

Jesus is best!

Week 9: Being a practising Christian

WELCOME

Spend time relaxing and sharing together.

As a nine-year-old boy, the future Archbishop of South Africa, Desmond Tutu, had an experience that changed his life forever. He was walking along the street with his mother when they were approached by a white man in a black suit. The rules of apartheid were clear; mother and son were expected to step into the gutter and deferentially nod to the man as he passed. But this white man was different and, to their surprise, it was he who stepped off the pavement and tipped his hat as they passed him.

The man was an Anglican priest called Trevor Huddleston, a man whose faith caused him to stand out against the backdrop of society through what he said and what he did. In later years, Tutu recalled the events of that day, citing them as being a key moment in his life. "When my mother explained to me that the man had done what he'd done because he was a 'man of God' I decided, there and then, that I too wanted to be a 'man of God'".

Through living out his faith, Huddleston's journey of faith had a positive impact on the journey of faith of another. As you reflect on this together, encourage people to share examples from their own lives of when a faith-driven act by someone else positively impacted their own journey of faith.

WORSHIP

Take time to praise and thank God for the moments just shared, and for the way that He chooses to involve us in growing His kingdom.

WORD

From having a faith to living a faith

Read Hebrews 12.28-29

These verses mark a key shift in the writer's message. In the first twelve chapters, the writer's focus has been on piecing together an argument to encourage the Jewish Christians he's writing to keep to their newfound Christian faith. Now, as we get to the end of chapter 12 and the start of chapter 13, the writer's focus shifts from having the faith to living the faith.

1. Based on the second part of verse 28, how should we respond to what God has done for us?

In considering this, have a look at some different translations of verse 28b, notably the New International Version (NIV), American Standard Version (ASV) and the Living Bible (TLB), plus others as well if you wish! You can easily switch between versions using BibleGateway (<https://biblegateway.com>).

Five Marks of Being a Practising Christian

Read Hebrews 13.1 – 13.5a

In these verses, the writer identifies five things that should mark out how we should live for Christ in our daily lives.

2. Verse 1 says that we should love one another. Why do you think the writer begins with this command?

You might find it helpful to consider Leviticus 19.18, John 13.34, 1 Peter 4.7-11 and 1 Corinthians 12.31.

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3. It's love that makes our Christian lifestyle distinctive and counter-cultural, and it's love that's at the heart of the five areas of practical living that the writer now proceeds to lay out in verses 1 to 5a; 'five marks', if you like, of what it means to be a practising Christian.

Take a moment of quiet to reflect on these areas before discussing your responses to some or all of the following questions:

- a. What is your reaction to the areas identified by the writer?
- b. Based on verse 1, Christian communities, if nothing else, should be communities where it's blindingly obvious to anyone that the people there love each other. Thinking of that in the context of Christ Church, is our love like that all of the time? What could we do to make it more like that?
- c. Verse 2 talks about us being hospitable to strangers. What do you think this means? What things could you do more of as part of your being more hospitable to people?
- d. Verse 3 extends the 'loving outwards' theme of verse 2 to embrace those who can so easily be out of sight to us. The writer identifies two such groups of people, yet who might such 'out of sight' people be for you? As you think of such people, how might you better show God's love to them?
- e. Whilst we can't avoid dealing with money and material things as we live our lives, how should our attitude to such things differ from that of the world? What things might this involve us doing?

You may find it helpful to consider Matthew 6.24 and 1 Timothy 6.6-10.



Not in your own strength...

Read Hebrews 13.5b-6 and 20-21

4. The author tells us that we're to live out what is said in verses 1-5a, but is it too big an ask? If not, why not?

WHAT NEXT?

As a group, take a moment to encourage each other as you share the ways the 'five marks' are already being lived out, either by yourself or as a church. As an example, showing hospitality through Big Breakfast.

In a time of prayer:

- Praise God for all the things just mentioned;
- Ask God to show you how else He wants you to live out the 'five marks'!

Personal reflection

Studying these 'five marks' of being a practising Christian reminds us that we're each called to live out our faith through what we say and what we do. To help you think about what that might mean for you, here's a question that someone once posed.

"Suppose that being a practising Christian was suddenly outlawed in this country. Would there be enough evidence to convict you?"