



ENGAGE

Notes and questions from the talks for further engagement by individuals or groups.

allsaintsworcester

BODY (1): desire

Icebreaker

If you could have one extra room bolted onto your house what would you go for?

Recap

On a profound level, we are deeply defined by our desires, by what it is that we are devoted to, given to, gearing our lives towards. Human beings are desiring creatures. And this is a good thing - our desiring human hearts, are originally designed and ultimately destined to find their fulfilment, their satisfaction, in the love and belonging of God.

Augustine prayed it like this: "Our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you."

And Jesus promised: "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness for they shall be satisfied."

The Bible is also very much in touch with the reality that our desires are fallen, we don't naturally hunger and thirst after righteousness but this is something we need to learn as we aspire to pattern our lives on Jesus.

Read

Galatians 5:16-26

- What good desires (e.g. for provision, for belonging) may underlie this list of what fallen desire looks like?

One of the key words in the NT that gets politely translated heart or affection, literally means entrails, bowels. We are talking about the deep seated desires of the substance of your life. And sobering reality is that the desires that we gratify, i.e. give ourselves to, come to shape our future desires. The task of chastening desire is a basic, foundational and essential one in our discipleship.

The talk suggested three metaphors for providing a mental picture of this task:

- Nuturing a tropical greenhouse (not letting the weeds ruin it)
- Tending to a kennel of dogs (not feeding/strengthening the vicious dogs)
- Constructing a marble run (rather than our marbles of desire just running down into the ditches on the floor)

Discuss

- Which of these metaphors do you find helpful? Are there others you prefer?
- What are some of the favourite biblical metaphors for this cultivating of desire, and development of virtue?
- Why is the chastening of desire so unfathomable to large parts of our culture? (e.g. consumerism)
- Where does wider culture still uphold this wisdom (e.g. every addiction recovery group)
- Where do you feel the discomfort/frustration/ache of unmet desire?
- The Bible claims this difficult channelling and recalibrating of our desires is the path towards fullness of life, fullness of freedom, and fullness of joy – discuss!

Practice

- Participate regularly in the worship of the church, which is set up to be affective of our hearts.
- Find a trusted friend/pastor/mentor with whom you can share honestly about the deepest/darkest desires in your heart.

Pray

Lord, you are the joy of all our desiring.

Give us vision and wisdom as we seek to recalibrate our aching hearts.

Re-capture our imaginations with a foretaste of glory.

May we learn to hunger and thirst for righteousness.

Come Lord Jesus,

Amen.

BODY (2): speech

Recap

In this talk we explored the power of our speech – how we can use the power of our tongues either to bring life or death, to bless or to curse, to build up or to tear down.

We worked through James 3:1-12 and explored what James was wanting us to see and understand. James emphasises the power of the tongue and how we all need help from God to “tame our tongues” so that we can use them for creative purposes.

We were encouraged to do three things to grapple with this topic:

1. To confess where we have not used our speech in a holy and helpful way (and to apologise to people where we have said things we should not have done)
2. Apply “THINK”:
 - Is it *true? helpful? inspiring? necessary? kind?*
3. Be intentional and creative in using our mouths for good

Read

1 Peter 3:10-12

- Peter quotes Psalm 34 here.
- v10 is directly relevant to this topic

What is Peter saying here? Why does he think it’s so important?

How does reading in light of vv8-9 clarify this?

Discuss

Rich shared a story where his internal “stuff” spilled out inappropriately and unhelpfully in a social situation. He reminded us that Jesus says in Luke 6:45 that “what you say flows from what is in your heart”.

How have you experienced this?

Where have you seen words used negatively and destructively?

Where have you seen words used positively and creatively?

How can we use words to build people up?

Where do you personally struggle with all of this?

Practice

1. Take time as a group to encourage one another with your words – to affirm them and build them up (Rich reminded us that affirmation and encouragement needs

to be specific and considered to have real value for people). What do you “see” in others that you want to affirm, bless, encourage?

2. Identify people in your lives who you could do something similar for. Pray about who God might want you to do this for. Consider writing a card and sending it, or picking up the phone to them (don't settle for email or text!!!).

Take it further

Read: “Your Words Have Power: How Controlling the Tongue Can Bring Wisdom from Heaven” by R.T. Kendall

BODY (3): health and disability

Recap

Laura talked to us this week about the theme of health and disability. We read the story of Mephibosheth, the disabled son of Jonathan, whom David elevates and gives a place at the royal table. The subject of health and disability affects us all in different ways, yet we all are offered a 'place of grace' at the table of the King whatever our struggles may be. Here are the three points Laura spoke to us about:

1. There is a place for us at the table
2. There is a table to come
3. Will we make space at our table?

Read

2 Samuel 9

Discuss

Can you empathise with the characters in this story?

What can we learn from the way that David treats Mephibosheth?

What stood out to you from Laura's talk?

Practice

Laura quoted Nancy Eiesland author of 'The Disabled God':

"The history of the church's interaction with the disabled is at best an ambiguous one. Rather than being a structure for empowerment, the church has more often supported the societal structures and attitudes that have treated people with disabilities as objects of pity and paternalism. For many disabled persons the church has been a 'city on a hill' – physically inaccessible and socially inhospitable."

Has anyone in the group had bad experiences in the church of engaging with illness and disability? How may we as the church improve to better allow mutual flourishing in the community of grace?

Take it further

Read: 'The Disabled God: Toward a Liberatory Theology of Disability' by Nancy L. Eiesland.

Visit: <https://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/place-belong-disability-and-church>

BODY (4): techwise

Recap

In this talk we were encouraged to think about the importance of being very intentional and wise about our relationship with technology. We saw that it is not *morally neutral*. It is neither all good nor all bad. The key is how we use and what for. Unchecked, technology can end up out of place in our lives and have a disruptive and destructive effect on us. In its proper place, technology can be a powerful gift from God that helps us thrive and bear fruit in the world.

Read and ask

Re-read both Exodus 31:1-6 and Genesis 11:1-5.

Are there other passages in scripture that speak to this question of being techwise, perhaps more indirectly?

How might we go about writing some 21st century proverbs for life in "digital Babylon"?

Discuss

Andy Crouch has five tests to help us examine whether technology is in its proper place in our lives:

1. *Technology is in its proper place when it helps us bond with the real people we have been given to love. It's out of its proper place when connections with people online displace meaningful commitment to people all around us.*
2. *Technology is in its proper place when it starts great conversations. It's out of its proper place when it prevents us from talking with and listening to one another.*
3. *Technology is in its proper place when it helps us take care of the fragile bodies we inhabit. It's out of its proper place when it promises to help us escape the limits and vulnerabilities of those bodies altogether.*
4. *Technology is in its proper place when it helps us acquire skill and mastery of domains that are the glory of human culture (sports, music, the arts etc). When we let technology replace the development of skill with passive consumption, something has gone wrong.*
5. *Technology is in its proper place when it helps us cultivate awe for the created world we are part of and responsible for stewarding. It's out of its proper place when it keeps us from engaging the wild and wonderful natural world with all our senses.*

What do each of these five aspects look like in your life?
How can you tell when technology is in its proper place in your life?
How can you tell when it's not?

Practice

Many people, as part of a deeper commitment to spiritual formation, are recognising the need to practice a digital asceticism (intentionally restricting the place of technology in their lives) through a digital rule of life.

A "rule of life" is simply a set of consciously chosen practices and habits to help us live well (see our teaching on this at <https://www.allsaintsworcester.org.uk/ptwoj>).

Consider developing a simple rule of life around technology that helps you use it ways that will keep it in its proper place. See some suggestions on the next page.

For in-depth teaching on this, listen to "The Case for a Digital Asceticism" by John Mark Comer – link below.

Take it further

Read:

"Digital Minimalism" – Cal Newport

"The Techwise Family" – Andy Crouch

Listen:

John Mark Comer teaching on "The Case for a Digital Asceticism" -

<https://practicingtheway.org/teaching/the-case-for-a-digital-asceticism>

SOME SUGGESTIONS FOR A "DIGITAL RULE OF LIFE"

1. Tame your phone

- Turn off all notifications on your phone (except for essential ones – e.g. an elderly family member being able to contact you at any time). Notifications interrupt what you are doing and hinder focus and creativity.
- Turn it off and "put it to bed" *downstairs* before (an hour before?) you go to bed. Time off screen before sleeping helps you relax and sleep better.
- Do not take phones upstairs/into bedrooms (or use as an alarm clock). This helps you start your day in prayer and present to others.
- Use the "screen time" function to limit your use of apps. This nudges you to do other things!
- Limit use of social media. Try to stick to checking it/posting once a day!
- Remove apps that cause anxiety and hinder creativity and productivity.

2. Fast from technology regularly

- Plan to fast regularly from technology – e.g. come off social media for a period of time
- Use the time and headspace this creates to pursue God.
- Notice your level of withdrawal anxiety which will indicate the extent to which you are digitally addicted

3. Simplify your tech world

- If possible have a room which has no screens in it.
- Audit your apps – remove the ones you don't need/use and those that work against creativity and connection with people
- Tidy and organise your digital workspace – e.g. desktop, filing system – to reduce anxiety and stress
- Remove any tech you don't use.

BODY (5): holding together in love

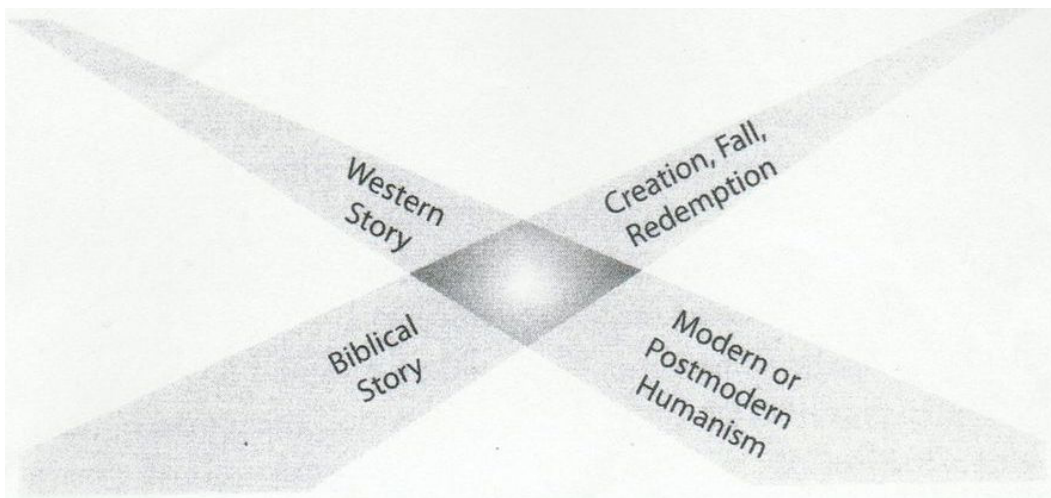
Recap

The final talk in this module focused on the call to seek unity as a local church, despite inevitable disagreements, and how we can go about doing that. We looked at Paul's clear, challenging and yet hopeful teaching in Philippians 2 to help us do this.

Rich helped us to see that we are living through a time in history of seismic cultural change, with competing worldviews and shifting beliefs about lots of things, and how this influences how we derive identity, purpose and meaning as humans.

We are seeing this in the current debate around important questions including racial justice, gender equality, violence to the poor, the climate emergency and human sexuality.

We were reminded that the people of God are called to work out what it means to live well in the intersection of two "meta-narratives" that collide in various ways:



All this means that it can be difficult to dialogue well with others who hold different views to us. Rich argued that it's vital that followers of Jesus engage in a healthy, undefended and wise way with these questions.

In the context of this teaching, Rich introduced how the Church of England is intentionally exploring questions of human sexuality through "Living in Love and Faith" and how and why we will be engaging with this process as a local church.

Please do watch the talk if you missed it and speak to Rich or Owen if you have any questions or concerns.

Read and ask

John 13:34-35

How do we engage with v35 in light of Philippians 2:1-11?

Discuss

How has the world changed during your lifetime?

Where and how do you experience the collision of worldviews?

How do you personally respond to disagreement with others/in the church?

Why do you think unity in the church is so important to Jesus and yet so hard for us to do?

What practices as individuals and as a church will help us "hold together in love"?

Practice

Identify a question/issue/topic you care about and that you recognise you need to better understand from the vantage point of someone who holds a different view on it to you.

If you know someone personally who disagrees with you, consider inviting them to share with you why they believe what they do. Promise only to listen and ask just clarifying questions!

Or, alternatively, identify a good book or podcast to listen to. We can recommend some to you. You might like to read something with others so you can discuss as you go.

Take it further

Read:

"Until Unity" – Francis Chan