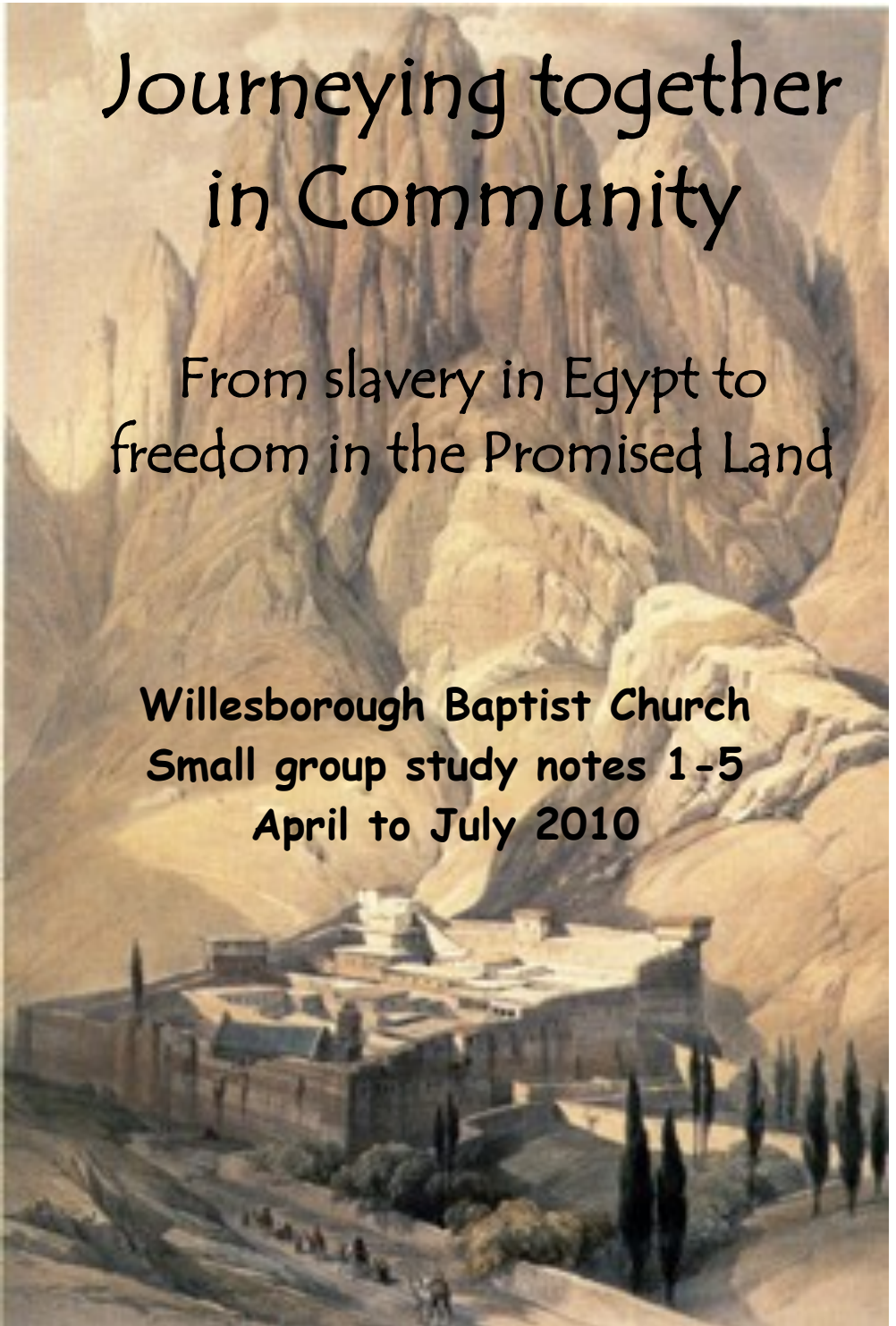


Journeying together in Community

From slavery in Egypt to
freedom in the Promised Land

Willesborough Baptist Church
Small group study notes 1-5
April to July 2010



Journeying together in Community

From slavery in Egypt to
freedom in the Promised Land.

The DVD introduction to the study series together with these study notes is brought to you by Mike Haywood, Mavis Gibbs, Chris Lukkien and Alan Dinnie.

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Exodus 2:11-3:10 | Alan |
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Exodus 4:18-6:1 | Mavis |
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The series is complemented by the Sunday Sermons that Alan will be preaching on Journeying Together in Community

If you missed a particular Sunday you can always listen to the message or download the message from the Church website.

www.wbc-ashford.org.uk

Journeying together in Community

In our new series we are going to *journey together in community* and hopefully learn fresh insights from the experience of the Israelites and their journey from Egypt to the Promised Land. In preparation I realise that there are numerous lessons we can learn for our journey together here at WBC. God is the God of plans and purposes. He calls us to journey together into the future, that is so often 'unknown' to us but is clearly 'known' to God.

We will see how the Israelites were not simply journeying together but they were journeying with God. It was not simply a case of getting on with your neighbour but the challenge of getting on with God who sees all things.

It is my heartfelt prayer that we would get to know God in deeper ways as a result of our journey together over the next three months. As you share in these studies within your small group they will be complemented by the preaching each Sunday on other aspects of our journeying theme.

There is a great verse in Daniel 11:32 where the prophet indicates, *'the people who know their God will stand firm and take action.'* This would be a wonderful promise to pray for, believe for, as vision is turned into reality.

One thing we will soon discover is that the journeying together and with God is far from being straightforward. There was liberation from slavery, miraculous provision, new worshipping patterns but also a falling out with one another, failing God time and again, yielding to enemies that messed everything up for their journeying together.

Well, what is community? I am not sure whether I have tapped into a full understanding of the word in its application within the church. My prayer is that fresh insight would be given as we seek to be a faithful obedient people to the one who is 'head of the church and Lord of all.'

Alan

Willesborough Baptist Church ~ April 2010

1: PREPARATION FOR THE JOURNEY

Passage: Exodus 2:11-3:10

When we think about the idea of journeys - take time as you begin sharing together, to have an **icebreaker!**

As you recall the past - what journey has been of particular significance for you? It might be a journey that went terribly wrong or simply because it was wonderful success?

In our series, **Journeying Together in Community**, we begin in **Egypt** where the Israelites had been for over 400 years. Over four centuries the Israelites had significantly established themselves in the land.

Moses is the focal person we will be studying.

- Take a few moments in your group to recall anything about Moses that has impacted your life in some way.

In the DVD Alan spoke about the **calling of God in our lives**. He said how *'God uses our upbringing, our education, our experiences through life - and he is the one who weaves it all together in a rich tapestry of His loving purposes.'* Discuss this thought together.

There have been a couple of introductory messages on Sundays and therefore we launch right into a key episode in Moses' life.

Exodus 2:11 One day ...after Moses had grown up. Moses was forty years of age. He decided to deal with an altercation that was taking place between a Hebrew and an Egyptian - and the end result was that he was a marked man on the run for his life.

The situation that occurred was a reflection of the darkness and difficulties the Israelites were experiencing at that time.

- Think of some of the other great heroes of the Bible who messed up big time!
- In what way do we find that these 'heroes' are a source of encouragement to us?

Perhaps the whole situation that arose was a result of over-confidence with Moses - it may have been the equivalent of a mid-life crisis!

It is in Ex 2:14 that there is an indication that the people would not rally around Moses and support him. They said *'Who made you ruler and judge over us?'*

Alan mentioned that *'he sensed God's calling but failed to grasp God's timing.'*

- Do you agree with such a perspective on Moses?

Moses flees for his life - and this is where he ends up in Median by a well.

- How do you think Moses felt at this time?

Remember that Moses had just left Pharaoh's palace with nothing - and he was not going to be able to return!

Even at the well he rescues the daughters of some Midian priest when they came to draw water from the well to water their flocks.

The end result was that Moses married **Zipporah!**

Midian became the next training ground for Moses. It was training in the experience of **solitude** encountered in looking after sheep in the desert waste of that region.

Yet God was still at work - he continued to hear the cries of his people suffering at the hands of their Egyptian overlords. There was also the covenant that still stood - the purposes of God would be accomplished.

Let's come back to this experience of solitude for Moses.

- List some of the outcomes that would be growing experiences for Moses in this period of his life:
 1. ... *there is the growing awareness of God's presence.*
 - 2.
 - 3.

God spoke to Moses from a BURNING BUSH. There would have been many occasions when Moses would have seen bushes burning in the desert . The difference with this bush - it was not consumed! It attracted Moses and drew him closer in order to investigate.

It was there that he heard the distinct call from within the bush

Moses! Moses! To which Moses replies - to a burning bush - **here I am!** By now, lessons in the school of solitude were paying dividends. Moses is told that he is standing on holy ground.

- What lesson does Moses learn and what lessons can we learn from this snapshot of his life?

God spoke at an unexpected time and in an unexpected place with an unexpected message.

It was like any other day - the dull routine (looking after sheep was not the most exciting task when you have been raised as a prince in Egypt!) but God broke inand he is still in the business of breaking into the dull routine of our lives and doing something new.

- What do you feel are some of the key lessons in this whole experience for Moses?
For instance, we can see God as the God of the second chance. Another opportunity was offered to Moses to be the liberator of his people.
- In our journey together - what are the principles here that we need to take hold of as a church? So often the temptation is to get on the journey without adequate preparation. With Moses there is important preparation taking place for something bigger that is going to happen in his life.

Moses was now eighty years of age - and the real journey of his life in many ways was only beginning!

Digging Deeper:

Alec Motyer has written on Exodus. He picks up on the nature of fire in Exodus. 'When the Angel of the Lord came to Moses, he clothed himself *in flames of fire from within the bush*, and this linking of fire with God's presence recurs throughout Exodus (13:21; 14:19; 19:18; 33:10; 40:38).

Exodus reveals that the fire stands for the presence of the holy God and the smoke for the gracious veiling of that holiness when he comes among humans.

....In particular fire is the bracket which provides a framework around the central narrative of Exodus. It starts with the fire in the bush (3:2) and ends with the fire on the mountain (19:18), and in each case the fire is linked with the separateness of the divine and the exclusion of the human as endangered.

This was the starting place for Moses as 'servant of the Lord', as it is indeed for all true and effective service.'

- As you read through Exodus, why not highlight all the references to fire.

2: LET MY PEOPLE GO

Passage : Exodus 4:18-6:1

Today's study is all about CHOICE. We all like to choose; we all like to think that we have the freedom to make up our own minds and to choose what we want or where we go, or even who our friends are. But, suppose you make a wrong choice, a choice that cannot be altered; a choice that affects the rest of your life? Think about choosing a life partner, or deciding on whether or not to buy a particular house or take a particular job. Sometimes our freedom to choose can present us with all kinds of difficult decisions. Our study today is about who we choose to obey. It's about weighing up all the pros and cons and coming to a decision as to which direction the rest of our life is going in.

Deuteronomy 30:15 reads: *“See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil, in that I command you today to love the Lord your God, to walk in His ways, and to keep His commandments.... That you may live... and the Lord your God will bless you.....”*

Joshua 24:15 reads: *“And if it seems evil to you to serve the Lord, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers servedor the gods of those in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”*

Make a good and right choice and things will go well with you, ultimately. Make a bad and wrong choice and eventually you will suffer for it. It sounds harsh doesn't it, yet there is one great basic choice that we all need to make, and if we make the wrong choice then the consequences are literally “hellish”.

The Biblical story of Moses leading the Children of Israel out of Egypt and into the Promised Land is absolutely full of choices. Moses' choice to obey God and go and speak to Pharaoh, the Israelites choice to listen to Moses; then there is Pharaoh's choice to ignore God's warnings and the choice of the Children of Israel to obey God and fulfil His commands for that very first Passover; plus many more.

Today we are looking at God's command to Pharaoh to “Let My People Go!” and particularly the choice that Israel had to make to move out of Egypt.

READ. Exodus chapter 8 verses 20 – 29

NOW WATCH THE DVD.

1. Nowadays we are not conscious of living in bondage to foreign overlords, neither are we aware of living under the influence of demonic gods. We like to consider that we live in a free country and will never have to suffer the kind of bondage that the Children of Israel experienced. But is it possible that we can, in fact, be enslaved by a different kind power? In the DVD I listed alcoholism, drugs, pornography, anger, jealousy, bitter rivalry, inferiority complex, vanity and fear.

Do you see these things as “bondages”?

If not, why not?

Can you list any other “powers” that can enslave us?

2. The Children of Israel needed to go three days into the wilderness in order to reach a place where they could free themselves from the bondage of Egypt. As you begin to think about the “bondages” that we can live under, what do you think might constitute a “three day journey” in order to begin to shrug off negative influences?

In other words, how can we begin to face up to and fight those things that hold us in subjugation? What choices do we have to make; how hard are those choices to make and how can we help one another to begin to face these challenges?

3. Leaving Egypt and the only lives that they had ever experienced must have been extremely difficult for those early Israelis. Living as slaves in Egypt had been a very hard and sometimes painful existence; but at least they had roofs over their heads, food in their stomachs and a place to sleep at night. The Egyptian word for the world outside Egypt was the word that we now use for “desert”! Most people living in Egypt at that time thought that their land was the only country that was truly habitable. Everywhere else was “desert”! Barren, inhospitable, cruel and harsh. The Children of Israel would have believed this too, and yet they were commanded to pack up their families and their belongings and trust in a God that only Moses really knew! What a choice!

You may find that, in your group, there is someone who has faced their “giants”, their “bondages” - give them the chance to tell you about them.

Stemming from my experiences in the Blitz during the Second World War my youth was burdened with immense fears. Those fears blighted my early life, and I had to learn – like the Children of Israel – that with prayer and determination I could break those bondages and be free in Jesus. I have to con-

fess, though, that it took me many years to find the freedom that I have now. I must also admit that I still get “memories” of those fears that tempt me to give in to them. Even now I could so easily slip back into the bondage of fear, and it is Jesus who holds me clear of them. I still have difficulty traveling far from home, and hate going on holiday. But each time I am tempted to “give in” to those irrational fears I have to tell myself that I must refuse to slip back into “bondage”. I have to fight with the immense help of the Holy Spirit to hold on to my freedom.

The Children of Israel had the same kind of “memories”. Once they entered the Promised Land they were confronted with the familiar pattern of demon worship in the idolatry of the nations living there. Anything that is familiar is always more comfortable than that which is alien and little known. This new faith that Moses was introducing was desperately unfamiliar, and therefore rather threatening. Sadly Israel gave in to those temptations and eventually slipped back into the bondage of the worship of Satan; but that’s another story.

How can we help one another break any enslavement they might be experiencing , and then how can we support one another when tempted to slip back into bondage?

4. At the end of my talk I said, *“It would be good to discuss what you think holds our COMMUNITY back from going all the way with Jesus. This study is the opportunity for us to break the chains that bind us to mediocrity, and to release us into the fullness of the power of God’s Holy Spirit.”*

Do you think that God has something special for us at WBC?

Are there attitudes that hold us back from “going all the way with Jesus”?

Do we have communal fears and “bondages” that need to be broken?

If you think there are, is your attitude to our congregation helping or hindering our journeying onward with Jesus?

Is there something loving and constructive that you could do to help our church, or are you (secretly) one of those whose “bondage” is a critical spirit?

We may not have Moses to lead us to freedom, but we do have the Lord Jesus Christ. Okay, we don’t see him in the flesh like the Jews saw Moses, but He has left us with Someone infinitely more powerful; we have the Holy Spirit to dwell within us. He encourages us, strengthens us and will do all that we can ask to release us from the kind of slavery that we live under.

The problem is that we have to choose to walk with Him. We have to learn to trust Him and to commit everything to His care. Those early Jews trusted Moses and the God they couldn’t see; do we have the courage to trust Jesus

and the Holy Spirit that we cannot see?

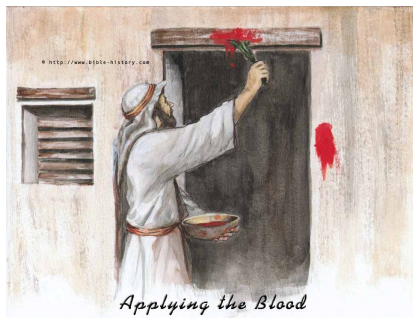
GOING FURTHER.

You may find that this study has stirred up your inner being and made you recognise some hidden fears or bondages that are still troubling you. In your personal Quiet Time bring them to Jesus. Be absolutely open and honest with Him, asking Him to bring to the surface those things that He wants you to deal with; then have the courage to face those “giants” head on. It’s strange, but “giants” tend to get smaller the closer you get to them and the more you face up to them.

If you need further help, then seek out someone in church who you can trust and ask them to prayerfully support you as you tackle your enslavement.

3: MEAL FOR THE JOURNEY

Passage : Exodus Chs 12 & 13



Introduction

Today we are looking at the story of the imminent departure of the Israelites from Egypt. That last night in Egypt, God's people are celebrating the Passover meal for the very first time. We read about this story in Exodus 12 and 13. Obviously it's quite a long read. I therefore suggest you read together the first 13 verses of chapter 12. After that please watch the DVD.

In the DVD Chris talks about three things. All are further explored below.

AN ACT OF FAITH

We pick up the story when 9 plagues have already hit the Egyptians. Still Pharaoh refuses to let them go. A few times he promises to let go, just to get rid of the plague. But every time he changes his mind. Now there is still one plague to come and it the worst all: every first born will die.

In preparation for their departure God instructs the Israelites to get ready and celebrate the Passover meal for the very first time. They all have to get dressed for the journey and have to slaughter a perfect one year lamb. They then have to take some of its blood and 'paint' their doorposts with it.

Many may have questioned why this time would be any different from previous times. Why would Pharaoh not change his mind this time, like he had already done so many times before. They were asked to celebrate the Passover meal, but Pharaoh was yet to let them go. They had to act in faith. Now please read Hebrew 11:1

Questions:

- Discuss how you understand the 'definition' of faith, as given in Hebrews 11:1?
- Can you recall an experience where you had to act out of faith?
- Is there a difference between an 'act of faith' and just being prepared to take risks, or are these the same?
- How can we overcome doubt and fear and become more prepared to take steps of faith?

A SIGN OF READINESS

For the Passover meal they had to barbeque a lamb. They were to eat it together with bitter herbs and unleavened bread. The latter is bread made without yeast, because there was no time to let the bread rise. And then they were to eat the meal while standing, fully dressed, ready to go out on the long journey. And then, they were to finish the lamb completely. No leftovers were allowed. If there were any leftovers they had to burn them.



The whole picture is one of haste and readiness as they are about to be delivered from slavery. The Israelites were ready to leave and start their journey to the promised land. In the New Testament Jesus makes the connection between the Passover and what we now celebrate as Holy Communion. Just like the Israelites were saved from the slavery of Egypt we are saved from the slavery of sin. And like the Israelites were looking forward to the promised land, we are looking forward to Jesus' second coming. In that sense, Communion is not only about remembering what Jesus did for us on the cross, it is also about looking forward with expectation about what God is going to do among us.

Question:

- What do you think about celebrating Holy Communion? Do you enjoy it? Does it have meaning for you? Do we celebrate it the right way at WBC? Any suggestions for how it could be done differently?
- How real are God's promises to you; do you live in anticipation of Jesus second coming, or does this not really play a significant role in your life?

Action: Why not take the opportunity and celebrate Holy Community as a cell group? Feel free to be creative in how you do this. Remember what Jesus has done for you, but also ask Him to make you ready, in anticipation for what he is going to do for you, your cell group, our church and this world as a whole.

LIVE A LIFE IN FREEDOM

The Israelites were to celebrate Passover every year. They were to throw a 7(!) day party. It served as a reminder to them how God had rescued them

from slavery, a reminder that they were God's chosen people. Likewise we celebrate Holy Communion, to remember what Jesus did for us on the cross and that we belong to Him. In Him, we have a great future ahead of us. In Jeremiah 29 God says: For I know the plans I have for you, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. But Jesus' work on the cross, is not only about our future, it is also about the here and now. God is saying to us: You are my people. You belong to me. I have given you new life. I have set you free.

Now the challenge for us is what to do with that freedom. How to live our lives in a way that demonstrates that we are His people. On that journey of faith we need each other. We need to encourage each other and spur each other on, help and pray for each other. That is what journeying together in community is all about.

Questions:

- We claim that we are not under the slavery of sin anymore, yet we keep on struggling with sin. Are these statements in conflict with each other? How can we fight sin?
- Some people say that for their journey of faith they don't really need the church, that it is just between them and God. Please discuss what you think about this. Also, how important is church for you?

PRAYER

Please take time to pray for needs within the group. Please also pray for people who experience oppression and slavery today. For instance, pray for the many children that work in sweatshops to manufacture cheap clothing, or for women that are held captive in the sex industry.

Please also pray that God will help to really claim the freedom we have in Jesus and that he helps us to fight sin in our lives. Please also pray that God will show us how we, as WBC, can be effective in showing what it means to us that we are free from the slavery of sin.

4. GOD'S SAT NAV

Passage : Exodus 17 & 19

Introduction

Now is the opportunity to recount to the group those tales of journeys that just didn't go according to plan. We've all got at least one tucked away for moments like this – mine is an epic journey from Manchester to Ashford that took only 22 hours. I could elaborate, but thankfully I won't.

Today we're looking at the wanderings of the Israelites in the wilderness. There was a simple journey from A to B, it just passed through every other letter of the alphabet along the way. Watch the DVD for an introduction.

Study

Read some of the stages in the epic journey of the Israelites in Numbers 33: 1 -6; 36-40; 48-54.

By taking the whole chapter and a Bible atlas you could have a great time 'joining the dots' to plot their meandering course. The accompanying map gives a high-level overview of the journey.

The more popular and direct route to Canaan was the northern route along the coast of the Mediterranean (Great Sea). However this passed a number of Egyptian military sites, which may have led to conflicts with the remaining Egyptian army units detailed to these outposts.

Although the wilderness journey is summarised simply as a series of camps and break-camps, it was not without its events along the way:

- It started in Egypt without opposition (vv. 3-6) What was the manner of their exit from the city (v3) What was God's diversion to enable this? (v4)
- However, while camped at Rephidim things were not so easy. What was the immediate problem? (v14) What other opposition did they face? (See Exodus 17: 8) What was God's escape plan this time? (see Exodus 17:9-13)



- Beyond Rephidim they moved into the Desert of Sinai (v15) What major event happened in this area? (see Exodus 19:1 – 20:21)
- From Kadesh (v36) the Israelites made their first foray into the Promised Land. Read about the reports in Numbers 13: 26-30 and 14: 5-9. What was God’s reaction? (see Numbers 14: 21-24).
- What was the event at Mount Hor? (vv. 37-39) How long had the Israelites been journeying at this stage? (v38)
- The final stage of the journey before entering the Promised Land was at the plains of Moab (vv. 48-49) Was God’s edict about entry into Canaan fulfilled? (see Numbers 26: 63-65). How might this have affected the length of the journey of the Israelites in the wilderness?

Discussion

God appeared to have led the Israelites on a merry dance. Their journey was certainly both extended and eventful – but all mapped out in advance, in keeping with God’s plans for his people. What can we learn from this today if God seems to be taking us by a round-about route?

Thinking first of all about our personal journey with God:

- Has God ever led you along a drawn out, convoluted, tortuous, and absolutely not straightforward route? How did you feel along the way? What have you learned looking back?
- Do you perhaps feel in the middle of such a journey right now? What encouragement is there in this study? What help is there from others in the group who have passed a similar way before?
- There is a growing expectation these days of “instant gratification”. It can overflow into our expectations of God, in terms of answered prayer and day-to-day guidance.
 - What does the experience of the Israelites teach us about the way God works – even today?
 - What perspective should we have on the way God orders our lives? (see Psalm 40: 1-3; Galatians 5:22-23; Hebrews 10:35-36; James 1:4)

Turning now to the lessons we can learn for our journey together as a church community:

- Where are we headed at WBC?
 - What is our “Promised Land”?

- How is this captured in our vision and mission statement?
- What might be some of the key stages along the way?
- How do we know we are proceeding in the right direction?
- In what ways might our journey not be as direct as we would like?
 - What are some of the challenges we may encounter?
 - What may hinder our progress?
 - In our spiritual focus
 - In our engagement focus
 - Why might God extend the timeline of our journey?
 - To what extent is this dependent on us?
 - How might we alter the situation?

Whether personally or collectively, it's important to know we are following the path that God has marked out for us – keeping in step with him, and not lagging behind – but equally not prolonging things by our actions.

- We walk by faith and trust (see Proverbs 3: 5-6)
- We know we are walking in his will (see Romans 12: 1-2)
- How do our regular monthly disciplines of listening, fasting, praying, reflecting and sharing assist us with this?
 - As individuals
 - As a church
- What can I do to ensure we journey together effectively in community?

“The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body ... If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honoured, every part rejoices with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.”

(1 Corinthians 12:12, 26-27)

5. IT'S ALL ABOUT A TEAM

Passage : Exodus 18

How the body of Christ functions

The church is the body of Christ. A body is a living organism. Just like our physical bodies are made up of different parts such as hands, legs, ears and eyes. So is the body of Christ made up of different parts. Each part is essential to the proper functioning and growth of the body. Our stomachs are essential to our well being. They may not be prominent, and much of the work they do is not always obvious, yet few of us would doubt their importance. Each person is important in the body of Christ. We all need to play our roles no matter how insignificant they may appear. Those singing, those praying, those ushering and so on, all are playing vital roles. Each local church or Christian fellowship is part of the body of Christ. Our individual roles within the local church are God-given and important. Only heaven will reveal how many churches have failed because somebody who was planted in the church to play the role of an encourager neglected their role, considering it too small or unimportant and walked away. This is true of many different roles that God has given to individuals. Roles that have sadly not been fulfilled.

From The Living Word Library

We are the Body of Christ here in Willesborough. It is essential that each and every one of us plays our full part in our church family. Our study today is all about playing that part. Here at WBC we are at the beginning of a very exciting phase in our growth together. All that Jesus has planned for us could be challenged and delayed because some of us are unwilling to take up the many jobs and roles that need to be filled. As you go through this study make this time a personal call to re-evaluate your part in church life. You could be amazed at what Jesus can do with your future within WBC.

NOW READ EXODUS CHAPTER 18

NOW WATCH THE DVD

QUESTIONS

1. Do you think that Moses would have had difficulty in giving up his authoritative position? What does this story tell us about his relationship with his father-in-law? Do you think that, perhaps, this was an unusual relationship seeing that Jethro had nothing to do with the Exodus?
2. How do you think Moses chose his new judges? How do you think it was possible for him to know the calibre of these men amongst so many in the nation of Israel?
3. What do you think we can learn from the way those early leaders were chosen? Do you think that we need to seek volunteers, or would arbitrarily appointing leaders be the best way?
4. Do you think that you are guilty of “putting people into boxes”? Surely this is a natural inclination, don't we all do it? How, therefore, can we begin to change the way we think about people?
5. What do you consider to be the greatest form of prejudice that we can be guilty of? How can we rectify this?
6. It is well documented that within church life (and indeed in many other secular circles) it is normal for 20% of the people to do 100% of the work. How do we encourage the 80% to pull their weight?
7. How responsible do you feel for your own “walk with Jesus”? Do you find that you automatically rely on Alan to provide all you need, or are you conscientiously trying to learn and grow closer to Him yourself?
8. Has there been any time in your Christian life when you have thought that you have heard Jesus asking you to work for Him, and you have pushed that thought aside because you believed that it was just your own mind conjuring up something? Has this study turned that attitude around a bit?
9. Go round your Group and ask each member, “What do you believe God has for you to do in His Body”? and, “Are you being obedient to Him and moving out in faith”?

GOING FURTHER

In your personal Quiet Time spend an evening meditating on the gifting God has given you. Begin to write down the things you enjoy doing, perhaps your hobbies or special interests. Is there anything here that could be of benefit to the church?

In the Bible there were people specially commissioned by God to do all sorts of jobs for Him. There were carpenters, sculptors, painters, embroiderers, even gardeners (remember Israel was thought of as a vineyard). Working for Christ doesn't have to mean speaking, praying, preaching or leading worship. The Body of Christ is an organ that is wonderfully various, and even making a cup of tea or cleaning windows can be used as a love offering to Him. What can you give to Jesus?

