

TESTIMONY

CONNECT GROUP QUESTIONS

Testimony Summary, 29th November 2020

1. Over the series, which testimonies spoke to you and in what way?
2. Thinking of the illustration of the woollen rug, can you identify the people who have been interwoven with your story?
3. What has God *been* doing and what is God *currently* doing in your story?
4. How can you get involved with what God is doing in your story?
5. Thinking about these questions and as an encouragement, perhaps try writing your own testimony.

Testimony #11. Eleanor Wallace, Sunday 22nd November 2020

1. How are you feeling?
2. What priority do you tend to give to feelings / emotions and rational thoughts? Equal or more one-sided?
 - a. Why do you think this is?
3. What do you think of the description of God as an inventor with every part of us being important?
 - a. How could this illustration be improved?
4. Read John 11:1-44. Why do you think it is important that Jesus took the time to experience emotions?
 - a. How might this help you to give time to your emotions?

Testimony #10. Mike Wilmott, Sunday 15th November 2020

1. How did you respond when Mike spoke of his being a 'nothing spectacular' testimony? Did it resonate with you?
2. In what way is Christian culture guilty of celebrating the spectacular over the obedient and faithful? Can you think of examples?
3. How does this (your response to Q2) impact upon the faith journeys and wellbeing of those (most of us) whose testimony is also 'nothing spectacular'?
4. Have you ever been on the receiving end someone's unspectacular generosity, forgiveness, wisdom, giving of themselves and their time? Who? What did you receive? How it support you? How did it make you feel? Did it matter that it wasn't spectacular?
5. How do you respond to the life and faith of Boaz as seen in the Book of Ruth?
6. Read Ruth 4:1-6, in which Boaz redeems Ruth. What to you note about Boaz's character during the exchange with the closest relative to Naomi (and therefore the first in line to redeem Ruth). How does this action of Boaz (again) show how Boaz, in his faithfulness and obedience, echo the actions of God towards each of us.
7. Who, in an 'unspectacular' way, are you being called to be alongside today?

Testimony #8. Helen Sharples, Sunday 1st November 2020

1. Look at the different passages which contain God's promise.
What types of situation do they include?
 - i. Genesis 26:24; Genesis 28:15;
 - ii. Joshua 3:7
 - iii. Isaiah 41:10; Isa 43:5;
 - iv. Jeremiah 1:8; 1:19; 15:20; 30:11; 42:11; 46:28;
 - v. Haggai 1:13; 2:4
 - vi. Matthew 28:20
 - vii. Acts 18:10
- b. What situations do you need to know that God is with you?
2. How easy do you find it to know and trust God's promise?
3. Why do you think God sends people to be part of his presence with us?
 - a. Can you identify people in your story who have 'gifts' and reminders of God's promise?
4. Naomi initially tried to deter Ruth from remaining with her. Why do we sometimes find it hard to accept support?
5. If you keep one ear to God, who might he be calling you to as his 'gift' to them?
 - a. In these challenging and different times, how might you be able to support them?

Testimony #7. Alex Irvine, Sunday 25th October 2020

(This is the full talk Keith planned to give. Questions/prompts are in **bold**.)

I wonder what struck you the most about what Alex shared. Maybe after this service you could sit and think, share with others if you are able, what was it that has meant the most from what he said.

I want to keep my reflection short today.

I want to make a few quick observations following on from Alex's testimony and end with one simple point.

1. Followers of Jesus are changed people; and are continuously being changed. Just to be clear it should be changing us for the better. As a dad, as husband, a wife, a friend, an employer being changed to be more like the one we follow. Sometimes that can start with a dramatic encounter, as with Paul on the road to Damascus, but more often, as with Jesus' first followers, the 12 disciples, it usually takes years of following Jesus, and is an ongoing process of being transformed to be more like Jesus (2 Cor 3:18) **How is your faith changing you? How do you want your faith to change you? What do you need to do to enable God to work in you to bring about these changes?**
2. Being a follower of Jesus creates a thankful heart. Even when there is much that is difficult, and without underplaying or denying the difficulties, thankfulness directed towards God, the source of all that is good, and right and worthy of our thanks, radiates from the heart. This doesn't just happen. At least two things need to happen. We need to recognise the ultimate source of our thankfulness; the cross and Jesus' resurrection where the darkest of situations did not dimmish God's light, power or love. The other thing we need to do is to continuously cultivate a thankful heart. We need to work at it. There are times when it is an act of will to give thanks. That is what we see in the Psalms; the writer, at the end of listing all that is wrong in life, wills their will to give thanks to God. **Recognise in your life what it is you can give thanks to God for.** If you have young children, ask them at the end of the day, what was the best bit of the day and then pray thank you to God with them for that.
3. Followers of Jesus are never alone. This is the Good News that we celebrate at Christmas; Emmanuel, God is with us, in Jesus, through his Spirit being resident in us. **(How do we at St James, as individuals and a church family, share with others that God is with them this Christmas? What can you do this Christmas? Let Keith know your plans, so they can be shared with others.)** Sometimes, at the toughest times and in the darkest of situations, we may feel that we are alone and God can feel distant, but...
4. Followers of Jesus, journey with others. We don't do this alone. We journey together. We meet with other followers to share life, to give and receive encouragement. To share a joke, have a laugh, and sometimes share one another's tears. The Rule of 6 means you can meet with 5 others, and for most of us one other is enough. **(Who are you journeying with?)**

5. A short one this one. But probably the biggest one. Followers of Jesus are forgiven. **(For private reflection. Are there areas of your life which you need to share with God and know his forgiveness?)**
6. Followers of Jesus have a broader perspective, a heart of compassion and a desire to respond. We don't live within the narrow and self-centred confines of our own lives, and the lives of our family, we see the bigger human picture. We need to continuously entrust God with our loved one, so that we can see, with a Christ-like heart, what is going on further afield. To see what is going on in the hospital bed next to the one our loved one is in, to see what is going on in our neighbourhood, to see our brothers and sisters in South Sudan, to see the impact of modern-day slavery and our devastation of the environment. And our heart is filled with compassion and a desire to respond. To respond with prayer, with our voice, with our resources, with our career choices, with our shopping choices, with how we spend our time and direct our lives. **(What are you passionate about? What has God given you a heart for?)**
7. And this is my final observation. Followers of Jesus have his strength. This goes back to what Rachel said a few weeks ago and the bit in Paul's letter to the church in Greece – I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. **(Where do you need God's strength today?)**

OK my one point is this:

It is a relationship, not a religion.

If you are sat there thinking, well as a follower I am not being changed for the better, don't feel v thankful, feel alone, journey alone, feel unforgiven, are often selfish and do stuff without the support and strength of Jesus, the first thing to say in response is, you are not alone. The Bible is full of people just like you and me; followers of God who often get it wrong. And if we were sat in church together, we could look around and see a whole load of other people who get it wrong.

But the second thing to say is, if we approach this recognition of our situation by thinking, 'How do we get ourselves right?', we could end up creating a religion, with a load of rules and not much else. But God does not want us to be religious, he wants us to be relational; he wants us to have relationship with him. And the best way to have a relationship with God is through Jesus, because see who God is by looking at Jesus.

Let me put it another way. When you were listening to Alex's testimony; the bits that resonated most with you; at those moments, was your response 'I want to have more of that kind of a religion' or was it 'I want to have more of that kind of relationship with God.' Did it sound to you as if Alex was talking about a religion or a relationship?

Alex's testimony, like those we've heard before, are not religious stories, they are accounts of a relationship; between a person and Jesus. They are accounts of how that relationship has transformed the person, their lives, their relationships, their direction of travel. Sometimes they are messy, sometimes they are difficult, but always they show God's character, his love, his presence, his provision. Just like the accounts we read in the Bible.

Alex said that the start of his relationship with God, when he chose to get Christened, was the best decision he had ever made. Have you made any good decisions lately?

Do you have a relationship with God or a religion? What's the difference between the two for you?

Testimony #6. Steve Dewar, Sunday 11th October 2020

1. What struck you from this talk?
 - a. What did you find most helpful / challenging?
2. Have you ever felt outside of the category of “loved”?
 - a. What helped you know you were included?
3. How would you describe the Father’s heart to a friend?
4. What has God given you a heart / passion for?
5. What might stop you from sharing the Father’s heart?
 - a. How can you overcome this obstacle?

Testimony #5. Rachel Gardner-Poole, Sunday 4th October 2020

Before your CG meeting it might be useful to ask your group to think about their 'go-to' verse in the Bible and why they value it beforehand.

1. What is your 'go-to' Bible verse and why do you value it?
2. In the disappointments, challenges and opportunities of life where do you go to find the strength needed? Are these good gifts from God you can give thanks for, or are they misuses of God's gifts that you need to repent of?
3. As a culture/nation where do we go to find the strength we need to deal with the disappointments, challenges and opportunities of life? Are these good gifts from God that we can give thanks for, or are they misuses of God's gifts that we need to repent of?
4. Rachel spoke about the challenges and opportunities in her life. In both challenges and opportunities, like so many followers of Jesus (including Paul), she looks to do all things through Jesus who gives her the strength needed. What can you do that will enable you to seek and find His strength for yourself? What can you do that will enable those around you to seek and find His strength when they face new challenges and opportunities?
5. Maybe you or someone you know has a low self-image. How does what Rachel shared about Psalm 139 help? 'God loves each one of us. We are fearfully and wonderfully made. He gives each one of us individual and unique gifts (and experiences - Keith) and we need to honour and respect that, not looking elsewhere, or hating ourselves. It's about trusting God. I came to realise that my way of thinking, of not liking myself was actually hurting God.'
6. To end. Rachel had two 'go-to' verses, Psalm 139 and Philippians 4:13. Read these out in your group, starting with Psalm, to start your time of prayer together. (You may want to prayerfully respond to Q3 here)

Testimony #4. Sarah Tarry, Sunday 27th September 2020

1. What struck you most from Sarah's testimony?
2. Do you sometimes struggle to believe that God welcomes you into his house in your muddy state?
3. How easy do you find it to allow God to clean you up instead of striving in your own strength to be clean?
4. How do you express creativity in your life?
5. How might you do something creative this week to worship God in a new or different way?

Testimony #3. Becky Seager, Sunday 20th September 2020

Before your CG meeting it might be useful to send out the link in Question 7 to your group to look at beforehand.

1. What is your favourite sad song? Why do you like it?
2. You don't have to share this with others, but from 1 (awful) to 10 (great) how is your mental wellbeing today.
3. What things impact most on your mental wellbeing (lack of sleep, anxiety about work, your physical health, your relationships, etc)
4. What impacted you most about what Becky shared in her testimony?
5. What 'ways out' (crying out to God, prayer, remembering, friends, family and church, the Bible, and hope in the resurrection) that Becky used, do you rely on/could you develop more?
6. We can have a strong faith and suffer from mental health issues, just like we can have a strong faith and have a broken leg. So, why do we make matters worse for ourselves and others by thinking that poor mental health results from a lack of faith?
7. Having better conversations about mental health is important. The Christian Mind and Soul Foundation is an excellent resource around the area of faith and mental health. Read the article below. After each of the 6 conversations types listed, stop and discuss your responses.
https://www.mindandsoulfoundation.org/Articles/515149/Mind_and_Soul/Articles/6_Christian_Mental.aspx
8. In the light of your discussions around Q7, how do we talk well about the hope there is in Jesus, his resurrection and the hope found in Lamentations 3:22-24.

Testimony #2. Niki & Paul Jakeman, Sunday 13th September 2020

1. How good are you at following directions?
2. Do you find it easy to hear guidance from God?
 1. What ways have you 'heard' guidance from God and in what situations?
3. Are you waiting to hear the next direction from God?
 1. What is stopping you from trying something, to get walking?
4. Read Eph 2:10
 1. What might be the good works that God has prepared for you?
5. Read Proverbs 3:5-6
 1. How often do you lean on your own understanding (strengths and skills) instead of trusting in God with your heart and mind?
6. Read Romans 5:6-8
 1. If you feel like God is distant and silent, how easy do you find it to know you are loved immeasurably?