

What can I give him? -
4) My life – past, present & future

Small Group Notes

Welcome:

Ask people to share with someone else what are the issues things they really get passionate about? (Ipswich Town; injustice; people jumping the queue at the Co-op!)
Get people to introduce each other by their passions as this illustrates what is on their hearts!

Worship:

Sing 'In the bleak mid winter' (I know it's not Christmas but it is cold and the words are important for this series.)

Word:

This evening is our final session that brings our series *What can I give him?* to a conclusion. It commenced after Christmas and is based on the final verse of In the Bleak Mid winter in which we sing...

What can I give him poor as I am?

and concludes

What I can I give him, give him my heart.

When I began the series on 17th January I suggested that giving our heart is more than a metaphor or an emotional excuse to avoid practical action. In Hebrew thought the heart is not only the seat of our emotions it encapsulates the whole of ourselves.

At St John's we have a single aim and that is **to make disciples**. To be a disciple of Jesus, a follower of Christ, a Christian, must result in practical action and not just mere words.

This series has therefore tried to provide a framework for us all to review **the practical action** that might follow what it means to give Jesus our hearts.

What can I give Him? Give Him my money....

Firstly we provided you with an opportunity to respond generously to a generous God who gave us everything through asking you to complete a commitment card indicating your level of financial giving to St John's Church. We are grateful for all those that have completed them and returned them which is over 50 people. The first question then is have you returned yours? If so then thank you so much, if you are like me and have not yet returned your form can I gently ask why not? (Note to leaders – have some spare commitment cards and letters available. They are some in the front entrance of the Church.)

The next three sessions of *What can I give him?* are connected to the practical matter of **giving our time to the local church**.

To do so we have been using the concept of Rick Warren in '*The Purpose Driven Church*' who reminds us that

You were put on earth to make a contribution.

He continues

*You weren't created just to consume resources
– to eat, breath and take up space.*

God designed you to make a difference with your life.

Rick Warren 'The Purpose Driven

To help us understand how we can make a difference Warren claims it is important to understand the unique way that God has designed us. If you sometimes feel that you are a square peg in a round hole then perhaps that is because you do not understand your particular Shape.

The last two weeks have provided you with a brief opportunity to begin to explore your SHAPE (Hand out a S.H.A.P.E. Checklist to each group member)

Trisha in *Give him your gifts and passions* provided a **brief overview of Spiritual gifts** and provided you with a questionnaire to help you identify your spiritual gift and to do so in association with a trusted friend or small group leader.

Once more the question is have you done so and if so what did you discover? (There is a list of Spiritual gifts at the end of these notes but the booklet Tricia provided is far more comprehensive).

These gifts have to be combined with what God has laid on your **Heart**. Each of us has a unique heartbeat and in a sense this mirrors a unique emotional heartbeat. Your particular interests and concerns can come from God and one way of identifying these is to consider that which makes you angry and also what you actually spend a lot of your time doing.

Andy continued this exploration

By looking at two aspects your **abilities** and gave you're a work sheet of 28 specialized abilities that he asked you to ring and then discuss in your groups if that was you.

He then moved on to give a very brief overview of helping you to discover your **personality** based on work by Myres Briggs

How you are around other people	Reserved or Outgoing
How you make decisions	Facts or Feelings
How you are in relationships	Dependent or Independent
How you make use of your time	Determined or Spontaneous

Complete what you can of your SHAPE inventory as well as completing your financial commitment cards. Share with others around your table or in your small group your findings so far.
(10 mins)

Experiences

The Final area of discovering our SHAPE so that we can make our unique contribution to the work of the kingdom through the local church is to consider **how your experience has shaped you**.

Most of these have been beyond your control but you need to understand them in the light that God has allowed them to mould you into the Shape that you are.

Paul writes

*And we know that in all things
God works for the good of those who love Him,
who have been called according to his purpose.*

Romans 8 v28

I used to find this verse very difficult especially the ‘*all things*’, as it is sometimes hard to see how God might use a very difficult time in my life for his purpose. At worst it can make God sound like someone who just stands back and lets bad things happen to us in order that we might learn a lesson.

I used to think that and for many years I could not allow myself to look closely at this verse or the concept that all our experiences can be used to transform us and shape our future ministry.

This is no idle verse and Paul knew what he was talking about from his own experience. (ensure the group now has turned to Philippians 1)

*Now I want you to know that what has happened to me
has really served the gospel....*

Phil 1 v12

His detainment in prison which was supposed to hinder the spread of the gospel has been used by God instead to further the work of the Gospel

*As a result,
it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard,
and to everyone else
that I am in chains **for Christ**.*

Phil 1 v13

God can use **all our experiences** for his purposes

- Our *family* experiences
- our *educational* experiences
- our *vocational* experiences
- our ‘*spiritual*’ experiences’
- our *ministry* experiences’

but especially our ***painful experiences***. God seems to use these especially to prepare us for the ministry that he has called us too.

The writer of the Proverbs observes

*Sometimes it takes a painful experience
to make us change our ways*

Prov 20v30

Rick Warren writes in *The Purpose Driven Life*

Our greatest life messages comes out of our weaknesses.

That is part of the upside down nature of the values of what lies at the heart of the Christian gospel.

The greatest experience of Jesus was that of going towards the cross. It is of such importance that John in his gospel devotes nearly half the gospel to the events and teaching of Jesus last week.

If we are to be followers of Jesus Christ then we too need to know and learn about the journey towards that Cross – that painful experience.

Can I invite you to attend the start of our main Lent series on Ash Wednesday **The Passion of Christ** as we share that journey with Jesus. (You may want to come as small group to one of the services at 10.00am or 7.30pm)

Painful experiences are part of the path of serving Jesus Christ, part of being a disciple a follower of Christ.

Discovering our Ministry has to take these experience into account if they are to have any

- depth,
- integrity
- or resonance to a hurting world.

Warren writes

*If you really want to be used by God,
you must understand a powerful truth.
**The very experiences that you have resented or regretted
most of your life – the ones you've wanted to hide and forget –
are the experiences God wants to use to help others.***

These experiences may be in part or in whole **because of your fault** (you did have some control) and I want you to hear these stunning words that I heard in Rick Warren's Church in Saddleback, Southern California in 2002

Your greatest failure could be your greatest ministry

I don't think this automatically means that because you have failed in a certain area it gives you the freedom to minister to others who also fail in that area.

It may be that God is still dealing with that area or it is too much for you to minister in that area. E.g. a recovering alcoholic may not be the best person to have a ministry in pubs etc...

It may be that you can assist in an area of failure once it has been healed.

I knew of a former organist at HTB who admitted that when he first went there to play the organ it was for his own enjoyment and to show off his ability. He was not interested in leading others to worship God. If anyone was being worshiped it was him. On his conversion he knew he had to give up playing the organ as it was too tempting and associated with the wrong sort of worship. After a time when invited he returned to playing the organ but now in support of others often as a background to a band or working with others rather than on his own. (I'm not picking on organists as the same could be true of any instrument!). The point is that it may be that some healing needs to take place deep in your soul to use the power of hell for the purposes of heaven.

The issue though is that we face those painful experiences that are due in large measure to our fault and nail them to the cross. This is what Rick Warren invited over 3,000 pastors to do who were attending with me a pastors conference in Southern California. We were asked to write down in one or two words what the fault was and nail it to a cross. All you could hear was the sound of nails being hammered into the cross. (We will offer an opportunity for you to do this in a few moments)

It could be that **painful experience was completely outside of your control.** Maybe from your family experiences, an illness that has/is overtaking you, a relationship breakdown that has nothing to do with your own actions, a situation at work or in the community.

The pain of those experiences has to be faced and not ignored if they are going to be used for different purposes than those who have perpetrated them on you.

There is a depth to Paul's words

*I know that through your prayers and the help given by the Spirit of Jesus Christ
what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance.*

Phil 1v19

You sense in the words that follow a real desperation that Paul of all people is hanging on by the skin of his teeth.

*I eagerly expect and hope that I will on no way be ashamed,
but will have sufficient courage so that now as always
Christ will be exalted in my body whether by life or death.*

Phil 1 v20

The NIV Study Bible has a pertinent comment on this verse

*The circumstances of imprisonment,
with all its attendant suffering and oppression
constitute **a real temptation** for Paul to **abandon the gospel**
and his resolute service for Christ.*

NIV Study Bible notes on Phil 1 v20 p1806

He may not be able to control the past but we can control the way we perceive it. Paul gathers himself and states

*For to me
to live, is Christ;
to die, is gain.*

All meaning is found in Christ whether by life or by death. Once you have faced a painful experience there is little left that can threaten you. Paul is torn between wanting to be with the Lord through death or continuing to live and thus serving God.

*Yet what shall I choose?
I do not know! I am torn between the two.
I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far.*

This is not Terry Pratchett wanting to take his own life and choose to end it rather than face a painful death. Neither is it a cheesy 'grin and bear it' Christianity that is a 'pull up your socks' from of faith that bears no relation to the reality of the pain of people's experiences.

Rather **Paul's desire is to serve Christ through whatever experience he takes him through.** We don't serve despite our painful experiences, rather we serve through them.

Paul is willing to let God direct him and is willing to humbly to accept his will for his life. **Paul puts the needs of others before his own personal preference.**

*Convinced of this I know that I will remain,
and I will continue with all of you
for your progress and joy in the faith.*

Phil 1 v25

Paul has been very honest with the Christians in Philippi. He does not cover up the pain of his present experience. For him it is literally being in chains. For us it may be something very different but the key is how we choose to respond to our experiences.

In what ways do we allow God to use them to shape our ministries?

Witness

This section needs careful handling. You will need a wooden cross that you can hammer nails into, some small pieces of paper, nails and a hammer.

Invite those who want to write down the failures that caused a painful experience on the piece of paper (No one must see this). Then invite them to move to where you have placed the cross (somewhere appropriate and not in the middle of the group) and fold their paper and nail it to the cross.

At the same time have another area where members can receive prayer ministry to bring your painful experiences (past or present) that have been outside of your control to the Lord for him to use as he would wish.

People also need to be free not to be involved in either response or both if they choose. This has to be by invitation and an individual's choice. Perhaps have some quiet CD on during this time

Conclusion

Experience is not what happens to you.

It is what you do with what happens to you that matters....

Close with an appropriate blessing.

Encourage group members in the week ahead to complete the SHAPE checklist perhaps using group notes from previous weeks if they have missed a session. Also encourage them to return to you as a group leader or some other trusted member of the group to share what their SHAPE is and commit to serving in the life of the Church in an appropriate area. As a group leader seek help with this if needed from Tricia as we seek to place the right people in the right ministry in the life of the Church. This may be an existing ministry or it may be a new ministry.

S.H.A.P.E. – Checklist

Spiritual Gifts

Spiritual Gifts I believe I have: (cf. Spiritual gifts booklet ‘Discover your Spiritual Gifts’ and overleaf)

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)

Heart

List some things you’re good at and love doing:

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)

People compliment me when.....

Abilities

The following are my strongest abilities:

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)

Personality

This is how I see myself: (*circle one of the two words for each comment*)

- | | |
|---|---------------------------|
| 1) Around others I am more: | RESERVED or OUTGOING |
| 2) My decisions are based more on: | FACTS or FEELINGS |
| 3) In my relationships I tend to be more: | DEPENDENT or INDEPENDENT |
| 4) My use of time is more: | DETERMINED or SPONTANEOUS |

Experience

How I became a Christian.....

Some painful experiences that I’ve had

A past experience I’ve learned from is....

Having completed this checklist talk this through with your small group leader or a trusted Christian friend who will be honest with you and choose a ministry in the church in which to serve. Having served for six months, review that ministry with your small group leader or friend.

A LIST OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS

(Key texts Romans 12; I Corinthians 7; 12 -14. Ephesians 3 - 4; I Peter 4.

Gifts that are clearly recognized as Spiritual gifts.

Prophecy
Service
Teaching
Exhortation
Giving
Leadership
Mercy
Wisdom
Knowledge
Faith
Healing
Miracles
Discerning of spirits
Tongues
Interpretation of tongues
Helps
Administration

Gifts that are suggested but not directly listed by the text

Celibacy
Voluntary poverty
Martyrdom
Hospitality
Missionary

Other possible Gifts

Intercession
Exorcism
Music
Craftsmanship