

Prepare the ground



A prayer book for lent
St. Marks Coventry 2024



**“Still other seed
fell on good soil.
It came up and
yielded a crop, a
hundred times more
than was sown.”**

Luke 8:8

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Introduction

This lent we want to “prepare the ground” for the Kingdom seed to be planted in us as individuals and as a church.

We have spent time getting to grips with just what farmers do to prepare the soil for crops to be planted so that a harvest can be reaped. As we journey through this booklet, looking at one theme every week, we will spend time looking at different Old Testament characters and look at how God prepared them to build His kingdom. The exercises in the booklet will help us to think through what we can learn from these characters and how we can apply it to our own lives.

We would encourage you to find people you can go through this lent journey alongside, whether that is through connect groups, prayer triplets, friends.

Our prayer is that we will allow the Holy Spirit to prepare us over these six weeks. That we will know Jesus’ healing, guiding and leading us as individuals and St. Marks as we press into Him this lent.

From the staff team



Prayer over lent

Prayer is one of the bedrocks of this Lent for us at St Marks. As we engage with the material, our prayer is that we will use the time as a continuous conversation with Jesus, allowing him to feed us, speak to us, reveal things to us and teach us.

As well as being more intentional in prayer in our personal times with Jesus over lent, we would also encourage everyone in the church to engage with one of the weekly prayer events that will run for the 6 weeks of lent.

You may decide to commit to the same event each week or mix it up or attend all of them but please put them in your diary and commit to being at one each week of lent.

Instagram Live

Join live at lunchtime to interact with the prayers. Also available through the day on St. Marks Instagram story.

More information on the website stmarkscoventry.org

Early Morning Prayer

A time for us to pray together online via zoom

More information on the website stmarkscoventry.org

Lent Encounter Room Thursdays at 7:30pm

A space of worship and prayer in person at St Marks.

Fasting over lent

As well as prayer, we are encouraging the church to fast over lent. You should decide what that looks like for you but the sentiment behind it is to give us more time to spend with Jesus and to aid as a prompt to give more time to Jesus than we may normally do.

It is meant to be normal part of the Christian's life, and can be very beneficial in seeking God – as it often heightens our spiritual sensitivity. It creates more time and an additional focus for our prayer and worship.

There are example in the bible where God responded to the fast of his people (eg. Ezra 8) – but God is not impressed by your fasting, although it can result in breakthrough of one kind or another.

Fasting can look like lots of things now that meal prep doesn't often take hours, but some suggestions are:

- **Intermittent Fast** – eg. 6am–6pm or a meal each day, apart from Sundays (feast days). This is what the early church used to do. Then give the money that is saved to charities.
- **Abstinence** – give up something that you do regularly and spend that time in prayer/bible reading/with God. Social media, cancel Netflix for 40 days give up a type of food that might be addictive (sugar/sweets) etc.

If you have fasted successfully before, maybe think about what the next step up in fasting could be for you to help you to spend more intentional time with Jesus this Lent. You may decide to fast with your connect group or team as you press in together.

Fasting is not advisable if you are pregnant on certain medications or you're under 18.

Daily Prayer

Father,

I choose to give you this season of lent and ask that you help me to prepare myself for all that you have in store for me and for St Marks.

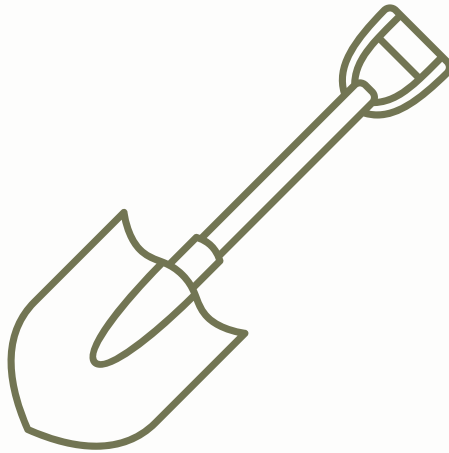
I submit to you, Holy Spirit, and ask that you heal me where I have been wounded and speak to me of the plans you have for me. Help me to cooperate with what you want to do in me and through me. Soften my heart that I would read your word and be changed.

Jesus, I pray that I would become more like you as I press in deeper this lent, and that you would be glorified more in my life and in St Marks.

Amen.

WEEK 1

Digging



w/c 14th February

When you want to reap a harvest, the first thing you need to do is know the ground you have been given and mark out that space. We all have a story, we all have had mountains and valleys. Some of us have known Jesus our whole life, some of us just for a few months or years.

As we look at the story of Joseph and think about the journey his life took and where God was, we will spend some time thinking about our own stories and where God has been at key moments and, hopefully, we will see how God has been leading and preparing us.

Read

Genesis 37, 39-45

Questions

1. What were the key events in Joseph's life? List them.
2. How do you think Joseph felt at each of those key events?
3. For each of those events, how much was down to Joseph's behaviour/reactions and how much was down to the behaviour/reactions of others?
4. For each of those events, where do you think God was? Do you think Joseph felt God close to him at each of those events?

I praise you because I am fearfully and
wonderfully made;
your works are wonderful, I know that full
well.
My frame was not hidden from you
when I was made in the secret place, when I
was woven together in the depths of the earth.
Your eyes saw my unformed body;
all the days ordained for me were written in
your book before one of them came to be.

Psalm 139:14 -16

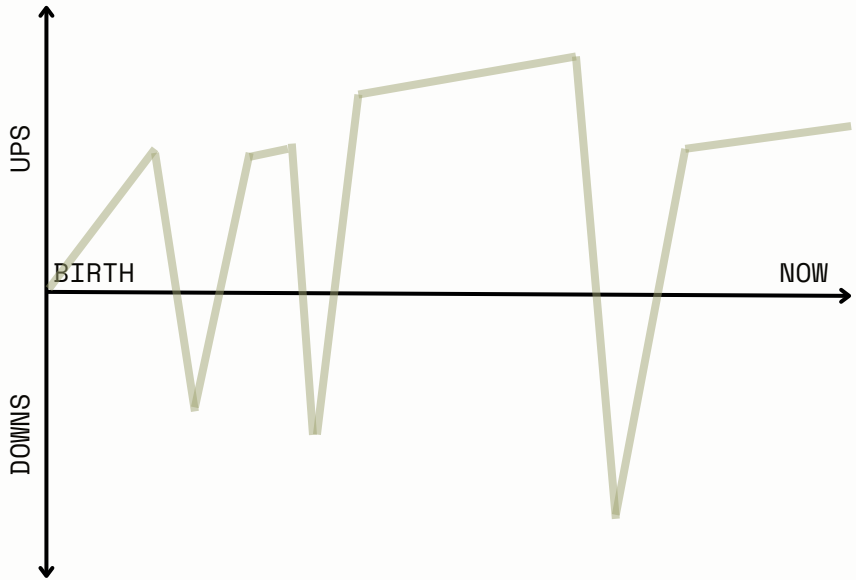
What does this mean for me?

Many people like to think of life like a journey. Looking back at the ups and downs of your life so far can help you think about your future. Take some time to 'map' the significant points of your journey to date.

- The horizontal line represents your life so far. By drawing a line, (green in the example below),map out the significant events in your life to date: education, relationships, jobs etc., showing roughly when they occurred.
- In a different colour trace a line showing some of the milestones of your Christian faith which might include: a moment when you first knew God's love for yourself, times when God seemed particularly close or far away or difficult, important relationships with other Christians, opportunities for ministry or leadership.
- Mark the times on your first line when you grew spiritually and understood more about why you were created –your purpose.

When you have finished, take time to notice patterns of how God has led you this far, of how your vocation has developed or perhaps of things you need to consider or act upon.



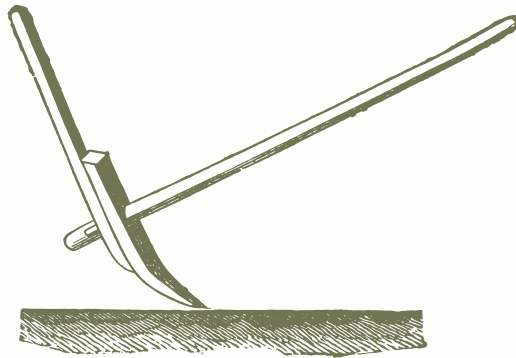


Questions for discussion

1. Positive moments. What are you grateful for?
 2. How have you experienced God's presence or grown spiritually? How is it possible God might have been involved, even if you weren't aware of him?
 3. Tough times. How have you grown through them and what have you learnt?
 4. Has God helped you make sense of your life?
 5. Where have the turning points been in your life?
 6. What clues does this give you about your future roles in life?
- Use this as a basis for thanksgiving to God, and also prayer that God will guide you further

WEEK 2

Ploughing



w/c 21st February

When the ground is ploughed, the soil is turned over to break up the soil to make it more fertile. As the ground is churned up it exposes things that should not be there, such as big rocks, and brings them to the surface so they can be dealt with. It cuts up the big weeds so that they will decay and disappear and not choke the crops. Ploughing also ensures fresh nutrients are brought to the top of the soil so the seeds can be planted in good soil.

As we look at the start of Moses' story, we will see how, as his life was ploughed by the experiences he faced, God met him and helped to remove the big rocks in his life that were tripping him up and stopping him from stepping into all that God had for him.

Read

Exodus 2-4:17

Questions

1. In chapter two, what events happen to Moses (from birth)? Is Moses responsible/to blame for each event?
2. What might have been the messages that Moses received or believed about himself at each of these events?
3. When God appears to Moses in the burning bush (3-4:17) what do Moses' objections (there are several) to God's command to return to Egypt reveal about what Moses thinks about himself?
4. Do you see any patterns in what Moses experienced and what he thinks about himself?
5. What are the differences between the way that Moses views himself and how God views him?

For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

2 Corinthians 10:3-5

What does this mean for me?

Using your own life map from last week, with your key experiences, what are some of the messages you might have received and believed about yourself?

Do you see any patterns in the messages you have received? Are there any that you see repeated? Or could be grouped together? If you had to name them what are the main (2 or 3) messages you have received?

How do you think these messages may have changed the way you see yourself?

How may they have changed the way you behave? Or relate to others?

What do you think God's message to you would be?

Find a bible verse that speaks the truth about how God sees you.

Questions for discussion

Share what you found were the key messages you have received from your life experiences and share why you think you received these messages?

Share how you think these key messages may have affected the way you feel about yourself, your behaviour, and the way you relate to others?

Share the verse you think God wants to give you that speaks the truth of who you are.

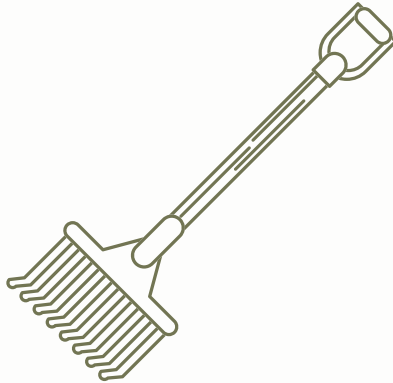
Pray and declare these verses over each other.

Key message I have received	What the Bible says God thinks about me
e.g people always leave me	The Lord your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you." Deuteronomy 31:6

- Ask God to forgive you for how this wrong thinking may have affected the way you view and behave towards Him, yourself and others. Receive God's forgiveness.
- Ask for the Holy Spirit to fill you again.
- Speak those bible verses over yourself, choosing to believe them over those key messages you have identified.

WEEK 3

Raking



w/c 28th February

In order to refine the soil further, it is then raked, which enables the soil to become aerated and for more moisture to get through. Whereas ploughing is about bringing what was underneath to the surface, raking is about refining the topsoil ready to receive the seed. It's more of the refining process, where small stone and weeds can easily be removed.

This week we're focussing on getting rid of stuff that has slipped in, that started to believe about ourselves ie. I'm no good, I don't have the strength. Just like Gideon and how God raked the soil to remove lies that he was believing so he could step into all that God had for him. God saw and declared the truth of Gideon's situation which was different to how Gideon saw it and felt about it.

Read

Judges 6 and 7

Questions

1. In Judges 6, what are some of the lies Gideon believes about himself?
2. How do these lies effect Gideon's behaviour?
3. How do these lies effect his reaction to God?
4. What words would you use to describe Gideon in Judges 6?
5. How does the angel describe Gideon?
6. What words would you use to describe Gideon in Judges 7?
How do they contrast to how you have described him in Judges 6?
7. Why do you think Gideon changes?

Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

John 8:31-32

What does this mean for me?

Jesus is clear we have an enemy who lies to us. In John 8, Jesus calls the devil “the father of lies”. The enemy wants to keep us down, hold us back and trap us, just as Gideon was hiding in Judges 6, and one of the ways he does this is by lying to us constantly. It was only when Gideon replaced the lies he believed himself with the truth of how God saw him, as a mighty warrior, that he was able to step into all the plans God had to build His Kingdom through Gideon.

We are going to spend some time this week thinking about the lies we may believe about ourselves. Make a note of any internal negative messages you hear about yourself and ask God to show you how he sees you then find a bible verse or passage which would counteract the message. This week is more about noticing the more subtle lies we hear and believe, or soundtracks we have allowed to play in our head.

- Ask God to forgive you for how this wrong thinking may have affected the way you view and behave towards Him, yourself and others. Receive God’s forgiveness.
- Ask for the Holy Spirit to fill you again.
- Speak those bible verses over yourself, choosing to believe them over the lies you have identified.

Questions for discussions

1. Share some of the lies you have heard or identified this week. Spend some time speaking the truth over each other.
2. The angel showed Gideon how God saw Him and who he could be, spend some time asking God how He sees each of you and who you are in Him.

	What are some of the lies I've heard/believed today?	What is the truth in the bible?
	e.g I always make mistakes, I am useless	Isaiah 43:1 "you are precious and honoured in my sight,"
Day 1		
Day 2		
Day 3		
Day 4		
Day 5		
Day 6		
Day 7		

WEEK 4

Levelling



w/c 6th March

Once the soil has been turned and aerated, the soil needs to be levelled. Levelling prevents the problem of unevenness and ensures the ground is optimal for its intended use. Levelling also expands the area.

As we look at the story of Queen Esther, we will see that as she believes and accepts the truth that is spoken to her she is able to walk into all the plans God has for her. As she allows the truth to level her ground and drive out any lies or wrong thinking, God can use Esther as she has been created and expands her influence and role in building God's Kingdom.

Read

Esther 4-8

Watch the Bible Project video of Esther to help give you the wider context of the story of Esther.

Questions

1. When Mordecai asks Esther to go to see the King what does her response in verse 11 show us how she is feeling?
2. What does the first half of the verse show us about God's plans and provision?
3. What is the truth that Mordecai speaks into Esther's life?
4. How does that one truth change Esther? What does she now believe about herself?
5. How does God use Esther to bring about His plans and purposes because she chooses to believe that truth spoken to her by Mordecai?

For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?"

Esther 4:14

What does this mean for me?

Esther shows us that believing one truth can change the way we respond to God and how we view ourselves. We are going to spend some time sitting with truths about ourselves found in the bible.

Read through the list below slowly and speak out each truth.

As you speak them out notice if there are any of these truths that you struggle to believe, find hard to accept is true of me or actually don't believe. As you read them through, highlight the ones that you struggle with. Pray. Speak that promise over yourself again – say out loud "I am a child of God" or "I am born of God and the evil one cannot touch me."

Commit to declaring that or those promises out loud over yourself at least once a day and pray and ask for the Holy Spirit to show you, firstly, what might be stopping you from believing it, and, secondly, for the faith to believe it. Ask the Holy Spirit to show you how you might be different if you believed that/those truths, just like Esther was.

Questions for discussions

1. Share the truths that you struggled to believe or say out loud. If you know, share why you think it may be hard for you to believe and accept that truth.
2. Speak out those verses each of you have struggled with over each other and pray them into each other's life.

WHO I AM IN CHRIST

I am accepted...

John 1:12 I am God's child.

John 15:15 As a disciple, I am a friend of Jesus Christ.

Romans 5:1 I have been justified.

1 Corinthians 6:17 I am united with the Lord, and I am one with Him in spirit.

1 Corinthians 6:19-20 I have been bought with a price and I belong to God.

1 Corinthians 12:27 I am a member of Christ's body.

I am secure...

Romans 8:1-2 I am free from condemnation.

Romans 8:28 I am assured that God works for my good in all circumstances.

Romans 8:31-39 I am free from any condemnation brought against me and I cannot be separated from the love of God.

2 Corinthians 1:21-22 I have been established, anointed and sealed by God.

Colossians 3:1-4 I am hidden with Christ in God.

Philippians 1:6 I am confident that God will complete the good work He started in me.

I am significant...

John 15:5 I am a branch of Jesus Christ, the true vine, and a channel of His life.

John 15:16 I have been chosen and appointed to bear fruit.

1 Corinthians 3:16 I am God's temple.

2 Corinthians 5:17-21 I am a minister of reconciliation for God.

Ephesians 2:6 I am seated with Jesus Christ in the heavenly realm.

Ephesians 2:10 I am God's workmanship.

WEEK 5

Fertilising



w/c 13th March

Soil can have extra nutrients added to it to boost the soil's fertility. Fertilizers improve the supply of nutrients in the soil, directly affecting plant growth. Soil amendments improve a soil's physical condition (e.g. soil structure, water infiltration), indirectly affecting plant growth.

Sometimes we need a time with God that is more than we get in a normal day or normal week. We need times of fertilizing – soaking in God's presence. David understood this. He knew He needed God's presence and yearned for more of it. This week we will spend time in the Psalms learning what it looks like to soak in God's presence and how it can change us.

Read

One Psalm for each day of this week;

Psalm 84

Psalm 27

Psalm 18

Psalm 100

Psalm 51

Psalm 23

Psalm 24

Questions

Each day read the psalm several times and notice:

1. How does David feel about himself/ his situation/God in this psalm?
2. What does this psalm reveal about who God is?
3. What does it mean for me that God is who He is in this psalm?
4. What prayer flows from you from this psalm?

Blessed is the one

**who does not walk in step with the wicked
or stand in the way that sinners take**

**or sit in the company of mockers,
but whose delight is in the law of the Lord,
and who meditates on his law day and night.**

**That person is like a tree planted by streams of
water,**

**which yields its fruit in season
and whose leaf does not wither—
whatever they do prospers.**

Psalm 1:1-3

What does this mean for me

Spend some more intentional time alone with God this week. This may be worshipping, reading or listening to scripture, spending time in nature, journaling, but be intentional about being in God's presence. This isn't about learning more or hearing what other people think but allowing you to spend time with God and let Him speak to you. Carve out more time than you may normally do. For different life stages this will look very different, but God is interested in our hearts and He knows our situations and capacity.

You may choose to make a note of what you think God has said to you but do not fall into the trap of feeling you have to produce something or have something to show for your time. This is just about you and God spending time together.

We've created a playlist you can use during your own times of worship; Follow the QR code at the bottom of the page;

Questions for discussion

1. Share any of the psalms that have spoken to you and why.
2. Share how you have found the times of soaking and what you think God has been showing you.
3. You could spend some time waiting and listening on God for each other.
4. Pray for one another.





WEEK 6

Planting



w/c 20th March

Once the ground is prepared well, it is ready to receive the seed. Jesus talked about a farmer who sows seed in Luke 8.

"A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path; it was trampled on, and the birds ate it up. Some fell on rocky ground, and when it came up, the plants withered because they had no moisture. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up with it and choked the plants. Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up and yielded a crop, a hundred times more than was sown.".....

"This is the meaning of the parable: The seed is the word of God. Those along the path are the ones who hear, and then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved. Those on the rocky ground are the ones who receive the word with joy when they hear it, but they have no root. They believe for a while, but in the time of testing they fall away. The seed that fell among thorns stands for those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by life's worries, riches and pleasures, and they do not mature. But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop.

Joshua was a man who had allowed God to prepare his ground, prepare his heart and prepare him. As he had apprenticed under Moses, so when God gave him the seeds of the plans he had for his life, they went into good soil and were able to achieve the crop that God intended. Joshua was ready for the call God had for him.

Read

Joshua 1-6

Questions

In Joshua 1:

1. How specific is God with the plans He has for Joshua?
2. What warnings does He give him?
3. What promises does He give him?
4. What truths can Joshua hold on to?

Over the rest of the chapters:

1. What do you notice about the way Joshua uses God's words to Him in Joshua 1 in the rest of the chapters?
2. What do you notice about the way Joshua behaves?
3. How has Joshua's ground be prepared for these plans to be fulfilled?

What does this mean for me?

Just like Joseph, Moses, Gideon, Esther, David and Joshua we all have an opportunity to build God's kingdom. As we have cooperated with the Holy Spirit over this lent we have prepared our ground so it is more ready to receive what God may want to plant in us, the kingdom seed that will produce a crop that will bring glory to God.

Some of us may already have a very clear idea of what that looks like in our lives and some of us may be wondering what they could look like for the person we have been created to be, in the situation we are in, "for such a time as this".

The following exercise is designed to help you to discern what that seed might be – what God may be calling you to. They may help you discern and be able to articulate what God is calling you to.

<https://www.freeshapetest.com>

or use the QR code below



After taking the test and praying, complete the following:

1. My top three gifts are: e.g encouragement, shepherding, creative communication
2. I am passionate about: e.g young people, homelessness
3. My dream is...e.g to create a space where young people can pray for themselves and issues in the world

**For we are co-workers in God's service;
you are God's field, God's building.**

1 Corinthians 3:9

Questions for discussions

1. Share what the exercises brought up. Share how it makes you feel. Share whether you can see and call out parts of those in each other.
2. Pray for what God wants to do with you and through you in this coming season.

Lent 2024



Other recommended reading;
Image Bearer – Dr Rachel Atkinson
Live No Lies – John Mark Comer
Will the real me please stand up – Stuart Lees
Dying to change – Mary Pytches

Book Prayer Ministry Appointments at;
The Well Christian Healing Centre in Leamington Spa
<https://www.wellhealing.org>

