

18th October – Bitesize Mini-series #1 – Deed**Colossians 2:17 & Matthew 5:14-16**

1. Think of someone who has made a real difference in your life. What was it about them that made such an impact? Was it something significant they did, or lots of little things?
2. In Matthew 5:14–16, Jesus says, “You are the light of the world.” What do you think Jesus means by describing his followers as light? What might people see of Jesus through the way we live?
3. The talk suggests that we don't need to do extraordinary things to make a difference. What small acts of kindness, encouragement or service have you seen make a real difference in someone's life? Why do you think these things can be so powerful?
4. Think about your everyday life at home, at work, at school or in your community. Where do you find it easiest to show the love of Jesus, and where do you find it hardest? What makes the difference?
5. The talk suggests that we don't need to force our faith on people or have all the answers; we can start by living in a way that helps people see what Jesus is like. How can our actions communicate something of Jesus' love, goodness and hope without us necessarily saying anything about our faith?
6. Perhaps you sometimes think, “I'm not particularly confident or gifted,” or “I'm just one person.” Do you ever feel that way about making a difference for God? What might the image of a small light shining in the darkness teach us about this?
7. Jesus says that people should see our good works and give glory to our Father in heaven. How can we make sure that the things we do point people towards God rather than simply drawing attention to ourselves? Is that distinction always easy to maintain?
8. Colossians 3:17 says, “Whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus.” What might it look like to do ordinary things — such as working, parenting, studying, shopping or helping a neighbour — in the name of Jesus? How might that change our attitude or behaviour?
9. What can sometimes stop us from letting our light shine? For example, fear of what people think, busyness, lack of confidence, frustration with others, or simply not noticing their needs. Which of these do you find most challenging, and what might help you overcome it?
10. The challenge from the talk is to choose one person, one situation, one opportunity to make a difference this week. Who or what comes to mind for you? What practical thing could you do to make their world a little brighter, and how could you ask Jesus to help you?

**You don't have to be the sun to make a difference.
You just need to let your light shine.**

11th October – A Royal commission #5 – Fearless Messengers**Matthew 10:23-31****Background**

Jesus continues to give his instructions to the disciples before sending them out on their mission. In this passage, Jesus speaks directly to the fears that they might experience as they go forward.

Whilst we may not be charged with the same tasks that Jesus sent his close friends on (casting out unclean spirits and curing disease and sickness), we are, like the first disciples, called to demonstrate in our daily lives the transforming impact that Jesus has on how we live. Just like them, we may not find ourselves in a comfortable place, so learning how we approach the fears we may face is an important part of our journey into life.

Read Matthew 10. V 24-33

1. Jesus tells the disciples no less than 3 times in the space of 6 verses to 'Have no fear/Do not be afraid'. Why do you think he repeats it so frequently in such a short time? Is fear a bad thing? If so, what is so bad about fear? Would you agree with the German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer who regarded 'Fear as the archenemy itself'?
2. **Read 1 Corinthians 2 v 1-5.** Paul speaks of his first visit to the Christian community at Corinth in Greece. In v 3 he says that '*I came to you in fear and in much trembling*'. Given that Jesus taught his disciples not to be afraid, was Paul failing? Or is the message that Jesus was trying to get across to his disciples one of overcoming fear when we experience it? Did Paul let his fear stop him from speaking to the Corinthians about Jesus? And what was the agency at work to convince his hearers of the truth of what he said? (v4)
3. **Read Matthew 25 v 14 – 30.** This story, coming just before Jesus's final entry into Jerusalem, illustrates the negative effects that fear can have. Three slaves/servants are trusted by their master to invest his money whilst he goes away. Two of them make full use of it and prosper, bringing joy to their master and earning greater responsibility. The third appears to be paralysed by fear and buries the asset he has been given and is soundly criticised. It poses the question – do we allow fear to eat away at the ties that bind us to God and to others, or do we trust God and use the gifts he has given to us wisely? What is our view of God – we may be more likely to be fearful if we see him as a stern, vengeful God – but the first two servants knew that his character was generous and loving and acted on that. What picture of God do our actions portray?
4. Mike suggested that to help us to overcome fear **we need to remember**. He suggested that there are four things to remember that will help us to overcome fear:
 - Remember who we are: (Spirit filled disciples)
 - Remember what we have come through:
 - Remember that we are children of a God who loves us and wants the best for us:
 - Remember that we are part of a body who we can share our fears with, rather than face them alone.

Do you think these are useful steps that we can take to help overcome fear? You may feel that some or all these help you. You may be able to think of some other steps that you find help you to overcome fear.

- How important do you think it is to remember who we are?
 - Mike talked of the re-ordering as a useful memory to him as to how overcoming fear (in this case of possible failure to raise the money) can bring blessing. Do you have your own memories of actions in the past that encourage you that fear can be overcome?
5. Mike talked about the importance of remembering that we are children of a God who loves us and wants the best for us – but not everybody sees God this way. What is your picture of God? How does it affect the way you behave?

6. Mike also mentioned that as disciples we will still face trials and tribulations – as he prepares the disciples for their mission, Jesus reminds them of their worth in God's eyes (Matthew 10 v 29-31). He implies that God knows and cares about even the small details of our lives – nothing, not even the hairs on our head, are too small for his care. Do you find this encouraging? In John 20 v 19 -22, we find Jesus coming and standing with his fearful disciples. Is it helpful to remind ourselves that in our fears, Jesus stands with us? – we are not alone.
7. We are also blessed with living in a community of people following Jesus. This means that we do not have to face our fears alone. Jesus had friends that he turned to in his ministry, particularly Peter, James and John. Paul had Barnabus. Who do you have that you can share your fears with when they gnaw away at you threatening your relationship with God and with others?
8. At the outset of this passage (v24-25), Jesus may be seeking to deflate his disciples ego when they perform the miracles that he calls them to carry out on their mission, by reminding them that no disciple is above his teacher – it is enough to be like the teacher. Humility is a key factor in discipleship, as everything we receive, we receive as a gift, by grace. We don't earn it. But it also reminds us that we are called to be 'like the teacher' in our lives. What can we do to help us become 'more like Jesus'? Do you agree with Mike's suggestion that discipleship is not a passive activity? What practical steps can we take to become 'more like Jesus'? What help do you need in pursuit of this goal? Perhaps Paul's advice in Ephesians 6 10-18 is helpful and useful?

4th October – A Royal commission #4 – Equipped for every response**Matthew 10:16-23**

1. How do you respond to pressured situations? Do you tend more towards fight or flight when you are under pressure?
2. How much opposition or pressure do we face today because we identify ourselves with Jesus and his kingdom? How do you respond to those situations?

Read Matthew 10:16-23

3. The disciples are told that they are being ‘sent out like sheep among wolves’. What does that image suggest about how their message will be received?
4. Why is it a surprise that they will be received like that? How does the compassion of Jesus shape the way we think about mission today?
5. In what contexts might the disciples find themselves under pressure?
6. What does it mean to be ‘as wise as serpents and innocent as doves’ in a hostile environment? The talk suggested that Christians can sometimes confuse proclaiming the Kingdom with ‘inviting hostility’ – where have you seen that happen?
7. How does the instruction of vs 23 help to shape our response to any pressure we might experience?
8. How do Jesus’ words about hostility equip his followers for the ministry he gives to them? What attitude does he protect us from?
9. How does the promise of the Spirit’s presence bring comfort? The talk suggested that the Spirit’s presence with us when we are under pressure is God ‘making himself to known to you in way that never happens when life is only plain sailing.’ Has that been true in your experience?
10. When are the moments of pressure this week that you will particularly need to know the presence of the Spirit? Are there moments when we are more likely to rely on our ‘fight or flight’ than trusting that God is with us?

27th September – A Royal commission #3 – Ordinary People, prepared differently

Matthew 10:1-16 (Luke 9:1-6)

1. The disciples move from watching Jesus to being sent out by Jesus. Where do you find yourself more comfortable: watching, learning, or actually stepping out and doing something? Why?
2. The disciples were ordinary people, but Jesus gave them an extraordinary message, power and authority. What do you think stops us from believing that Jesus can use ordinary people like us?
3. The talk suggested that we can sometimes think, “God could use them, but I’m not sure he could use me.” Have you ever felt like that? What particular qualities, experiences or abilities do you tend to think you need before God could use you?
4. Jesus tells the disciples to “take nothing” for their journey. What are the modern equivalents of the “bag, bread, money and spare tunic” that we tend to rely on for security and confidence?
5. The talk described Jesus' instructions as “being prepared differently” rather than being unprepared. What do you think it looks like in practice to be prepared to trust Jesus rather than simply being prepared by having everything under control?
6. Jesus makes the disciples dependent not only on God but also on other people. Why can receiving hospitality, help or support from others sometimes be harder for us than giving it? What might God want to teach us through that?
7. The talk says, “We don't need to wait until we have everything sorted before we respond to God's call.” Is there something you sense God might be asking you to do that you have been postponing until you feel more ready, confident or equipped?
8. Jesus prepares the disciples for rejection. They are called to be faithful, but they aren't responsible for controlling how people respond. How can the desire for people to respond positively affect the way we share our faith, serve others or step out for God?
9. Think about the question from the end of the talk: “What do we pick up on our way out of the church doors?” What do you personally tend to “carry” — knowledge, experience, planning, confidence, resources, fear, something else? Which of those things can become a substitute for trusting Jesus?
10. “The challenge is: Do I trust the one who is sending me?” What would trusting Jesus in this way look like for you this week? Is there one practical step you could take as a result of this passage?

20th September – A Royal Commission #2 – The other Lord's prayer

Matthew 9:35-38

1. What comes to mind when you hear the word 'mission'?
2. Are you optimistic or pessimistic about the future of the church?

Read Matthew 9:35-38

In vs 35 Jesus describes the Kingdom as 'good news'.

3. What does the Kingdom look like in Jesus' life in Matthew's gospel so far? (Chapters 5-7, 8-9 will help)
4. Where do we see signs of the Kingdom today? What might explain the difference from what we see in Jesus?
5. Why do we forget that the Kingdom is 'good news'?

In vs 36 we're told of Jesus' compassion towards the crowds.

6. Why might Jesus view the crowds as like 'sheep without a shepherd'?
7. In what ways are people vulnerable (helpless and harassed)?
8. What is the mission of Jesus grounded in?
9. How does seeing that counter our fears or anxieties about mission?

In vs 37-38 Jesus reveals the catalyst for mission

10. What motivation does Jesus provide in vs 37?
11. How does that contrast with our own experience/assumptions?
12. What is the first thing that Jesus expects his followers to do?
13. How can you be involved in the mission of Jesus?
14. What would help you to keep praying this Lord's prayer as much as you pray the other one?

13th September – A Royal commission #1 – An invitation like no other
Matthew 11:25-30

1. How would you describe your ideal rest? When do you feel most ‘rested’?
2. And what are the things that are weighing on you most at the moment? Where do you feel most ‘heavy-laden’? **If appropriate, take a moment to pray for each other at this point.**

Read Matthew 11:25-30

3. Jesus prays at the end of what seems like an unsuccessful time of ministry. Why is the tone of his prayer surprising?
4. *Who* does Jesus say that the Father has things from, and to *whom* has he revealed them?
5. What has been handed over to Jesus, and what is the only way to truly know the Father and the Son?
6. While there is a deep mystery in God’s sovereignty, how do vs 25-27 underline what we need to truly know God?
7. Why do we struggle with the idea that we can’t just work out who God is on our own?
8. Where are you tempted to rely on your own resources (intelligence, common sense, friendship) rather than coming to God like a child?
9. What is the only thing that we need to bring to Jesus?
10. What three invitations does Jesus give in vs 28-29?
11. What does he promise will be the result?
12. It seems like a paradox, but how can taking a ‘yoke’ result in ‘rest for our souls’?
13. How does Jesus describe his own character in vs29? Why will that make a difference to the ‘yoke’ he offers?
14. What, or who’s, yoke are you carrying at the moment? If you feeling weighed down, burdened or burnt out at the moment, what might you need to receive from Jesus to find rest?