

#9: Adoration (26/03/23, Richard Saint)

Reading: Psalm 63

1. Read the phrase, ““As two lovers do nothing but gaze into each other’s eyes, so we gaze lovingly at our heavenly Father and have our heart’s delight satisfied”.
 - a. How does this phrase make you feel?
 - b. Would you describe yourself as an “adoring person”?
2. Now read this description, “What **we** love, we want to spend time thinking about, contemplating, adoring, seeking a greater depth, and understanding, and intimacy. What we love, we want to see all the complexities and intricacies of and as we do, we are nourished, energised, and moulded by it.”
 - a. Is this an easier concept to deal with regarding connecting with God in adoration?
3. Inspired by Psalm 63 (have a read of it), Richard asked the following questions, spend some time thinking about them and the reasons for your answers:
 - a. How much time do we give to seeking God’s face?
 - b. How strong is our desire to seek God’s face? Where does it come in our list of priorities?
 - c. What is our knowledge and understanding of God’s nature and deeds?
4. Thomas Merton (monk and writer) wrote, “there are so many Christians who have practically no idea of the immense love of God for them and of the power of that love to do them good, to bring them happiness.”
 - a. Discuss to what degree you understand / experience the immensity of God’s love?
5. Consider as a group the following phrases. What resonates with you?
 - a. “Adoration is an intentional and deliberate decision to remain in God’s presence.”
 - b. Psalm 27:14 Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the Lord!
 - c. Psalm 46:10 Be still, and know that I am God
 - d. Psalm 27:8 “Come”, my heart says, “seek his face!” Your face, Lord do I seek
6. This has been the final talk in the series, “Connecting with God”, looking at how we all connect with God, how we can be nourished by God and recognising that we all do this in different ways. Look across the various ways we have covered and share:
 - a. Which one or two are your preferences?
 - b. Which one or two do you find most alien?
 - c. Which one or two would you like to try, how might you do this?

Senses;
Activism;
Loving Others;

Solitude & Simplicity;
Outdoors;
Mystery & Celebration;

Ritual & Symbol;
Mind;
Adoration;

#8: Mind (12/03/23, Anthony Rose)

Reading: Romans 11:33-12:2

1. Jesus said, 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength' (Mark 12:30). Do you find the words in the Bible describing human make-up helpful (heart, soul, mind, strength *and* spirit)? Bear in mind that the Bible isn't always fully clear on what those words mean and they are often interchangeable.

Following with the mind:

2. In prayer and worship, how much would you say you engage with God through your mind and how much in your spirit?
3. Thinking of your own story of first coming to faith in Christ, what part did your mind play? How important was it compared with your feelings?
4. A 'disciple' in the New Testament literally means a 'learner'. How important is it to you to keep learning more of God in your ongoing Christian walk?
5. Do you agree that there are dangers in too much 'intellectualism' (pride, enjoying controversy and argument, knowing stuff rather than doing)? What can we do to avoid it?

Feeding the mind:

6. How do you feed your mind? What do you find most helpful out of the following (or any others)?
 - Bible study (including using study aids)
 - Christian books
 - Gatherings such as New Wine
 - Listening to talks and sermons
 - Theological study
 - Generally seeking wholesome entertainment and pursuits
7. Do you agree that we often are influenced by unwholesome things without realising it? What would you include in those (TV, the internet, etc.)?
8. What practical steps can you take to avoid negative influences and find positive ones?
9. Are there bad habits you need to be free of when it comes to what you allow your mind to take in? (Maybe instead of discussion, sit in silence for a few minutes and ask the Holy Spirit to help you to identify them and to overcome them.)

Faith and the mind:

10. Are you good at reminding yourself of who God is and what he's done? How do you go about it?
11. When you first came to faith in Christ, how far did your mind take you before a step of faith carried you further?
12. How often do you have to admit you don't understand the Lord and his ways but just have to trust him?

13. Do you struggle sometimes to know things in your heart, not just your head (like 'I know God loves me and values me but I find it hard to feel that')? What steps can you take to change that?

14. Are there people you know who 'just don't get it' no matter how often they've heard the Gospel? Does 2 Corinthians 4:4 help explain their situation? (*The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.*)

#7: Ritual & Symbol (05/03/23, Keith Brindle)

Reading: Luke 4:16-21

1. Do you have any 'baggage' around the use of ritual and symbol as a way of connecting with God? If so, discuss/share.
2. Symbols use something visible to help us connect with what can't be seen
 - a. What physical/visible things (symbols) already help you connect with God? Discuss.
 - b. What new (to you) symbols could help you further connect with God? Discuss.
3. Rituals are simply a pattern of worship and prayer, that provides a regular structure (a regular opportunity) for faith to be nourished.
 - a. What routines/practices (rituals) already help you connect with God? Discuss.
 - b. What new (to you) rituals could help you further connect with God? Discuss.
4. In our chaotic and easily-distracted lives, how does/can the intentional use of Christian rituals and symbols be of benefit?
5. Ritual and symbol work well for a variety of people; those who like structure (or recognise their need for it!), those who need (visible) reminders, as well as those who are creative. Knowing, can you see new ways in which you engage with, and benefit, from ritual and symbol.
6. How could seeing ritual and symbol as a **gift from God** given to help us connect with Him, inform our use of them?
7. The Sabbath is both a ritual (the routine of taking 1 day in 7 to rest from work and rest in God) and a symbol (it is a visible earthly thing that points to the invisible eternity of heaven). How can you receive and use well the gift of Sabbath?
8. Like all ways of connecting with God, using ritual and symbol comes with some warnings (7a,b & c below can possibly be answered as one question):
 - a. How do we avoid symbolism that is nothing more than skin deep? (Read Ps 51:7-17)
 - b. How do we avoid ritualism that is nothing more than going through the motions? (Read Matthew 23:25-28)
 - c. How do we avoid fixating on the ritual and the symbol, making them central, and missing the God they connect us to?

#6: Mystery & Celebration (26/02/23, Richard Saint)

Reading: 1 Chronicles 16:8-36

9. Richard spoke about how Christian faith is mysterious using, as an illustration, the words from the communion liturgy, "Great is the mystery of faith: Christ has died, Christ is Risen, Christ will come again".
 - a. Take some time to consider these words, discuss how these words, central to Christian faith, speak of the mystery of faith.

10. "We worship and serve a supernatural God".
 - a. What does this statement mean to you?
 - b. How do you feel about not being able to fully understand the mystery of God and faith? That it is a relationship between "two unequals".

11. Discuss in your group whether you find it easy to connect with God in the mystery of the supernatural.

12. Take the time to re-read 1 Chronicles 16:8-36.
 - a. Read it slowly, maybe a couple of times, listening out for a particular phrase that strikes a chord with you. Ask God for "good listening ears" as you listen for His voice.
 - b. Share with each other the phrase that God brought to your attention and why it might have stood out.

13. Richard introduced the three ways that this song helps us to connect with God in mystery and celebration:
 - a. To recognise the mystery of who God is and what God has done.
 - b. To tell others of this mystery even when we don't fully understand it ourselves.
 - c. To celebrate God, even in the darkest moments of life
 - i. Which of these do you find easiest, which do you find hardest.

14. If you have, encourage each other by sharing how you may have heard God in dreams or visions or in prayer. Times when we have had "good listening ears".

15. Discuss ways in which we can nurture and increase our expectancy of God.

16. Perhaps finish your time together praising God, celebrating the supernatural God we worship and serve and then, with expectancy, pray for the needs of your group, our church, and the world.

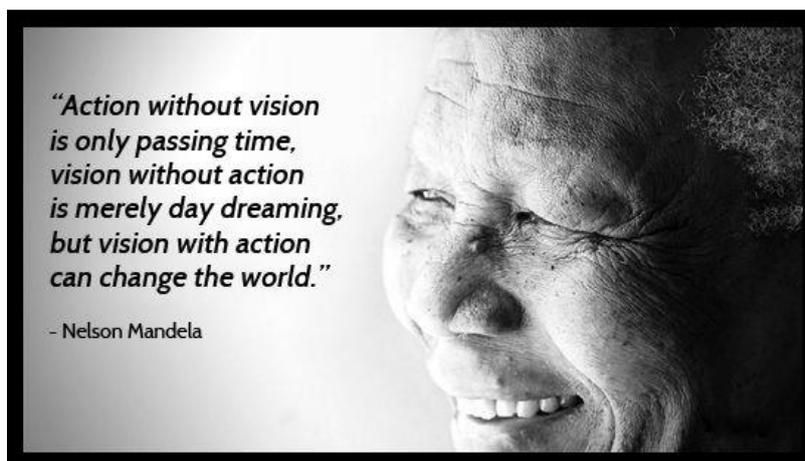
#4: Solitude & Simplicity (05/02/23, Keith Brindle)

Reading: Psalm 46:10, Lamentations 3:25-18

1. Do you enjoy silence and/or solitude? (The Slido results from 11am service are below.)
 - a. What do you/don't you enjoy about silence/solitude?



2. Are you good at being in your own company without distractions?
3. Do you struggle with FOMO (fear of missing out)? If so, how does it manifest itself?
4. Where do you go to find silence/solitude? (Alternative Q. How do you find the time and space for silence/solitude?)
5. Does (and, if so, how does) silence and/or solitude connect you with God?
6. How could you seek to know an inward stillness, even amid the activities of daily life. (The 3rd queries of the Quaker book of Advices & Queries.)
7. Does your life have too much clutter that prevents you from connecting with God? Clutter can be either internal or external.
8. What could a simpler life, that gives you more capacity to connect with God, look like for you?
9. How could you make your (internal/external) life simpler to enable more connection with God? (...recognising that we can't quit our jobs, dump the kids at the in-laws forever, etc!)
10. Below is a quote often said by Nelson Mandela, which he adapted from an old Japanese proverb. Discuss how this quote may relate to connecting with God through simplicity and solitude.



#3: Activism (29/01/23, Sarah Mallett)

Reading: Matthew 25: 34-40

1. What resonated with you from what Sarah shared?
2. What challenged you from what Sarah shared?
3. Are you (1) a natural care giver (it's one of the ways you connect to God), or (2) a care giver because of the situation you are in rather than by choice, or (3) not a care giver at all but could find you connect with God by caring.
4. If you are a care giver, are you able to share how it is for? (joy giving, indifferent, drained...)
5. How, for you, can/could you connect with God through caring for others?
6. Can, for you, caring for others be a form of worship to God? (What would you need to do, to change your caring into worship?)
7. Have you ever sensed the presence of God through your care of someone? How was it?
8. Have you ever sensed the presence of God as you received care from someone? How was it?

#2: Activism (22/01/23, Mike Wilmott)

Reading: Isaiah 58:6-11

1. Read Isaiah 58 6-11. In this passage, God is calling his people out of the complacency of merely seeking personal holiness (through fasting and religious observations) and urging them to become deeply concerned about social injustices as well. What actions does God call Israel too? In what ways can activism refresh our relationship with God? Why do you think this is?
2. Do you think Jesus was an activist? Read John 4 27-38 – what did Jesus say was his source of nourishment? Can you think of other ways that he connected with God? Do you see any links between them?
3. Given the words of Isaiah and the activism of Jesus, do you agree that we should all have at least a streak of activism in our lives as followers of Jesus? What might that look like in your daily life? (Mike talked of small acts - Can you think of any one act or change that God might be calling you to consider this week?) What do you think of Mike's suggestion of a 'balanced diet' in relation to connecting with and being nourished by God?
4. Whilst the example of James and John in Samaria (Luke 9 51-56), as mentioned by Mike, might be a bit extreme, what dangers do you think an activist would need to be aware of?
5. Can activism be a shared activity? Can you see any benefits if it is? Do you think St James provides opportunities for activism? Should we?
6. Is generosity a form of activism? Does it refresh or feed you?
7. Is the analogy used by both Mike and Isaiah of seeing our spiritual lives as a garden helpful? Hopefully this series will help you think of ways in which you can nurture your own spiritual garden. Has anything helped so far? Share any insights you have learnt/received.

#1: Series Introduction & Senses (08/01/23, Keith Brindle)

Reading: Matthew 26:17-29, 1 Corinthians 11:23-25

1. Discuss how, where, when you connect with God? (Esther in her interview mentioned coming to St James, going for walks, keeping a journal, recording 3 things she is grateful for each evening. Becky in her interview mentioned doing sport, grappling with the Bible, and listening to podcasts. Make a note of the difference way people connect in your group.)
2. Encourage the group to question one another for details about how they connect with God (What's it like connecting with God the way you do? etc)
3. Discuss the possible pros and cons of how you connect with God?
4. How do you connect with God with your senses? (The results from the in-service poll are below; though don't limit your answers to just the ones listed.)
5. A. If using your senses is your preferred way to connect with God, how could be more intentional about using them to deepen your connection? B. If using your senses is not your preferred way to connect with God, how could you give it a go in the coming weeks?
6. Discuss how during the last supper (and communion) 'the senses embody the truth of what Jesus went on to do on the cross in a deeper way than just words would have achieved.' (Matt 26:17-29, 1 Cor 11:23-25. Remember that the last supper would have included sounds, and smells, and touches that are not present in our formal communion liturgy.)
7. What are the possible ways folk who primarily connect with God through their senses could get it wrong? (eg. worshipping worship; getting a sensual hit from music, art, etc; idolising beauty, ritual, ceremony, etc; superficial connection and discipleship)

