



25 - 31 October 2020 So deeply do we care

Related Bible reading(s): Leviticus 19.1-2,15-18; Psalm 1; Matthew 22.34-46; 1 Thessalonians 2.1-8

Bible study

A selection from this week's resources to help you plan and run a Bible study.

Welcome and opening prayer (5 mins)

A prayer of approach

We bring ourselves to a moment of quiet,
to a place of peace, to this place of safety and welcome.
We bring ourselves to cast off the cares of the world
and for a time to reflect on you, Lord God,
that our batteries may be recharged,
our direction be refocused and our energy renewed;
that we may let go of things that hamper us
and be free to care gently for those we share time with.
O God, we pray, renew us that we may renew others.

Amen.

Read the text (10 mins)

Consider different ways to read the text. For example, sharing parts between several readers, or hearing it more than once using different versions, or using/adapting this suggestion.

Present the New Testament

Prepare a varied selection of recent news headlines (local, national and global) about what might be described as 'bad news'.

Arrange a group of people to read out these headlines. Each one should be read carefully and deliberately – take time over it, with a pause between each one. Do not let it become hurried.

Invite brief comments on any of the bad news. How much bad news is there? What effect does all this bad news have on us, especially if it is about something that affects us personally?

Say that the relatively new Thessalonian Christians had their share of bad news around the time that Paul wrote to them. We do not know exactly what had happened, but we do know that this is how Paul, Silvanus and Timothy sought to encourage them. Now read the passage.

Explore and respond to the text (30 mins)

Use the Bible notes as a way into Bible study. For example, you could read a section, then allow time for people to discuss issue raised and respond.

Bible notes

Old Testament: Leviticus 19.1-2,15-18

This passage is part of the Holiness Code (Leviticus 17–26). It emphasises the holiness of the promised land and calls upon all Israelites to attain holiness by observing God's commandments. For priests and people their becoming holy is an ongoing work of God, whose commandments are to be kept, 'that I may be sanctified among the people of Israel: I am the Lord; I sanctify you' (22.31-33).

Leviticus holds together moral and ritual requirements, thereby linking correct behaviour with right worship. So, the holy land can be polluted by sexual misconduct (18.28) and by the worship of false gods (20.1-6). The linking of the ritual and the moral is seen clearly in the requirement to observe the sabbatical year, giving rest to the land (25.1-7), and the year of Jubilee (25.8-55), bringing redemption to the enslaved. Above all, the call to holiness is a call to be like God, who alone is to be worshipped. To love your neighbour as yourself, not taking vengeance, is to be like the one who is 'slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness' (Exodus 34.6).

New Testament: 1 Thessalonians 2.1-8

The apostles were maltreated at Philippi for 'advocating customs that are not lawful for us as Romans' and pursued by a mob in Thessalonica for 'acting contrary to the decrees of the emperor, saying that there is another king named Jesus' (Acts 16.21; 17.7). Their emphasis on the philosophical ideal of speaking the truth courageously despite opposition, on speaking 'not to please mortals, but to please God', fits being called by God 'into his own kingdom' (2.12).

'We might have made demands as apostles of Christ' refers to their entitlement, rooted in Jesus' words as he sent the twelve to proclaim the kingdom (Matthew 10.5-15), to support from their churches (1 Corinthians 9.4-12). But Paul and his companions worked for their living alongside the Thessalonians (2.9), and their intimacy is expressed using the female image of a nursing mother. A Jewish man and a Roman citizen, Paul expected to inflict rather than experience suffering. In following Jesus, he experienced hunger and hardship (2 Corinthians 11.23-28), bringing him close to the underprivileged majority of society living in the 'extreme poverty' of the Christians in Macedonia (2 Corinthians 8.1-2) and now 'very dear to us'. This seems to have made him more empathic with women, subject to male oppression in Jewish and Roman society. From his image of the nursing mother he is moved to speak of the centrality of self-giving to the preaching of the gospel, a self-giving at the heart of his understanding of God in Christ (e.g. Galatians 1.4).

Gospel: Matthew 22.34-46

The commands to 'love the Lord your God' (Deuteronomy 6.5) and to 'love your neighbour as yourself' (Leviticus 19.18) are central to Judaism.

In Luke 10.27 the Jewish lawyer offers the twofold summary of the law, and the Jewish leaders do not dispute what Jesus says here about 'the greatest commandment'. Jesus reflects accounts of Jewish law grounding conduct towards others by rules of humanity, and justice in conduct towards God by rules of piety

and holiness (Philo, Special Laws 2.63). Virtue in human relationships was an aspect of reverence for God (Josephus, Apion 2.170).

Rabbi Akiva, Jesus' younger contemporary, saw 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself' as at the heart of human relationships (Sifra 89b), and Jesus' insight that this is to 'do to others as you would have them do to you' (Matthew 7.12) is close to Rabbi Hillel's, from a generation earlier: 'What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbour' (Shabbat 31a). But Jesus' use of Psalm 110.1, interpreted by his contemporaries as a prophetic address by God to the promised Messiah, is more controversial. Taking David himself to be the prophetic author, Jesus suggests that the messianic 'my Lord' must then refer to someone superior to David rather than to one of his descendants. Although Matthew and Luke give Jesus a Davidic ancestry, Mark (see 12.35) and John (see 7.40-44) are much more ambiguous about Jesus' Davidic sonship.

The links between the lectionary readings

'You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy', is fundamental to all Scripture. To 'love the Lord your God', whose name 'I AM' is a promise of self-giving presence, is therefore 'to love your neighbour as yourself', the 'like' commandment recognised by Jesus. Imitating Jesus, Paul shares 'not only the gospel of God but also our own selves'.

For more discussion ideas, and practical and active ways to explore and respond to the readings, choose from: [Sermon ideas](#); [Active worship](#); [Picture pointers](#); or [PostScript](#)

Pray together (10 mins)

Prayers of intercession

Lord God, we pray for those who have brought us to faith, who have shown us your love, who have tended to our needs, physical, emotional and spiritual.

We pray for those who have put themselves in harm's way for us and others. We pray for those whose lives have been made harder because they have sought to serve you and help their fellow human beings.

We pray for those whose selfless acts have caused them distress.

We pray for those who have at any cost shared the gospel of Christ.

We pray for those imprisoned and tortured for their faith and witness.

May they be blessed in abundance with your love and care.

Amen.

End the session (5 mins)

A sending out prayer

From the security of this place, with friends and family and our faith community, be with us, eternal God, as we step into the world of 'mixed-up all-sorts'. May we be kind and caring to all people, no matter how they treat us. May we be true to ourselves

and hold our heads high, sharing your love and your care with all those we encounter.

Amen.

Live your faith

Look for opportunities to be strong, to express strength, or to convey a strong message, through a gentle action/response.

The ROOTS resources include a range of materials that can be put together to plan and run a Bible study, either leading up to a service based on the reading or in the following week.

The Bible study above is a selection of this week's resources and the timings are based on a Bible study session lasting one hour. This can be printed off and used as it is, or modified to suit your situation.

If you prefer to make your own selection from the weekly materials, please see our [guidance on preparing a Bible study](#). You will also need to include a copyright acknowledgement as follows:

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