

# Jesus shaped culture

---

*A five-session course reflecting on  
the Diocesan Culture Guide*



**Diocese of Monmouth**  
**Esgobaeth Mynwy**  
Yr Eglwys yng Nghymru  
The Church in Wales

## PUBLISHED BY

**The Diocese of Monmouth**  
in the Church in Wales

Diocesan Office  
64 Caerau Road  
Newport  
NP20 4HJ

Email: [monmouthadministration@churchinwales.org.uk](mailto:monmouthadministration@churchinwales.org.uk)

Phone: 01633 267490

[monmouth.churchinwales.org.uk](http://monmouth.churchinwales.org.uk)

## WRITING TEAM

**The Ven Ian Rees**  
**Revd Lea Ryder**  
**Wendy Matthews**  
**Revd Samuel Helkvist**  
**Revd Philip Averay**  
**Revd Helen Rees**

## USE OF THIS MATERIAL

Permission is granted to adapt, reproduce and/or share this material  
for use within your local ministry area or parish.

To seek permission for any other purpose, please first contact us.



## Introduction

In March 2024, Monmouth Diocese launched a culture guide. At the launch Bishop Cherry said that ‘the Culture Guide is not so much about what we’re doing as disciples and church communities, but about who we are, how we behave towards one another, and what people experience when they meet us.’

The values in the guide were arrived at following discussion with various groups. They’re probably the sort of values we’d expect, but that makes it even more important that, when others look at us expecting to see these values displayed, they’re not disappointed! The values chosen are:

**Love**  
**Humility**

**Generosity**  
**Courage**

**Joy**  
**Integrity**

The culture guide is a simple reminder that we carry the responsibility of allowing God to be judged by our actions all too often. It isn’t fair! It isn’t right! But it is reality. We want our churches to be seen, not to be working hard at living out the values in the guide, but to live them out naturally. We don’t want the guide to be left on a shelf. Hopefully individuals will use it to reflect on how well we live out those values, and how we can use those values in our decision making. Churches can think how these values are displayed in worship, pastoral care, invitation, welcome and hospitality, as well as in our meetings and our decision making.

Building on the Diocesan Vision, this is about challenging ourselves to live out the values as we continue to build our relationships with God and with other people. This course will help to explore some of the values in a bit more detail and offer some biblical reflections to consider as we reflect on the fact that being a Christian isn’t just about being nice, respectable and kind (important though those things are!). Our faith and our attitudes are rooted in the life and example of Jesus. The course also reminds us of the importance of prayer. Prayer is essential as we seek to be the people and the church God calls us to be.

Culture is important. It is often what people see and judge, long before they think about deep questions of belief.



## How to run the course

All of the sessions should begin with a time of prayer. This may be structured, or 'free'.

Different groups will decide what suits best for them.

Each of the sessions begins with a bible passage and another quotation. It would be good to read these aloud in the group.

There is then a section described as 'Pre-reading'. As this suggests it can be read before the session or as part of the session or both!

That leads into the discussion questions. The group leader should encourage as much participation from group members as possible, but it's worth remembering that some people don't like to share much or will take time to build confidence to speak. Everybody should feel comfortable in the group.

At the end of the discussion questions there is a section on prayer. Prayer remains hugely important and the prayer section is there for the group to join in together, but also as something for people to take home and use in their own time. The ideal for Christians is that prayer should be as natural as breathing. We hope these sections will help to further develop that practice.



# Session 1

## What culture? (being more like Jesus)

### Bible passage

<sup>3</sup> Now by this we know that we have come to know him, if we obey his commandments. <sup>4</sup> Whoever says, "I have come to know him," but does not obey his commandments is a liar, and in such a person the truth does not exist; <sup>5</sup> but whoever obeys his word, truly in this person the love of God has reached perfection. By this we know that we are in him: <sup>6</sup> whoever says, "I abide in him," ought to walk in the same way as he walked. 1 John 2: 3-6

### Other quotation

Some people say that there are five gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John and the way that we, as Christians, live. And most people, don't read the first four. Anonymous

### Pre-reading

Being like Jesus is a pretty big ask! We certainly won't manage it perfectly, but that doesn't excuse us from trying. This bible passage reminds us, as do others in the bible, that we are called to live like Him. This means trying to do the things he did. Let's start with love – and loving our enemies. Immediately we get the picture of how tough it is, but that is what we're called to do. And we don't do it alone although sometimes we try.

We need to be people rooted in prayer and the bible, people who encourage one another inside and outside of church. We have to be people who meet in small groups and find opportunity to share thoughts and ideas as well as challenges. Let's not forget that as well as prayer and the bible and our churches, God gives us each other as gifts!

So, we are called to be like Jesus and the adjudication on that can often be a tough one. The second quotation reminds us that people often don't look very deeply at faith. They do look at us. I don't think that when they do that, they're expecting perfection. But they do want to see, and are entitled to expect, that we are trying to live out the sort of values we're thinking about in this course, because they are the values that Jesus displayed so clearly. Displaying the right culture is about being who God calls us to be, but it's also about being taken seriously as we seek to share the good news of Jesus, the Saviour, risen, alive and with us always.

### Questions for discussion

- In the Bible verse we read of walking like Jesus, which means being more like Him. In what ways can we show that we are living like Jesus ?
- Where do you find the strength to live like Him?



- How do you feel about the idea of others looking at you as a way to find out more about Jesus (rather than perhaps looking in the gospels for more about the life of Jesus) ?
- If people look at the Church, what type of Jesus do they see and how attractive is that?

### Thought for prayer

Jesus said, *“Come, follow me.”* (Matthew 4:19), and, *“Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.”* (Matthew 16:24) This is what makes us Christians – by following Christ. What does that mean now when He is no longer physically walking on earth? It means listening to His voice, learning from Him, and then willingly doing the sort of things He teaches us to do.

How willing am I to listen to His voice?

When we see or think of baby lambs, baby calves, baby foals being born, we notice that within moments of the birth, young animals will almost immediately fight to get to their feet – to remain safe from predators; they will quickly try to suckle – to gain sustenance; and they will automatically follow their mother – who will lead them in the right direction and teach them how to survive. Similarly, when we become Christians, we must immediately get to our feet to stay safe from the devil; we must quickly and regularly feed on God’s word to gain sustenance; and we must follow Christ to go in the right direction and learn how to

best live.



Do I regularly feed on God’s word to gain sustenance?

It's worth noting that Jesus also said, *“For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it.”*

(Matthew 16:25). In

other words, we cannot be a disciple by sitting on the side lines merely watching others being active Christians – that’s like trying to save our old life. Instead, we have to accept that parts of our old life, the non-godly bits, will have to be left behind – that’s losing our old life. But the great thing is, that when we do that, we will find life, and have life to the full.

What do I need to leave behind to be a good disciple?

It's also worth noting that *“Jesus said, ‘and I will send you out to fish for people’.”* (Matthew 4:19). Disciples of Christ don’t just learn how to follow, they also learn how to bring others to Christ. Jesus’ call is not just to follow him as companions but as sharers in his mission. Discipleship is not simply about 'Jesus and me', but about 'Jesus, me, and those who he



sends me'. Each of us is a fisher: a witness, a prophet, an evangeliser, a healer, a communicator of the good news.

Do I use my skills and abilities to draw others to Jesus?

Our purpose as a Christian is not fulfilled by going to church and sitting in a pew. It can only be fulfilled when we begin to serve Jesus. And we'll never know what we can do for God, until we're willing to wait upon Him and be used by Him.

Prayer:

Father God, help me to understand your call to follow and all that that entails. Help me to listen to your voice, to learn from Jesus, and to willingly do the sort of things He teaches me to do. In His precious name. Amen.



# Session 2

## Love and Joy

### Bible passage

*Let all that you do be done in love. 1 Cor 16: 14*

*Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say rejoice. Philippians 4:4*

### Other quotation

*Joy and Love are inseparable twins... wherever one is, the other will be found.*

*LeAura Alderson*

### Pre-reading

Love is the theme of so many great films, books and plays. For a number of years in the 1980s the Gold Blend coffee advert had people gripped as a growing romance between neighbours was watched by millions. The romance grew as the coffee was drunk. It had all begun with a simple request for sugar from one neighbour to the other, and over a number of adverts they started drinking coffee together and eventually ended up becoming a couple.

We all like a happy ending. It brings joy. Of course love is not just romantic love, but it is nearly always connected with a happy feeling. At times like this joy and love naturally go together. When we think of the greatest act of love ever, Jesus dying for us, then joy seems far away as we think of the pain that love can bring at times. The resurrection brings the joy element. Joy is not just about a big smile and a lot of noise. In the verse from Philippians it helps to know that this is the most joyful of all the New Testament letters.

The joy that is found in Philippians comes from someone, possibly Paul, who wrote whilst he was in prison. In this situation he felt true joy, he knew that everything he was doing was because of his faith in Jesus who knew and loved Him. This brought him assurance and joy that was more a way of life than a great big smile. It is the same for us. Joy isn't about having the big smile all the time. There will be times when that's the last thing on our mind.

If we think of joy as the contentment and assurance of knowing God is with us, then we are helped. We are to do all things out of love, and this can some times brings us little joy. We are human and so it can be really tough to love others, let alone do things for them. In this, all we can do is think of is, that as we try to do more things like Jesus! Then, it will become easier to do things out of love. We might even find ourselves liking some people that we never thought we would!





## Questions for discussion

- 'Joy and love are inseparable twins... Wherever one is, the other will be found.' How much of a challenge is this quote given the fact that sometimes love can be so painful and joy seems distant?

With the second part of the above quote, 'Wherever one is, the other will be found', how true is it that where one is found, the other will also be found?

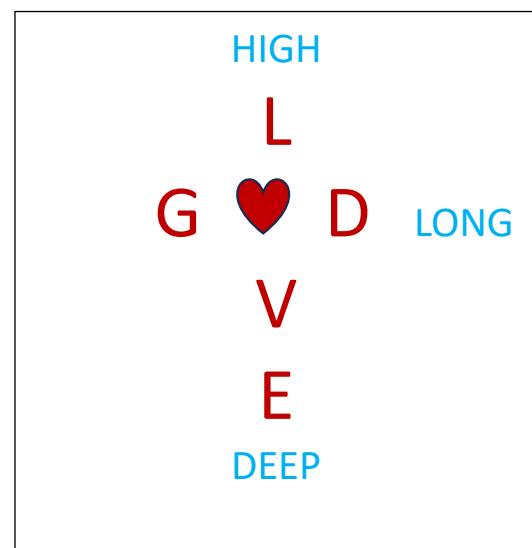
- How do we (as individuals and churches) reflect these values to others?
- In what ways does our faith sustain us when love and joy seem difficult for us?

## Thought for prayer

Jesus was asked, "*Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?*" He replied: "*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbour as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.*" (Matthew 22:36-40)

Jesus knows that love is the greatest force of life - it drives relationships, compassion, kindness, caring and understanding – and so He says that the most important thing for us to do is to love God and love our neighbour. St. John tells us that "*love comes from God,*" and that "*we love because he first loved us.*" (1 John 4:7 & 19). And St. Paul says that without love we will be "*only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal*" (1 Corinthians 13:1), but fortunately, nothing "*in all creation will be able to separate from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*" (Romans 8:39). To encourage us even further, Paul prays "*that (we), being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge – that (we) may be filled to the measure of all the fulness of God.*" (Ephesians 3:17-19)

Grasping "*how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ,*" may appear to be a difficult concept considering His limitless and unconditional love, but in simple terms the 'width, length, height and depth' can be seen as forming the cross on which His sacrificial giving clearly demonstrates His love for us. Ponder for a few moments, if you will, on the awesomeness of that and on the image -

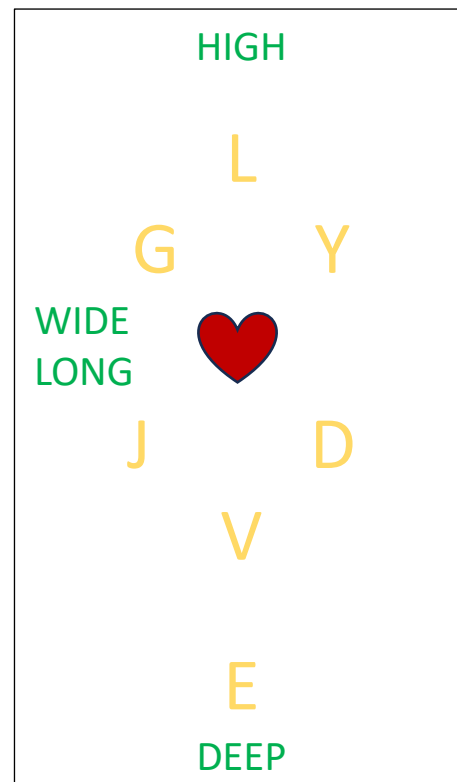


Are you beginning to feel the enormity of God's love for you, and feel more love for Him? Will you be able to feel the same level of love for your 'neighbours'? Remember that God says, "*The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.*" (1 Samuel 16:7). And despite our imperfect heart, if He still loves us unconditionally, then He will be calling us to express the same sort of love to those we come across each and every day. So, let's not judge others by their appearance, rather let's look through any mask they may have put on and pour God's perfect love into their hearts.

Experiencing the fulness of God's love allows us not only to express His love back to Him and out to others, but it also fills us with His joy. As Jesus says, "*As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.*" (John 15:9-11).

In the same way that "*God is love,*" He is also 'JOY'. And He doesn't just give joy occasionally or when He's in the right mood to, rather as with His love, He always lives and breathes and shares it unconditionally, and we must too.

Our love and joy should be heartfelt and evident at all times. That brings to mind the humorous saying, "If you've got the joy of the Lord in your heart, would you mind telling your face!" In other words, don't look miserable, because miserable looking disciples are in a way suggesting that Christianity, and may be even God, is also miserable! God who is 'love' and who is 'joy' could never be miserable, therefore, "*the joy of the Lord is your strength.*" (Nehemiah 8:10). Ponder again for a few moments, if you will, on the awesomeness of that and on the new image below –



Focussing on the cross of Christ is more than just seeing a gnarled piece of wood, or even the blooded pain and horror of crucifixion, it's more about us recognising the outpouring of God's love. So let us *"fix our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy that was set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."* (Hebrews 12:2). Then, *"Clap your hands, all you nations; shout to God with cries of joy."* (Psalm 47:1).

As we reflect on love, joy, and life, let us remember that they are intertwined and dependent on each other. Love cultivates joy, joy fosters love, and both love and joy give meaning to life. They are the essence of what it means to be human – to feel deeply, to find joy, and to live fully, even in the smallest of moments - and at all times we can be confident in calling on *"Immanuel (which means 'God with us')."* (Matthew 1:23).

So, let us embrace love, seek joy, and cherish life. Let us spread kindness, share laughter, cultivate gratitude, and build relationships. Let us make the most of this incredible gift called life and leave a legacy of love and joy for generations to come.

Prayer:

Father God, open our understanding of the heart within, that we may know how You look upon every one of Your children. Show us more of Jesus, more of Your truth, to love as You love, to experience Your joy, and to reflect more of You in our lives, in our words, in our actions, and in our faces. We ask this in the name of Your Son, Jesus Christ, who through death on a cross and resurrection, fills us with hope. Amen.

*"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."* (Romans 15:13)



# Session 3

## Generosity and Courage

### Bible passage

*Now to Him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever. Ephesians 3:20,21*

*The Lord is my light and my salvation. Whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid. Psalm 27: 1*

### Other quotation

*Without courage, we cannot practice any other virtue with consistency. We can't be kind, true, merciful, generous, or honest. Maya Angelou*

### Pre-reading

The theologian Soren Kierkegaard wrote a parable about a community of ducks waddling off to duck church to hear the duck preacher. At the service, the duck preacher spoke eloquently of how God had given the ducks wings with which to fly. With these wings there was nowhere the ducks could not go. With these wings they could soar high into the sky. Shouts of "Amen!" were quacked throughout the duck congregation and there was real excitement at the wonderful gifts that God had given them. At the conclusion of the service, the ducks left commenting on the wonderful message, and then they waddled back home – but they never flew.

The ducks were able to agree with the principle of flying but not able to take the risk of actually doing it. We have been given gifts by God but at times we need courage to take the risk and use them. You can often see people being very generous with other people's time and gifts but not want to offer their own time and gifts. Being generous involves courage. Using the gifts of God to the full is not easy – it takes trust and faith and it takes courage.

The ducks in the story never saw the full possibilities of flying because they never tried it. They lacked courage and the belief that they could do it. The Bible verses from Ephesians 3 and Psalm 27 help us out with generosity and courage. As we recognise with thankfulness the gifts that we have, we are compelled to respond.

The verses from Ephesians remind us that we are to offer praise and Thanksgiving to God for all He has given us. We are to show generosity. As we do this, we are reminded in the Psalm that because we have God on our side we have no one to fear. We can have courage!



## Questions for discussion

- “Without courage, we cannot practice any other virtue with consistency. We can't be kind, true, merciful, generous, or honest”. How true is this quote? Is courage the key virtue for a Christian?
- How easy is it to say (and trust) that ‘God is on my side’? (as intimated by Psalm 27)
- To people outside, do we look like a generous and courageous church? In what ways? Or in what ways could we?

## Thought for prayer

### *Introduction to Lectio Divina*

#### **What is Lectio Divina?**

Lectio Divina is a contemplative practice rooted in scripture: it uses a passage from scripture, which is read slowly and prayerfully, allowing the Holy Spirit to speak to you through the text. The goal is not to complete a thorough reading of the bible, to perform a bible study, or to better understand the text – sometimes, one might not get past the first line! The importance is to reflect upon what stands out for you, and allow that to resonate within you, allowing a conversation to evolve with God about what you’ve read. Finally, Lectio Divina allows you the opportunity to rest in God’s presence, open to transformation.

To reflect on the theme of Generosity and Courage, here we have **two** Lectio Divina exercises. Do be sure to not read both passages in the same sitting – our recommendation is one a day over two consecutive days. You might like to re-visit these passages at a later date.

We have included some questions that might help guide your reflection, but it should be noted that the purpose of Lectio Divina is for you to have a conversation with God, aided by the “divine reading” of his Holy Scripture, and not for us to “put things into your head”. So, please, only use the guided reflections here if you feel that is appropriate.

Finally, don’t be discouraged if you find this difficult! Sometimes Lectio Divina comes easy, sometimes it is more challenging. Sometimes we must wrestle for a blessing!

#### **Preparing for Lectio Divina**

Before diving in, follow these steps to prepare yourself for the exercise.

- **Space**

Set up some space that is comfortable and appropriate for the exercise, by which we mean, somewhere where you can be alert and attentive to God, somewhere where you have enough light to read your Bible, somewhere where you will not be interrupted for the time



you're about to set aside. You might like to have a candle or some holy image to help you pray.

- **Bible**

You will need a Bible for Lectio Divina. The translation is important – this is not an exercise in literary eloquence but rather an exercise in understanding what is written. When you have your bible, locate the reading before you begin – this will enable you to centre down, become ready for prayer, and get straight to it, rather than to then start indexing your Bible!

- **Timer**

You will need to set some uninterrupted time aside – we recommend 30 minutes for each exercise. Being able to keep track of time is therefore useful. When you're praying and your content resting in God's presence, don't feel like you must stop at 30 minutes.

- **Know what you're doing!**

Be sure you understand what you are doing: familiarise yourself with the steps outlined below, particularly if this way of praying is new for you.

## **An Order for Lectio Divina Session 1 – Mark 12:38-44**

### **1. Silent Centring**

Find a quiet, comfortable space. Close your eyes and take deep breaths, focusing on each inhale and exhale of your breath. Be aware of your surroundings and thoughts, but when these distractions come, put them to one side. Open yourself to God's presence and ask Him to remain with you and guide you in your reading. Remain in this place for a few moments.

Pray: In the name of the (+) Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

### **2. Reading**

Open your bible to Mark 12:38-44 and read the text through. After a few moments, read the text through again, this time slower and deliberately stop to ponder and reflect on anything that stands out for you, for as long as that takes. You might not finish the text. Allow yourself to become immersed in what stands out for you, reading that several times, allowing it to repeat within you as you begin to reflect.

### **3. Pointers for reflection**

*Your prayerful reading of the text may be leading you into your own reflection – continue prayerfully reflecting and when you are ready, move on to step four. If you require some assistance with reflection, you might like to ask yourself some of these questions – if the question doesn't feel right for you, skip over it and re-visit it later.*



What stood out for you in the text? Why do you think that is? What motivated the characters in the text? What seems important to them? What do you think the hallmarks of generosity are? The text is concerned with financial generosity, but what other types of generosity are there? What does generosity look like for you after your reading of this text? Has that changed? Does something need to change? How can you apply the principles of generosity and trust in God's provision in your life? What practical steps can you take to become a more generous person?

#### **4. Resting in God's presence**

Spend some time in sat with God in silent prayer, pondering in your heart all that has happened for you in this time of prayer, asking Him what He wants to say to you.

#### **5. Prayer of Thanksgiving**

As your time of reflection ends, be sure to thank God for this time of prayer. What do you need to say to him as you move forward from this time of prayer?

### **An Order for Lectio Divina Session 2 – Matthew 28:16-20**

#### **1. Silent Centring**

Find a quiet, comfortable space. Close your eyes and take deep breaths, focusing on each inhale and exhale of your breath. Be aware of your surroundings and thoughts, but when these distractions come, put them to one side. Open yourself to God's presence and ask Him to remain with you and guide you in your reading. Remain in this place for a few moments.

Pray: In the name of the (+) Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

#### **2. Reading**

Open your bible to Matthew 28:16-20 and read the text through. After a few moments, read the text through again, this time slower and deliberately stop to ponder and reflect on anything that stands out for you, for as long as that takes. You might not finish the text. Allow yourself to become immersed in what stands out for you, reading that several times, allowing it to repeat within you as you begin to reflect.

#### **3. Pointers for reflection**

***Your prayerful reading of the text may be leading you into your own reflection – continue prayerfully reflecting and when you are ready, move on to step four. If you require some assistance with reflection, you might like to ask yourself some of these questions – if the question doesn't feel right for you, skip over it and re-visit it later.***

What stood out for you in the text? Why do you think that is? Who is being generous in this text? What was enabling their generosity? Has your view of generosity changed with the reading of this text? Are you able to share in that same spirit of generosity? What does the



promise of the Son of God mean to you when he says: “And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age”? Does this give you courage?

**4. Resting in God’s presence**

5. **Spend some time sat with God** in silent prayer, pondering in your heart all that has happened for you in this time of prayer, asking Him what He wants to say to you.

**6. Prayer of Thanksgiving**

As your time of reflection ends, be sure to thank God for this time of prayer. What do you need to say to him as you move forward from this time of prayer?





# Session 4

## Humility and Integrity

### Bible passage

*Follow the example of Jesus, 'who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited.'* Philippians 2:6

*But you have upheld me because of my integrity, and set me in your presence for ever.*

*Psalm 41:12*

### Other quotation

*Never look down on anybody unless you're helping them up.* Jesse Jackson

### Pre-reading

During the American Revolution, a company of soldiers under the command of a captain was building a fort out of a pile of heavy logs. While wrestling with a log which was to form the top-stone and was really too heavy for the men to handle, the captain kept yelling at his men, "heave it up", while he himself stood by with his hands on his hips.

Suddenly a stranger in everyday clothing rode up on horseback, and seeing the soldiers sweating and struggling with the log, he stopped and asked the captain why he was not helping his men. "I AM AN OFFICER" was the reply.

With that, the stranger leapt off his horse, took off his coat, and helped the men put the heavy log in place. Then, as he was about to ride away, he said to the captain "Next time you need help, just call on me. My name is George Washington and I am Commander In Chief of The United States Army!"

This is a big lesson in humility, and also integrity. To be truly humble means that we don't shout about how humble we are. This would almost be the exact opposite to humility, and it lacks integrity. The officer in the story from the revolution war lacked humility, but George Washington showed true humility by not saying who he was until after he had provided the help that was needed. This is where integrity comes in.

The passage from Philippians shows us the best example of true humility and integrity. God became as nothing for us so that He could die for our salvation. This is amazing, and it is the best example of humility and true integrity that we will ever see.

### Questions for discussion

- How do you see people who seem to put themselves above others ? How do you avoid being like this yourself?



- The quote from Jesse Jackson reminds us that when someone has power, they should be looking to help others out rather than control them. This is the way to treat power with integrity. How often do we put others needs before our own as a church and in what way?
- Do people see our Churches as places where people are happy to help out and not be judgmental?
- In the Bible verses we read of the ultimate reversal of power as Jesus, in complete humility, became like nothing for us. How does this make you feel? How can this example of humility help us in our day to day life as Christians ?

## Thought for prayer

### Prayer

Lord you say, “O people, the LORD has told you what is good, and this is what he requires of you: to do what is right, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God.” Today we choose to walk with integrity and humbly with You. We choose to live by Your Holy Spirit and to follow Your lead. Help us to hear You clearly, for we do not want to walk by pride or self-sufficiency, we want to walk with You. In Jesus name, **Amen**

Humility and Integrity are intertwined, those who live with integrity tend to be humble and those who are humble tend to live with integrity.

Jesus said “God blesses those who are humble, for they will inherit the whole earth.” (Matt 5:5 NLT). A Christian life is one of humility and integrity, as Saint Bernard of Clairvaux said, “No spiritual house can stand for a moment except on the foundation of humility”.

In this short reflection we will consider what it looks like to live a life of integrity and humility and those things that might get in our way.

### Exploration

How would you describe what humility and integrity looks like when lived out?

Is there anyone in your life or that you have met that embodies a life of integrity and humility? What is it about them that makes you see them this way?

One definition of humility is “Not to see yourself to be greater than you are or lesser than you are, but just as you are”. What are your thoughts on this definition? What do you like or dislike about it? Does it challenge your usual perception of what being humble is?

If living with integrity and humility is not to see yourself to be greater or more important than you are or greater than others, is there anything in your life that causes you to think and act this way? Types of people, social status, wealth, your job?



Also living with integrity and humility is not to see yourself as lesser or less important than you are or lesser than others. Is there anything in your life that causes you to think and act this way? Again, certain people, social status, wealth, your job, your upbringing?

We all have certain things in our lives that get in the way of us having “the same attitude that Christ Jesus had”, and living the life of integrity and humility that Jesus invites us to live. What practices have helped you become aware of these things and overcome them? What practices might you endeavour to incorporate in your life to help you live with more integrity and humility?

Some possible suggestions are contemplative prayer or meditation, the practice of gratefulness, the Welcoming Prayer, the practice of forgiveness, having an accountability circle and working at deepening your friendships.

### **Conclusion**

Humility and Integrity are central virtues of living a Christian life, we hope this short exploration has helped you to find ways live out these virtues in your life.

So we close with prayer:

### **Closing Prayer**

Lord Jesus, when you walked the earth,  
Your humility obscured your Kingship.  
Your meekness confused the arrogant,  
hindering them from grasping your purpose,  
Your nobleness attending to the destitute.  
Teach me(us) to model after your life,  
to subject my(our) human nature to humility.  
Grant me(us) with a natural inclination  
to never view myself(ourselves) greater than anyone.  
Banish all lingering sparks of self-importance  
that could elevate me(us) greater than you.  
Let my(our) heart(s) always imitate your humility. Amen

### **Going Deeper (Additional Prayer and Practice Resources)**

A regular spiritual practice that you might find helpful is the Welcoming Prayer, it was developed by Contemplative Outreach and it help us to remain open to all life has to teach us and to live humble lives of integrity. This link will help you understand the spiritual practice, <https://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/welcoming-prayer-method/>



### **The Welcoming Prayer**

Welcome, welcome, welcome

I welcome everything that comes to me today;

because I know it is for my healing.

I welcome all thoughts, feelings, emotions, persons, situations and conditions;

I let go of my desire for power and control

I let go of my desire for affection, esteem, approval and pleasure;

I let go of my desire for survival and security;

I let go of my desire to change every situation, condition, person, or myself.

I simply open myself to the love and presence of God and God's action within me.

### **Contemplative Prayer and Christian Meditation**

Contemplative Outreach

<https://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/practice/>

The World Community for Christian Meditation

<https://wccm.org>

Grateful Living

<https://grateful.org>



# Session 5

## What's next?

### Bible passage

*I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another. (John 13:34-35)*

### Other quotation

*Not only do self-love and love of others go hand in hand but ultimately they are indistinguishable. M. Scott Peck.*

### Pre-reading

The culture guide has identified all the points below as aims for our Churches. Some might be clear already in your Church, others may be identifiable but needing some work; there may be some that are aspirations. Spend some time thinking about these and how they fit in the life of your church/ ministry area.

- Everyone who comes to church will experience worship that is joyful, generous and loving.
- We have a culture of prayer, and times of fellowship outside of worship, to intentionally support and encourage everyone to move forward in their journey of faith.
- All our communities can share in God's love through the joyful celebration of life events and festival services, experiencing the generous welcome of church.
- We have the courage and humility to look outside of ourselves towards the needs of others, so that our communities can see that we stand with Christ through social action and loving service.
- Our care for the environment embodies God's love for creation which gives us courage to stand against the misuse of the world's resources. This challenges us with integrity and humility to be conscious of our actions.
- We express a courageous invitation for new people to join our church communities, showing a loving welcome and generous hospitality.
- We celebrate our differences with humility and we have the integrity to address barriers to belonging.
- We appreciate that all we have is a gift of God and so we give our time, talents and money generously in service of God's Kingdom.



## Questions for discussion

- In what ways does the short bible passage at the beginning bring the values (Love, generosity, joy, humility, courage, integrity) of the culture guide together?
- Discuss the ways that you can use the values in the culture guide, both as an individual and as Churches, to get to the aims mentioned in the reflection above. It may help to write down some thoughts as a way to plan for the future.

## Thought for prayer

Jesus said, “*Come, follow me, and I will send you out to fish for people.*” (Matthew 4:19). The ‘follow me’ is Christ’s call for us to be disciples, and the ‘send you out’ is His call for us to be apostles. In the New Testament, the Greek word ‘ἀπόστολος’ (apostolos) translated in English as apostle, literally means ‘one who is sent.’ This is not being told to go away, rather it is going out on behalf of Jesus to carry on His work. Apostles become the hands and feet of our Lord and Saviour, sharing in His mission to share His love with all people.



Looking at these hands, try and see them as Jesus’ hands. Held as they are, they appear to be both receiving – i.e. from God – and giving – i.e. to us. These are hands that can touch, smooth, embrace, offering comfort, healing, and love. They are also hands that carried a cross and that through which nails were brutally hammered, because of our sins and for our sins. However, He allowed that to happen that we might be saved from the penalty of death for those sins. That is how much He loves us!

Now spend some time holding your own hands in the same position as those in the photo above. Notice the shape of your hands, perhaps feel the texture and the warmth of your skin. Now look closely at the length of your fingers and thumbs, the creases at the joints, and the multitude of wrinkles and lines on them. Can you see that these hands were made to move, to hold things, to carry things, to work? How might you use your hands to assist Jesus in extending His kingdom?



When Jesus sent out His disciples, He gave them authority to do His work, and He said to them, *“As you go, proclaim this message: ‘The kingdom of heaven has come near.’ Heal those who are ill, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received; freely give.”* (Matthew 10:7-8).

Also, *“He told them, ‘The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field. Go! I am sending you out like lambs among wolves.’”* (Luke 10:2-3). He knows this work can be frightening, but He also said, *“surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”* (Matthew 28:20).



We too are to go, and we too are authorised by Jesus to do His work, but before we go, think for a moment about the people who have helped you in your journey with Christ - their work has been a little like that of a sheepdog. Sheepdogs are sent out into the flock by the shepherd to gather, to direct, to walk beside, to separate from harm, and to bring His sheep to safe keeping. All the while the dog is listening to its master's voice, and will very often return to sit at its master's feet. Other Christians have behaved similarly and brought us to Christ, and now we are called to do the same and bring others to Him.

Paul wrote, *“Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.”* (Philippians 2:1-4).

As we reflect on 'What's next', let us remember that we are first and foremost disciples – followers of Christ – and as we follow Him, we are to listen and learn. We will not all be asked to do the same tasks, nor will we all be gifted in the same way. So, we do need to discern, maybe with the help of others, exactly what He does ask us to do for Him, and that might alter from time to time. Yes, that might sound scary, but remember also that by His Holy Spirit, God will be with us at all times. And just like a good sheepdog, all the while we will be listening to our master's voice and will very often return to sit at our master's feet.



**Prayer :**

Dear Father, thank you for your wonderful creation, help us to always see you at work in the world. Thank you, Lord Jesus, for calling us to be your disciples, for sending us out to be involved with your work, and for showing what love truly is. Thank you, Holy Spirit, for blessing us with spiritual gifts, and for empowering us to carry out the Lord's work. Inspire us, Almighty God, to be active members of your Church, exercising our gifts, and experiencing your kingdom grow for your sake and to your glory. Amen.

*“Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Messiah.” (Acts 5:42)*





## Additional notes

To access the Diocesan Culture Guide, use the QR Code



Or go to :

[https://mcusercontent.com/b3afd1b0d0adb8d4215f17201/files/97ba9bd2-8105-bd9c-e79b-396a44957fca/Culture\\_Guide.01.pdf](https://mcusercontent.com/b3afd1b0d0adb8d4215f17201/files/97ba9bd2-8105-bd9c-e79b-396a44957fca/Culture_Guide.01.pdf)

