



Life Groups in Central Telford

## A Handbook

In Matthew 28:19/20, after being raised from the dead, Jesus left final instructions with his disciples and commissioned them for the task ahead: *"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you."* The instruction is pretty clear ... **"make disciples"** (as opposed to "get people to come to church") and **"teach them to obey"**. Being a disciple of Jesus Christ is not about coming to Church on Sunday and trying to remember what was said on Monday but a 24/7 life experience. Jesus' own disciples (note the word) followed in Jesus' footsteps day after day for around three years, watching, learning, copying, doing and simply living *with* him as a natural part of who they were as people, so that they eventually could carry on his work in the world, *obeying* what he wanted them to be doing. Being a disciple is about *living out* our faith ... so the simple "definition" of what a Life Group is must be that it is a group of people wanting to encourage each other to live their lives as disciples of Jesus Christ.

Whilst the idea may be simple, few would say it is easy – that is why the word "discipline" is closely attached to the word "disciple". The Gospels are full of stories of the disciples getting things wrong in their walk with Jesus and occasionally being told off for it – but constantly being encouraged by Jesus to persevere with it. That is why Life Groups are so important and why we want everybody in the Parish to be associated with one – because they help us to persevere and grow in our faith.

As a Parish, our Vision is ***"To see the light of Jesus shine into every corner of our community"***. Why? Because the purpose to the Church is to look outwards, not inwards, and take the Gospel into the world so that people will discover the amazing love of God in Jesus Christ.



### What are Life Groups ... ... and what are they not?

Some people will have been involved in a group before and it may have been called a Home Group, or a Bible Study Group or something similar. Life Groups are similar ... but probably a bit different! There are a number of principles to them which may help people to understand them ...



## All Involved.

In some forms of small groups, there is often a “leader” who is expected to know the Bible inside out and lead every session. This means that the others in the group may feel that what they think is not as important or not relevant. The aim in Life Groups is that the work of the Holy Spirit is happening in all of us – so all of us have something to offer! There will still be the need for someone to coordinate the group and there may well be one person who knows their Bible slightly better than the others – brilliant! They can help everyone to get to know their Bible better. But there will be others who have very important things to offer – like being able to ask the question that cuts to the heart of an issue or being able to see how it applies to people’s lives in practical ways. Or people who don’t say much but make a fantastic cup of coffee and love to show care for others. In Life Groups, everyone has a role and a job!



## Becoming Disciples.

Becoming a disciples is not an overnight miracle. It takes time and each of us is on a path that has, over time (whether years, months or even days), taken us to different places where we have experienced different things that have shaped our relationship with God. Every individual’s experience and walk offers something to encourage and challenge others in the group. That includes the times when we have messed up - it is interesting to note that the stories of how Jesus’ disciples constantly messed up are features of the Gospels! Life Groups are aimed at helping us in Becoming Disciples ... they are for every single person who wants to grow in their faith and their walk with Jesus.



## Creating Community.

After Jesus returned to heaven (Acts 1), the Bible tells us that God sent the Holy Spirit (Acts 2) to empower Jesus’ followers to do the work he had commanded them to do ... so make disciples (i.e. grow the Church). One of the first things they did was to get into small groups in order to do this: *“All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.”* (Acts 2:44-47). It must have been a wonderful time to be a Christian and many of us would love to be able to go back to that time or somehow “recreate” it - the “problem” (!) was that the Church grew and changed. But what a sense of community – living out what Jesus had taught them, caring and sharing everything. Whilst it may look somewhat different to what it looked like in Jerusalem in AD33, we want the Life Groups in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Telford to look and feel similar.



## Doing Outreach.

We all know that the Church in the UK has struggled over the past few decades and it is increasingly hard to be a Christian in the secular world of today. “Outreach” is not about standing on street corners and waving a Bible at people, it is simply about reaching out into our communities with the love, the hope, the care and the Good News of Jesus’ death bringing us life. As a Parish, our Mission Statement is *“Reflecting Jesus Everywhere”*: the aim that, day by day, as we live our lives, people will begin to see the reflection of Jesus in the things we say and do. This happens when we simply live out our faith amongst our friends, our families and those who live down our street or where we go to the club, or at the gym, or in the pub, building relationships and growing friendships. And Doing Outreach together as part of a Life Group is so much easier than doing it on our own!



## Encountering Jesus.

If you have met someone in your life who has made a deep impression on you, it shows. It may have been someone famous, it may have been a relative or it may have been someone you met who changed you profoundly in one way or another. Encountering Jesus has an amazing effect on our lives and the aim of a Life Group is that, together, we are able to meet with him and let him affect us more

and more. Jesus said in Matthew 18:20 "*Where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.*" The same Jesus said "*I am the Life*" (John 14:6). It stands to reason that if we want to know the life Jesus offers, we need to encounter him and he has promised to be there in the midst of any group that meets in his name.



## Where, When, Who, What ... ?

There are LOTS of questions which people will want to ask and some of them we can answer – and some of them will need to be answered by the Life Groups themselves. For example, **Where** you meet ...some may meet in homes, some may meet in a Church room ... it's up to you! **When** you meet? We'll answer that in a moment! **Who** does **What** ... the Staff will aim to work with everyone in order to work out some of the answers to these and they may take a while to sort out ... but we'll get there gradually as things begin to take shape!

## What Happens at a Life Group?

People often get worried about being in a small group and the fear is often about feeling trapped: trapped into being with people they don't know, trapped into being forced to do things, say things and think things which they don't agree with ... and probably a few other fears as well! The aim of Life Groups is that they are all different and as a small community, they decide together how things work ...

## Some Things We Would Love To Happen ... !

- ☺ we would love it if all Life Groups met on a Wednesday evening (so that we can dedicate that night to them) but we know it may not be possible for everyone to meet then. So it may be that a group decides to meet during the daytime or at some other time.
- ☺ we would love it if people shared the leading of the sessions, but we know there may be some who are (initially) more experienced and confident at leading than others. It's a good starting point – but what we don't want is Life Groups to be *always* to be led by the same person.
- ☺ we would love it if people feel able to share the things on their hearts but some may find that easier than others. Life Groups will take time to grow and develop - what we don't want is it to be like a "clinic", where sessions are dominated by one or two people and their problems!
- ☺ we would love it if everyone is able to use the materials that will be provided, but some may find that they need to go deeper or perhaps approach the topic from a different angle (more in a moment).
- ☺ we would love it if people meet every week but know this may not be possible for everyone, so some groups may meet twice a month instead.

## Each Life Group will be different ...

... and that is great, because it means the Group will reflect the people in it and also it means that we can try to find the right group for people to the Parish to join. Some Groups may be in specific areas and everyone goes to the same Church – some may have members from 2 or 3 Churches attending. Equally, we would like to have groups that are focussed on particular needs or interests eg a Nurture Group for those new to their faith or for Young Mums ... the possibilities are endless!

## A Typical Life Group Evening ...

The previous section spoke of the way that there will be different types of Life Groups and so there will never be one way in which the Groups occur. But a typical evening will have four parts to it and look something like this ...

### Welcome

#### Welcome

The most important aspect of a welcome may well be Coffee! Some groups may involve homemade cakes or biscuits or occasionally wine ... whatever makes you all feel at home. Most of us have come across the idea of an "Ice Breaker" ... a small, fun activity that helps people to relax into a meeting, hopefully with a bit of laughter. I suspect that many people will already know each other but questions like *"Who was your favourite teacher at school?"* or *"What is the best Birthday Present you have ever received?"* may open up conversation and introduce the theme for the evening.

### Worship

If we are saying that in a Life Group we are coming into the presence of Jesus, then it will not be a case of "Come on in mate and sit down"! We are saying that we are in the presence of the Son of God, the Saviour of the World, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords – he is not our "mate" but someone we should treat with anything other than awe and wonder. In Matthew 28:17, we read of the disciples meeting Jesus after his resurrection ... *"When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted."* What a wonderfully honest response – but to acknowledge his presence and recognise his voice, as well as recognising our own doubts, means taking time to worship him. Whilst some thoughts and Bible verses may be offered as a starting point, different groups will worship this in different ways, using candles, CDs, instruments, quiet or whatever is appropriate to that group.

### Worship

### Word

#### Word

So far in the session, the Group will have drunk coffee, hopefully laughed at each others' answers to the icebreaker and worshipped in an informal and relaxed way. The "word" aspect of the evening affectively asks God to "speak to us". All of us "hear" in different ways ... through words, through pictures, through ideas, through film, through songs ... God speaks to us individually and the aim is that in this part of the evening (usually the largest part), we hear God speak to us through each other. Starting with some verses from the Bible, the notes provided will aim to take the group on a small journey, together.

Whilst there may be an idea or destination that underpins the journey, how the group gets there and what they experience or witness on the way will be different in each and every group. The notes will have questions that some will say are "easy" and others say are "difficult" (about the same questions) and some will try and work out what the "right" answer is ... the questions are merely signposts on the journey in order that the members can have a rough idea of where they are going. At the end of this booklet, you will find a sample of Life Group Notes that will help you to get the picture.

## Some Important Things To Say ...

- ☺ Life Group themes will work across the "Terms" ... Autumn, Spring and Summer, and will vary: some Terms will follow a theme, others may work through book in the Bible and others follow a particular course.
- ☺ The way the notes appear may change over time, responding to feedback from the groups. It is important to get this feedback but also to remember that it will take time for us all to get used to the way they work and not give up!
- ☺ We can't say it enough! The aim is not to have lots of groups which are all the same but each one of them having their own character and personality. There is no "set formula" for the Groups but a framework which, it is hoped, will enable individual groups to find their own pace and style of working.

## Works

The Christian faith talks about the idea of "Incarnation" - a word which describes the fact that God didn't just sit on the sidelines and shout at the world, but in Jesus, he came into the world to do something practical about its problems. Jesus didn't just "talk" - he "did". Life Groups are about talking *and* doing, equipping us to be better disciples of Jesus Christ - and then going out to put what we have learned into practice. Luke 10:1-20 tells of Jesus sending out disciples to do some field work midway through their course. The Works section of the session asks us to apply what we have heard and learnt into the practicalities of our daily lives. There are opportunities to pray for each other and for the world and to ask for God to water the seeds of ideas and challenges that he may have planted in us during the session.

## And So ...

Our desire is that we leave having encountered Jesus and been changed through meeting him with others. An old cliché says *"No Jesus, no life. Know Jesus, Know Life"* and an underlying aim of Life Groups is simply to Know Jesus and Make Him Known. The Gospels not only tell the story of Jesus but (along with the book of Acts) the story of a bunch of no-hopers who spend three years learning to be disciples and a further thirty plus years working out what it looked like in practice. We witness their mistakes and their frail humanity and much, much more. Following Jesus Christ is a lifelong task and privilege and doing it together in Life Groups is a wonderful way to grow and be more effective in Knowing Jesus and Making Him Known.

## But Also ...

Once a month, there will be an evening on the programme called **"Life Groups Together"** and the aim is that rather than meeting in the usual places, the Groups will meet together for an evening of Worship, Discussion and Prayer as we seek to bring together the thoughts and words which God has been saying to us in our separate groups.



## Putting All of This Together ...

The Vision we have as a Parish is *"To see the light of Jesus shine into every corner of our community"* and we are aiming to do this by *"Reflecting Jesus Everywhere."* Life Groups are a fundamental way in which we can grow as individuals and as communities so that we can do this effectively, so that Jesus, the Light of the World will be a beacon of hope and life across the whole of Telford.

**Please continue on to find a Sample Set of Life Group Notes ...**

## Life Groups in Central Telford Parish

### Spring Term 2015 "From Bethlehem to Calvary"

Week beginning 11<sup>th</sup> January 2015

## Luke 2: 41-52 "Jesus: The Model Child"

### • The Aim of this Session

The journey of Jesus' life from Bethlehem to Calvary begins with the Christmas story of fulfilled promises and a baby born to unlikely parents in unlikely circumstances (including shepherds and wise men turning up). As he grows, how do we picture him as a child? Was he "normal" or a bit "weird"? In the story in Luke 2, we get a few insights into him as an earthly child ...

### • Welcome

What was your favourite activity or hobby when you were a child?

### • Worship

If it helps you to worship, light a candle in the middle of your group and be quiet for a while. Read Luke 2:8-16. You may want to sing a relevant song or play a CD (possibly the "Hallelujah Chorus" or something similar). Out of the blue, the shepherds (complete outcasts and nobodies) get told of the arrival of the greatest man who has ever lived. Try to imagine how they must have felt – and their hurry to respond. In your mind, sit around the fire with them and imagine how they reacted to the news. Say the prayers that come to you in response and ask God to take you to meet with Jesus in your time together.

### • Word

Previously in Jesus' life ....

- Luke 2:1-20 tells of Jesus' birth.
- Luke 2:21-38 tells of Jesus being presented in the Temple.
- Matthew 2:1-12 tells of the visit of the Wise Men
- Matthew 2:13-18 tells of the massacre and the family fleeing.
- Matthew 2:19-23 tells of the return of the family to live 60 miles north of Bethlehem in Nazareth

Other parts of other Gospels fill in some of the gaps in Jesus' childhood – that Mary and Joseph had a number of other children and that Jesus learned the building trade (not just carpentry) from his father. We also know that Joseph died and Jesus took over the business ... but not much more.

Any of us who are parents know that our children have to learn the difference between right and wrong from an early age and none of them are perfect ... do you have any image in your mind as to what Jesus was like as a child? The *perfect* child?

- ❖ Read Luke 2:19 and Luke 2:32-35. How do you think Mary and Joseph must have felt about their eldest child? (By the way, the way Luke writes chapters 1 and 2 make many people think that Mary told him all the stories)

Read Luke 2:40-52

- ❖ Verse 40 ... (maybe a memory of Mary?) ... Jesus was clearly "different" but in a good way!
- ❖ What do verses 41-42 say about Jesus' family?
- ❖ What does verse 43 say about Mary and Joseph's understanding of their relationship with Jesus?
- ❖ And what does it say about his relationship with them?
- ❖ And what does it say about the community in which they lived?
- ❖ Why might it have taken three days to find him (verse 46)?
- ❖ Where else might they have looked?
- ❖ Why might they have not thought about looking in the Temple?

Verses 46 and 47 ... the scene may not be what we imagine. The "teachers" would be in the Temple discussing ideas and trying to learn from each other as they discussed (a bit like a Life Group really!). Their response ("amazed") is in response to the mature way in which Jesus was joining in, rather than the idea that they were quizzing him and he was simply giving the right answers!

- ❖ Is Mary and Joseph's reaction justified (verse 48)?

Knowing how most modern 12 year olds might answer their parents back, how do you imagine Jesus said the words in verse 49?

- ❖ Despite all the things that Mary and Joseph had experienced at the start of Jesus' life, why do you think they did not understand (verse 50)?

The final two verses of this passage speak of the years that followed and again, indicate that Luke may have been told the story by Mary herself (how else could he know the second half of verse 51?). They indicate a personality which is striking and attractive, a person who is confident about things and the life they lead.

## • Works

As we begin to look at the life of Jesus ...

- What does this passage say to you about Jesus as a person, as a boy, teenager and man in a community?
- What attracted people to him (we have no idea what he looked like)?
- If we want to reflect Jesus to our community, how does this challenge the way we are as a worshipping community?
- And as individuals?

**Think** of one thing in your own life and one thing in the life of your own worshipping community that needs to be changed so that the Jesus you have seen in this session can be seen to those around you.

**Share** these things as you are able – and then pray for each other and for your worshipping community that God will change you through the work of the Holy Spirit.

Also, **Pray** for any other specific issues people are facing in the Life Group. It is a great idea to start a prayer diary, recording the things you have prayed for and seeing how God answers your prayers!

## • Next Time ...

### **Luke 3:21-22 – The Baptism of Jesus**

How did Jesus understand what was happening to him?

