**St Martins C3 – August 20, 2023**

**Permeate - Invite**

**Reading: Matthew 22:34-38**

Our journey into a relationship with God and partnering with Him in reaching the world around us, starts with Loving God. As we respond to God and grow in a relationship with Him, the natural overflow of that, will be us wanting others to experience the transformation God can bring.

Love also forms the basis of bringing God’s life to the world around us. We are to love our neighbours (everyone around us) as Christ would. Now, let’s be honest, we like that idea in principle, but that is hard to do in practice. So, where do we start?

1. **PRAY**

In prayer, God changes our perspective. He helps us see others, as He sees them. So, let’s come to God in prayer for those around us every day. It doesn’t have to be long, but it helps if it is regular. Attach praying for the salvation of others to a daily routine you do, like driving to work, or home from school kids drip off in the morning. As you pray for others, you will find yourself loving them more.

1. **SHOW CARE**

Loving our neighbours, isn’t just caring at a distance, but putting love into action. At the very least, we can take a genuine interest in those around us. Then when they are facing a challenging life situation, we can offer our help.

1. **INVITE**

When followers of Jesus go out to tell others about Christ and His Kingdom, some received the message and some didn’t. (Luke 9:1-6) Jesus encouraged them to work with those who responded positively to the invitation and leave alone, those who rejected the message. God is not asking us to force people to listen. We simply need to invite people on the journey. Which means that we will love everyone, but share our faith with the few who are open. A question I am getting used to asking is: “*Is that something you would be interested in knowing more about?”*

1. **SUPPORT**

Stay on the journey with those who are open to the gospel. Use resources like church services, the Alpha course or other Christians to help you and them. It may take them some time to come to faith and grow in their faith, so patience is required; however, the rewards are powerful.

**Note:**

One practical problem we end up with as Christians is not having many relationships with others outside of church. When this is the case, use a community engagement program in the church to expand your contacts with those who need Christ. Consider today an age group, or demographic in the community God may be calling you to reach out to.

The Kingdom of God grows around us, as we love God and love others. As we pray, care, invite and stay on the journey with those around us, we will see many people come to faith in Christ and lives transformed.

**Suggested discussion questions for Connect Groups:**

*What did Jesus mean when He said, “love your neighbour?”*

*How might prayer make a difference in the sharing of your faith?*

*What could be some good “invitation” questions that we could use to help people towards a journey of faith?*

*What ministries could you use to make new relational connections with those in St Martins and beyond?*

*What resources could we use to help us, help them, on their journey towards Christ?*

*What excites you, or concerns you, about being the key person who is helping someone towards Christ, or them growing in Christ?*

**Songs we sang this morning:**

* King of Glory
* We praise you
* Son of suffering
* What a beautiful name
* He Toka

**Monday’s Devotion – Prayer makes the difference.**

**Acts 2:42**

*They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to* ***prayer****.*

For me, prayer has changed my effectiveness in sharing my faith more than anything else. I have read lots of books, been to various conferences on evangelism and mission, and tried various techniques and approaches. Most of them are helpful. However, prayer far and away surpasses everything else. If someone were to ask me, what one thing could they do to see those around them come to faith, I would say, pray. That is why this week I am going to unpack how prayer makes a difference in the sharing of our faith.

The early church DEVOTED themselves to prayer. They knew that they were fully dependant on God. If God’s Spirit wasn’t empowering them and working around them, God’s Kingdom wasn’t going to grow. Let us be inspired again by those who have gone before us and devote ourselves to prayer. Let us depend on God’s Spirit for His empowerment, guidance and grace.

But don’t take my word on this, or even the inspiration of the first church, commit to putting it into practice yourself and see what God will do. Why not commit yourself to a few minutes of prayer for the salvation of those around you, every day this week. Putting inspiration into action is the real test. Plan out a few minutes that works for you. Put a reminder in your phone. Do whatever helps you pray. Why? – Because prayer makes a difference.

**Tuesday’s Devotion – A different perspective**

**2 Kings 6:17**

*And Elisha prayed, “Open his eyes, Lord, so that he may see.” Then the Lord opened the servant’s eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.*

Elisha’s servant was freaking out at the monumental task of overcoming the enemy that had surrounded the Israelite city of Dothan. Elisha knew that his servant had to see what was happening from God’s perspective.

This is one of the first things that will change as we pray. We will see things more from God’s perspective than our perspective. Here are few perspectives I have discovered God changes in my heart as I have prayed for those who need Christ around me:

**Genuine care** – As I pray for others, God reveals to me how much He loves them. This helps me see how valuable they are to God. Consequently, how much I should value them.

**How lost they are** – I love how Jesus simply describe everyone who doesn’t know Him as lost. Everyone is different. Some may be rich and complacent, others struggling and desperate, but as far as God is concerned, they are all simply lost people in need of salvation.

**The Spiritual Battle** – There is a battle for every person’s soul. As we pray God will give us insight (like Elisha’s servant) as to what is happening in the spiritual realm around the person’s life and how we are to pray into that.

**Wednesday’s Devotion – Opportunities**

**Colossians 4:5**

*Live wisely among those who are not believers, and make the most of every opportunity.*

I have discovered that the number of opportunities that come my way to share my faith is in direct proportion to how much I pray for those opportunities.

Let me emphasise here, that I still have a lot to learn in this area. I look back and realise that there were many times God was working around me and I missed it, because my head or heart was not in the right space. Having learnt from that, I now try and be more open to see God opportunities in my daily life.

There are no accidents with God. He knows who we are going to encounter each day and what is going on in their lives. He is simply trying to help us see what He sees, so we can better partner with Him and make the most of those opportunities.

In your prayer time each day, pray for opportunities to make connections or to share your faith. Pray that God would make it obvious to you.

Then, as you go through your day, especially as you step into a new situation where you are connecting with others, pray again. Maybe something like, “God show me the opportunity I have to share something of your life with this person.” In my experience, God loves to answer prayers like that.

**Thursday’s Devotion – Openness**

**Acts 16:14**

*One of those listening was a woman from the city of Thyatira named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth. She was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul’s message.*

As I said on Sunday, scripture and our experience show us that some will be open to the gospel and some won’t be. We like Paul want to use the opportunities we have to share with those who are most open. That is where prayer comes in.

Firstly, we are praying that God leads us to those who are open to Him. He knows what we don’t, so we need to follow God’s lead on this one. What that means is that we are prayerfully looking for the little signs, like who God is drawing us to, or their positive response to our invitation to explore life’s questions. Think of people like your hairdresser or your uber driver. As you pray, ask God to reveal to you how open they might be.

Secondly, in our regular prayer for the lost each day, we are praying for open hearts to receive God’s life. Spiritual blindness is a work of the enemy and that blindness can be lifted from people’s eyes. We usually focus these prayers on those who are particularly close to us, like family members who are not yet followers of Christ. They may not be willing to engage in the conversation yet, but we can be vigilant in prayer. Maybe pray that they would be open to someone else having the gospel conversation with them.

**Friday’s Devotion – Strategies**

**Acts 16:9-10**

*During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.*

It seems obvious from Paul’s lifestyle, that he was a man of prayer. He was open to God’s leading in his life. As he was praying into various situations, God gave him guidance and strategies as to what to do next, including who to share the gospel with. Likewise, we can expect God to guide us strategically where we are to best share our faith and how best to do it.

For me this isn’t a big feature of my individual prayers for those who don’t know Christ around me; however, it is certainly part of my corporate prayers with others. God speaks to individuals or groups, as we come together and pray for God’s guidance.

There are times where we need to change our approach or do things differently. Those changes shouldn’t be just our ideas, they ought to be God directed. We are most likely to hear from God, in regard to strategies, if we are actually praying. So, let’s keep praying together.

So, how are you going on your prayer journey this week? - My prayer for you, is that God changes your heart and perspective. That He opens up opportunities and uses you to bring His life to others.