

Life Worked Out

Introduction

For an introduction to this series, see the front cover of this month's magazine. But here are a few pointers...

During April & May, at Christ Church and St Luke's, we're taking some time to think about our daily lives and consider what difference our faith makes to them –whether it's 10am on a Monday, 10am on a Sunday or 9pm on a Friday.

In particular, we're thinking about our 'work'. **By 'work' in this context, I don't just mean paid employment** (although this is a very significant part of it for some of us). It's about our whole lives –the things that God gives us to do and the ways we spend our time.

In the west today, we often try and split up our lives into sections, but whether you are employed, unemployed or retired, paid or unpaid, at school or college, caring for someone, or being cared for... God is interested in your whole life –not just a 'spiritual bit'. What's more he's interested in every stage of your life –whether you're young or old.

Having looked at some passages in the book of Psalms before Easter, during April and May we're going to look at this theme using a few passages from the next book in the Bible, Proverbs.

The Book of Proverbs

Proverbs is a practical book of wisdom for day-to-day living. Written up to 3,000 years ago, we will consider what it has to say to us today. Please note that Proverbs is not intended as a rulebook to cover every situation. It tells us *how life works most of the time*.

We will particularly focus on Proverbs 3. Each week, we will consider some verses from this chapter, along with another passage. Hopefully, these readings will be a helpful basis from which to consider our day-to-

Growth Group Notes

April-May 2008



day relationship with God, our personal integrity, our impact on others, and our use of time. So here goes...!

Practicalities

For practical reasons, the four sermons in this series will be during April –at the 9am & 11am at Christ Church. There will be ‘potted versions’ on the same theme at Oakhanger. However, there are also 4 sets of Growth Group Notes –so these will last you through April & May. You will therefore be a bit out of ‘sync’ with the sermons, but not much!

Further Reading

If you personally want to look further at some of these issues, then I’ve used a number of different books to help write the series. The one that most directly relates to the material is ‘Making Life Work’ by Bill Hybels (published by IVP). If you’re in employment (paid or unpaid) I’d also recommend anything on the subject by Geoff Shattock or Mark Greene.

If you come out of the end of this series thinking ‘I’d like to look at this subject more’ then let me know, as I’ve got a number of other resources and it might be possible to look at ways of going into more depth in the future.

Life Worked Out

1: The God Life?

WELCOME

Even if you don't usually use this section, please try this...

Each share: Where will you be at 11.15 next Monday morning?

Where would you rather be (if somewhere different)? Why?

WORSHIP

Use music, silence, prayer, meditation, reflection, songs, hymns, etc. or be creative with drawing, writing, symbols, poetry etc to help people to draw near to God. You could try this...

Praise God for his faithfulness –using open prayer and/or songs.

Perhaps reflect on the words of 'Great is Thy Faithfulness' (if you don't have a book, try searching online for 'Great is thy faithfulness lyrics')

WORD

To help ground our thoughts in this series in our own day-to-day lives...

Individually:

- On a sheet of paper, list 3-8 of the main ways that you spend your time during a typical week (e.g. at work, with family, doing housework, studying, watching TV, shopping, growth group etc) –try to be honest, but it doesn't have to be perfect!
- Now, against each activity, score yourself on how well you think you do as a Christian (or how well you think God thinks you're doing). Score 0=worse than Adolf Hitler, 10=better than Mother Teresa!

As a Group:

- Share any particular things from the exercise that you feel able to
- When in the week do you feel particularly close to/far from God?

Growth Group Notes

April-May 2008



Now use **some** of the following, *leaving yourselves time for 'What Next?'*

Read Proverbs 1:1-7

This is an introduction to the book of Proverbs.

- Which of the attributes listed in verses 1-6 (wisdom, discipline, doing what is right, just etc) would you particularly like to have?
- How is the 'fear of the Lord the beginning of knowledge' (v7)?

Read Proverbs 3:5-20

- Look at each pair of verses in turn (5&6, 7&8, 9&10, 11&12). For each pair:
 - These verses may sound like good advice, but how easy are they in practice?
 - Are there particular situations when you have found these verses to be true?
 - What would change in your life if you took these verses more to heart in the situations you scored yourself low on earlier?
 - What difference would it make to your relationship with God?
- Considering verses 13-20: How far can you relate to this picture of God's wisdom?

WHAT NEXT?

Either as a whole group, or in 3s or 4s...

Talk about new ways of reminding yourself of God's presence with you this week in one or two of the times/places that you listed on the back of the sheet –others may be able to help.

Pray for one another that you would be faithful to God, as he is faithful to us.

Life Worked Out

2: People of Integrity

WELCOME

Spend time relaxing & sharing together. If you want an ice-breaker, you could try this...

Of the people you encounter day-to-day, who do you admire? Why?

WORSHIP

Use music, silence, prayer, meditation, reflection, songs, hymns, etc. or be creative with drawing, writing, symbols, poetry etc to help people to draw near to God.

You could try this...

Each draw a picture of a situation that you were in today. Now offer that situation to God. Then draw how it might be different if you allowed God to be more involved in it. Ask for God's help alone or in pairs.

WORD

We're thinking this week particularly about our behaviour –about being people of integrity, whose words and actions can be trusted.

Discuss your initial reactions to each passage after you've read it:

- Does anything in the passage jump out at you? Why?
- Does anything connect with something you've been doing, reading or thinking about?
- Is there anything you haven't noticed before?

Then use **some** of the questions (*and set a time limit to leave yourselves time to pray!*)



Read Proverbs 3:27-35

- v27: In your life, who do you have the power to do good towards and how do you use it?
- v28: Can you think of examples when acting at the time, rather than delaying, makes a big difference to someone else?
- Why might God give grace to the humble (v34) any more than anyone else? Is this your experience?

Read Proverbs 12:13-28

- What does this passage say about how we should speak?
- Are you ever tempted to tell lies or twist the truth in your day-to-day living (vs17, 19, 22)?
Are there times when it is justified?
- Are the places where you spend your time full of kind words or anxiety (v25)?
- How ready are you to listen to advice (v15)?
- How can we be people of peace (v20) and righteousness (v28)?

WHAT NEXT?

In a time of quiet, each think of a way that today's session has challenged you to do something differently this week, then commit to God to do it.

You may want to light a candle as a symbol of your commitment to God or put a note or object in your purse or wallet as a reminder.

Pray for one another: Pray for God's blessing and strength

One to take away: Who could you cheer up with a kind word this week (12:25)?!

Life Worked Out

3: People of Influence

WELCOME

Brainstorm these questions. i.e. Ask the question. Anyone shout out answers that come to mind. Write them all down where everyone can see. Don't discuss answers until you've finished. Just keep going!

- Who influences you?
- Who do you influence?

WORSHIP

Use music, silence, prayer, meditation, reflection, songs, hymns, etc. or be creative with drawing, writing, symbols, poetry etc to help people to draw near to God. You could try this...

Reflect on God's knowledge of your whole life & his concern for it. Look at your hands closely & think of God's creativity –his work. Then consider what he wants you to use them for –your 'work'.

You could use Psalm 121. In particular, you could say verses 7&8 to one another as a blessing either here or at the end of the session.

WORD

We're thinking this week about the impact we have on others.

Discuss your initial reactions to each passage after you've read it:

- Does anything in the passage jump out at you? Why?
- Does anything connect with something you've been doing, reading or thinking about?
- Is there anything you haven't noticed before?

Then use **some** of the questions (*and leave yourselves time to pray!*)

Read Proverbs 3:1-4

Growth Group Notes

April-May 2008



- Are love and faithfulness (v3) qualities that are respected by the people you spend time with (v4)?
- How can you be more loving and faithful to others in your daily life (v4)?
- How can you be more loving and faithful to God in your daily life?
- Do you ever find a conflict between winning 'favour and a good name' in the sight of God and 'favour and a good name' in the sight of others? How can we handle this?
- How might these verses help you think about the way you share your faith or show it to others?

Read Proverbs 28:1-28

- What do these verses have to say about how we behave and how we are viewed by people who we have an influence on or power over (see 'Welcome'—children, employees etc)?
- What do these verses say about how we should relate to those who have power or influence over us (relatives, the boss etc)?
- What do these verses say about our attitude towards money?
- How does our attitude towards money affect our relationships with others?

WHAT NEXT?

Discuss practical things that you could do to show love and faithfulness to others this week. Are there particular people with needs that you meet in your daily life?

As well as those you meet, you might also want to think of ways of blessing those with the least money and influence in the world.

Pray for one another. Pray for those you know with particular needs. Pray for the world's most needy.

Life Worked Out

4: Time for Everything?

WELCOME

Spend time relaxing & sharing together. If you want an ice-breaker, you could try this...

If you had an extra hour in each day, how would you use it?

WORSHIP

Use music, silence, prayer, meditation, reflection, songs, hymns, etc. or be creative with drawing, writing, symbols, poetry etc to help people to draw near to God. You could try this...

Have exactly 5 minutes of silence. Discuss what it felt like. Then...

WORD

Make the transition from Worship to Word by listening to this Psalm read –I suggest you close your eyes while one person reads, then allow a few moments of quiet to reflect on it before looking through it.

Read Psalm 90 (*Don't panic –Proverbs is coming!*)

- How much can you relate to the thoughts & feelings of Moses expressed in this Psalm...
 - ...about God?
 - ...about Us?
 - ...about Time?
- Do you feel encouraged or discouraged by this Psalm? Why?
- What does 'numbering our days aright' mean (v12)?
- How do you feel about your use of time? What do you struggle with? What is good or bad?



Read Proverbs 3:21-26

Discuss your initial reactions to the passage:

- Does anything in the passage jump out at you? Why?
- Does anything connect with something you've been doing, reading or thinking about?
- Is there anything you haven't noticed before?

Then use **some** of the questions (*and set a time limit to leave yourselves time to pray!*)

- How can sound judgement and discernment (v21) cause our sleep to be sweet (v24)?
- How can they keep us from the fear of sudden disaster or ruin (v25)? Is this your experience?
- How does Prov 1:7, which we started the series with, compare with this verse?

WHAT NEXT?

You could split into 2s/3s for this. Each talk briefly about the main issues you face in using your time. Pray for one another. You may want to swap watches while you pray to remind yourself to pray for the other person's use of their time.

Finish by praying Psalm 90:14-17 together to God

Looking Forward: As you meet as a growth group in the future, I encourage you to keep bearing in mind all the different situations/ places/people in your life that you've been thinking about in these studies. Keep encouraging one another & praying for one another in the day-to-day things as well as in the 'big' or 'spiritual' things!