

Introduction to Vision Series

Where are we going:

We seek to be a community of believers that **GROWS** in God, **CONNECTS** with others and **SERVES** one another, living out “God within, reaching out” through which BBC aims to provide an opportunity for all in our community to respond to Jesus’ call to follow Him.

How we are going to do this?

By seeking to be a Jesus centred community;

built on **PRAYER**

PRAYER: To develop a corporate and individual prayer life that draws a greater percentage of the fellowship year on year to its knees acknowledging that this work underpins all ministries of BBC and affects the spiritual climate of our town. (Luke 18:1-8, 9-14)

by the power of the **HOLY SPIRIT**,

HOLY SPIRIT: Filled with the Holy Spirit, and knowing that it is a continuous filling, we seek to see the outworking of the Spirit in

our lives through the development of the fruits and gifts of the Spirit. (Acts 1:8, Gal 5:22-23, 1Cor 12)

and by the **WORD** of God

THE WORD: Become a people who are passionate about digging into the Bible to unearth God's truths through both individual and group study. (2Tim 3:16-17)

Doing this we will:

Deepen our personal relationship with God

Be open to the work of the Holy Spirit

Communicate timeless biblical truth in relevant ways

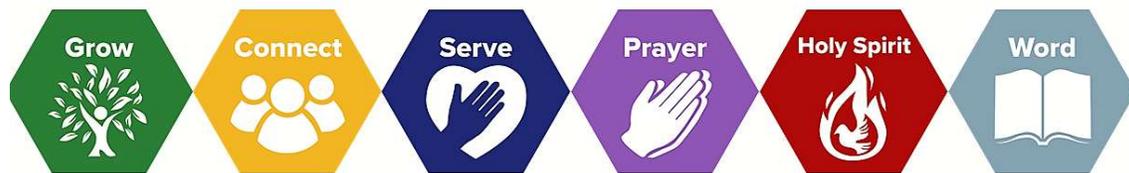
Be inclusive, celebrating uniqueness

Be part of church life

Serve the community

Some questions to reflect on this week

- What is your personal vision for your own life?
- What is your understanding of the BBC vision?
- In which ways does your personal vision fit into the vision for BBC?



Grow, Connect and Serve

Life-Group notes and questions

Introduction

Our vision document states, 'We seek to be a community of believers that **GROWS** in God, **CONNECTS** with others and **SERVES**' each other and the world. This is built on **PRAYER**, in the power of the **HOLY SPIRIT** through the **WORD** of God. This sermon series picks up on these six themes, which we find above in bold.

Grow: Ephesians 4:1-16

- In the past year, how do you think you have grown as a Christian?

The Baptist Union has two safeguarding procedures, one for children and one for adults. The children's procedure is called "Safe to Grow," the adult one is called "Safe to Belong." This got me thinking, do adults not need to grow? We all need to continue to grow as Christians, if not, we stagnate.

- What does "to stagnate" mean in regards to our Christian lives?

The analogy of *growth* is clearly from the natural world. Plants grow, animals grow, we, as humans grow. When we use this term in regard to us as Christians, there are at least two ways which we are referring to. Firstly, to grow *towards* God. That is, we get closer to Him. When we get closer to somebody, we love them more. We grow together with somebody when we have shared experiences. We remember times we spent together and can reminisce.

- How do we spend time with God?

Because God is a person, not a force (we were made in His image so if we are persons then He is also a person) we can grow into relationship with Him.

- What do you think this would look like?

The second way in which we grow is in maturity. What is maturity? *Maturity* is the ability to respond to your environment in an appropriate manner. *Maturity* also

encompasses being aware of the correct time and location to behave, and knowing when to act, according to the circumstances and the culture of the society one lives in.

In Luke 8:1-15, Jesus tells the parable of the sower. The point he is making is that growth and maturity lead to fruitfulness.

- What are three ways in which our growth and, therefore, fruitfulness can be hampered? [Devil takes away word, no roots and worries, riches and pleasures].
- How does this happen to us and how can we prevent it?
- Accordingly, how do we mature to produce the thirty, sixty or one hundred times?

Final challenge: During this week think of areas in which you want to grow. How will you implement growth in this area?

Connect: I Corinthians 12:12-31

If “to grow” is a vertical relationship, then “to connect” is most surely horizontal. We connect with each other. The Christian faith is above all things relational. God lives in Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Church is where we connect with one another. It is far more than an institution: it is a family, with God as Father and us as sisters and brothers. We have a personal relationship with God, but it is in the context of relationships with others that this personal relationship becomes real and is realised.

- In what ways has this been a reality for you? In what ways has it not been a reality?

The Bible uses many metaphors to describe the Church, from the true people of God, a priesthood, flock of sheep, and household to temple of the Holy Spirit, Body of Christ and assembly. Many of these metaphors are “corporate” in nature.

I Corinthians 12 uses the analogy of the body of Christ and its many parts. Verses 12-20 speak of the diversity of the Church, whereas verses 21-26 speak of the interdependency and interconnectedness of the Church.

- In what ways do we celebrate, or lament, the diversity of the Body of Christ at BBC?
- How are we interdependent and interconnected at BBC?

Now practically and personally:

- In what ways do you connect with others at BBC (I guess apart from Life Groups!)?
- In what ways do you feel the need to connect with others at BBC?
- What other ways do you think we *should* connect with each other at BBC?

Final challenge: During the coming week: Think of ways you could better connect with one another at BBC. Think of two ways you could make this happen.

Serve: I Peter 4:1-11

- Brainstorm the ways in which we can serve God and serve others?
- What are the motivations that we could have for serving God and serving others?

In Matthew 22:34-40, an expert in the Law asks Jesus about the greatest commandment. I guess we may also have tried to pick one from the Ten Commandments. I would have chosen, “You shall have no other gods before me.” Jesus, however, picks two lines, one from Deuteronomy 6 and the other from Leviticus 19. God’s greatest concern and therefore what he commands us to do is...love. Love is the basis of service.

- What will distinguish service based on love from service based on other motivations, such as obligation?

Leviticus 19:18 tells us to love our neighbour as we love ourselves. Jesus tells us to “act towards to others as you would have them act towards you” [Matthew 7:14]. Service to God and to others does not mean neglect of yourself but is based on a correct and healthy self-love.

- How do you think healthy love of self can inform our service to others?
- In what ways do we have to be careful in acting towards others as we would have them act towards us?

Peter tells us to “love one another deeply” [I Peter 4:8]. The Greek word, “deeply” means translated “stretched right out,” in other words “to maximum potential.”

- List out the ways Peter explains what this love can look like. What qualities are demonstrated by people who do these things?

If love is the motivation for our service, then the second half of verse 11 gives us the source of power to serve [God’s empowering] and the ultimate aim of our service [the praise and glory of God].

Final challenge: In this coming week, think of ways you can better serve others. This could be by laying down some of the things you are doing in order to better do other service.

So we have looked at the three areas of our vision for ourselves as a community and how we want affect the wider world. We now move on to examine the three factors that will facilitate that vision to happen: Word, Holy Spirit and prayer. I would like to link each of these areas to that section of the vision statement. Word – Grow; Holy Spirit – Connect; Prayer – Serve.

Prayer: Matthew 6:5-14

- What is the most prominent part of your prayer life? E.g. praise, petition.

Have you ever had a conversation with somebody and afterwards you think, “Wow, what a pleasure it was to talk with them. They didn’t judge me, they listened with care, they were wise.” Should it not be the same with God?

Given who we are talking to, prayer should be a rich, multifaceted and loving interaction. The problem is that it tends to end up as a rather poor, monochrome and formal shopping-list to God.

Prayer is relational, which links to the work of the Spirit in enabling us to connect with one another as well as to God.

We talk of four broad areas of prayer: praise and adoration, confession, thanksgiving and petition, and intercession. In Matthew 6, the model of prayer Jesus gave, *praise & adoration* come in the words, “Our Father, in Heaven, hallowed be your name”; *confession* comes in the words, “Forgive us as we forgive others”; and *petition & intercession* are summed up in “Your kingdom come, your will be done,” “give us today our daily bread” and “deliver us from evil.”

Praise and thanksgiving should come from a full heart of love towards God. This can come in the form of spontaneous outbursts of praise to God but can also be more liturgical such as in the Psalms.

- How can we improve our praise and adoration of God?

- What practical steps can we take to achieve this?

Confession is perhaps something we find difficult. It reminds us of failure, which is painful. Confession is, however, something that should release us from guilt. God's loving conviction should lead to confession and repentance and therefore forgiveness.

The old word "absolution," although meaning something like forgiveness, is linked to the word "absolute." Confession leads to absolute cleansing.

- How do you confess your sin?
- Are there any other ways in which your confession can help you serve God better?

It is interesting to note the three petitions of the prayer of Matthew 6: the coming of God's kingdom; the request for daily bread, and the plea for deliverance from evil (or the evil one).

- How would you categorise these three elements of petition?
- How could this inform our petitions?

Final challenge: During the week find new ways of praying [e.g. praising God in the countryside; focussed "arrow prayers"; using the prayers of others, such as liturgy or the Psalms].

Word: John 1:1-18

It has been shown that a church planted in a new place does not grow until they have the Bible in their own language. Just

as the Bible is essential for a healthy church so is a working knowledge of the Bible essential for growth as a Christian.

- Which parts of the Bible do you know best?
- Which parts of the Bible do you find more difficult?
- What is your favourite book of the Bible and why?

John 1:1-14 is about God's perfect Word, Jesus Christ. The Greek word is "logos". It is better translated "discourse," "message" or even "explanation." In the light of this fact, Jesus is God's message to human beings. Hebrews 1:1-4 says the same thing. God has spoken in many times and ways but now he has spoken through His Son. Jesus is God's ultimate or supreme communication to humanity.

- What does this mean for our understanding of the Bible?
- List out the things said about the Living Word in John 1:1-14.
- Taking these characteristics of Jesus as the Word of God, what do they mean for you in your daily life?
- In the Gospels in general, we get to know Jesus Christ. What characteristics do we encounter in Jesus? Which verses would you say illustrate these characteristics best?

Understanding the Bible is essential if we are truly to understand the Living Word as we find it in Jesus. The Bible, therefore, is not a book to read casually, when we feel like it, it is *The Book*, through which we find the way to grow into God, connect with one another and serve the world.

Final challenge: Think of new ways of engaging with the Bible [e.g. regular Bible reading notes, *Search the Scriptures*, online course, talk to Paul?].

Holy Spirit: John 14:15-31 and 16:5-16

In many traditions, it has been said that the Holy Spirit was the ignored member of the Trinity. Some traditions believe in God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Bible. We, in the Charismatic tradition, have another danger: we tend to believe that we have the Holy Spirit sorted, almost as if we have domesticated the Holy Spirit.

- How do you experience the work of the Holy Spirit in connecting you to others at BBC?

In the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit creates, inspires prophetic speech and inspires prophetic writing. In the New Testament, the Holy Spirit is active in the birth of Jesus, in His baptism, even in His temptation. It is here in the Gospel of John where Jesus speaks a great deal about the Holy Spirit.

- What does Jesus say that the Spirit will do in these passages?
- What does it mean to you to be helped by the Spirit and for the Spirit to be with you?
- How does the Spirit teach us and remind us of what Jesus said?

Traditionally, in the Nicene Creed, the oldest of all the official creeds which all Christians hold to, the doctrine of the Church is a subsection of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. That is to

say, the whole concept of “Church” is based upon, linked to, fed by the Holy Spirit.

The Church is *united* under one head. At Pentecost, by the coming of the Holy Spirit, it is then *integrated* as one body and it is *equipped* by the Spirit to witness to the risen Christ.

- What does the unity of the Holy Spirit look like in practice?
- In what practical ways does the Holy Spirit unify us?

Final challenge: This week, try to think of practical ways in which we can live in the power of the Holy Spirit.