

THE COMMUNITY OF ST CUTHBERT



# ST CUTHBERT

Study Guide for  
Spiritual Growth  
Groups

DECEMBER 2021 - JANUARY 2022

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## Welcome

Welcome to our resource booklet for these Advent–Christmas–Epiphany seasons, taking us through December 2021 and into January 2022. Here you will find

- a reminder of how we are developing the rhythms of our SGG groups
- four sessions to use through November

Our themes for this season include faithfully **Waiting and Rejoicing**, to tie in with Advent and Christmas.

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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 7<sup>th</sup> 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. Around this Christmas season we do not expect most groups will meet every week, so the pattern is a bit more spread out:

We aim to keep meeting time to around 60–75 minutes. One practical suggestion for this period is:

(1) 29 Nov – 3 Dec      Bible Study

(2) 6 – 10 Dec          Worship and Prayer

(3) 13 – 17 Dec          suggest a Christmas social time this week

*no meetings expected in second half of December*

(4) 3 -7 Jan              New Year meeting:  
**reviewing our CSC rule of life\***

(5) 10 – 14 Jan          Bible Study

\*this is an important session, and if groups cannot do it this week we suggest making it a priority for the week of 10-14 Jan instead.

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.

A CSC booklet for 2<sup>nd</sup> half of Jan + Feb 2022 will be out in the new year.

## ***Session 1 – Waiting Faithfully – an Advent Study***

The season of Advent (the 4 weeks leading up to Christmas) was traditionally a time of *waiting* – for the coming of Christ, as well as reflecting on waiting for the second coming of Christ. It included a focus on our need for Christ, and could therefore be quite sombre.

- What have our experiences of ‘Advent waiting’ been like? In what ways have they been helpful or unhelpful?
- In the run up to Christmas in our modern world, what is the value of focusing on waiting, or on quiet reflection? Do we find it possible in practice? Or desirable?

Our 9am and 11am services through Advent include readings from the prophets about hope, expectation, and waiting. Look at these passages and ask – *what do they help us understand about waiting?* For example:

- *what are we waiting for?*
- *what is the waiting like?*
- *what sort of hope is there?*

You may wish to divide the passages between different people to reflect on and share back with others.

- Jeremiah 33:14-16
- Malachi 3:1-4
- Zephaniah 3:14-20
- Micah 5:2-5(a)

Finally, share something these passages have shown you of Christ.

## ***Session 2 – Rejoicing Faithfully (prayer and worship)***

(Background Note: as we looked at in the previous study, the pre-Christmas season of Advent was about waiting, and quiet reflection. Traditionally many churches did not sing Christmas carols or songs until the arrival of Christmas – which is also behind the tradition of not putting up a Christmas tree until the evening of 24 December. You might like to reflect as a group on what our culture and church life in the UK have gained and lost by largely abandoning this tradition. This CSC session assumes you are happy to celebrate Christmas in worship even though it is still Advent. If some in your group think otherwise, then that is a good opportunity for discussion!)

Get each member of the group to say something on:

- my favourite Christmas Bible reading (and why)
- my favourite Christmas carol or hymn (and why)\*
- one way my Christian faith makes a difference to what I do at Christmas

\*you may wish to play the relevant carol or hymn after each person shares

Our SGGs are committed to acts of loving service. What particular needs or opportunities might be important to look out for over the Christmas season? Is there anything practical the group can offer?

Spend time in prayer together, including thanksgiving.

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***(Session 3) Many groups may plan a Christmas social time too.***

## ***Session 4 – Our Rhythm of Life in the Community of St Cuthbert***

This session is designed to be the first one you do in 2022.

Please download the *Community of St Cuthbert Rhythm of Life 2022* document from the St Nics webpage. (It will be available from mid-December onwards).

- This 'Rhythm of Life' statement has been discussed with various people through the second half of 2021 – the PCC, church staff, many SGG group leaders, and a meeting of all the small group leaders. Our prior, Richard Briggs, is very happy to continue discussions on how to refine it as we look ahead.
- The statement is limited to 2022 to make it a realistic commitment. As 2022 goes on we can review this as a community and suggest what is and what is not working, with a view to adapting it if necessary in future.

Discuss your understanding of what this commits you to in your SGG for 2022.

The group is then invited to say together the prayers at the end of the document

## ***Session 5 – Looking Ahead (Bible Study)***

As we settle into the rhythms of 2022, this Bible study looks at some Psalms that were part of Israel's annual expression of hope. They are drawn from the 'Psalms of Ascent' (Psalms 120–134) which we understand they sang together on the path to Jerusalem as they were on pilgrimage. They are short and beautiful expressions of trust and confidence even in the face of distress (e.g. Ps 120:1).

### Read **Psalm 121**

- what encourages you most in this Psalm?
- what questions does it leave you with?
- why does the Psalmist 'lift up my eyes to the mountains'? (v.1)
- what does it mean to say God will 'neither slumber nor sleep'? (v.4)

### Read **Psalm 122**

- how does this Psalm help us to think about worship?
- how does this Psalm help us to think about praying for peace?
- 'prosperity' (v.8) does not mean financial prosperity. What other kinds of prosperity are there?

In light of the idea of 'praying for peace', now read **Psalm 120**

- how can we relate to the Psalmist's concerns?
- what distresses might we need to bring to God?
- do we have any experiences of having peace in the midst of distress?

Let these Psalms shape your prayer time together.