

THE COMMUNITY OF ST CUTHBERT



ST CUTHBERT

Study Guide for Spiritual Growth Groups

APRIL - MAY 2022

The Community of St Cuthbert:

***Spiritual Growth Group* Study Guide**

Apr – May 2022



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Welcome

Welcome to our resource booklet for April – May 2022. Here you will find

- a reminder of how we are developing the rhythms of our SGG groups
- five sessions to use through late April/May

These studies follow our Sunday morning sermon series on John'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) 25 – 29 Apr Bible Study – *Getting Back Together*

(2) 2 – 6 May Study and Praise

(3) 9 – 13 May Study and Prayer for Mission

(4) 16 – 20 May Acts of Service

(5) 23 – 27 May Bible Study

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.

Session 1 – Getting Back Together (study)

John 20:19-31

Many groups were paused during Lent as we looked at the *Living in Love and Faith* course as a church. If your group has not met for a while, spend some time catching up on how everyone is doing.

We then suggest a couple of ways of focusing our time this week:

Reviewing our Commitments to the Community of St Cuthbert Rhythms of Grace

- How is everyone doing with daily prayer and Bible reading?
- How is the group doing with worship and hospitality?
- How are plans developing for being involved in acts of service and justice?
- Has the group had a social time (for ‘rest’) lately?

Looking at John 20:19-31

- How do people respond to the story of Thomas and how Jesus meets with him? (vv.24-29)
- What is verse 23 (on forgiveness) saying about what we do, what we should do, and what God does?

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 – Meeting the Risen Lord Jesus (study and praise)

John 21:1-19

Brief reflection on the passage

Jesus meets the disciples and has breakfast with them (vv.1-14).

There is a miraculous catch of fish (vv.6,8).

Jesus affirms Simon's love* for him (vv.15-19).

(*Some translations draw out the different words for love used in this discussion – the NIV agrees with those who say this is not significant, and just translates them all as 'love'. If you have different translations among you, you might like to look at what difference this makes to your understanding.)

- What insights into Jesus do we have from this story?
- What insights into Peter do we have from this story?
- What can we learn about ourselves from reading this story?

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

This may be the group's first chance to offer praise together after Easter, and in light of these post-resurrection stories we have been looking at. Maybe listen to a great Easter hymn (e.g. 'Thine Be the Glory', or a more recent song such as 'See What a Morning')

- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RbBOOmKMLmI&ab_channel=NorthBaptistAssociation

- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6xM-fpXayUg&ab_channel=JustChris77

(If time permits:) Prayer

Share prayer requests together, praying for resurrection life and hope for all.

Session 3 – ‘Love One Another’ (*study and prayer for mission*)

John 10:22-30

In this passage we hear Jesus’ words ‘The works I do in my Father’s name testify about me’.

- Have each person share something that strikes them about the passage, or a question it raises for them.
- How far can we take these words of Jesus and apply them also to our own work for God, as a testimony to others?

What other questions about the passage do people in the group have? For those who heard Fiona Stevenson in church this past Sunday, discuss any insights or reflections, and use this opportunity to pray for her and for the work of our other mission partners supported by St Nics.

Here is a summary from our APCM report on International Mission (pp.25-27), available here: <https://cdn.filestackcontent.com/PwP6jFwzQ4W72Nl26t5S>

One option: download and print off the Mission report, and distribute a different section (or two) to each group member, to lead in prayer.

- We offer support in prayer and financially.
 - A prayer meeting for our mission projects is held each month – anyone interested is invited to join us in praying for our mission partners.
- These are the projects and mission agencies we support at St Nics:
- LATVIA BIBLICAL CENTRE and the work of Victor and Esther Petrenko
 - CMS – Church Mission Society, and in particular:
 - Michael Browne, in Argentina, translating the Bible into the Toba language and Tim Curtis, in Paraguay, has translated the Bible into Enxet.
 - Davis Mananna, leading the The Bungokho Rural Development Centre (BRDC) in the east of Uganda.
 - THE BIBLE SOCIETY – encouraging life-changing reading of scripture
 - MISSION AVIATION FELLOWSHIP – Fiona Stevenson
 - THE STAMP BOX (near the chapel) – supporting Leprosy Mission
 - MANASSEH TUYIZERE – formerly in Rwanda and now a pastor at a church in Germany.

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.)

- This Sunday's passage was **John 13:31-35**, which invites us to think anew about the significance of our practical love for one another. Have each person share something that strikes them about the passage, or a question it raises for them. This can lead into practical reflection together on how we may be demonstrating love in acts of service.

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 – Loving and Obeying Jesus (study)

John 14:23-29

Sunday's passage was **John 14:23-29**, where Jesus says 'Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching'.

In his book on *Discipleship* (originally 1937), Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote that we cannot love God without obedience, and we cannot obey God without love. Neither comes first, separate from the other. His concern was people who thought they could love God, and then move on to obedience at a later date. He called this a 'cheap grace' understanding of God.

- What do we make of the link between love and obedience – loving Christ and obeying Christ?
- What is the role of the Holy Spirit in this passage? (v.26) – how do we find this works out in practice?
- In what ways do we experience God's peace in our lives? (v.27) – how do we respond to Jesus' words to 'not let our hearts be troubled'?
- In v.28 Jesus tells his disciples they should be glad that he is going away. Does this make sense to us? Why or why not?
- *A more general reflection:* do we think Bonhoeffer's point about obedience is related to our focus in the Community of St Cuthbert on living in step with the rhythms of God's grace in practical ways?

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.