



# RESOURCES

THE CROSS



## CONTENTS

**"The purpose of discipleship is to be with Jesus, to become like Jesus, and to live as Jesus did"**

**03**

WEEK 1  
HOW TO FIND FULFILMENT

**05**

WEEK 2  
HOW TO FIND HOPE

**07**

WEEK 3  
HOW TO FIND PEACE



# WEEK 1

## HOW TO FIND FULFILMENT

Many of us look to find fulfilment through our work, within our possessions or via relationships, but often these things don't satisfy the deeper longings of our heart. We were made in the image of God, for an eternal relationship with God, and it's only through Jesus that we can find this universal human longing met.

### ICE-BREAKER

Divide into twos or threes. Ask everyone to take turns naming the following:

- What possession have you owned the longest?
- What is the most valuable item you own (either by monetary or personal value)?
- What item could you not live without?

Then:

- Who have you known the longest?
- Which relationship is most valuable to you?
- Which relationship would make life significantly harder to live without?

The aim of this ice-breaker is to introduce the themes of provision and fulfilment whilst also helping us get to know each other better.

### REFLECT

The wider context of John's story is important if we're to fully understand the words Jesus uses in the passage of scripture we're focusing on today. News of Jesus, his teachings and his miracles had been sweeping through the region, resulting in vast crowds gathering to hear him speak. Earlier in chapter 6, Jesus feeds a crowd of 5,000 who are following him through the countryside. Such is their excitement at this that they intend to make Jesus king 'by force' (6:15). Jesus leaves them, eventually making his way across the Sea of Galilee with his disciples (though by contrasting means!). Our passage begins with this same crowd, who had been fed by the five loaves and two fishes, finding him once more.

In your small groups, read John 6:25-40. What are your first impressions and thoughts about this whole story?

Re-read verses 25-29 and reflect upon these points:

- Notice the changing nature of the questions the crowds ask. What do you think they're really looking for? What do you make of Jesus' responses to them?
- What does the phrase 'Do not work for food that spoils' stir in you? What are you currently hungering after that will only leave you hungry?
- Does verse 29 feel like 'work' to you?

What begins as an enquiry about sustenance and work quickly becomes one of Jesus' identity; the crowd are attracted to Jesus, his works and his words, but there's a deep yearning to know who Jesus is and what the source of his teaching and actions are.

Re-read verses 30-35 and reflect on the following:

- The crowd ask Jesus for a sign, but in the same instance, reference the multiplication of the loaves. It is as if they are saying 'Show us something that makes us believe in you. Your act with loaves wasn't enough; Moses gave us bread from heaven'. What do you make of their question? What do you make of Jesus' responses to them?
- Reflect again on those possessions and relationships you discussed in the ice-breaker. Are we walking through life with a response like the crowd, 'always give us this bread', or are we prioritising different sources of provision?
- What does 'I am the bread of life' mean for you? How does Jesus' identity, and your faith in him, sustain you?

# WEEK 1

## HOW TO FIND FULFILMENT

The back-and-forth between Jesus and the crowd reaches a crescendo: this is the heart of what Jesus has been getting at, he is the food that endures to eternal life. The bread they received from Moses was in fact sent by God, and it sustained their faith and hope in God's provision. Here stands a heavenly bread that will never perish, but will sustain their faith forevermore.

Re-read verses 36-40 and reflect on the following:

- Do you ever think of Jesus as your 'daily bread'?
- Does this change your thinking in terms of how we can find our longings met in him?
- Jesus will never drive us away as we approach him. Have we held ourselves back from seeking Jesus this year so far? Have we driven ourselves away from him?

In Jesus we have an eternal promise. Before moving on to a response, have someone read verse 40 again to the group. Our belief in Jesus gives us eternal life – a sharing of his inner life, a life of abundance that God makes visible throughout Jesus' teaching and signs. What does this promise do to the longings of your heart?

### RESPOND

What begins as a conversation about bread becomes a revelation of the eternal life that God offers in and through Jesus; the miraculous discovered in the ordinary, fulfilment on a divine scale. It's a signpost towards the cross and resurrection; this bread is set to be broken for the many, that hill-top meal for 5,000 echoes in the breaking of Christ's body on the cross and in the bread he breaks with the disciples at the Sea of Galilee (John 21:13).

In our response, there is a chance we could be like the crowds following Jesus; we miss the miracle offered to us, the fulfilment of our hopes through something apparently ordinary.

Think of the places and relationships set around you; what opportunities to share this 'bread', this eternal life, have been handed to us?

Think of those things we are turning to for sustenance; what is leaving us hungry? What is God asking us to redirect to him to fulfil?

### RECEIVE

A significant aspect of this story comes to life every time we take Communion at church; we are seeing the miracle in the apparently ordinary, as we approach the broken body of Christ in the Eucharist bread we enter into his life and he enters into us (John 6:53-58).

Finish the meeting with a time of prayer. Read verse 35 aloud, inviting the spirit to draw out our needs and hunger to Jesus. What 'spoilt' foods do we need to put down before him in repentance? Ask and listen: what fulfilment is Jesus eager to reveal to us in his presence?

## WEEK 2

# HOW TO FIND HOPE

Mary is filled with grief and disappointment; she feels let down by Jesus. Jesus understands and shares in her suffering at the death of Lazarus. But Jesus does more than sympathise with the pain, he transforms the situation. Jesus is the source of life. This miracle foreshadows Jesus' own resurrection in which he will overcome death once and for all. It's through faith in Jesus that we can share in his life beyond the grave and know hope in all circumstances.

### ICE-BREAKER

Sympathy verses Empathy:

- In small groups of 2 or 3, discuss what you understand the difference to be between sympathy and empathy.
- Ask each person in the group to give an example of when someone sympathised with them in a difficult situation and when (in another situation, or perhaps the same) someone showed empathy.
- Ask each person to reflect on how both responses made them feel and how they were different.

### REFLECT

Read John 11: 32-44

Last week we reflected on the wider context of Jesus' ministry to date, his teachings and miracles that have preceded these passages in the book of John. We thought about the revelation of the eternal life that God offers in and through Jesus; the miraculous discovered in the ordinary, fulfilment on a divine scale. In our response, we reflected that there is a chance we could be like the crowds following Jesus; we miss the miracle offered to us, the fulfilment of our hopes through something apparently ordinary.

In our passage this week we read of the death of Lazarus, which initially, although far from ordinary appears to be anything but a hopeful situation.

Read John 11:25.

This verse is the culmination of the unfolding revelation in the preceding chapters:

'Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die'.

He is the good shepherd who has come to give life 'to the full' (John 10:10). The life he brings is primarily 'eternal life' (literally 'life of the age'), the life of the long-awaited kingdom of God.

The life he gives is nothing less than the indestructible life of the resurrection, moreover, it is his gift here and now; in what practical and literal ways have we seen Jesus revealed in as the giver of life in preceding chapters?

- Materially – Jesus turns the water into wine (John 2:1-11)
- Spiritually - Jesus offers the new spiritual life of the kingdom of God to Nicodemus (John 3:1-8)
- Physically – he imparts life to a dying boy, a long-standing physical paralytic, and a man born blind. (John 4:46-54, Mark 2:1-12, John 9:1-7)

Reflecting on these miracles;

- How must have the follower's expectation and faith in Jesus have been raised having witnessed the preceding miracles?
- Looking at verse 32, how does Mary react? In what way can we take hope from Mary's reaction?

Read verses 33-34 again;

'When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. "Where have you laid him?" he asked. "Come and see, Lord," they replied. Jesus wept.

## WEEK 2

### HOW TO FIND HOPE

Jesus' reaction is profound, and in some degree surprising. He was 'deeply moved in spirit and troubled'. Jesus is not remote from the sufferings of his fellow humans. The fact that he is one with us in humanity means he is one with us in agony. The language used by John in verse 35 expresses a definite action, hence 'Jesus burst into tears', it illustrates that the tears were not the professional tears of the hired mourner or the inwardly detached spectator. Jesus is one with us in our need; he feels our pain; his tears at that moment authentically expressed the emotion of his heart.

Read in small groups Luke 10:39 –42

In John 11 we witness that Mary's demeanour is less composed than Martha's.

- How does Mary's connection, perhaps even a greater sense of spiritual intimacy with Jesus (Luke 10:39) allow her a sense of freedom to share her deepest feelings?

### RESPOND

This passage uncovers the fullness of Jesus' humanity as almost no other within the New Testament gospels. 'Sympathy' literally means 'feeling along with', and that is who this passage unveils to us – a Saviour who shares our feelings – but also empathises with us, having experienced the pain and sorrow of loss and disappointment firsthand.

We live in a world swept by great emotions: pity, anger, joy, hatred, desire, rage, love, grief, regret... At times our personal world is invaded by these storms, lifting us to heights of ecstasy, or more often plunging us into depths of agony. In such moments the familiar landmarks lose their power to direct us. We seem not even to know ourselves. But Jesus is there. He has been this way already; he understands. Ultimately, our authentic connection we build with Jesus is key to our response in all situations.

In small groups;

- Do we share our heart to those close to us in all circumstances or do we provide an outer front in the culture of 'comparison' - exhibiting a positive outlook of our lives?
- Reflect on the areas that distract and pull us from deepening our connection to Jesus.
- What are the current areas you would like to have more hope in?
- What boundaries and practices could we put in place to enable us in times of trouble to redirect our hope back to Jesus? What are the practical reminders we can put in place that this connection, this intimacy is above all our sustaining hope?

### RECEIVE

**In your small groups pray for those specifically struggling with a lack of hope. Ask the Holy Spirit to restore, renew and resurrect that hope within them.**

**Allow for a time of waiting on Holy Spirit to speak words of prophecy & encouragement over one another.**

**This could be a great space for those who feel they maybe haven't spoken out in prophetic words to practice; waiting on God for specific words and pictures, using words of encouragement and personal experience of overcoming hope to build others up.**

## WEEK 3

# HOW TO FIND PEACE

These past few weeks have seen us journey through the gospels towards the cross. Jesus knows he is about to be killed and will no longer be with his disciples, so he offers them a reassurance that still applies to us, that we are not left on our own to fend for ourselves in this world. Jesus will be with us through the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives. The Holy Spirit brings us peace in the midst of trouble, calms our fears and helps us to face life with a confidence in the plans and power of our heavenly Father.

### ICE-BREAKER

Finding Peace: divide your group into teams of twos or threes. Each team has five minutes to use their phones (or recall from memory!) to find what they believe to be the perfect peaceful weekend escape in the UK. Suggest they use services like AirBnB or TripAdvisor. After the five minutes is up, the teams should feed back to the group what their suggestion is, explaining why it would make them feel at 'peace'. You may even find somewhere your group would like to go for a weekend retreat!

This ice-breaker should help introduce the theme of peace, whilst also helping us get to know a little more about each other and what helps us relax.

### REFLECT

In today's passage, we read that Jesus promises to give his peace to the disciples – not an AirBnB escape, not a peace that looks like anything this world could offer us, but a peace that surpasses understanding. He offers this promise in the middle of what is sometimes described as his 'farewell discourse'; chapters 14, 15 and 16 of John's gospel, in which he gives final teachings, promises and explanations of what is to come. This discourse was of immediate use to the disciples who heard it, but its value is of great significance to us who follow after them.

In your small groups, read John 14:15-31. What are your first impressions and thoughts about this passage?

Re-read verses 15-21 and reflect on these points:

- Notice the way Jesus frames his instruction to keep his commands; our obedience is a response of love, and as we respond, the Father sends us the Spirit to help us. Do we keep Jesus' commands out of love? Do we look to the Spirit for help?
- Jesus states that the world won't be able to accept the Spirit because it neither sees him nor knows him. How do you think the world could come to know the Spirit?
- Imagine hearing verses 19-21 for the first time as a disciple, before Jesus' death and resurrection took place. What would you make of these statements?

The disciple Judas (the other one!) asks a question that exposes what many of us may have felt at some point in our Christian journeys: 'I can see you, Lord, I know you. Why can't you show yourself to the world so they can know you too?'

- What do you make of Jesus' reply in verses 23-24?
- The Holy Spirit is sent to teach us all things and to remind us of what Jesus says. How could this impact how we pray and read the bible?
- What impact does verse 27 have on you? Does it stir comfort or leave you with questions?

Verses 28-31 is a moment of promise and prophecy – Jesus talks about what is to come but uses language that isn't immediately clear for those who don't know what's about to happen nor why it will happen. These are words that Jesus has just explained will come to their fulness when the Spirit reminds the disciples of everything Jesus said to them after he has left them; he pairs the promise of what the Spirit will do with an immediate example of the words they will need to be reminded of.  
(Con't on next page)

## WEEK 3

# HOW TO FIND PEACE

- When was the last time you left room for the Spirit to teach you and remind you of Jesus' words?
- What could this look like for you to do regularly?
- Where are you currently longing for an encounter with Jesus' peace?

### RESPOND

Jesus' response to Judas' question is a subtle one: 'Why do you intend to show yourself to us and not to the world?' is met with the reply that those who love Jesus will obey his teaching, that the Father and Jesus will make their home in them. Jesus does show himself to the world, but he chooses to do so by setting up his home within us, by filling us with the Spirit of truth, a peace that is not of this world.

Jesus doesn't cut us out of his plans – his plans to reveal himself to world rest upon working in and through us. He longs to partner with us in spreading his message! We are invited to love Jesus, to obey his commands and be filled with the Spirit that will teach us and remind us of his words.

Give your group some time (10 minutes or so) to consider their response to this passage – perhaps with some worship music on in the background – using these prompts:

- Do you love Jesus? Are you looking for your relationship with him to go deeper? What could you do ahead of Easter to make more time to invest in that relationship?
- Do you obey Jesus' teaching? Are there any teachings you feel you need the help of the Spirit to understand and walk in? What could you do ahead of Easter to spend more time reading Jesus' teachings in the gospels?
- What causes you to struggle to feel at peace? Are there any specific relationships, environments or circumstances you would like to offer over to Jesus, to receive his peace in them?

### RECEIVE

Consider leaving a good amount of time for prayer at the end of your gathering. Open your time of prayer by asking someone to read verse 27 aloud. Invite anyone who is struggling with fear or a troubled heart to be prayed for by members of the group – assuring them they don't have to share anything publicly that would make themselves uncomfortable. Pray that God would make His home within them.

You may like to draw all your prayers together with the words of Philippians 4:4-7

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.