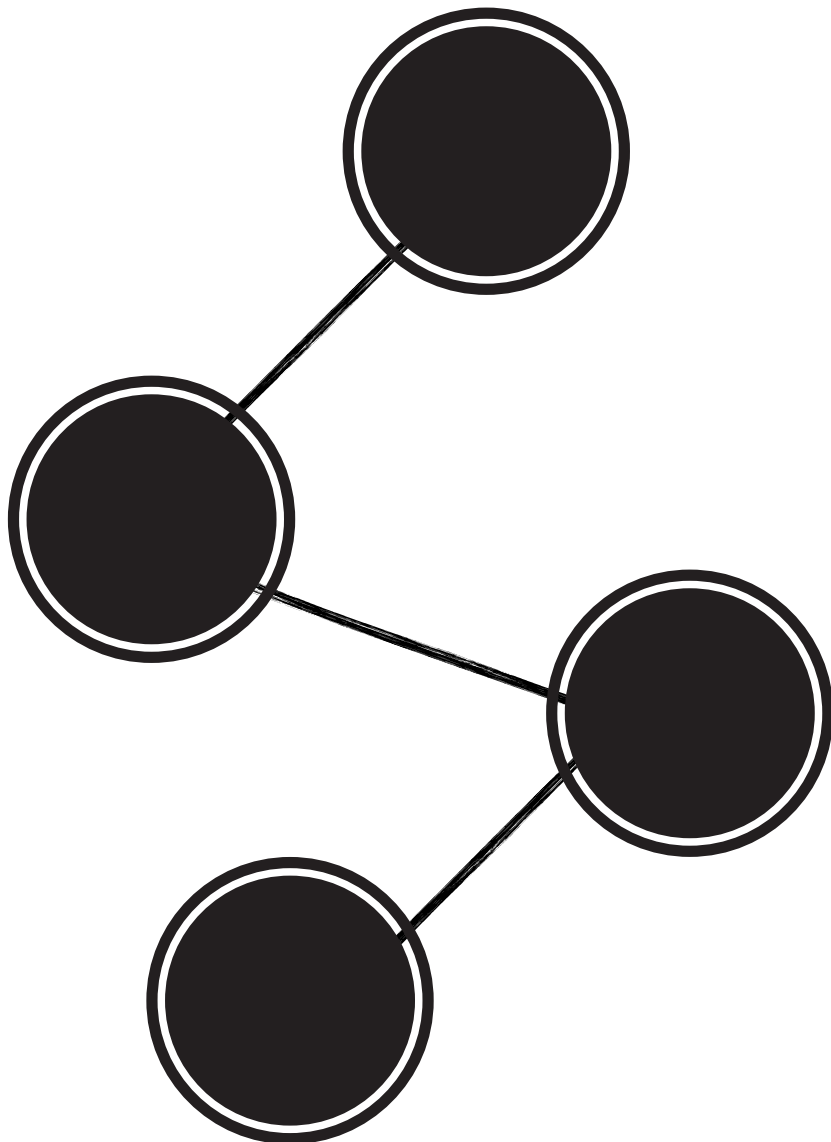


VISION SERIES 2024

COMMUNITY GUIDE



WELCOME

Introduction:

We have spent the last few years as a church developing our vision and our discipleship pathway. The call for us over these next few years is to live it out together. We have included the key elements of our vision in the below pages to refresh your memory.

Rather than trying to cram everything into a few weeks, we are going to spend the next year looking at different parts of our vision and discipleship pathway. This will help us to reflect and put these things into practice at a more sustainable pace. There will be less content, but more opportunity for prayer and social times and mission.

Your Community Leaders will be able to suggest a rhythm that works well for your group. Here is one suggested rhythm:

For weekly groups:

Week 1: Content

Week 2: Prayer

Week 3: Social/Mission*

Week 4: Content

Week 5: Social/Mission*

Week 6: Prayer

(A day in the month/term – social)

For bi-weekly groups:

Week 1: Content

Week 2: Prayer

Week 3: Content

Week 4: Mission*

(A day in the month/term – Social).

***'What do we mean by 'Mission?'**

Mission is a broad theme, however in the context of All Saints Communities, we mean using a session where you can represent Jesus to people who don't yet know him. This may need to be done on a different or time to when you usually meet, so use this as a replacement for a 'normal' meeting. We certainly don't want this to be stressful for you, so if you can't do something, that's ok.

On the other hand, we hope that you can give something a go, where possible, to stretch your faith and do something fun and outward-looking together. Here are some ideas, but we're sure you'll find even more creative ways to bless your neighbourhood or area:

- If you're celebrating a birthday, consider having a mix of inviting neighbours, non-Christian family members and members from your All Saints Community together.
- Turn up as a Community (pre-announced!) and mend/ paint/ fix/ shift/ garden for a neighbour/friend/colleague.
- Prayer walk an area/ street of one of your Community members. If anyone asks what you are doing, tell them and see what they say!
- Get some shoe boxes and spend an evening/afternoon together, filling them with items for a mission agency/ homeless etc. Better still, see if there is already a local agency that you could turn up together as a Community to join in with.
- Have a games night and invite Community members and non-Christian neighbours/ friends.
- Have a meal, a bite for lunch or have desserts together with neighbours and some Community members.

OUR PURPOSE:

Living with, like and for Jesus in Hoole, Chester and beyond.

Live with Jesus:

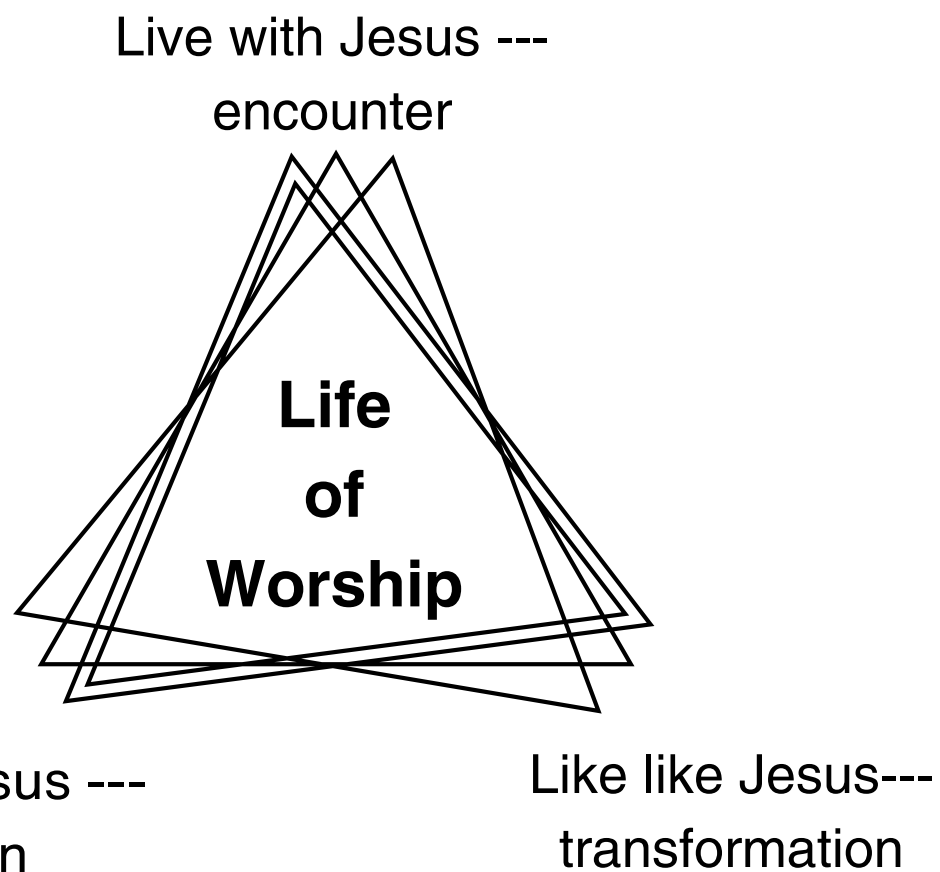
Deepening personal relationship and connection to him. This is a life of 'encounter' with God through his Holy Spirit.

Live like Jesus:

Increasingly reflecting his character and lifestyle. This is a life of 'transformation' in the image of Jesus by his Holy Spirit.

Live for Jesus:

Re-presenting his Good News, in the power of the Spirit, wherever we go. This is a life of 'mission', sent by the Holy Spirit.



HOW TRANSFORMATION HAPPENS

The Holy Spirit:

Only the Holy Spirit can bring transformation to our lives. Our part is to provide the space for him to do what only he can do. (John 14v15-16; 15v1-4; 2 Corinthians 3v16-18). We do that through the three main ways below.

Receiving Teaching/Truth:

In a world that wants to shape our life stories, we recognise that only God speaks true, life-giving reality into our lives. We receive this truth primarily through the Bible and primarily through the Good News of Jesus, which we believe is God's alive, powerful Word to us. Personal reading of Scripture and Scripture-based teaching within our Sunday services and other gatherings is essential to us. (Mark 1v14-15; 2 Timothy 2v2; 2 Timothy 3v14-17; James 1v22).

Putting into Practice:

We believe apprentices are called to be practitioners. We don't just believe and receive God's reality and truth but we aim to put his words to us into practice (Matthew 7v24-27). We follow ancient practices that Jesus and his early Church held out to us as ways of doing this (e.g. reading scripture, prayer, fasting, community, generosity etc).

Living in Community:

On earth, Jesus called a community of people to follow him and sent them out as family. We recognise that discipleship to Jesus is done primarily in community and not on our own. In a world of isolation and selfishness, we seek to serve, love, encourage and learn from each other. Our tightly drawn boundaries start to loosen as we open our lives to one another and those who don't yet know God. (Luke 10v1-3; John 17v20-21; Acts 2v42-47; Galatians 3v26-27; 1 Corinthians 12v13-14).

ALL SAINTS DISCIPLESHIP PATHWAY:

1. Welcome:

Whether people are new to God, to faith or simply to our church, they are met by a welcoming and hospitable culture and quickly feel like they belong.

- Sunday services.
- Midweek ministries.
- Alpha Course.
- Welcome or Connect Lunches.

2. Family:

People become part of God's family as they become Christians and seek to go deeper with God and learn how to be disciples in community.

- Baptism / Confirmation.
- All Saints Communities.
- Discipleship courses.

3. Home:

When you feel at home, you make yourself at home. Everyone pitches in. We discover and grow in the gifts we have to share with our church family and the people and places we are called to serve outside the church walls.

- Growing in spiritual gifts.
- Growing in our lifelong callings.
- Serving in a Team.
- Giving Financially.
- Growing in leadership.

4. Launch:

We believe the Good News of Jesus is for everyone within this parish, City and beyond. We are committed to multiply leaders, ministries and even churches to play our part in seeking God's renewal of this City.

- New congregations
- New and growing leaders
- Multiplying Communities.
- Church planting.
- Resourcing and serving our parish and City.

ALL SAINTS DISCIPLESHIP PATHWAY

as

FAMILY:

People becoming
Christians and being
apprenticed to Jesus
in community.

LAUNCH

Playing our part in
seeking God's renewal
of our Parish and City.

WELCOME:

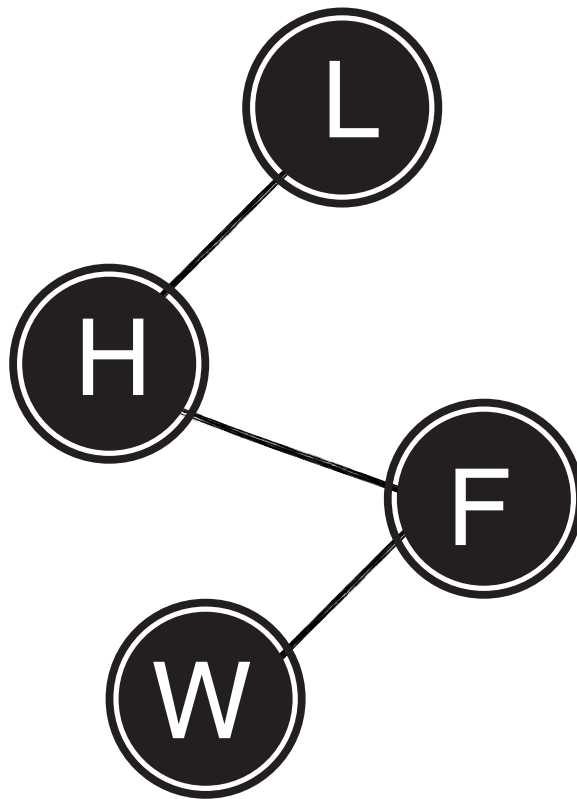
Culture of welcome
and hospitality to all
who are new to God,
Church and Chester.

HOME:

We all get to play,
sharing and growing in
our gifts, callings,
service and
generosity.

STUDY MATERIAL:

This term we will be focussing on the
Welcome and Family sections of our
Discipleship Pathway



SESSION 1: WELCOME, HOSPITALITY & ALPHA

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:

As apprentices of Jesus, we know that we're also called to make other apprentices of Jesus (Matthew 28:19-20). But how can we do this? Do I need the gift of evangelism to do this? Isn't this what vicars, or evangelists, or professionals are for? No. These people can sometimes help us, but we can all play our part in making disciples. Jesus and the early Church have gifted us with a few ways of doing this – one of which we're going to look at today: Welcome & hospitality.

Intro Questions:

- Who were the godly people who supported you either before or during the early steps of your journey towards Jesus?
- How did they demonstrate this to you?
- What do you think it takes to be a welcoming and hospitable church?

Bible Study: Have some people from your Community read these passages.

- Mark 2:13-17
- Luke 19:1-10
- Acts 16:11-15

Discussion Questions:

- Which words or phrases stand out to you from any of these passages?
- Put yourself in the story, imagining that you are one of the tax collectors/sinners, Zacchaeus or Lydia. What do you think it was like to be approached and welcomed by Jesus/ the apostles? Why?
- In the Mark passage, Jesus said: "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick, I have not come to call the righteous but sinners." What might this mean for us in terms of making disciples of Jesus?

Have Someone Read This Out:

We live in a world where many are far from God. Jesus and the apostles demonstrated the welcome and hospitality of God for such people, either by inviting them or being invited by them into their lives and homes. Extending or receiving hospitality to those far from God led to opportunities to share the Good News of the Kingdom with them.

Discussion Questions:

- What is your experience of being able to welcome or be welcomed by those far from God?
- Are there people in your life whom you think God may be prompting you to welcome, show hospitality or be welcomed?

E.g.

- A Sunday service?
- Your home?
- A social event / coffee?

- If not, what might be the blockage preventing this? How can we pray for you to see breakthrough in this area?

Personal Reflection Time (5 mins)

- 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?

My Reflections:

Ongoing Practice: Inviting People to an Alpha Course

For this vision series, there is one ongoing practice for our Communities: Inviting people to Alpha. The Alpha Course is a great way to show welcome and hospitality to those far from God and provide relaxed opportunities for conversations about Jesus and the Christian faith.

We will be holding at least two Alpha Courses each year from 2024-5.

Our next course is on a Monday, between **23rd September – 25th November, 7.30pm**. We invite you to do the below practice of inviting someone and praying together in your Community for those potential invitees at the end of every session over September and October. Read and discuss steps below and then fill out the below exercise.

Simple Steps to Invite Someone to Alpha

1. Ask God who he is putting on your heart and mind to invite. If a name or face comes to mind, write their name down in the box below. Usually, it will be someone you have a relationship/ friendship with already, but you may be surprised who comes to mind!
2. Ask God for courage and an opportunity to invite them (bring an Alpha flyer from church if you like). You may want to consider going with them to Alpha to accompany them, at least for a couple of weeks.
3. Invite them!
4. Share with your All Saints Community or a friend how you got on (maybe the next time you meet up). The 'victory' is you asking the person, not if they said 'yes' or 'no' this time (It can sometimes take at least 7 times before a person says 'yes', so don't be put off!)
5. If you didn't get a chance to ask or if you were shy, don't worry! Ask God and your Community to give you courage and a fresh opportunity.

Prayer Exercise for Inviting Someone to Alpha:

Three people I could invite:

Name: _____

Name: _____

Name: _____

The potential blockages to inviting them are:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

End the Session by Praying for each other in Twos/ Threes

- Pray that you would each have courage and opportunities to invite at least one person. Name any fears or worries that you may have in inviting someone.
- Pray for each potential invitee by name, especially that God would open their heart to receive the invitation well.

SESSION 2: DISCIPLES IN COMMUNITY

Opening Prayer / Worship:

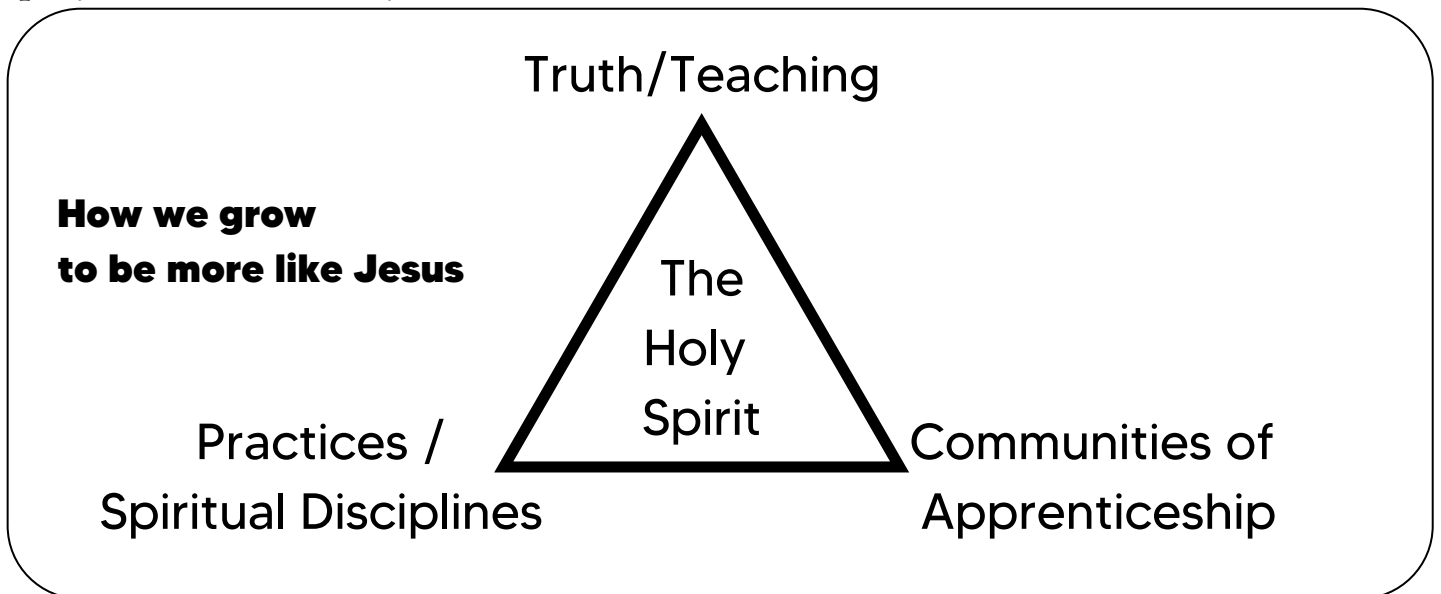
Gather around in a comfortable space to pray and worship. You may want to start in silence, listen to a worship track or sing some worship songs together. Pray that the Holy Spirit would lead your time together.

Intro Questions:

- How did you get on with praying for and inviting people to Alpha? Any stories to share about this?

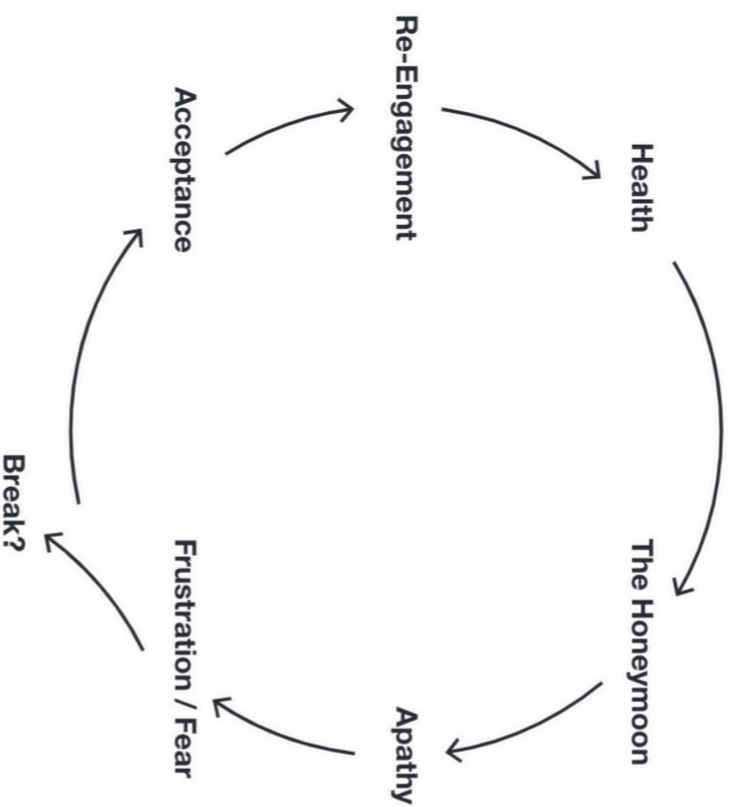
Have Someone Read this Intro:

Discipleship to Jesus, living with him, like him and for him, happens best in Community. Look at the below image which may be familiar to you. The Holy Spirit transforms us over a life-time as we receive biblical teaching/truth, and put this into practice, whilst being encouraged and supported in Jesus-centred, prayerful, community.



This is why we place so much emphasis on joining All Saints Communities. At the start of this academic year, we encourage you to review the vision of your Community, so you can reflect on what's going well and what may need to change. Let's see where this leads us this next season! If you are new to Community or starting a new Community, this is a great chance to dream together how you would like things to be!

Six Stage Cycle of Community



The Honeymoon: While most obvious at the beginning of a Community's life cycle, a Community might cycle through a few times, arriving at a point where everything is going great! There may be some anxiety, but for the most part it's an anxious anticipation and excitement. Everyone's at their height of being willing to commit and get involved.

Apathy: At some point, doing the same (mostly fun) things over and over can get a bit tedious and the energy that got everyone to the table starts to wane. Showing up to Community actually becomes a choice. Apathy can set in, causing people to stop caring as much and become harder to rally to do things.

Frustration / Fear: This apathy can give way to frustration and fear. The frustration usually comes with irritation with individuals, the group, or some rhythm. And the fear usually comes with an anxiety that something bad may happen.

Break?: While not an official stage, dissolving a Community is still an option and typically happens around this time – especially if the fear or frustration remain unaddressed.

Acceptance: Acknowledging and addressing the very normal frustration or fear by choosing to have open and honest conversations, a Community can enter the liminal space of acceptance, in which you begin to decipher what may need to change.

Re-Engagement: As you work towards this, your Community will begin to re-engage, causing the energy and participation to increase again.

Health: With open communication and re-engagement, your Community will enter a sweet spot where there is neither an over-idealized vision of your Community nor an air of discontent. While this stage will not last forever, it's really nice to be in.

Community Reflection Exercise: Work through these questions Together

1. Reviewing last year 2023-4.

- What has been your highlight of being in Community this past year?
- Has there been a person, a practice or experience that has helped you grow in your relationship with God?
- Have you been able to regularly attend Community this year? If not, what has prevented this from happening?

2. Six-Stage Cycle of Community¹

Both healthy and unhealthy things can grow, develop and change. Our hope is that Community life is healthy, but we all know that life changes and different seasons impact our life together. Read through together and discuss the descriptions of the different stages of Community life, found on the last page. As you do this, ask God to highlight where it is your Community may be. It is ok to disagree about this – it will open the way for some healthy discussion and prayer!

Discussion Questions:

- Where do you think your Community may be on this cycle? Why is this?
- What do you think may be needed to get to the next stage?
- What's one practical way this could happen in the next season? How can we individually play our part to make this happen?

Mission:

Last year (Vision Series Guide 2023 and This is Church Guide) there was an invitation for your Community to think about engaging in a monthly or termly area of mission. We considered an area of justice, hospitality, work or announcing the gospel. We've included this again on the next pages for you to revisit if appropriate.

¹Cycle Stages Image Used by permission of Bridgetown Church, Portland Oregon.

Community Mission Audit:

Mission can be expressed in many different ways. Add to the 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. 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

I think God may be calling our community to this one thing:

e.g. 'To show hospitality to... termly'
Or 'To get involved with..... project monthly'
etc.

Some Final Questions:

- Have you moved further into an area of occasional mission? If not yet, could you do something this season (with Christmas coming up) and what one practical step could you take to do this?
- What might we need to revisit, stop or start to move forward as a Community in the next season?
- Is there anyone here who feels God may be calling them to lead a new Community?
- To help out our leaders, would it be worth thinking about other informal roles within the Community that could share the load – e.g. different people to organise socials, food, worship, rotas etc?
- Are there any other questions or conversations that you think it would be good to have?

End the Session by Praying Together:

- You may want to pray thanksgiving prayers to God for the last year.
- You may want to ask God to help you put into action anything that has been discussed today about moving forward.
- Don't forget to pray for those who you'd like to invite to Alpha!

FURTHER RESOURCES FOR GOING DEEPER

BOOKS ON SPIRITUAL FORMATION

More

Simon Ponsonby

Life Together

Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Practicing the Way

John Mark Comer

Liturgies of the Ordinary

Tish Harrison Warren

The Deeply Formed Life

Rich Villodas

When the Church was a Family

Joseph Hellermann

The Gospel Comes with a House Key

Rosaria Butterfield

Beautiful Resistance

Jon Tyson

Scattered Servants

Alan Scott