

**The Community of St Cuthbert:
Spiritual Growth Group Study Guide
October 2021**



Contents

The Community of St Cuthbert	3
Welcome	4
Developing our life together as a SGG	5
October 2021	6

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 through **justice** and **witness**

and celebrating God's regular gift of **rest**

Welcome

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

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

Our theme this month addresses **Climate Justice and Creation Care**

October begins with our celebration of the Young Christian Climate Network visit over the weekend of 1st/2nd October, and it builds up to the COP26 UN Climate Change Conference that starts in Glasgow on 31 October.

Our studies this month have been prepared for us by Hannah Malcolm, a Cranmer Hall ordinand who is on placement with us at St Nic's over the coming year, and has been part of St Nics' *Climate Justice & Creation Care* group – see www.stnics.org.uk/climatejustice

We also invite you in this study guide to look at our church statement on the climate emergency. This has been considered at PCC, and we hope to be adopting this at the end of the month. In the meantime, do discuss in your groups any comments on aspects of the document that you would like to bring to the PCC's attention – and do get in touch with a PCC member with your comments.

Richard Briggs
Prior of the Community of St Cuthbert
(Contact Richard at prior@stnics.org.uk,
but nb he is not available during October)

Developing our Life Together as a SGG

(For a longer version of this note see the September 2021 guide)

We encourage groups to meet weekly, but not necessarily to do the same thing every week. We aim to keep meeting time to around 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 and prayer
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)

Groups are welcome to develop their own outward-looking ideas for ‘acts of service’, but there are lots of ideas also being suggested in and around the church. These include (but are not limited to):

- *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 ...)*
- *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*
- *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!

October 2021

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

Theme: **God's Good Earth: Truth, Beauty, Justice, and Climate Change**

Week beginning:

4 th Oct	Session 1 – focusing on Bible study
11 th Oct	Session 2 – focusing on prayer and worship
18 th Oct	Session 3 – focusing on Bible study
25 th Oct	Session 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.

Hannah offers us an optional intro video to the theme for the month here: <https://youtu.be/2EMx7vJAHJA>

Session 1: The Truth of Being a Creature (study)

Read Genesis 1:1-31:

'And God saw *everything* that he had made, and indeed, it was very good.'

- In this famous passage we often focus on the instructions God gives humans, or debate what it means to be in the image of God. But let's adjust our focus first. What instructions does God give other creatures? What do these instructions have in common with the instructions God gives to humans?

- Humans are made on the same 'day' as the other animals – the first identity we are given is as *creatures*. What does it mean to be a creature? (e.g. – loved, limited, dependent, relational, broken, everything is a gift that we have received, we are made for praise...)
- What makes creation *very good*?

Read Genesis 3:1-7:

when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God...
(NRSV)

- The first temptation we face is the temptation to see ourselves as more like the Creator than the creature we are. How can we see climate change as a consequence of overstepping the bounds of being a creature, and trying to be like gods?
- The lie that the serpent told was followed by Adam and Eve hiding from God, ashamed to face the truth about themselves. For decades, people have tried to hide, downplay, or distort the findings of climate scientists. How can facing truth about the world and ourselves help us to return to right relationship with our Creator?

*(Bonus question if you have time!) What is this image of God in us?
What does this image-bearing demand of us?*

You may want to listen to this song to close your time in reflection:
Great is Thy Faithfulness: <https://youtu.be/t3sd1Z75j7A>

Session 2: The Beauty (the Awe! The Majesty!) Of God's Abundance (prayer and worship)

Read Psalm 148

Read Job 38-40

- God's creation is beautiful in its diversity, abundance, mystery, and most of all in the glory it gives to its Creator. What parts of creation have particularly prompted praise in you?
- What parts of creation do you dislike, or fear? Do they praise God too? Is there a limit to which creatures can praise God?

You may want to use these songs to guide your time of worship:

All Creatures of Our God and King <https://youtu.be/9tevVTnYvss>

So Will I (100 billion times) <https://youtu.be/C2U7ffUM5Ec>

You may want to use this prayer:

Merciful God,

You have made all things.

You give breath and life to all things.

For billions of years, creation has praised you, and now we add
our voices.

But we have imagined that your creatures are our creatures,
that the beauty you have made for your glory is ours to
cast aside.

Humble us today. Fill us with gratitude. Fill us with wonder.

And make us ready, again, to sing your praise.

Session 3: Justice for the Earth (study)

Read Leviticus 25:1-24

- How do rest for the earth and rest for people mirror each other in this passage?
- Notice how God's ownership is emphasised as the basis for our treatment of the earth and each other. What are the consequences – for human and nonhuman creatures – of imagining that we own the land?

Read Isaiah 24:4-13

- Old Testament scholar Chris Wright has observed that the Earth can act as a kind of thermometer, measuring and reflecting human obedience and human sin. This passage gives us one example (the earth is described as 'mourning' 13 times in scripture). How do we see the earth as a thermometer of our sin today?

Read Colossians 1:15-20.

- We often ignore the relationship Christ has to creation, and imagine it is just a personal relationship with us as individuals, or with the church. Does this change the way you see the incarnation, cross, and resurrection?

Read Romans 8:18-23.

- What does it mean for creation to be set free? How will creation be set free?

You may want to listen to this song as you reflect on what justice for creation looks like:

Hear The Song Of Our Lament: <https://youtu.be/gRgt62AoZnQ>

Session 4: Seeking Goodness Together (Practising Hope)

So much of the news around climate change appears hopeless. But, believing in the goodness of our Creator God, and in the promise of redemption, we are called to practise hope in God's faithfulness here and now, rather than imagine we can store up security for ourselves.

Read Luke 12:13-34

- Notice how these two famous passages follow each other. How can we turn from ever bigger barns and towards the faithful trust which our fellow creatures show?
- What could you do as a group to seek truth, beauty, and justice for the Earth?
- What personal commitment do you want to make that will daily remind you of the goodness of God's creation?

You might want to listen to these songs while you close this month by writing to your MP about COP26. Christian Aid suggest a template letter that you could adapt: <https://www.christianaid.org.uk/get-involved/campaigns/engage-your-mp-cop26>

You can easily write to your MP at this link:
<https://www.writetothem.com/>

You may want to listen to these songs while your write together, or use them to close in a time of reflective prayer:

Your Labor is Not in Vain: <https://youtu.be/bPj3Kf7Dorw>
Little Things With Great Love: <https://youtu.be/pm5VQAxDMrc>