question*
 - Luke mentions Jesus' 'departure' (v.31) that is forthcoming in Jerusalem, and many Bibles include a footnote to point out that the word used here is the Greek word *exodos*, from which we get 'Exodus'. How might it be helpful to compare what Jesus will do in Jerusalem with the story of the Exodus and Israel's escape from Egypt?
- How might this story, including the voice from heaven in v.35, prepare Jesus for what is to come?
 - As we think about Lent and our own journey towards Easter, how might we be prepared in our spiritual lives?
 - Discuss in the group how Lent might be used helpfully this year, and pray for each other's Lent journeys

What other questions about the passage do people in the group have? For those who heard the sermon on it this past Sunday, discuss any insights or reflections.