

THIS IS CHURCH SERIES COMMUNITY GUIDE



WELCOME

We are living in uncertain times in our culture as well as in our church. In September 2021, drawing on Isaiah 43, we identified that All Saints would be going through 'waves of change' as we move in the direction that we believe God is leading us.

Two years in, there is a visceral experience of change that is now being felt among us - many people are disquieted by this, and many people are excited by this, with a sizeable number in between. The purpose of this series is to take stock on four markers of what Church is and can be, that will help us stay anchored to Jesus amid the turbulence:

- We are rooted
- We are set apart
- We go beyond our walls
- We are One Body and everybody gets to play.

Part of this series will be to encourage those in your Community to fill out two 'Spiritual Gifts surveys.' We think that to do two slightly different versions a couple of days apart will give you a balanced view of what yours might be in this season. This will be introduced in session one and you will have the whole series to fill these in.

Our prayer is that you will continue to be inspired to remain close to Jesus and develop in your understanding of how you can play your part in our unfolding story together in 2024 and beyond.

Grace and peace.

Tina Trevett
Craig Gaudion

(Community Guide Writers)

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WEEK 1: ROOTED

OPENING PRAYER/ WORSHIP:

Gather around in a comfortable space to pray and worship. You may want to start in silence, listen to a worship track or sing some worship songs together. Pray that the Holy Spirit would lead your time together.

HAVE SOMEONE READ THIS INTRO:

Michael Frost, in his book *Exiles*, says 'The primary ideological voices of our time are the voices of autonomy ... an individualistic approach which sees no need for recourse to any outside authority to validate personal choices and decision making'. In other words, 'The only voices that I will allow to shape my life are my own and those that reinforce what I believe.'

A consequence of this is that it gets very hard to respect and love others if we only listen to those in our own 'tribe' and 'cancel' anyone who isn't us, whether that be political, sociological, economic, LGBTQIA+ communities, or other religious communities etc.

Today we look at the first mark of what it means to be church in a world of change, turbulence and tribalism and competing stories. We look at what it means to be rooted, to have roots in a particular Story - the biblical story (worldview).

INTRO QUESTIONS:

If in a larger Community, it may be helpful to break into smaller groups of two or three.

- What is your response to the summaries above?
- How far do you think 'the Church' today is shaped and impacted by these values? Can you give some specific examples?

ASK SOMEONE TO READ THIS INTRO TO THE PASSAGE

One of the earliest declarations of Christian faith is called the Nicene Creed (See page 5). Towards the end of this Creed we declare that: 'We believe in One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic church.' What does it mean to be apostolic?

At a very basic level this says we are rooted in something which extends back over centuries; something which we have to take seriously. To be rooted in which every culture it has lived in, the Church has always drawn on the worldview and authority of the Bible/ Scripture as primary way to do this.

Bible expert N.T. Wright argues that 'the authority of scripture is really a shorthand for the authority of God exercised through scripture' and he goes on to say that the way we experience and understand that today is intrinsically linked to the authority of our accredited church leaders who have the responsibility to 'proclaim the word in the power of the Spirit.'

It is this faithful preaching of the word which has come down to us in the Bible from the authoritative teaching of the Apostles, confirmed by the early church councils, which reminds us of our purpose and our position as beloved children of God, and which provides the foundational Story (worldview) on which we are called to base our lives.

Read a few, if not all, the following passages and then discuss the questions below.

1 Tim. 4:6 -16;

2 Timothy 3:14-4:5.

Acts 20:12 -31

James 3:1

2 Tim. 1:11-13;

2 Peter 1:12- 21.

Ephesians 4: 13-16

Lk. 1:1- 4;

Galatians 1:6-11

Titus 1:1- 9, 2:1

- What do these verses show us about how the apostles regarded the gospel they were preaching?
- What patterns of leadership emerge as new churches were being planted through the missionary activity of the early church?
- What might this look like in All Saints?
- What does this say to us today about how we should respond to the preaching and teaching of those who have been called and appointed to lead our churches?
- What questions or tensions might this raise for you in terms of your apprenticeship to Jesus and being rooted in him?
- Is there a posture or action that God may be stirring up within you to take to resolve this tension?

PERSONAL REFLECTION QUESTION:

(Take 5 minutes to respond to this question in a journal or in the space provided on the next page)

- What do you sense God inviting you to do in light of the Bible passage and your discussions today? After writing, if you feel comfortable to do so, would you like to share with your Community so they can support, encourage and pray for you for this week?

Leaders allow at least 5 mins, giving people space to think, write, reflect and then where necessary to allow for sharing from those who would like this. Silence is to be encouraged at this point!

Notes:

PRACTICE OVER THE MONTH: SPIRITUAL GIFTS AUDIT.

Over the next four sessions, we invite you to complete one of the Gifts questionnaires that your Community leaders will provide you with.

Spend some time during the month reflecting on these questions:

- What were the two or three key gifts that this exercise highlighted for you?
- Was there anything surprising in your results?
- Has this highlighted gifts you have not recognised in yourself before?
- Where are you already using your gifts as part of the church family?
- Has doing this exercise caused you to rethink how you contribute to the church family?
- Are there any barriers that might prevent you from following through on these results?
- Is God calling you to use your gifts in a new way of serving?
- What would be a helpful next step for you?
- Is there someone you need to talk to?
- Do you need some advice or training in order to put this into practice?

Here are the links to the surveys, if you would prefer to download them yourself.

<https://spiritualgiftstest.com/>

<https://www.lifeway.com/en/articles/women-leadership-spiritual-gifts-growth-service>

CLOSING PRAYER

As we close today there are a number of things you could pray for as a Community.

- Our leaders.
- Our church continuing to remain rooted and flourishing in the biblical Story.
- Each other as we seek to share the Good News of Jesus in our context.

Feel free to choose one or more of these topics as you close your time together.

APPENDIX FOR SESSION 1

THE NICENE CREED (381 A.D)

We believe in one God,
the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and
unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten
of the Father,
God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not
made, of one Being with the Father;
through him all things were made.

For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven,
was incarnate from the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and was made man.

For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered death and was buried.

On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures;
he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom
will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from
the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son is worshipped and
glorified, who has spoken through the prophets.

We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church. We acknowledge one
baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look for the resurrection of the dead,
and the life of the world to come.

Amen.

Week 2 Instructions

Please read below:

The content for Week 3 - 'Beyond Walls' is a retread session from our Vision Series 2023. We have included this just in case your Community didn't get a chance to do this first time around or if you would like to see how things have developed for you regarding an area of mission.

Because some Communities have already have done this and might not want to repeat, there are a couple of options:

Option A:

Week 2, Do the session - Set Apart

Week 3 Do the session - Beyond Walls

Option B:

Week 2, Do the Group study on Holiness by the 'Bible Project' (additional resource). If you can watch the short video by Bible Project (see below.

Week 3, Do the session - Set Apart

Bible Project Study notes for Holiness link:

<https://d1bsmz3sdihplr.cloudfront.net/media/Study%20Notes/Holiness-Study-Guide.pdf>

Link for Holiness Video:

https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/holiness/?utm_source=web_social_share&medium=shared_video

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WEEK 2 / 3 (OPTION B) : SET APART

OPENING PRAYER/ WORSHIP:

Gather around in a comfortable space to pray and worship. You may want to start in silence, listen to a worship track or sing some worship songs together. Pray that the Holy Spirit would lead your time together.

HAVE SOMEONE READ THIS INTRO:

Today we look at the second mark of what it means to be church amid a world and culture full of change and disruption: Holiness. If you have used the [Bible Project](#) study guide on 'Holiness', this follows on nicely from that study. Holiness means 'to be set apart' or to be 'starkly distinct' from the world for the sake of the world. Holiness firstly characterizes the God we know as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, who is distinct from God's creation in the sense that He is the source of all goodness, purity, and power. There is none like Him.

However, throughout the pages of Scripture we read the identity of God to his people: 'You shall be holy as I am holy.' (e.g. 1 Peter 1:16, amongst many other passages). Today we develop this theme of holiness as one of the key vocations of every individual disciple of Jesus and of every church.

INTRO QUESTIONS:

If in a larger Community, it may be helpful to break into smaller groups of two or three:

- 'Sin', in biblical terms means literally to, 'miss the mark', to fall short of God's standards of holiness and goodness. It is a power that enslaves us as well as a series of choices that we make in rebellion and disobedience to God. If sin can be so destructive, why is it so appealing?
- What specific areas of brokenness, rebellion and sin in God's world bring you the most distress? Why is this?
- In some places, 'holiness' can mean 'self-righteousness or arrogance. How does the word 'holiness' resonate with you? How do you think our surrounding culture understands holiness? Why?

ASK SOMEONE TO READ THIS INTRO TO THE PASSAGE:

The apostle Peter, formerly, one of Jesus' inner twelve disciples, writes this letter to Christians scattered over the country that we would know as modern day Turkey. He's going to be using images, metaphors, phrases from the Old Testament, particularly the images of priests and the Temple, foreigners and exiles, to describe the kind of set apart life, the holy life that the Church is called towards. Let's take some time to explore the calling of holiness through these lenses.

ASK SOMEONE TO READ THIS PASSAGE: 1 PETER 2:9-12

THEN BREAK INTO SMALLER GROUPS TO DISCUSS THESE QUESTIONS BELOW.

- Which words, phrases or images stand out to you from the reading(s)?
- Did anything shock, surprise or resonate with you in particular?
- Read verses 9 and 10 again. What is the significance of the call to holiness being addressed to a community, not just to an individual?
- Read verse 11 again. Do you resonate with the reality that the Church is a 'foreigner and exile' in the world today? Why/ why not?
- What are the sinful desires that wage war over you personally in this season? It could be anything from envy to lust to greed etc. How are you overcoming these? Where is the struggle? How might your Community help or support in this area?
- What are the distinctive ways that you believe All Saints may be called to press into that would cause the people of Hoole, Chester and beyond to give glory to God?
- Is there a tension of living within the world (being subject to earthly rulers) and living for God? (God's slaves?) Where do you feel this tension most keenly in your life and the life of our church?

Personal Reflection:

Take some time for silence to write down in the space below.

What do you sense God inviting you do in light of the Bible passage and your discussions today? What is the one step over the course of this next month that would help you personally live in the creative tension of living in but not of the world? Of being distinct, set apart and holy as part of God’s holy people?

Notes:



FINAL PRAYER: CONFESSION (LEADER OR OTHER TO READ OUT)

When we become Christians our sins are wiped away and we are given a new life. However we recognise that there are parts of the old life before we trusted Jesus that still have their hold on us.

This is where The ancient practice of confession can help us. Along with receiving truth and teaching, living the spiritual practices and living in community, confession can often be a gateway or marker along the journey to submitting our whole selves to God and allowing his Spirit to do his work of transformation.

We have complete freedom to confess alone to God in private, but there can be something powerful about doing this as a corporate act.

So may we finish our time today by engaging in this simple act of confession, drawing on words from Scripture and the Church of England daily prayer book.

A SIMPLE ACT OF CONFESSION:

Leader:

Seek the Lord while he may be found,

All: call upon him while he is near.

Leader:

Let the wicked abandon their ways

All: and the unrighteous their thoughts.

Leader:

Turn back to the Lord, who will have mercy;

All: to our God who will richly pardon.

A time of silence and self-examination may be kept.

All: Lord God,

we have sinned against you;

we have done evil in your sight.

We are sorry and repent.

Have mercy on us according to your love.

Wash away our wrongdoing and cleanse us from our sin.

Renew a right spirit within us

and restore us to the joy of your salvation,

through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Leader:

May the Father of all mercies

cleanse us from our sins,

and restore us in his image

to the praise and glory of his name,

through Jesus Christ our Lord.

All: Amen.

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WEEK 3 (OPTION A)

OPENING PRAYER/ WORSHIP:

Gather around in a comfortable space to pray and worship. You may want to start in silence, listen to a worship track or sing some worship songs together. Pray that the Holy Spirit would lead your time together.

HAVE SOMEONE READ THIS INTRO:

This week we look at our third marker for what it is to be church in a changing and turbulent time: Missional. The word mission comes from the latin, 'missio', which means to send. We are reminder that the Church is a people not a building and it is called to go and make disciples which means going beyond our usual walls and boundaries, to where and to whomever God calls us. Let's explore this below.

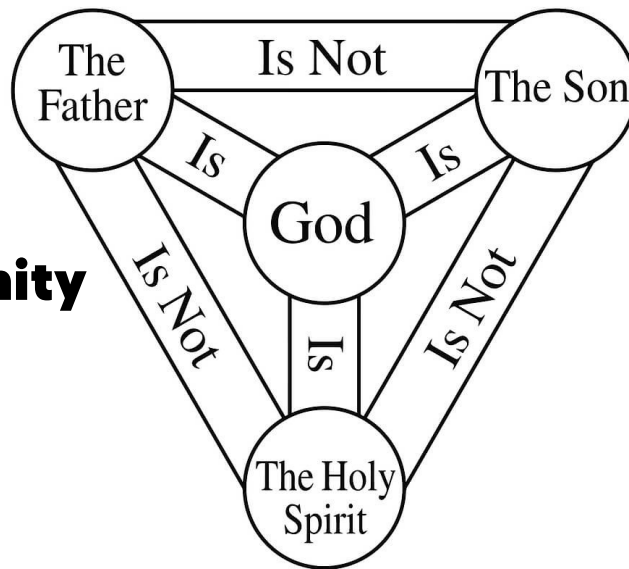
INTRO QUESTIONS:

If in a larger Community, it may be helpful to break into smaller groups of two or three.

- Have you been able to do your spiritual gifts questionnaire yet? If not, remember to bring in your results for next week!
- Do you know anyone who has been an overseas missionary? If so, where did they go, what did they do? How did it go?
- What kind of thoughts and feelings does the word 'mission' provoke in you?

ASK SOMEONE TO READ THIS OUT:

One of the core truths that is discovered in the Bible and the teaching of Jesus in person, by those early disciples, is that God is One (there is no other god), but is three persons (Father, Son and Holy Spirit). This is a huge mystery in one sense (as you'd expect when we talk about God!). Today we don't have time to get into this foundational Christian belief in much detail. What we want to emphasise, however, is that 'mission' doesn't begin with the Church, but with God. Look at the diagram on the next page:



The Holy Trinity

This is a limited attempt to explain the tri (threeness) and unity (oneness) of God, which is where we get the word 'Trinity' from. The witness of 2000 years of Church belief and action is that God is a God of 'mission' and that the three persons of the Trinity have different roles within this mission. The Father 'Sent' the Son to the world to rescue it (John 3v16), The Son sent the Holy Spirit to be with and empower the Church and the Spirit sends the Church to the world to share the Good News of the Kingdom of God. Let's look at a few passages from Scripture to start exploring what it is to be sent in mission.

CONSIDER DIVIDING INTO SMALLER GROUPS AND ASK SOMEONE TO READ A COUPLE OF THESE PASSAGE(S):

- | | |
|--------------------|-----------------------|
| + MATTHEW 28v16-20 | 1 Peter 4v7-11 |
| + JOHN 20v19-23 | 1 Corinthians 12v4-11 |
| + ACTS 1v4-8 | Hebrews 13:1-3 |

- Which words, phrases or images stand out to you from the reading(s)?
- Why is it important to be empowered by the Holy Spirit for mission?
- Do you have any examples of being empowered by the Spirit for mission
If so, please discuss.

Notes:

PERSONAL REFLECTION QUESTION:

Take some time to think about what God might be stirring up for you in terms of your being empowered by the Spirit into mission as an individual and as a Community. Are there any people or places where you think God might be calling you? Spend some time on this and then discuss in smaller groups.

Leaders allow at least 5 mins, giving people space to think, write, reflect and then where necessary to allow for sharing from those who would like this. Silence is to be encouraged at this point!

PEOPLE	God may be sending me to...	God may want our Community to reach out to....
PLACES	God may be sending me to...	God may want our Community to reach out to....

IF THERE IS TIME: COMMUNITY MISSION AUDIT

Mission can be expressed in many different ways. Using your personal reflection from the previous page, add to these four areas below any idea, Bible passages, prayer, Words, where God may be prompting you and your Community to develop a missional presence, project or posture. In the thought bubble in the middle, see if you can come up with ONE missional idea that God may be sending you towards. Discuss with your Community to see if there are overlaps! This is just a start so don't worry about having anything fully formed.

Our invitation will be to consider something termly or monthly in the new year.

JUSTICE

e.g. Luke 4v18-19

HOSPITALITY

e.g. Hebrews 13v1-13

WORK

e.g. Colossians 3v17

ANNOUNCING THE GOSPEL

e.g. 1 Peter 3v15

PREPARATION FOR THE LAST SESSION:

Spiritual Gifts Questionnaire

Please bring your completed Gifts questionnaire to this session so that we can discuss the ways the results might help us find or develop our role within our church family.

You might find it helpful to think through the results of your gifts questionnaire before the session in the light of today's passages (see below) and come prepared with any questions or observations you have as a result of doing this exercise.

Notes:

Bible passages: 1 Cor.12; Romans12:1-8; Ephesians 4:11-16

Week 4: One Body and Everybody

OPENING PRAYER/ WORSHIP:

Gather around in a comfortable space to pray and worship. You may want to start in silence, listen to a worship track or sing some worship songs together. Pray that the Holy Spirit would lead your time together.

HAVE SOMEONE READ THIS INTRO:

The below passages give a compelling vision of being a church that is one under the Lordship of Jesus and which encourages everyone to play their part (including a call to get involved through signing up for ministries etc.).

Whilst many recognise that their primary use of their gifts is in their regular everyday job, this does not let us off the hook when it comes to using our gifts within and for the benefit of our church family - anymore than being in full-time work or full-time church ministry lets us off contributing our time and skills to our families at home. Let's look at our fourth marker: Unity and Diversity in the Church.

READ: 1 COR.12; ROMANS 12:1-8; EPHESIANS 4:11-16

You might find it helpful to list all the different gifts that are listed in these passages:

Notes:

As you can see there is a great variety of gifts and we think the lists are indicative – given as examples – and not exhaustive.

If in a larger Community, it may be helpful to break into smaller groups of two or three with each smaller group re-reading one of the passages before answering the questions below.

- What do we learn from these passages about the variety of gifts?
- What does Paul say is the main purpose of such a range of gifts?
- What words or phrases stand out for you?
- How do these relate to how you understand your own gifts?
- If you have been in smaller groups you might like to come back together to share your findings.

HAVE SOMEONE READ THIS OUT:

A further aspect of using our gifts is related to our life stages. There are no hard and fast rules about this and God may and does call us into many ministries regardless of our age, personal circumstances and commitments. This is all part of what Paul calls ‘offering our bodies as living sacrifices’.

In her Advent book, *The Meaning is in the Waiting*, Paula Gooder says ‘Even those who are more or less comfortably established in doing something to which they have been called by God cannot be certain that tomorrow, next month or next year that this calling will remain the same.’

I (Tina) can resonate with that: if I had not followed God’s call to leave a church I was comfortable in, where I had been called to serve as a Reader, not gone through a time of searching and uncertainty before moving home and church (in Somerset) I would not have had ten exciting, demanding and incredibly rewarding years working for a Bible college ... and probably wouldn’t have ended up in Chester and All Saints.

Obedying God’s call may well involve a sacrifice in terms of time, money and personal goals and ambitions; or it may just involve a re-think of practicalities around managing serving and childcare on a Sunday morning for example. And that might well involve another member of the church family stepping in to help. It can be a very helpful and effective way of getting to know people and mixing across age groups.

It might be helpful to ask if there is anyone in the group who has had the experience of hearing and responding to God's call to get involved in a specific ministry or to change direction.

Reviewing the questionnaires

It might be helpful to do this as a group if you feel comfortable with sharing your findings as often it is people who know us well who can confirm and encourage us as we explore what this might look like in practice.

- What were the two or three key gifts that this exercise highlighted for you?
- Was there anything surprising in your results?
- Where are you already using your gifts as part of the church family?
- Has doing this exercise caused you to rethink how you contribute to the church family?
- Are there any barriers that might prevent you from following through on these results?
- What would be a helpful next step for you?
- Is there someone you need to talk to?
- Do you need some advice or training in order to put this into practice?

- If, following your discussion with your community leaders, you would find it helpful to talk to someone about taking any of this further then please, in the first instance, contact tina.trevett@allsaints.church and I will arrange for you to be put in touch with the relevant person.

PRAY FOR EACH OTHER:

It would be good to end today's session by praying for each other focusing on any specific questions, concerns and positive responses that have arisen.

FURTHER RESOURCES FOR GOING DEEPER

Books

Being Human

Jo Frost and Peter Lynas

Why the Bible Matters

Mark Erre

Invisible Divides

Natalie Williams and Paul Brown

Know your Spiritual Gifts

Mark Stibbe

The Mission of God's People

Christopher J.H. Wright

Telling a Better Story

Joshua D. Chatraw

Streams of Living Water

Richard Foster

Podcasts

Truth over Tribe

Shifting Culture

Theology in the Raw

This Cultural Moment

