

## Study

Read Philippians 3.  
1-11: What helps Paul reach a place of deep identity here? What do we gain by being in Christ? What do we lose?  
12-14: What does this say about living with change?  
15-21: Why is hope so central for identity?

## Living it out (Application):

Read Luke 4: 1-11.  
Which is the greatest temptation for you at the moment?  
For our church community?

## Coming Up at St Mark's

**Trip to the Holy Land.** March 2015.  
There will be an introductory meeting at Guy's at 7.30pm on Tuesday 4<sup>th</sup> March.

**Naked Truth Prayer Event.**  
Saturday 1<sup>st</sup> March 7.30pm. Led by Ian Henderson. Seeking to pray for our area and to challenge the grip of pornography.

**Youth/Children's Strategy** is under review. Please see recent notices for how you can participate by Feb 10<sup>th</sup>.



### *Please pray for...*

Ask the Lord to help us with our **losses and changes**.

Give thanks for **Rainbow through the Rain** – pray for those you know living with bereavement.

Pray for our **prayer ministry team**, and our development as a healing community.

Pray for **daytime Alpha** – a fantastic group

For our **plans for a journey of prayer** through Lent and Easter.

For peace in **South Sudan**.

Pray for **Jane Hodson**, Susie Appleby's sister, who starts chemo on the 10<sup>th</sup>.

Pray for wisdom as Dan leads a **review of our children/youth strategy** – you can participate as well! See down below...

Pray for the people of **Syria**.

### **Mission Partner Prayer Focus:**

Pray for **the outreach plans we have for Le Tour** and for the planning committee..

Please do take the opportunity for more prayer requests/feedback - it's a wonderful way of sharing.

**Thank you for your prayers for this church community!**

# INDIVIDUAL STUDY NOTES

Week beginning: 9th February 2014

## Worship/ reflection:

What have been significant changes or losses for you? Reflect on the promise that God never changes. Thank Him for the ways in which He is with you in three sections: yesterday...today...and forever...

### Luke 4: 1-11. The place of deep identity

When Jesus came up out of the water at his baptism we are told that the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a “**peristeran**”. We tend to think it was a beautiful white dove. But it wasn't. The chapter before, we read how when Jesus was presented in the temple as a young baby, this happened: When the time came for the purification rites required by the Law of Moses, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, ‘Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord’) and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: ‘a pair of doves or two young **peristeron** - pigeons’. When Jesus came up out of the water, the Holy Spirit came down on him in the form of a **sacrificial pigeon**. Like the one at his dedication. No wonder he then was driven into a desert place. To be in a place where only his Father could see him. Imagine if you were to ask God to confirm your mission, and an electric hair hovered over your head. It had just been confirmed to him that his mission was to give his life as a sacrifice. To contemplate such a tough mission, such a tremendous loss, such a self-giving of himself...no wonder he was immediately led into the desert. Before he gave himself away, **he had to settle his identity**. Before he lost his life, he had to be focussed enough to embrace the path of self-giving love. Before he began this journey he fasted for forty days as a way of living in complete dependence on His father.

When we come to places of change, challenge or loss, **we need to know that Jesus has been there too**. And is wrestling with us. There is a place of deep identity we need to reach with him that will see us through the natural difficulties of life. Life as it is will throw enough at us – loss of jobs, relationships, health, and eventually our lives. Have you ever been in a place in your life of contemplating great loss? If you have, you will know how it throws everything up in the air – who you are, what you are doing, where you are heading. **We need to be settled in our deep, eternal, unshakeable identity if we are to live well through life's inevitable losses.**

When Jesus entered the desert he was “full of the Spirit.” But, we are told when he came out of the desert, he did so “**in the power of the Spirit.**” The difference was, he had wrestled through to the place of deep identity he needed to give his life away. He was ready to live. And to die. And to cope with all the losses he would face along the way.

We are going to look at how he got there in reverse. **Temptation three was to be spectacular, and draw attention to himself.** To make himself the focus. “Throw yourself down, and everyone will look at you”, and you will be popular. This has always been my big battle. To get my identity from other people looking at me. One of my earliest memories is being presented with a cup for effort at school. When I was eight. But what I’ve found is that people’s opinions, or the way I hear people’s opinions, go up and down like a yoyo. Sometimes in life this will be helpful, and other times not. But as a place of deep identity it’s useless. Sometimes we play this game with God. “God, if you will do this, then I know your love will be real...” But Jesus said, “Do not put the Lord your God to the test.” In fact, **you don’t need to.** His love will never change, never fade. You can rely on it. When we know that, we cannot be swayed so much by other people’s opinions. **As a church, our place of deep identity will be found as we reject the need to be the biggest, or the best in the town.** It’s not numbers on pews that matter so much as lives that are being transformed to be Christlike. That’s what Jesus counted. And that’s why we are **putting an emphasis and resources into creating resources for discipleship.** That’s why we are getting a communications and resources person – to enable that to happen effectively, for everyone. But if discipleship is the core, that will be costly. Sometimes we may be misunderstood. We may not seem like such an easy church to hop in and out of. **You’ll note that in Mark we are constantly told how people kept leaving Jesus.** It’s also why the Kingdom Life role has an emphasis on **fostering links with other churches** – developing the ways in which we work together, whether or not it’s under St Mark’s banner. I’d like to think that the work we do with Michelle could serve the whole body of Christ in our area. Because it’s not about us. We don’t need to have people look at us. **We are after a place of significance. Not a place of fame.**

Temptation two was for Jesus to worship satan, who interestingly is shown to have some measure of influence in the world – a demonstration of the spiritual battle we were reflecting on a few weeks ago. Here Jesus is being asked to **leave things as they are**, to accept the status quo, **to give up the fight.** Not to take risks. As he contemplated the cross, that temptation must have been huge. As you might have picked up, to some degree this isn’t the biggest one for me. Even though there is always loss when it comes to change, I don’t mind it. I’ve grown up in a time of enormous cultural change in society and the church, and grew up living in a lot of different contexts. But, as a church leader, I know the temptation to opt for a quiet life! Particularly when things are going well. I inherited a fantastically healthy church here when I arrived. Sometimes there is hassle to trying to lead change. You tend to just hear about the negative stuff. People tell me about the format of leaflets and the “business” language. We have a community of 1,000+ and a budget of half a million. It’s hard to avoid some organisational concepts! As someone said to me this week, “No one notices when your shoes are clean, only when they get dirty.” I’m not moaning, I’m the same.

But honestly, **it’s tempting sometimes to go for maintenance rather than mission.** I think a lot of us feel that, and you can see evidence of it all over the place. But I’m so glad that as a church community you wanted to move forward. That you wanted to listen to where God wants to lead us **now.** Because I guess until every person in Harrogate has heard about Jesus, until there is no more loneliness, no more brokenness, no more spiritual oppression, **we haven’t finished yet!** Until we’ve explored every way of reaching young, middle aged, and old people, until we’ve explored every way we can transform our community, until we’ve tried every way we can make church accessible, we haven’t finished yet. That’s why Michelle and Alison are **first of all finding out where the opportunities for community transformation are by looking at our local community.** That’s why we have a **widening our doors** part of our mission. That’s why we are considering **new opportunities with our youth and children’s work.** That’s why we are **expanding the leadership team** – not only because it suits the size of the church we are better – but so that we can do as much as we can to equip everyone to be growing and seeking God’s kingdom, more and more. There’s no way we are going to accept satan’s status quo. Jesus wrestled through to that place, and so do we.

The first temptation was to turn stones into bread. **This would effectively mean paying attention to his own needs first.** Making life comfortable. **Arranging life so he didn’t really need to depend on His Father.** I think this is a strong temptation for me financially. I’m not sure I yet know what it is to have to depend on my Father for my every need because I’ve given in such a radical fashion. I don’t put my security or comfort at risk that much. I organise things so that I don’t need to come to a place of really needing God to provide. This is important because ultimately none of my “worldly goods” will last – I will lose them all. But also it means I find taking risks for God hard. I’m still learning that bread isn’t what I live on. Jesus, the bread of life, wants to be my food for eternity. I think it’s a very strong temptation for us as a church community too. To be comfortable. Not to spend God’s money in any risk taking venture, **and to stay within our current resources. But this would mean our vision as a community could never exceed where we are now.** It would also keep us from that place of deep dependence on our Father. I heard of a church in London that gave away a million pounds. And they decided to do it in two days. They are not living on bread alone. They are not staying comfortable. They are in a place of dependence on God – a place of deep, risk-taking, identity. This church never has money left over at the end of the year. They always give excess away and start with a blank sheet. And I bet they pray hard.

The plans we have match our existing resources for no more than two years. So as soon as we can have a clear idea of the costs of future direction – particularly related to mission and youth strategy – we will be asking everyone to risk dependence, and to give to this vision sacrificially. If you want to leave an easier place, you may want to do that soon! But I believe we want to be a church that lives in a place of deep identity. Yes, life means loss, change means risk, sacrifice. But let’s walk Jesus’ way, the way of sacrificial love. I would encourage you to bring your losses to God your Father who wrestles with you in the wilderness. Whatever losses and changes come our way, let’s be people who know He will never let us go, who don’t accept the status quo, and know that we depend on Him every moment. As we do so, we can walk with Jesus, in the power of the Spirit, whatever life’s challenges may be, or wherever change may bring us.