



Practice & Principles

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to consider some of the principles and practices of one particular local church (Chichester Baptist Church), and to invite us to consider how examples from this church might spark ideas for trying things differently in our own contexts.

Opener

In March 2019, students took to the streets from all over the world to protest government inaction on climate change. In “A manifesto for tackling the climate change crisis” by UK Student Climate Network it says:

We’re young, we’re students and we’re calling for change. Our movement started in February when tens of thousands of young people took to the streets in towns and cities around Britain, in an unprecedented emergence of a youth climate justice movement.

We’ve joined a movement that’s spreading rapidly across the world, catalysed by the actions of one individual in taking a stand in August last year. Greta Thunberg may have been the spark, but we’re the wildfire and we’re fuelled by the necessity for action.

The climate is in crisis. We will be facing ecological catastrophe and climate breakdown in the very near future if those in power don’t act urgently and radically to change our trajectory. Scientists have been giving increasingly dire warnings about the state of our planet for years, with the urgency and severity of their message escalating in recent times. It’s abundantly clear: change is needed, and it’s needed now!

We are living in a time when environmental issues are more to the fore than ever in our world’s history.

Whether we view this action positively or not – are there any lessons we can draw from this student action for the issues we wish to bring to the fore?

Why do we care, and how does it reflect in our actions as individuals, companies, and societies?

Bible study

Read John 14:1-21.



Question 1

We join the story in John 14 partway through a conversation between Jesus and his disciples. They are understandably anxious about Jesus' talk of his departure, because they have given up everything to follow him for three years. How does Jesus reassure them? (14:1-7)

Jesus expresses his care for his disciples by reassuring them that this approaching separation is only temporary (3), that they will be reunited and provided for in the future (3), and that (even if they don't fully grasp it yet), their relationship with Jesus (6) is the key to this future.

Question 2

There are three related themes in John 14:1-21 which we often separate: the *assurance* given to the disciples (1-7), the *asking* that comes from faith in Christ (8-14), and the work of the Holy Spirit as our *advocate* (15-21). What links do you see between these themes?

Jesus has assured his disciples of their future (1-7), but that assurance is not enough for Philip who still feels insecure (8).

To address his on-going insecurity (and presumably that of the other disciples too), Jesus reminds him of who he is (9-10), what he has done (11), and what is possible now in his name (12-14) to those who ask.

But how will that work out in practice, with Jesus no longer on the scene? The Holy Spirit will be for the disciples exactly what Jesus was (15-16) – another advocate, i.e. an advocate of the same sort.

Pulling these threads together, the work of the Holy Spirit as our advocate makes all things possible to those who ask (the disciples then, and us, for he will be with us for ever, verse 16) until Jesus finally comes to take us with him.

Question 3

Think about the principles underpinning Jesus' words and promised actions in this passage. What are those principles and in what ways do Jesus' words and actions reflect them?

Two examples would be

- *his love and care for his disciples, reflected in his assurance and promised provision for them*
- *the glory of the Father, reflected in the 'whatever you ask in my name' promise*

There are other examples in the passage.



Application

Watch the video for this session. The video is available from https://www.baptist.org.uk/Articles/540996/Where_do_we.aspx

Question 4

In the video Ken describes a guiding principle (“reaching those who foreseeably wouldn’t come to a church”) and some secondary principles to inform how that first principle is worked out in practice in one local setting (missional alternative gatherings which are low maintenance, appealing to different people, requiring a once-in-a-month commitment from church regulars).

What guiding principles underpin your choices as an individual and as a church? Are there any transferable lessons from the approach described in the video?

Question 5

Think about your guiding principles as a church, and the examples shared in the video.

What new thoughts do your guiding principles and these examples spark off in you for doing something different in addition to what you already do?

Think back to the Opener, and the reference to Greta Thunberg. This 15-year old girl started the first school strike for climate outside the Swedish parliament building. “I am doing this because nobody else is doing anything. It is my moral responsibility to do what I can,” she said. Don’t underestimate what can be achieved. Greta was the spark!

Question 6

In C. S. Lewis’ *The Screwtape Letters*, Screwtape advises his nephew, the Junior Tempter, to keep his charge from actually **doing** anything. “The more often he feels without acting, the less he will be able ever to act, and, in the long run, the less he will be able to feel.”

How will you encourage each other to put your thoughts and feelings into action?

Taking it forward

Watch the feedback video for this session. The video is available from https://www.baptist.org.uk/Articles/540996/Where_do_we.aspx.

How might your social activities as a small group be missional as well?

Think again about the C. S. Lewis quote. What do you need most of? More feeling? More action? Repentance and love like you once had (Revelation 2:4-5)?

How will you pray by way of response? What will you do?



Notes

¹The examples given were

- A golfing morning with a theme to discuss on the way round the course
- Providing a meal for the homeless
- A sports morning with half-time team talks
- A mountain biking morning, where the riders stop for reflection
- Taking services in local care homes