



Material for lifegroup and personal reflection

21<sup>st</sup> August – 6<sup>th</sup> November 2022

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**“Readers are advised to remember that the devil is a liar.” CS Lewis in Screwtape Letters.**

**“For me the most radical demand of Christian faith lies in summoning the courage to say yes to the present risenness of Jesus Christ.” Brennan Manning**

**“Every Christian should be both conservative and radical; conservative in preserving the faith and radical in applying it.” John Stott**

**“Grace has become not free, but cheap!” AW Tozer**

**“No Christian can be a pessimist, for Christianity is a system of radical optimism.” William R Inge**

**“Jesus at the heart of the Christian faith is the wildest, most radical person you'd ever come across. Follow Him!” Bear Grylls**

**“There is need of a great revival of spiritual life, of true fervent devotion to our Lord Jesus, of entire consecration to His service. It is only in a Church in which this spirit of revival has at least begun, that there is any hope of any very radical change in the whole of life.” Andrew Murray**



### **1. God never said alone.**

Matthew 28:16-20 & John 14:16-26

He's never said you're on your own!

Matthew 28:16 - 20 is enduringly true. God has promised us that he is with us to the end of the age. We have confidence in what we do because we know we have back up, we know the Father is cheering us on from the sidelines, even when we face difficulties. That knowledge, that we're not alone, colours our behaviour and gives us courage. We're never meant to fight our battles on our own. The gift of the Holy Spirit, to accompany us in our earthly struggles, gives us the assurance of the presence of Christ and the love of God to welcome us home when our struggles are over. God never said to go solo – He assures us company, presence and community. Our steps are for sharing and life.

1. How does 'God with us' manifest itself in our daily life?
2. Read Matthew 28:16 - 20 three times including other versions of it. What three things strike you from the passage?
3. Why is this bible passage so important in the Christian life? How do you feel about it?
4. What is included in "everything that I have commanded you"?
5. In the passage it says: 'some still doubted' - how does our faith impact our ability to trust God in all circumstances?
6. Do our doubts matter to God? How do we integrate faith and doubt?
7. John 14:18 promises the alongside God. How do you experience this reality?
8. What are the qualities of those you go to for support in life and faith? How might you emulate these qualities? were the people you went to for support before you became a Christian? Do you still reach out to the same people now?
9. Have there been times or situations when you felt isolated? How did your faith in Jesus help strengthen you?
10. How can you live into the truth of God's omnipresence?



## 2. God never said you've got it....

Proverbs 3:5-6 & Numbers 23:19

God never expect that we should believe in our own abilities alone. Despite how much our culture messages independence, the way of the kingdom is always interdependence: many parts – one body! Moses, Abraham, Esther, Rahab and the countless other heroes of the faith, where who they were because of who they believed in. It's really about who you know!

There may be moments in your life where what you see and what you believe appear to be in contradiction to each other. However in those moments you can still trust God to do what he has said in spite of the situation. His ways are better, His motives are pure and His heart is eternally kind. This is the uncomfortable but assuredly good ground to trust God completely with everything and not lean on your own understanding.

1. How do we weigh up what is true when experience and faith appear to be at odds?
2. Why do you think God allow us to experience challenges in our lives?
3. What strikes you from the passages set for us and from Sundays talk?
4. Summarize Proverbs 3:5-6 in your own words what the author is saying?
5. Pick your favourite hero of the faith, and share why their trust in God inspires you?
6. Can you think of a situation when you've been absolutely sure about something, and then changed your mind?
7. Look at Psalm 28. How does this contrast with the secular view of self-reliance?
8. What three ways might you actively increase your trust in God?
9. How might you ask others to pray for you as we all seek to better know, trust and follow Jesus?

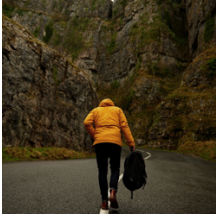


### 3. God never said impossible.

Mark 10:27 & Philippians 4:13

He's the God of impossible! All things are possible for God, and yet not all things are part of His plan. Philippians 4:13 is not a blind promise that you will be successful in every endeavour. Instead, it is encouragement that we are able to remain hopeful in all circumstances because our source of joy is in an unchanging Saviour.

1. What comes to your mind when you hear the word 'impossible'? Instinctive response: no right or wrong answers here!
2. How do you respond to Jesus's promise that all things are possible with God?
3. Where have you know the impossible-inbreaking of God?
4. Paul's message to the Philippians was that he was able to endure hardship and persecution because of Jesus. Discuss?
5. How does trust in God's eternal plan help us measure our own trials & bring a healing perspective?
6. Read The Message version of both passages. How do they contrast? What's your takeaway from this?
7. What struck you most from Alianore's talk on Sunday?
8. How do you best live this out? *Obedience more than opinions...*



#### **4. God never said compare.**

2 Corinthians 10:12, Job 39:13 & Galatians 6:4-5

We gain **nothing** by comparing ourselves to each other! For each of us is unique, distinct and precious. Comparing ourselves to others is dangerous – it leads to resentment, discontentment, jealousy and envy, pain, greed, anger, bitterness, and even pride, on the flip side. It robs us of joy and peace, and diminishes the beauty of God’s blessings in our lives. When we stop comparing ourselves to others, we run our own race at our own pace, we allow God to accomplish his plans in and through our lives.

1. How does society rob us of the truth that we are all unique and valued?
2. Why did God create Jesus to be an ‘ordinary looking’ man rather than an Adonis?!
3. Does the pressure to conform to social standards have any benefits?
4. Why do we yield to comparison and criticism more than contrast and celebration?
5. Reflect on the passages suggested and how they speak to this theme?
6. What struck you from the talk on Sunday? What one big idea grabbed you...
7. How does Galatians 6:4-5 speak about individuality and personal responsibility?
8. How does the theology of ‘imago dei’ help: each of made in God’s likeness but with distinct personhood?
9. How can we preserve our belief in unique selves, in the face of social media onslaught?
10. What are the practical takeaways from this theme for you?



## **5. God never said be afraid!**

Joshua 1:9 & Philippians 4:6-7

There are 365 “fear-not” verses in the Bible, one for each day. As the most said phrase in scripture it must have significant meaning for our lives. God never said be worried – We read over and over again in the Bible that when it comes to fear, there shouldn't be anything that we fear more than God. And this fear isn't a dreadful anxiousness. It's a reverent, awe-like fear that is motivated from security and love in a gladness to please him. Because we know God is our strong tower. He is our protection. He fights for us. “Do not worry” doesn't mean that we should not think about or plan ahead but that we are not to be anxious.

1. Why do you think ‘fear not’ appears so often in the Bible?
2. Why does scripture speak to our emotions do you believe?
3. What struck you from Sundays talk and these bible passages?
4. What is your working definition of worry? Johnny’s worry is the preoccupation of life without taking God’s constant love and power into consideration. Reflect on this...
5. What exceptions do you usually make for your worries?
6. How do we combat the 3am night fears? What do you choose to do in this...?
7. What does it mean to be ‘God fearing’?
8. How do social pressures contribute to our anxiety? How do we combat this?
9. How might you lean into God’s peace and provision more consistently?
10. What three action choices might you take away from this session?

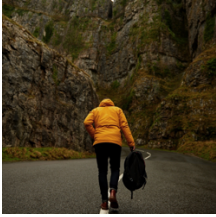


## **6. God never said ignore others**

Philippians 2:3-4 & Ephesians 4:32

It's OK to consider what's best for you and your family, but also keep in mind what will be most beneficial for others. We're invited to the way of selflessness not selfishness! The way of the kingdom of God will result in others looking out for your interests as well. Everyone working together. God ever models the best behaviour for us to replicate. When we understand the incredible sacrifice, grace, and mercy of God on our behalf, we realize that we have no use for pride. When we recognize God's abundant grace, provision, and love, we understand that we have no need for selfishness. The fruits of the Spirit are outward facing. The best of life is for sharing.

1. Philippians 2:1-11 are some of the most challenging in all of the bible! What does it actually mean to have the 'same mindset' as Jesus?
2. What is the big idea in these two bible passages and from Sunday's talk?
3. It has been said that we are called to be 'in' this world but not 'of' this world. What does this mean? What specifics would this mean?
4. These contrasts to the culture of this world seem more
5. Is caring for others a luxury only the comfortable can afford?
6. How does caring for others manifest in our daily lives?
7. God created us to live in families and societies. Why?
8. In what ways might you put selfishness and pride to death in your life?
9. How do you increase selflessness in your own life when just-getting-by at times is hard enough?
10. Consider posting the words of Ephesians 4:32 on the inside of your front door? What might it do in you if you meditated on it and let it do its good work in you?
11. What is your key takeaway from this session?



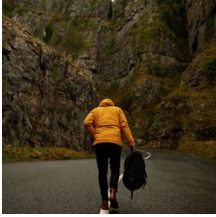
## **7. God never said it would be easy**

James 1: 2-4, John 16:33, Psalm 9:9-10 & Psalm 56:8

When we're struggling or hurting we may feel like God is distant or distracted, but he's described here in a profoundly tender, engaged and intimate way. In Psalm 56:8 God cared about David's heartache enough to notice and remember each tear, and He cares about our sorrows with the same gentle intensity. Nothing we go through escapes his compassionate attention.

1. Is it ok to be confused and angry with God when we are hurting?
2. Why do you think God allows us to suffer?
3. What struck you from Sundays talk and these passages?
4. Is it realistic to 'consider it pure joy' when we face trials?
5. Why do you think James is so blunt...?
6. It seems like suffering is a major way in which God produces maturity and perseverance in us. Why do you think trials refine us so well?
7. How does leaning into John 16:33 help us face our problems?
8. Where have you known Gods 'compassionate attention' recently?
9. How do you resight things with heavens perspective and wider discernment?
10. What might you mark as the memorial stones: journey markers from today's session?





## **8. God never said get rich**

1 Timothy 6:17 & Matthew 19:23-24.

Abundance isn't God's provision for me to live in luxury. It's his provision for me to help others live. God entrusts me with his money not to build my kingdom on earth, but to share in his kingdom life. Getting rich or being first isn't the promise or aim in scripture. In fact the New Testament mentions equality only once or twice, but when it comes to social relationships, it is far more interested in concepts like oneness, commonness, partnership, union, and joint-inheritance. The phrase "the first will be last and the last will be first" does not mean one person gains more honour than another. It means that while a person may be first in this life with honour or wealth, that does not hold true in God's kingdom. Salvation or eternal life is not earned by one's status in this life. God values us all equally.

1. How can we tell if our trust has shifted from God to riches?
2. The prosperity gospel is a terrible trick that says if you follow God you get good things. What is a balanced way of describing the blessings that come from life with God?
3. What struck you from Sunday's teaching and the bible passages we have here?
4. Building on week six in this series, what does God say about self-interest?
5. To be good and rich, we must aim to be rich toward God. What might this look like in action?
6. How can we strike the right balance between aspiration and ambition?
7. In Animal Farm George Orwell said we are all equal but some are more equal than others (sic) How does this contrast with the Bible passages?
8. Read The Message version of Matthew 20:16 and compare to NIV? Paraphrase in your own words?
9. Suggest three practical choices as a result of this session?



### **9. God never said judge.**

Matthew 7:1-6, James 4:12 & Luke 6:37

God never said judge but rather discern, pursue wisdom, love, grow and flourish. The Bible's command that we not judge others does not mean we cannot show discernment. Immediately after Jesus says, "Do not judge," He says, "Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs" Matthew 7:6. A little later in the same sermon, He says, "Watch out for false prophets. . . . By their fruit you will recognize them" v15-16. How are we to discern who are the "dogs" and "pigs" and "false prophets" unless we have the ability to make a judgement call on doctrines and deeds? Jesus is inviting and equipping us to tell right from wrong.

1. What strikes you most about this theme?
2. Where does it connect most for you? In the light of the passages and the Sunday talk?
3. Matthew 7:1 is frequently taken out of context. Does it give us an excuse to abdicate from social responsibility?
4. To judge is to form an opinion or conclusion. Why is Jesus forbidding this?
5. Can you think of a time when you made a rash judgement which you later regretted?
6. How do we discern wisely and live responsibly?
7. How do we recognise 'false prophets' and avoid getting swayed by public opinion?
8. How can we deal with personal blind spots? Are we open to change or criticism from others?
9. Seek to be encouraging, never be malicious, angry, or demeaning, but affirming and willing to help. What might this look like in personal resolve?
10. Spend some time in quiet & prayerful resolve in the light of this...



## **10. God never said shame.**

Romans 8:1, Isaiah 54:4 & Mark 8:38

Cancel culture is our unavoidable reality at present. Whether fake news or just what is plain untrue. His covering and completeness that comes by faith is the antidote to ever being ashamed. God never prescribes failure or shame for those who know the grace and favour of God! In our life script much is negative, yet the way of the Christian faith is an invitation into victory and overcoming. Because sin is alive in our bodies, Romans 7:23 and because we are beset with weakness, Hebrews 5:2, the kind of shame we often experience is a potent combination of failure and pride. We fail to live up to our own and other people's expectations and because we are full of sinful pride, we are ashamed of our failures and weaknesses, and will go to almost any length to hide them from others.

This means pride-fuelled shame can wield great power over us. It controls significant parts of our lives and consumes precious energy and time in avoiding exposure. There is only one place to hide that offers the protection we seek, where all our shame is covered and we no longer need to fear: the refuge of Jesus Christ, Hebrews 6:18–20.

1. When is a recent moment that has caused you to blush? Light relief only!
2. How does shame or embarrassment make you feel? Do you think God wants this for us?
3. What do you make of these key scriptures?
4. What is the takeaway from the Sunday preaching we have heard?
5. Shame and pride are two sides of the same coin. Discuss?
6. Law, flesh & spirit are explored in Romans 8:1. What does this mean...?
7. Adam and Eve hid from God in their shame. How might things have been different if they hadn't!?
8. Does Romans 8:1 mean that we don't have to fear the consequences of our actions?
9. What does the reach of Mark 8:38 mean for us?
10. How does confidence in God attend to the negative concerns of the flesh?
11. What might you do in practical ways as a result of this detail...?



### **11. God never said it'll be bad!**

Romans 8:28 & Jeremiah 29:11

God's will for our lives has reason and purpose. It is through scripture, where we can find meaning and principles discerning God's will. If we want to know God's plan for our life, then we must learn to walk with God. We need to develop a relationship with Him. Jesus demonstrated what it means to serve the King, submitting to ultimate authority. He modelled loving submission to the Father. Then God demonstrates that He has control over sin and death, raising His Son from the grave. Life itself falls under the command of He who bestows life in the first place.

1. What does your confidence in God make you think about the present & the future?
2. What grabbed you from Sunday's teaching?
3. Read around the focus scriptures from Romans 8:28 & Jeremiah 29:11. What do you like and what do you struggle with about these?
4. How do we balance Romans 8:28 with John 16:33?
5. How do we learn to walk with God in our daily lives rather than just on a Sunday morning?
6. Can you think of a time when you saw God at work in your everyday?
7. What is your takeaway today from this conversation and this wider series?
8. Share what God is saying to you at the moment...?