



RESOURCES

VISION & VALUES



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

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WEEK 1

TENACITY

As we start our Autumn Term, we'll be looking at how we can all play a part in the vision and values of our church. We begin with Tenacity: we are a people who encourage each other to never give up, fixing our eyes on the example of Jesus, praying through all things. But what does that look like and how can we play our part?

ICE-BREAKER

These ice-breaker questions are an invitation to hear each other's story and to think on the main theme of today's study: to pray with tenacity and never give up.

Break into small groups of two or three to discuss the following ice-breaker discussion points:

- Have you ever encountered a challenge or moment in life that left you wanting to 'give up'? What happened? How did you overcome it?
- Who do you turn to when you're having a tough week? Do you find prayer easier or harder in these moments?
- What would it look like to 'run with perseverance the race marked out for us'? Hebrews 12:1

REFLECT

'Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up.'
Luke 18:1

How did you respond to that instruction from Hebrews 12, to 'run with perseverance'? With excitement? With apprehension? How do you reflect on the instruction to 'not grow weary and lose heart' (Hebrews 12:3)?

This letter to the Hebrews is expanding on an encouragement that Jesus offers to his disciples: to always pray and not give up.

Jesus illustrates this encouragement with a parable – read it together as a group, Luke 18:1 -8.

When encouraging the disciples in the 'race marked out' for them, Jesus instructed them to be rooted in prayer with an attitude that Jesus likens to a resolute widow constantly seeking justice from a corrupt judge, day after day after day.

It's a peculiar set of characters to illustrate our tenacity and God's justice: widows would find themselves on the margins of society, ignored and lacking representation afforded to most citizens. The judge offers justice not out of duty to God or society, but simply to rid himself of the tenacious pestering of the persistent widow. If an imperfect, human judge can offer justice like this, how much more excited should we be for the justice of our loving, gracious God.

Break into small groups of two or three to reflect on the following: What's your immediate reflection on this parable? What do you think the response of the disciples would have been?

Recall that Jesus offers this parable to his disciples to 'show them that they should always pray and not give up'. If a widow, a member of society so unlikely to receive justice from a corrupt judge, can carry on seeking the justice she knows she is due, then surely we can be tenacious as we call out to our Heavenly Father? Jesus uses this illustration of tenacity and persistence to encourage us that our loving, just, gracious Father will bring about justice to those who call on Him – and we're invited to call on Him in prayer at all times, to participate in pointing all who seek justice back to God and His kingdom, the ultimate source and end of all justice.

WEEK 1

TENACITY

RESPOND

As we look to respond to this passage, note that the tenacity of the widow doesn't imply a high level of intensity, but rather that she perseveres with a strong, consistent faith. Our response to this model of tenacity should not see us form a habit that will exhaust our faith. We are invited to 'run the race with perseverance'... to focus on Jesus who 'endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart' (Hebrews 12:1-3).

What would it look like to draw on that same tenacious spirit that Jesus illustrated in the widow? How would our prayers change? What is our response to that invitation, to call on our just Father who wants to bring justice to our world? How do we persevere in that call?

Take some time to think on our own response to these questions. It might be helpful to allow members to have a moment to pray through and write their response in private. Some may like to draw their response, or express themselves in ways other than writing.

You might also like to think about how your group is going to be tenacious in prayer this coming term: Could you create prayer triplets throughout your group, encouraging each other in word and prayer? What would it look like to all embrace the 11.02 Prayer Campaign, feeding back to each other all that you witness as you pray together each day?

Set a small, simple goal, but be tenacious in pursuing it – and be sure to report to each other what you witness.

RECEIVE

'We never give up, fixing our eyes on the example of Jesus, focussing on what God has called us to and running the race with perseverance.' Nicky Gumbel, Leadership Conference 2019

We value this tenacious attitude to prayer at HTB because Jesus invites us to form our discipleship around it; this isn't a sprint, it's not a short walk, it's race that must be paced, run together with a family alongside us, each of us fixing our eyes on Jesus and his example and never giving up. This race is not a contest, it's a recognition that we must have disciplines if we are not to grow weary, that we find our encouragement approaching Christ who now sits at the right hand of the throne of God.

Take time at the end of your session to pray together in twos or threes.

- You may like to enter into prayer in a way that helps you 'fix your eyes on Jesus' – worshipping his name and reflecting on his love.
- You may wish to pray on anything that emerged as you thought on your own response to the parable of the tenacious widow.
- You may wish to pray for a spirit of renewed tenacity for the term ahead.

WEEK 2

HUMILITY

This week we're reflecting on humility; what does it look like to put ourselves second to others and to God? How do we practice this day by day? We'll look at Philippians 2:1-11 to discover the example of humility given to us in Jesus and the importance the apostle Paul places on this value.

ICE-BREAKER

- Humility is often characterised as being a push over, being someone who lets everyone else get their way without making any fuss. Show a picture of a fictional Christian TV character that fits this description e.g. Ned Flanders.
- Who are the humblest people you have met? What words, pictures, and feelings come to mind when you think about the word humility? Break into small groups to write lists of your reflections and then share your thoughts.

REFLECT

Read Philippians 2:1-11 as a group.

For Paul, there is nothing he wishes more for the Philippians than for them to follow the humility example of Jesus, structuring this around three key themes. Introduce each theme for the whole group together and then continue in smaller groups for the questions. Encourage the groups to share any significant insights at the end.

The Challenge, vs 1-4 The Message translation makes The Challenge clear:

"If you've gotten anything at all out of following Christ, if his love has made any difference in your life, if being in a community of the Spirit means anything to you... Forget yourselves long enough to lend a helping hand." (MSG)

- What is our initial response to this teaching? Why does Paul insist that humility is the most important characteristic of Jesus to try to imitate?
- Is this easy? Is it even possible in today's culture?

The Example, vs 5-8

Jesus' life, his ministry and his death were all a constant walk of humility. Paul is very clear in explaining exactly how much Jesus gave up.

- Do we know any people who have given things up, laid things aside, to serve God and others?
- Are there parts of our lives where we need to lay aside attitudes toward power, relationships or wealth and instead 'make ourselves nothing by taking on the very nature of a servant' (v 7, re-worded)

The Result, vs 9-11

Verses 9 to 11 show us that the ultimate consequence of this outrageous depth of humility is glory, honour, power and might. What a challenge that is for us today! Not only does the Son of God humble himself to such depths but the creator of the universe also honours him above all others as a result of those very acts of humility.

- What would it look like to see humility being rewarded with power and success in business or politics?
- Do we celebrate those within and outside the church who live lives full of humility?

WEEK 2

HUMILITY

This value of humility invites us not to cower because of our failings, nor to boast because of our achievements. As Tim Keller writes:

"The Christian Gospel is that I am so flawed that Jesus had to die for me, yet I am so loved and valued that Jesus was glad to die for me. This leads to deep humility and deep confidence at the same time. It undermines both swaggering and snivelling. I cannot feel superior to anyone, and yet I have nothing to prove to anyone. I do not think more of myself or less of myself. Instead, I think of myself less."

RESPOND

What is our response? How can we foster a lifestyle of humility, putting ourselves second to others and to God?

Within our church community, one expression of this value of humility is offered in our worship – the way we as a body declare our position before God.

- What is our posture during worship? Is it from a place of humility, loving God with our whole heart, soul, mind and strength? Or is it, maybe sometimes, more primarily focussed on our own needs and agendas?
- Do we have an attitude of 'What do I need?' more than 'How can I serve?'
- How can we celebrate those who have modelled this attribute which is so prioritised in scripture?
- Take 5 minutes for everyone to send an encouraging text to a person who they think has modelled humility well, celebrating them and thanking them for their example.
- Are there people in the group who deserve encouragement for living with great humility?

Give space and time for people to honestly share areas of their lives where they believe they need to act with greater humility.

RECEIVE

It is important that we do not allow this passage to leave us feeling like we are not good or holy enough, but instead to present to us the beauty of Jesus' example as an inspiration to live a life that puts our own agendas second to God's and second to each other's. It is important to close your evening praying and worshipping, focusing on Jesus and his example.

Read Philippians 2:1-11 again (try a different translation, such as the Passion or Message, if this helps) reading slowly, and allow it to lead into a time of worship, whether sung or calling out prayers of thanksgiving and praise.

Leave space and time to pray for those who have shared where they would like to act with greater humility. Ask God for words and pictures of encouragement as you are praying.

WEEK 3

UNITY

In this week's study we look at Jesus' very own prayer for Christians to live in unity. Why is unity so important to Jesus? What does it look like for the church to be united in this call? How do we play our part?

ICE-BREAKER

- This game is a fun-but-practical way of introducing the theme of unity. Tie several pieces of string to a marker pen suspended over a piece of paper. Ask the same number of people as there are pieces of string to communally draw or write a picture or word you choose. Click here to watch this video for an idea of what you're trying to achieve. This can be done in two teams for competition if your group would appreciate that.
- After this, break into groups of 3-4 to explore whether anyone has any experiences where unity, or lack of unity, within the church has had consequences that have impacted them.

REFLECT

"Be united with other Christians. A wall with loose bricks is not good. The bricks must be cemented together." - Corrie Ten Boom

Read John 17:20-25 (The Passion translation is particularly brilliant for our study). [CLICK HERE](#)

- Break into small groups of 3-4 to reflect on the passage. Leave space for groups to feedback together at the end.

John 17 is a passionate prayer of Jesus for his disciples spoken just before his arrest, trial and crucifixion. As he approaches the cross, his call to unity is clear and multifaceted:

Supernatural unity

"I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one, I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity."

- What is your initial response to these verses, to know we have received Christ's glory?

Jesus outlines unity between believers as something we receive through his own action, not theirs. Whilst this can feel like a theological nuance, it is immensely profound: it declares that the primary way of achieving unity is to seek a greater experience and understanding of God through his Holy Spirit, rather than purely working harder to 'get along'.

- Have there been times when we have sought to fix our disagreements with other Christians without first seeking a deeper personal relationship with Jesus? What would that look like?

Tangible unity

The Passion Translation adds great depth to the reality of unity expressed in vs 22-23 by adding the word experience. Jesus' Prayer is that we might "experience the same unity that we enjoy" (v22 TPT) ...That he lives in us so that we "will experience perfect unity" (v23 TPT).

Unity is not a rule we obey but a reality we experience.

- Have there been times in our lives when we have experienced Christian unity in a way that's shifted our experience of life? What situations or circumstances led to those moments?

WEEK 3

UNITY

"We the church have to set an example of unity to the world... what unites us is infinitely greater than what divides us" Nicky Gumbel, Leadership Conference 2019

When Christians are unified, there is a profound tangible reality that we not only feel, but the world can see.

- Have you ever had comments from friends outside the church about how different generations, ethnicities etc unite together around the Gospel?

Evangelistic unity

Jesus' prayer repeatedly emphasises that the fruit of this unity goes beyond our own experience, but sees the Father be made famous, "so that the world may believe that you have sent me."

This unity is a counter-cultural example to the world of how we can form community that flourishes in its diversity; it's an example to the world of what is achieved when uniting around God.

- What would it look like for those in your life to witness this unity? How would it impact their experience of Christianity?

RESPOND

Read 1 Corinthians 12:12-27

Desiring unity and serving within the church are core to our discipleship. Go around the room and list on a sheet of paper all the talents, gifts and resources of those present. Encourage others to call out gifts and abilities that they think others have that they may not even realise.

- How can we use these gifts to serve each other in our church community and beyond? Are there any ways in which you could serve as an entire connect group?

RECEIVE

Spend time as a full group together meditating on Psalm 133.

Allow space for prayer into all that has been discussed. Ask for and share words and pictures for particular people and how God might want them to serve the body of Christ and beyond.

If there are some who have pain and baggage as a result of division within the church, listen to and pray for these people, asking first and foremost for God's healing.

Finally, listen together to what God might be calling you as a group to do to serve the Church or foster unity.

WEEK 4 GENEROSITY

This week we're looking at the value of generosity: we aspire to be a people who give generously, not storing up our treasure here on earth but continually growing in the spiritual gift of giving and playing our part in creating a culture of generosity in our community.

ICE-BREAKER

Break into small groups of two or three to discuss the following discussion points:

- A lot of people find giving up material things or giving financially to the church to be a particularly challenging part of their Christian walk. Why do you think that is? What role does the culture we live in play in setting our standards of living vs our standards of giving?
- What does it look like to be generous? When it comes to being generous, what difference do you think we make between picking up the bill for lunch with a friend and tithing or making a gift to the church? How do you feel about generosity being seen vs unseen?

REFLECT

Read Galatians 2:20:

'I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.'

This is one of the most dense, incredible, exciting statements on Christian identity we find in Paul's letters. This is what it means for him to 'live for God'. Take a moment to reflect in small groups: what does it look like for us to die to ourselves? To no longer live for ourselves but 'live by faith in the Son of God'?

This statement of living 'in Christ' is one Paul emphasises throughout his writing to the early churches. It's the place from which he sees our entire identity flowing, a new status that sees us become a part of God's new creation, with distinct gifts and behaviours flowing from this place 'in Christ'.

Read Romans 12:4-8:

'For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.'

Break into small groups of two or three to reflect on the following:

- What is your initial reaction to these verses? Had you previously thought of giving as a spiritual gift like prophecy or leadership?
- When we talk about 'giving' we often focus on it in a financial sense. In what ways is that helpful, and in what ways is it unhelpful?
- When you reflect on Christ giving everything for you, and now living in you, how does it impact on your views of what resources (time, money, support, expertise) you have to offer?
- Financial independence and property ownership are often seen as markers of 'success' in secular culture. Should our view of success differ if we no longer live for ourselves, but 'live by faith' in Christ? How does/should that impact our financial goals?

WEEK 4

GENEROSITY

RESPOND

Break into small groups and read Matthew 6:19-21.

Take a moment to discuss the following questions as a group:

- How does this teaching relate to the two passages we have read in Paul?
- What do you currently regard in your life as 'treasure'?

Have groups share their thoughts with each other. When asking people to think upon their personal response to this topic, give time and space for individuals to pray and respond to the following questions in private:

- What is our response to Jesus, giving it all for us?
- What is your role in belonging to the one body of Christ, belonging to all others in your church family?
- How can we live by faith when it comes to using our gifts, in managing our finances, time and other resources?

You might also like to think about ways you could encourage one another in good stewardship, or donate your time or resources together.

- Is there a cause or ministry within HTB that you might like to raise funds for as a group?

For ideas on how you could respond as a group, get in touch with the Discipleship Team's Social Transformation Relationship Manager, Tom Ahern, tom.ahern@htb.org

RECEIVE

Just as we love because he first loved us, we give because of what we have been given. Paul identifies giving as a spiritual gift, to be counted alongside gifts such as prophesy and service. Like all gifts, we can exercise and strengthen our generosity like a muscle, all the time fixing our eyes on Jesus and his example of giving it all for us.

Take time at the end of your session to pray together in twos or threes:

- You may wish to pray on a call or prompt that emerged as you thought on your response.
- You may wish to pray for a new spirit of generosity in the term ahead.
- You may simply wish to enter into prayer in a way that helps you 'fix your eyes on Jesus' – worshipping his name and reflecting on the great gift he has given you.

WEEK 5

AUDACITY

In this final week of our Vision & Values series we're looking at the value of audacity, focusing our attention on the Great Commission in Matthew 28; we are a people who ask God to give us a vision so big that it's impossible without God. But what does that look like and how do we play our part?

ICE-BREAKER

Many people find it helpful to make resolutions at the beginning of the year, to reflect on what they've faced in the previous 12 months and set out bigger and better plans for the next 12. Break into groups of threes and fours to think about your year so far, working through the following:

- Did you set any resolutions that haven't worked out? Why do you think they didn't come about?
- If you were to set out a new set of bold resolutions for the remainder of the year, what would they be?
- What would it look like to be audacious, brave, daring, in going after these resolutions in the next few months?

REFLECT

Ask the group to read Matthew 28:16-20, a passage commonly referred to as The Great Commission.

There's so much packed into the close of Matthew's Gospel account that we're going to work through it passage by passage.

Worship and doubt, vs 16-17

The disciples have spent the last three years learning at the feet of Jesus, building hopes that here, finally, was the one who would bring about God's Kingdom, overthrow Roman rule and restore Israel to its rightful place. Yet in the moment of Jesus' crucifixion, those hopes died. Then comes a report from Mary Magdalene and Mary mother of James and Joseph that Jesus is risen, waiting for them in Galilee.

- Why do you think there was a mixed response amongst the disciples to seeing Jesus at this moment?
- What has your response been to Jesus throughout this year? A constant state of worship? A mix of praise and hesitation?

All authority, vs 18

Have no doubt, Jesus has total authority over our world. But Jesus is not saying here that the work is finished – this is his declaration that the victory has been achieved, that death no longer rules, nor corruption, greed and wickedness. Christians should be audacious, we can ask God for big visions, because we know that we are witnesses of his resurrection, and the same spirit that defeated death now lives in us (Romans 8:11).

- Christ, who's spirit lives in us, holds all authority over this world. Take a moment to read Romans 8:11-17 and reflect on this truth.
- How do these passages impact those resolutions you recorded at the beginning of the evening?

Go. He is with you, vs 19-20

This is at the heart of why we value audacity at HTB – because Christ has commissioned us to a vision that is both exciting and daunting, both grand and demanding. This commission is what it looks like for us to pray that God's kingdom come on earth as in heaven; as we pray that prayer, we should hold these words of Jesus in our hearts as to what we're being asked to play a part in.

WEEK 5

AUDACITY

But notice that we're not sent alone. Christ, who holds all authority, goes with us as we set out in this audacious vision. From this very moment, the church of Jesus began to spread – not simply because the disciples were excellent baptisers and teachers, but because they stepped out and found Jesus alongside them.

- As you reflect on this commission, this invitation from Jesus, how does it make you feel? Which aspects excite you? Which feel particularly challenging?

RESPOND

'Therefore go and make disciples of all nations...'

We have been given an audacious calling by Jesus. We are invited to take part in God's grand plan to reconcile the world, to point to Christ's authority and baptise them into his eternal life. We might respond with worship. We might respond with doubt. But Jesus draws alongside us, walking with us and in us through his Spirit.

We do not walk alone in this commission – Jesus extends it to all his disciples, not a small part. We all have a part to play. Consider the term ahead:

- Who are you praying for, to become a disciple of Jesus or to pursue their discipleship to new depths?
- Who have you spoken to, inviting them to explore their own questions about life at Alpha?
- Could you invite them to come this term: www.htb.org/alpha
- Who are you walking with in your discipleship? Are you supporting, encouraging and teaching others as you yourself seek support and fresh teaching?

RECEIVE

'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me... And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.'

Finish your evening with a time of prayer – both for those we are praying for to come to know Christ, but also for our own discipleship. Some people may simply wish to reflect upon Jesus' encouragement that sits within this promise, that he is with us always – he comes to us, whether our first response is to worship or to doubt. Pray for a fresh encounter, a renewed audacity, that comes from standing in the presence of Jesus, the ultimate authority of heaven and earth.