

4th October 2020 10 am Nehemiah and Discipleship

Service led by Andrew Attwood, Talk by Lindsey Attwood, one-minute video by Penny Bryans, Interview of Michelle Harris by Andrew Attwood

Notices.....	1
Activity.....	2
Video: Indescribable Love.....	2
Song: Mighty to Save (Everyone Needs Compassion).....	3
Introduction to the talk.....	3
Reading: Nehemiah 1:1-10 [NIVUK 1984].....	3
Talk.....	4
Prayerful Response.....	9
Interview of Michelle Harris by Andrew Attwood.....	9
Prayers.....	11
Blessing.....	12
Song: The Potter's Hand.....	13

Notices

[Andrew Attwood:]

Good morning everyone. That music makes me kind of Daah-daah-daah-dah-dah! It gets me ready for a good morning service, so well done, I like that. How are you doing, Michelle?

[Michelle Harris:] I'm well, thank you! How are you?

[Andrew:] I'm fine. Very well, I'm going to say, how you doing Lindsey but I know how she's doing because she's at home. [Michelle:] I'll ask her. How are you doing Lindsey?

[Lindsey:] I'm fine actually. I know I should be downstairs, doing it with Andrew, but I decided my chair upstairs in my little studio is more comfortable.

[Michelle:] And that's a beautiful painting you have behind you.

[Lindsey:] It's blocking out the light, but I thought I might talk about it later today.

[Andrew:]

Okay, great. Good. Well, nice to see you guys I have to do some notices now.

So - it's great to see you all. Good to have you with us again for another Sunday morning at St John's Church. Lindsey is going to be speaking to us later and I'm going to do a bit of an interview with Michelle in a tick as well, but just some simple notices to get the service going,

- There is going to be (as we've said before) an APCM happening. We have permission to do this online from the bishop and the APCM is going to happen on October the 19th in the evening. If you are part of the church you will get the information via the newsletter as to how to connect to that. So that's October the 19th for a fairly abbreviated APCM. We'll probably need to do a much better, bigger APCM in the following year, obviously.
- This evening is a Healing and Refreshing service but it's a Healing and Refreshing service with a difference: it's got a strong Harvest theme. And I'd really want to recommend that you tune into that again at this channel, the same YouTube channel, so do make a point of watching that.

Activity

What I wanted to do, just to help us get focused on God, is something I've done before, is where we use our hands to basically show ourselves in all the different ways we relate to God, and the different digits can indicate different things. So whether you're old or young, if you just want to have a look at your hands now. And just think of the different fingers as meaning different things:

- So the thumb points us up in our upward relationship to God. How is your relationship with God at the minute?
- This [index] finger is the kind of directional finger. How is the direction of your life going at the minute? How does that feel?
- The longest finger is the finger that you reach around and hug people - in pre covid times anyway - so that's the relationships one.
- This [next] one, this finger is finances, because that's where the gold band often goes. So finances is that one.
- And the little finger is your weakest finger, so that's to do with health.

So: relationship with God, direction, relationships with others, finances and health, just have a think for a minute, and maybe prayerfully just wonder, which of those is most pressing or important in your life at the moment? Relationship with God? The direction of your life? The relationships in your life? Finances? Or issues to do with health? Just have a moment, just pause for a moment, maybe 10-20 seconds of quiet and just have a think. What is pressing at the moment, what is important?

[pause]

Let's just hold up our hands now to God and give ourselves to God, whatever is pressing, whatever is important, as a way of preparing ourselves to enter into God's presence consciously, just give those important things, maybe name them, give them to God.

We give these things to You, Lord.

[pause]

Let us just pray, so our focus remains on God now.

Lord, we pray for Your Holy Spirit to give us full attention on Jesus now. Help us to concentrate on Him. And to be open to Him. Help us to enter into His courts with praise. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Now Penny Bryans is going to lead us with just 60 seconds of video, and then we'll sing together.

Video: Indescribable Love

[Penny Bryans:]

Jesus chose to go to the Cross to suffer,
to take my sins upon Him,
to accept my punishment,
instead of me to die.

He did this when I was a sinner,
before I ever knew I was a sinner,
knowing that I did not, and do not deserve it,
knowing I could never earn it.
But He still did it.

Why?

He did it to offer me the gift of life,
with no guarantee I would ever even accept His free gift.
He did it out of indescribable love.
And I think that's amazing.

Song: Mighty to Save (Everyone Needs Compassion)

Everyone needs compassion
A love that's never failing
Let mercy fall on me

Everyone needs forgiveness
The kindness of a Saviour
The hope of nations

Chorus:

Saviour, he can move the mountains
My God is mighty to save
He is mighty to save
Forever Author of Salvation
He rose and conquered the grave
Jesus conquered the grave

So take me as you find me
All my fears and failures
Fill my life again

I give my life to follow
Everything that I believe in
Now I surrender

Chorus x 2

Bridge:

Shine your light and let the whole world see
We're singing for the glory of the risen king
Jesus

Repeat Bridge

Chorus x 2

Bridge x 3

Introduction to the talk

[Andrew:]

So let's continue in that atmosphere of worship, let's just pause and remember the good things that God has done. Remember that He is mighty to save us too, all of us in every way.

And Lord, as we come to hear your word, help us to be open to the Scriptures, help us to be teachable, so that we can learn.
Amen.

So if you have a Bible to hand, I just want to encourage you to open up to Nehemiah. We're just doing a little interlude, we've had a series focusing very much on the Gospel of Jesus Christ for the last few weeks, and we'll continue that later too, but this is an interlude where we get to respond at a personal level – what kind of things does God seem to be emphasising? And Lindsey is going to be speaking with Nehemiah as a kind-of jumping-off point, to help understand what God has been doing through her and with her in recent weeks and months, so if you've got Nehemiah, could you turn to chapter 1, and I'm going to read the first 10 verses.

Reading: Nehemiah 1:1-10 [NIVUK 1984]

1 The words of Nehemiah son of Hacaliah:

In the month of Kislev in the twentieth year, while I was in the citadel of Susa, **2** Hanani, one of my brothers, came from Judah with some other men, and I questioned them about the Jewish remnant that had survived the exile, and also about Jerusalem.

3 They said to me, “Those who survived the exile and are back in the province are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been burned with fire.”

4 When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven. **5** Then I said:

“O LORD, God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him and keep his commands, 6 let your ear be attentive and your eyes open to hear the prayer your servant is praying before you day and night for your servants, the people of Israel. I confess the sins we Israelites, including myself and my father’s house, have committed against you. 7 We have acted very wickedly towards you. We have not obeyed the commands, decrees and laws you gave your servant Moses.

8 “Remember the instruction you gave your servant Moses, saying, ‘If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the nations, 9 but if you return to me and obey my commands, then even if your exiled people are at the farthest horizon, I will gather them from there and bring them to the place I have chosen as a dwelling for my Name.’

10 “They are your servants and your people, whom you redeemed by your great strength and your mighty hand.”

So these are the first 10 verses. I'm going to pray for Lindsey now. So if you could just maybe even stretch out your hand to the screen while we're praying, I'm just going to pray for Lindsey.

Lord Jesus, we want to thank You for her. We want to thank You for the words that You've been preparing and Lindsey's heart, and we pray that You would anoint her now to speak to us.

Amen.

Talk

[Lindsey Attwood:]

Thank you, Andrew. And I don't know if you remember, quite a long time ago, a number of weeks ago, I did another talk about the Song of Songs. And it's all about the bridegroom and His bride. And it's the wonderful, amazing picture of God's love and commitment to us. And I don't know if any of you watched Luke and Ruth getting married last weekend? I was watching on YouTube because obviously I couldn't be there. And it was just so beautiful, and it was just a reminder to me of what it's like about Jesus and His bride. I talked a little bit about God's investment in me and how, over a number of years, I've really felt Him talk to me about being His bride and about His commitment to me.

And interestingly, that's all lovely, and but He's begun to disciple me, and actually to prepare my heart to follow Him in new ways and more closely. So this week when I was praying He mentioned Nehemiah and I will get to that. But He also seemed to suggest, you know, “I talked about preparing your heart.” So me being a bit of a researcher, I decided to look at what does it mean to prepare your heart? So I love Google, so I did a bit of googling and looked at various articles on it. And these are some findings that I found.

- I think it includes having a tender heart to begin with: one that's a heart of flesh and not of stone. Sometimes in the Bible God talks about Him changing our hearts of stone into hearts of flesh.
- Another thing is having a clean heart. And that basically means confessing any sin, and, I think, being really honest about our real struggles. I've learned not to hide things from God. And I've felt increasingly that He asked me to have access to the whole of me, which I think is actually quite, quite scary. It's sort of a... I don't know, just going deeper with me.
- The other thing is a willing and obedient heart, and a humble heart, and one that's basically yielded and devoted and surrendered to God, ... which sounds all amazingly simple, which isn't it. It sounds incredible, we know it's sort of true, but it's really hard. And it's a process. I always think God talks to me about His process, and it will take a long time, probably the whole of my earthly life.

I think in the last few, probably couple of, years, one of the most important ways of preparing my heart has been to read the Bible more and more, and asking before I do, the Holy Spirit to fill me, so that I can listen to what it says. I don't know if you've heard the phrase, that just the Word of God by itself can make you dry up, and the Spirit on its own can make you blow up, but the two together make you grow up, and I'm sure lots of you've heard that phrase before.

Andrew over the last few weeks has been looking at the whole Gospel and what it means again. And that this is something He's felt really increasingly called to since he's been on General Synod. It's basically having our foundations based on the Word of God, and actually trusting what it says, and do we trust what it says? And having it live at the core of who we are. In Jeremiah 31 verses 31 to 33, so, famous bits from Jeremiah, and it says this:

31 'The days are coming,' declares the LORD, 'when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah.

32 It will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them,' declares the LORD.

33 'This is the covenant that I will make with the people of Israel after that time,' declares the LORD.

'I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts.
I will be their God, and they will be my people.'

When praying recently, I was just praying and I felt God brought to mind Nehemiah. Now I don't know much about Nehemiah, I'm not like Denise who's an amazing Bible scholar in a way, but it led me down a sort of rabbit-hole of looking at Nehemiah, and then Ezra, because I didn't realise Ezra and Nehemiah are written quite closely together or even by the same author. I don't think it was about academics, I think He gave me the word for a reason. Many months ago incidentally, because it's all about walls, I was staring at a friend's house or in their garden waiting for them to come back, we would have gone to visit them. And I don't normally go around staring at walls, but I remember even then, God saying something about needing His people to build His house, not just concentrating on looking after my own family, my own little kingdom and concerns. It was just a little thought He put in there, and I believe He's building on that.

Incidentally Ezra, if you didn't know this, was a priest who had led the exiles back to Jerusalem. This is after they'd been taken to Babylon. He devoted himself to God's laws. In Ezra 7 verse 10 it says,

10 For Ezra had devoted himself to the study and observance of the Law of the LORD, and to teaching its decrees and laws in Israel.

The book contrasts purity with compromise. And it was written at a time when local religions seduced the returned exiles. Ezra helped the people to remember that God was holy. Now this is something I've been doing over the years: I felt really called to be fed by Scripture and to be nourished by it, and also just to stand on it. And I felt called to test and pray about it. This is a word that often people have given to me in the past, actually it's from Psalm 119 verse 105, it says,

105 Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path.

Now in contrast, Nehemiah, I don't know, lots of you might know about Nehemiah. He was also an exiled Jew who eventually became governor of Israel, and restored the broken-down walls of Jerusalem. He had been cup-bearer to King Artaxerxes, I think that's the name of it (had to look that up). The events happened around 444 to 432 BC. However, there's so much to say about it and it's not really what I want to do, to give you a history lesson on both of them, but I would suggest you read it, along with Esther, and even the Book of Esther. That's an interesting point. Nehemiah was an amazing strategist who practically organised the rebuilding of Jerusalem's walls that had been broken after the Jews were exiled. And if you want to know more, my suggestion is you look at the Bible Project on YouTube¹ because they give an amazing overview of these two prophets and do a bit of studying yourself.

The reason I feel called to look at Nehemiah chapter 1 is because it's all about mourning and fasting over the walls of Jerusalem being burned and broken. And on behalf of the people he confesses the sins of Israel, including His own. He wants the Name of the Lord to be revered again. This is the key thing. God's Name is to be honoured above everything. This is what I think God is perhaps drawing our attention to, that His Name be worshipped above every other name. He says in verse 11,

11 “Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of this your servant and to the prayer of your servants who delight in revering your name.”

Nehemiah, like Ezra, was mourning because people had forgotten who God was and had stopped worshipping Him. As I said before, I think God seems to be bringing us back to the very core of what the Gospel is. And we've also spent lots of time talking about mission. But I think maybe the two go hand in hand: in order to mission we need to understand what that mission is and have a grasp of God's Word, and what it is a reminder of, who He is, and first and foremost, a call to worship Him. In the Old Testament, when the people of God forgot who they were and worshipped other gods and drifted away, they ended up in captivity, often to other nations. I think God showed me this passage because in order for us to really understand mission, we need to remember who we are, and that we are following a King who asks us to follow and obey Him. It goes back all the way to preparing our hearts, and remembering the Word of God and its firm foundations. We need to repent when we've got this wrong and gone adrift. I do sort-of wonder whether sometimes we've minimised what it is, what sin is, and things like that, and maybe God is bringing us back a little bit. I was struck many months ago, actually I read this and I had to try and find it, and it says in Judges 21 verse 25 [KJV]

In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes.

Does that sound familiar? Because in a way, I think it's what a lot of us do now. “Every man did that, which was right in his own eyes.” I don't think following somebody is necessarily seen in a positive light - individual choice is celebrated. I don't know how many times we hear it, like in the words ‘follow your dreams’, and ‘be true to yourself’. We may not think of it as following idols as the Israelites did, but it does put ourselves or even myself, often at the centre of worship. This is the culture which most of us live in - we don't even really know it. It's hard to be told what to do. It might feel really alien. And we may not even be aware that we are doing this. And perhaps we sort-of want God to do our bidding a bit? without the cost of seeking Him and His ways. And, again, I've had a little note from God, when I felt a bit sorry for myself: “Shall I worship you?” And I had a picture once, of God at my feet and I felt a bit weird - it was like a really strange picture and it was a bit of tongue-in-cheek, and God being a bit cheeky with me. But it was a little bit of a sting. But it wakes me up to the fact that I need to worship God and delight

1 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MkETkRv9tG8>

in Him, not the other way around. He delights in me and He's wooed me as His bride. But it's so I can actually see Him for who He is. John chapter 1 [verse 1], it's a very famous first we all know:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

Now we are called to follow the Living Word. We know that Jesus Himself embodies the whole Word of God, that the Old Testament is pointing to Him, and He becomes the Word itself. And He's been pushing me a little bit more recently into being trained as a disciple. I know, I don't know about you, but I can be a little bit inflexible when God interrupts me, asking me to let go my own agenda, and follow His. I don't know if you've ever had that yourself, where you feel God prompting you? And I know for myself, I've got a bit of stubbornness. My mum, if she's watching this, knows that I used to be quite stubborn as a child, and I could be quite naughty and put my foot down. I think it's very hard with God, but I can't get away from it: He'll, He'll chase me. But this is again where the tender heart comes in: that sense of being tended towards God, not having a heart of flesh, and one that says 'yes' not easily. And just the last couple of weeks I had to cancel some work due to COVID restrictions (it's to do with the rule of six). And it's actually quite hard to suddenly change your plans and think, "God might be in this maybe," and letting Him have that space. But sometimes it's a bit of fear of space. And what I'm going to do instead, how I fill that? I think it's caused me to pray more and seek God's face, and not try and make things happen, but to wait and listen.

Sometimes I think relying on God can feel almost foolish. And I can get challenged, especially by, say, my daughters who are not in the same place as perhaps both myself and Andrew are. And it sometimes doesn't feel very wise or educated: it's a little bit foolish to sit and wait on God over things. I think another time I was praying, I felt God in a gentle, slightly fun way said, "You think you're wise in your own sight." To which I sort-of thought to myself, "Ooh, thank you very much! I think I probably am!" Which wasn't probably the right answer. Isaiah 55 verse 8 says,

"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD.

This is quite hard, as it's saying that following Jesus may not always look like what we imagine, or that the way we see things may not be the way God does.

I have to say that this week, trying to actually do this talk has been a bit of a roller-coaster with loads of thoughts going through my head. I don't know of anybody doing a talk, it's always quite hard, and you go down and backwards and forwards, what you're going to say, but I felt His hand on me. One day it was "Fast cups of tea today." And I found that really hard: it's like "Oh, but I love my cup of tea!" Or it might be "Fast into your lunchtime." Then there's almost a sort of "And relax." I'm going "I don't understand it - it just feels like you're nudging me, that it would be something else." But it's like from Psalm 23, when David says, "Your rod and your staff they comfort me," I don't know, it's like gentle training, directing, it's getting me used to following His prompts. I suppose if I can do this in the small things, even the tiny things, that I'm more likely to do this in the big ones. It's like if you're training for a marathon, you have to do bits at a time. God doesn't just say, "Go and run 26 miles." I think they're doing that today, aren't they, doing the marathon. But He doesn't just say, "Go, run 26 miles!" Because you can't go from nought to 26 miles in a few hours or days: God knows how to train us, He knows how to do it in a way that is gentle, and things we can grasp hold of. Jesus says, doesn't He, Mark 4:23, over and over again in fact, Jesus says this: "If anyone has ears to hear, let them hear." He says, over and over again, "If anyone has ears to hear, let them hear."

I'll be honest and say that sometimes I can get a little bit moan-y. And as I said, it's about getting fitter. I go swimming regularly because I love swimming, and I've been going to the Sports Centre at Warwick University, and

I've felt God say, "Why do you go swimming?" And I'm thinking, "Well, it's because I want to get fitter." And He said, "Well, exactly." And, like God was saying, "I want to equip you better, so that you can stand firm when it's perhaps not so easy to do so." Again, He's preparing my heart to do so.

I've equally found just recently God calling me to think about maybe praying around the streets and asking for His Kingdom to come. But I needed to keep doing it more than once, perhaps, I'm really good at doing things once and then going "That's done," but I'm beginning to realise that we may need to do that over and over again. And thanks to Heather actually, she was the one recently who said "I really feel called to go out walking, I need to go walking and pray around the streets." And myself and Andrew went with her. I've started to have coffees with friends who aren't Christians, just to spend time with them and just see what God might be doing and seeing: is this person a person of peace? But it's again rather than one-off I probably need to keep doing it.

I'm trying to hear what He says, and be obedient, even when I'm afraid and cautious. I've found fasting quite helpful. It's not something we've actually talked a lot about, I think, but perhaps on another sermon we could talk about that and what/how you can do that. Because invariably when you get to be prompted by God, you're going to get spiritual warfare and other voices telling you not to do it or you get distracted.

We're not necessarily building literal broken walls, perhaps, but we are called to join in with the building of the Kingdom of Heaven, the Kingdom of Heaven, including making disciples who make disciples. It's something we've been told time and time again recently.

Like Nehemiah did, God wants me to care about His house and purposes, and not just my own. As I said earlier, it's about having a bigger view. To do that I need to climb higher, to be closer to Him, so that I can see what He sees and mourn the brokenness that He sees. Nehemiah was totally broken by what he saw and he was, you know, He fasted and prayed. I don't know if I do that enough: I don't know if I am broken enough. I don't see as God sees. But I want to care like Nehemiah did. I've decided I need God's heart. And that takes time and it needs to change my heart.

The other thing is that the building of the walls in Nehemiah needed the whole people of God to play their part with their skills. It was a team effort. But it all started with repentance and a willingness to obey and join in. It starts, I think, with humility and on our knees. I believe God wants to share His heart with us, so that He can share His purposes with us. Maybe this is what God is doing during this time of coronavirus: our normal way of life has been interrupted. It's perhaps time to reflect and come before the Lord in humility. And, I think, having silence and times where you can't fill it with lots of things is actually quite scary because it's silence? And it's almost allowing that small voice of God to break into that silence. What do we stand on? And do I actually trust His Word? And do I believe its message? 'Prepared heart' means that we can more easily open up the way to what God is doing. And I want to know God's heart for the world.

I don't think it's all doom and gloom. I don't think it's supposed to be "Oh, this is really, ... we should all, you know, get really get doom-and-gloom about it." We should be excited. Because it starts with the Bridegroom wooing us and calling us to prepare our hearts, so we're devoted to Jesus, the One who died for us, then joining in with the work of the Kingdom, each person using his or her gifts. We need to respond individually, but together we become a body.

I don't know, I've got my painting behind me I don't know if you can see, it's called *Preparing the Way* and I found a calling to paint that a couple of years ago now, even this morning I was painting bits of blue out because it was a bit too blue. But it's that sense of God leading the way, and us joining in? I don't know, interestingly about Nehemiah I was reading on about it - if you do read it, he actually was so good organising the people, who incidentally all worked in groups on the bit nearest where they lived or where they were. And the wall was completed in 51 days, which is incredible. That's teamwork.



In my prayer times God has been telling me that there is a harvest. I invite you to join me in preparing your hearts before the Lord, so we can listen together to what He is saying, and to join in with His mission. To do this we will need the support of one another when it gets tough or difficult. And I think we need a place where people can feel honest and more accountable and open about the struggles that they have. And we also need to share the temptations with each other, we face in a loving and supportive environment, and it will be messy sometimes, it won't always be clean and easy. It will be messy but we'll work together. This is teamwork. My prayer is, I think this is what God is saying, that He wants us to build the Kingdom together with Jesus at the centre as King. Amen.

So I just want to hand over to Andrew now.

Prayerful Response

[Andrew:]

Thank you, Lindsey, thank you very much. Rather than say a lot more straight away, I thought it would be good just to give everyone a minute or two of quiet. So I'm just going to be still now. I just want you to remain as quiet as you can, and let God bring to mind what was important for you to hear today. Be still.

[pause:]

So, Lord Jesus, would You give us soft hearts. Would You continue to prepare our hearts.

I ask this in Jesus' Name. Amen.

Interview of Michelle Harris by Andrew Attwood

[Andrew:]

Okay, I'm going to invite Michelle now to join me. Michelle is going to just do a bit of kind of question-and-answer with me because, like Lindsey, you know, we've all been on bits of journeys really over these last weeks, months and years. So I've just got a few questions I'm going to throw your way Michelle and you tell me what you think, okay?

Given these last months, in what ways do you think God has been reshaping, for example, your picture of Church?

[Michelle:]

I think it's not just over the last months, if I'm honest. I think it's actually over the last years, that God has been changing my idea of what Church is. So yeah, I think God's been changing my heart more and more, but it's not about coming to the church building on a Sunday (and I'm in the church building at the minute, I'm in the office) and absolutely that's the place where we can connect with Him and where community meets together. And you can have those kind-of incidental conversations, catching up with people, but that's not Church.

I think Church, more and more, is about the people. And I know we keep saying it and it's stuff that we kind-of know in our heads. But we forget to apply it to our lives? And so we end up kind-of going to church every Sunday and you kind-of get your refilling of the Spirit or whatever, and it's like actually God's been training me more and more that that's not what being Church is, it's about being Church out in life in everyday.

[Andrew:]

Really helpful. I mean likewise I've, I've been kind of been having to like relearn from scratch how important it is simply to share life together, and not sort-of formal meetings: you know, yes to services and yes to group times but actually eating together, socialising together. And then you've got something which you can connect other people into, who aren't necessarily Christian, so we've got something about it being a bit more organic, a bit more relational?

[Michelle:]

Yeah, and it's like the whole, ... like before lockdown started we were meeting together regularly, weren't we, with our families together? And that was a new thing to try out, to see how that worked, and it was so lovely seeing the way that my kids were learning from you and Lindsey and from Karen and Michael what life is about, what being a Christian is about, this being family together in that much more extended family way. And so, yeah, it's about the relationships outside of the Sundays or small groups or whatever.

[Andrew:]

Okay, well what about other things that have been developing with regard to your thoughts to do with, like Lindsey was saying, the Bible, the Gospel? What's been developing there?

[Michelle:]

[laughs] I've been on a bit of a journey lately, and so it was the last week and the week before, and I just had a week where I was really getting into Scripture, I think it was because of stuff that I was doing, so I felt like I had to do a bit more preparation than normal maybe, and, but I just love it, it's so enriching being able to get into the Bible and, like we do our Wednesday Bible study stuff.

And I've always envied Denise in her biblical knowledge, and I don't think that she even realises what a gift she has, and what a gift she is to other people and what an inspiration she is to other people. But I've loved getting into it. I've loved like finding out about what's behind it, about how it all connects together about... yeah, context and all that sort of stuff: it's just so enriching for me as an individual, like I feel like I'm being massively trained, and it's not like I'm doing anything special, it's not like I'm a major scholar or anything like that. I'm just, I haven't even got a degree in anything, never mind a biblical one. And that's my little secret that I haven't got a degree. [laughs] I'm very unqualified. But that's the point, is that I'm not qualified and yet I'm still able to dig into Scripture, and to train and to learn and yeah and it's given me so much more confidence in talking about God and talking about Jesus and talking about who He is and like trying to bring Him into my everyday conversations, like I was having a chat with a friend and yes she is a Christian, but I felt so much more confident during the conversation to just saying how's things with you and God at the minute? Where are things out with that and how's that doing? And, yeah, just normalising conversation about God and Jesus.

[Andrew:]

That's really good. And I guess it's familiarity with doing it, with making it normal to go a bit deeper. I mean, likewise for me. I'm absolutely delighted in doing talks about the Gospel because it's meant me really being sure of it,

which means I kind-of want to tell people about it, so it's released me in all kinds of ways. Given that you've experienced that level of richness in Scripture and you've had your eye on a different way of being Church, what might you say then to perhaps some other Christians who are beginning to question the inherited ways of doing Church, what might you say to them?

[Michelle:]

A couple of things I guess. It was interesting I was among various different Facebook groups and stuff for being a youth worker. And one of the American ones that I'm on, this guy posted this thing and it says, "I'm deeply concerned that the American Church," and actually I think it applies to all Church, "has missed the lesson God designed to teach us through shutdown. If we continue to focus solely on the weekend experience, and neglect the greater mission of discipleship, we've missed the point. Hype does not a disciple make." And I was like, "Whoa! Mind blown!" Right, that's what I think God has been teaching me, certainly and a lot of people throughout all of this time is that it's not about the Church experience, it's about being a disciple. We all need to change our mindsets and our hearts about our relationship with God, about our training, about what a disciple is. And the fact that we are told to be disciples and to go out and be and make disciples (and if you don't know what that is, then come and speak to us) firstly, but secondly, like if you're a Christian and you're not following that, then why? Like, you want to follow Jesus, you want to be a Christian? Well, being a Christian is being a disciple, and that means that we need to live life in the way that the Bible tells us to. So it's, yeah it's about the whole of our lives, not just about our weekly experiences. So yeah, come and talk to us - is one thing.

[Andrew:]

Maybe to finish, could you just perhaps pray for us? If you could pray for us in our relationship with the Bible, the Good News, maybe even our thoughts about Church? Just pray for us now.

[Michelle:]

Father God, thank You for the time that You've been giving us, where we've been able to change our mindsets about our relationship with You, about what being a Christian actually is. Thank You that You've been teaching me about the Gospel, and all of us about the Gospel, through the talks that have been going on during Church, and God, I do ask that You would help each one of us to really connect with what that is, to really connect with who we were before You sent Your Son to die for us. And then, to help us to connect with the fact that He died for us so that our sins can be forgiven, so that we can be in relationship with You for all eternity. And God I ask that You would bring to mind people that we can share that Good News with, that Gospel message with. And God, where we've been wrong in our thoughts about what Church is, I ask that You would help us to repent of those thoughts and You'd help us to change our minds, change our hearts and draw closer to You and that You would continue to train us and, yeah, help us to grow up in our faith as Lindsey was talking about earlier. Amen.

[Andrew:]

Thank you Michelle.

Prayers

Okay, we're just going to continue now and just a little bit more of openness to God so, again, just a moment of stillness. If you feel like God is touching you, speaking to you, can I just encourage you while I pray again, maybe have your hands open as a physical sign to God, you saying, Yes, I want to get this. I want to learn, I want to grow. Let's pray.

Holy Spirit, prepare our hearts. Come now, Holy Spirit, prepare our hearts, more and more.

Come, Holy Spirit.

I just want to pray for those who are listening, for those who are watching.

Holy Spirit, would You birth a new open soft-hearted attitude in us, tender and responsive to what You are saying and doing. Birth something new in us, Holy Spirit. I want to pray, Holy Spirit, for those who are open for a new and deeper focus and passion for Jesus, more focused on Jesus, Lord, and less focused on ourselves. Holy Spirit, come now and start to move our focus away from ourselves and towards Jesus. Come, Holy Spirit.

I want to pray too, Father, that You would draw us back to Your Word. Jesus, You said "If you love me, you will obey my commands." We can't say that we love You if we don't do what You say. So I pray now, Lord, for a new willing submissiveness to the words of the Bible as a way of expressing our love for Jesus. Would You draw us back to the scriptures? Come, Holy Spirit. Give us a tender heart towards Your written Word. And likewise, Lord, I pray for a new experience of the Good News of Jesus, even if some of us have been Christians many years. I pray, by the power of Your Spirit, that we would hear it like for the first time. How wonderful it is, what Jesus has done. How amazing it is that the King is reigning, because of His death and His resurrection. Help us to hear it new again. I pray, Lord, for a new joy in our salvation, of knowledge of being rescued.

And finally, Lord, I want to pray that we would see others as You see them: people that You have compassion on, people that You care about, but people who are presently lost without You. Lord, help us to have honest eyes to see how lost others are who don't know You, friends, relatives, even people on our street, people we work with, people who are lost without Christ. Birth within us, Father God, the same compassion that Jesus had when He cast His eyes across the crowds, who saw them as sheep without a shepherd. And I pray Lord, that You would motivate us to want to share the Good News that we have heard, and share with them. So Holy Spirit, do a sovereign work in us through this lockdown, through this time of COVID. Change us, prepare our hearts, soften our hearts, so that we're flexible and adaptive, as You reshape and reform us as a Church in Jesus' Name. Amen.

Blessing

So I'm going to finish with a simple prayer of blessing now. Thank you for joining us today, it's been good to have Lindsey and Michelle contributing, it's been great to hear from them. We would love your feedback: if you've got any responses or comments do leave them either online or email us at the office. But I'm just going to pray God's blessing on you now and then there'll be a song to help us remain focused on God,

Father, Your nature is to bless, Your nature is to care. And so in Your Name I pray for Your blessing on all those who are watching today.

I bless you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

May God be with you today and through the remainder of this week.
Bye for now. Good to see you.

Song: The Potter's Hand

Verse 1:

Beautiful Lord, wonderful Saviour
I know for sure, all of my days
Are held in your hands,
Crafted into your perfect plan

Verse 2:

You gently call me into Your presence
Guiding me by Your Holy Spirit
Teach me dear Lord
To live all of my life through Your eyes

Bridge:

I'm captured by Your Holy calling
Set me apart,
I know You're drawing me to Yourself
Lead me Lord I pray

Chorus:

Take me and mould me,
Use me, fill me
I give my life to the Potter's hand
Hold me, You guide me,
Lead me, walk beside me
I give my life to the Potter's hand

Repeat verse 2

Bridge

Chorus x 2

[Transcribed by Hamish Blair with help from <https://otter.ai>]

[NIVUK 2011 unless otherwise stated] Extracts from the Holy Bible, New International Version Anglicised, copyright © 1979, 1984 Biblica, formerly International Bible Society. [Used by permission](#). All rights reserved. 'NIV' is a registered trademark of Biblica. UK trademark number 1448790

[NIVUK 1984] Extracts from the Holy Bible, New International Version Anglicised, copyright © 1979, 1984 Biblica, formerly International Bible Society. [Used by permission](#). All rights reserved. 'NIV' is a registered trademark of Biblica. UK trademark number 1448790

[KJV] Scripture quotations from The Authorized (King James) Version. Rights in the Authorized Version in the United Kingdom are vested in the Crown. Reproduced by permission of the Crown's patentee, Cambridge University Press

Mighty To Save (Everyone needs compassion) by Reuben Morgan & Ben Fielding, Copyright © 2006 Hillsong Music. Used by permission.

The Potter's Hand – Words by Darlene Zschech. Copyright © 1997 Hillsong Music. Used by permission.