



**Study Guide**

**to**

Brian D. McLaren's

*We Make the Road by Walking:*

*A Year-Long Quest for Spiritual Formation,*

*Reorientation, and Activation*

by Hanna Zuring Peterson

This e-book supplements *We Make the Road by Walking: A Year-Long Quest for Spiritual Formation, Reorientation and Activation*, published by Hachette in the US and Hodder & Stoughton in the UK (2014).

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If you would like to ask a question or give feedback, please contact [hannazuringpeterson@gmail.com](mailto:hannazuringpeterson@gmail.com).

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Cover photo: Hanna Zuring Peterson (taken in Iceland)

## **Preface**

*We Make the Road by Walking* by Brian D. McLaren is a wonderful resource for believers and seekers alike. In accessible language, it offers a comprehensive overview of the Bible and the story of God's redemption and invites us to join the liberation movement.

I first encountered the book in 2015 whilst we lived in Tokyo, Japan, where my husband served an international church. His South-African colleague started using the book as a lectionary for the Sunday services.

A few years later, we found ourselves back in Stockholm, Sweden and I started hosting a small group of women for Bible study and prayer in our home. *We Make the Road by Walking* turned out to be a wonderful companion on our road.

The *Engage* questions in each chapter were helpful in sharing our thoughts. At the same time, there was a longing in the group to look more closely at the selected Scriptures as they connect with the chapter themes.

This resulted in a customized study guide to *We Make the Road by Walking* with questions for each Scripture reading, selected passages from the book and personal suggestions for further meditation, resources and life application.

I hope that this study guide - along with the book - will be a support for those who long to spend time in Scripture with others. In my experience, sharing vulnerably with others around God's Word is incredibly rewarding. Be blessed as you do!

*“So will My word be which goes out of My mouth;  
It will not return to Me void (useless, without result),  
without accomplishing what I desire,  
and without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it.”  
(Isaiah 55:11)*

Hanna Zuring Peterson

PS For those with a more theological background, Brian D. McLaren has published an Author's Commentary that goes beyond the material in the book (available on [www.brianmclaren.net](http://www.brianmclaren.net)).

## Chapter 1: Awe and Wonder

- Genesis 1:1 - 2:3

Q1a: If you grew up outside of a Christian context, how does this creation story compare with the one that was passed down to you?

Q1b: If you did grow up in a Christian context, how have you received and understood the Genesis account of creation? Did you ever wrestle with it?

*“The poetry and stories of Genesis reveal deep truths that can help us be more fully alive today. They dare to proclaim that the universe is God’s self-expression, God’s speech act. That means that everything everywhere is always essentially holy, spiritual, valuable, meaningful.”<sup>1</sup>*

Q2: Have you ever thought of creation as holy, spiritual, valuable and meaningful? How can this understanding inform the way we think about and treat all things created?

Q3: Share a story about a time when you felt a deep awe and wonder at creation. Perhaps when experiencing the vastness of nature, witnessing the birth of a child or learning about the complexity of ecosystems.

- Psalm 19

Q4: This Psalm poetically describes the ongoing revelation of the Creator by all of creation. Name one thing that you have learned about God by observing creation.

Q5: Romans 1:20 states that “(...) ever since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through His workmanship (...)”. Do you feel that it is easy to recognize God the Creator in “His workmanship”? Why or why not?

- Read Matthew 6:25-34

*“Genesis tells us that the universe is good (...) That harmonious whole [not simply human beings, but the whole creation] is so good that the Creator takes a day off, as it were, just to enjoy it. That day of restful enjoyment tells us that the purpose of existence isn’t money or power or fame or security or anything less than this: to participate in the goodness and beauty and aliveness of creation.”<sup>2</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> McLaren, B., 2014. We make the Road by Walking. 2nd ed. London: Hodder & Stoughton, Page 5.

<sup>2</sup> McLaren, B., 2014. We make the Road by Walking. 2nd ed. London: Hodder & Stoughton, Page 6.

Q6: The passage in Matthew instructs us to stop being worried or anxious about our lives. Why do you think that this is difficult for us?

Q7: When is the last time that you noticed the goodness and beauty and aliveness of creation? How did you arrive at that moment? Share ideas about how to feel more alive in the business of our daily lives.

## **Chapter 2: Being Human**

- Genesis 2: 4-25

Q1: The creation story in the first chapter of Genesis emphasizes that we were created with an essential goodness that is celebrated by our Creator. It also tells us that we were created in God's image. The author of the book notes that back in ancient times, the idea that all people - not just kings - were image-bearers of God was a surprising message. When you consider the idea that you are made in the image of God, how does that make you feel?

Q2: If every person bears the image of God, we have to conclude that every person is precious to God and has value. Do you think that our culture honors the idea that every person has value? Why or why not?

Q3: Another angle to look at this idea is that every person reflects something of God. *"Tell us about a person who has reflected God to you in some special way."*<sup>3</sup>

Q4: The second chapter of Genesis introduces a garden that contains two special trees. How would you describe the difference between these two trees?

*"The Tree of Life is a beautiful image - suggesting health, strength, thriving, fruitfulness, growth, vigour and all we mean by aliveness. (...) the second tree could represent the desire to play God and judge parts of God's creation - all of which God considers good - as evil. Do you see the danger? God's judging is always wise, fair, true, merciful and restorative. But our judging is frequently ignorant, biased, retaliatory and devaluing. So when we judge, we inevitably misjudge."*<sup>4</sup>

Q5: *"Share a story about a time when someone played God and judged you, or a time when you played God and judged someone else."*<sup>5</sup>

Q6: How can we responsibly bear the image of God? How can we join God in His creative, healing work? Can you think of an example when you used your intelligence, physical strength or resources as a positive force to bless others?

- Mark 3:1-6

Q7: Jesus chooses to "do good" and to "save a life". Why would that be grounds for accusation?

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<sup>3</sup> McLaren, B., 2014. We make the Road by Walking. 2nd ed. London: Hodder & Stoughton, Page 12.

<sup>4</sup> McLaren, B., 2014. We make the Road by Walking. 2nd ed. London: Hodder & Stoughton, Page 10.

<sup>5</sup> McLaren, B., 2014. We make the Road by Walking. 2nd ed. London: Hodder & Stoughton, Page 12.

Q8: What would a contemporary version of this story look like? Where do we allow the hardness of our hearts to stand in the way of choosing to do good?

### **Further meditation**

- Psalm 8

Reflect on the idea that God has crowned you with glory and honor and given you the tremendous responsibility to care for his creation. Allow that thought to humble you.

## **Chapter 3: A World of Meaning**

Introduction: In this chapter, we seek to find some answers regarding the logic of our universe and whether there is any meaning to it all.

Natural science teaches us that there are patterns of beauty to be found everywhere in the natural world around us. One of the main themes in Western philosophy is identifying the nature of beauty. As humans, we seem to have a sense that there are at least glimpses of beauty and meaning to be discovered in our world.

Is there an order, a logic, a meaning to our universe? What do the creation stories from Genesis and the gospel of John challenge us to believe?

- Psalm 145:1-16

Q1: This Psalm reminds us that: “His [God’s] tender mercies are over all His works” (verse 9). Is this a thought you can identify with? Why or why not?

- Proverbs 8

Q2: This bible passage equates wisdom with finding life and obtaining favor and grace with God (verse 35). Verses 1-4 suggest that wisdom “cries out” and is directed to us, “sons of men”. Do you find it easy or difficult to find wisdom? And to receive it?

- John 1:1-17

*“John had a special term for the pattern of meaning God has spoken or written into the universe. He called it ‘Logos’, which is often translated into English as ‘Word’. (...) This Word or Logos, he said, was ‘made flesh’ in a man named Jesus. In other words, if we want to know what God is like and what the universe is about, we should pay attention to the logic, meaning, wisdom and patterns found in the life of Jesus.”<sup>6</sup>*

Q3: Have you ever thought about Jesus as the starting point for understanding what the universe is about? Do you think that Jesus’ life can give answers to that question?

Read about the logic of love, the logic of rivalry, the logic of compliance and the logic of mechanism on pages 15-16 in the book.

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<sup>6</sup> McLaren, B., 2014. We make the Road by Walking. 2nd ed. London: Hodder & Stoughton, Page 15.



Q4: Which logic seems to best describe the world around you? What do you think most of the people around you - family members, friends or co-workers - see as most powerful in today's world?

Q5: John writes that Jesus was the true Light that enlightened everyone. Can you think of something that you have come to see in a new light since you know (of) Jesus? How does knowing (of) Him change your thinking?

Q6: John also writes that those who believe in Jesus become born of God. What does that mean?

Q7: According to the *logos* of love, we see "*God as our loving parent, and we will encounter all other creatures as our relations, our relatives, in one family of creation.*"<sup>7</sup> Imagine and describe what your life would be like if you chose to live more by the *logos* of love than you do now.

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<sup>7</sup> McLaren, B., 2014. *We make the Road by Walking*. 2nd ed. London: Hodder & Stoughton, Page 16.

## **Chapter 4: The Drama of Desire**

- Genesis 3:1-13

*“The story of Adam and Eve doesn’t need to be about literal historical figures in the past to tell us something very true about us, our history, and our world today. We humans have consistently chosen the wrong tree. Instead of imitating and reflecting God as good image bearers should do, we start competing with God, edging God out, playing god ourselves. We reject the Creator and choose another model instead: a snake (the story says), who seems to represent a subtle and dangerous desire to choose rivalry and violence over harmony and well-being.”<sup>8</sup>*

Q1: Did Eve know God’s word regarding “*the tree which is in the middle of the garden*” (verses 2-3)?

Q2: What caused her to give into the temptation (verse 6)?

Q3: Read 1 John 2:15-17. Consider the temptations mentioned in verse 16. How are these similar to the temptations that Eve faced? And to the temptations that we face today?

Q4: How did the relationship with God change when Adam and Eve ate from the forbidden tree?

Q5: What were the consequences for Adam and Eve when they disobeyed God? Can you see signs of this separation in our world today?

*“Now, there’s nothing wrong with desire. The question is, whose desires are you imitating? To be alive is to imitate God’s generous desires---to create, to bless, to help, to serve, to care for, to save, to enjoy. To make the opposite choice - to imitate one another’s desires and become one another’s rivals - is to choose a path of death.”<sup>9</sup>*

Q6: “*Share a story about your interaction with someone you were jealous of or considered a rival. What did they have or desire that you desired? How did your relationship play out?*”<sup>10</sup>

- Philippians 2:3-11

Q7: How does Jesus’ attitude stand in contrast to the human drama of desire as personified by Adam and Eve?

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<sup>8</sup> McLaren, B., 2014. We make the Road by Walking. 2nd ed. London: Hodder & Stoughton, Page 18.

<sup>9</sup> McLaren, B., 2014. We make the Road by Walking. 2nd ed. London: Hodder & Stoughton, Page 20.

<sup>10</sup> McLaren, B., 2014. We make the Road by Walking. 2nd ed. London: Hodder & Stoughton, Page 22.

- Psalm 32

Q8: The psalmist describes what it feels like to carry a sin that is not confessed and forgiven (verses 3-4). Can you identify?

Q9: How do you confess your sin? Do you feel reassured of God's forgiveness?

### **Further meditation**

Let this verse remind you of the One we wish to imitate:

*“Therefore become imitators of God [copy Him and follow His example], as well-beloved children [imitate their father]; and walk continually in love [that is, value one another—practice empathy and compassion, unselfishly seeking the best for others], just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and sacrifice to God [slain for you, so that it became] a sweet fragrance.” (Ephesians 5:1-2)*

## Chapter 5: In Over Our Heads

- Psalm 51

Q1: Describe the hope of this Psalm for us as individuals and for us as mankind. What can we offer to God as a first step to a better life and a better world?

- Genesis 4:1-17

Q2: Why do you think that God rejected Cain's offering?

Q3: What is the sin, crouching at Cain's door (verse 7)? What led him to become the first murderer?

- Genesis 6:5-8, 7:1-5, 8:1 and 9:7-17

Q4: Here we have mankind, whose *“every imagination or intent of the thoughts of his heart were only evil continually”* (verse 5). How do you understand this story where God decides to destroy mankind from the surface of the earth? Where do you see grace?

(Consider the stories of Joseph or the Tower of Babel as you read this quote.)

*“As we progress through the biblical library, these stories interact with one another again and again. Together they reveal an even fuller and deeper vision of God. We come to know a God who consistently refuses to support a pyramid economy with a few at the top and the masses at the bottom. We come to trust a God who consistently opposes the oppressors and consistently takes the side of the humble, the vulnerable and the poor. (...) **the living God doesn't uphold the status quo...but repeatedly disrupts it and breaks it open so that something better can emerge and evolve.**”<sup>11</sup>*

Q5: Can you think of a story in the bible where this claim rings true?

Q6: *“Share a story where you felt like someone at the top of the pyramid, or like someone at the bottom.”<sup>12</sup>*

*“These ancient stories courageously expose how all civilisations were founded on violence and oppression, producing luxury and ease for a few but exhaustion and degradation for the many. They warn us that unjust structures are unsustainable. They advise that floods*

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<sup>11</sup> McLaren, B., 2014. We make the Road by Walking. 2nd ed. London: Hodder & Stoughton, Page 26.

<sup>12</sup> McLaren, B., 2014. We make the Road by Walking. 2nd ed. London: Hodder & Stoughton, Page 28.

*of change will sweep injustice away and internal conflicts will thwart arrogant ambitions. They promise that in the long run, justice and reconciliation will prevail over injustice and rivalry. (...) To be alive is to join God in caring about the oppressed, the needy, the powerless, the victims and the vulnerable. To be alive is to believe that injustice is not sustainable and to share God's desire for a better world. To be alive is to look at our world and say, 'God is better than that!' - and know that our world can be better too. And so can we."*<sup>13</sup>

Q7: "What one thought or idea from today's lesson especially intrigued, provoked, challenged, encouraged or surprised you?"<sup>14</sup>

### **Further meditation**

Read James 4:1-8. Reflect on whether there is any envy towards another in your heart. Then pray for that person and thank God for the blessings in his/her life.

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<sup>13</sup> McLaren, B., 2014. We make the Road by Walking. 2nd ed. London: Hodder & Stoughton, Page 27.

<sup>14</sup> McLaren, B., 2014. We make the Road by Walking. 2nd ed. London: Hodder & Stoughton, Page 28.

## Chapter 6: Plotting Goodness

- Genesis 12:1-9

*“They are from a prominent family in a great ancient city-state known as Ur, one of the first ancient Middle Eastern civilisations. Like all civilisations, Ur has a dirty little secret: its affluence is built on violence, oppression and exploitation. Behind its beautiful facade, its upper classes live each day in luxury, while its masses slave away in squalor. God tells this couple to leave their life of privilege in this great civilisation. (...) No longer will Abram and Sarai have the armies of wealth and comforts of Ur at their disposal. All they will have is a promise - that God will be with them and show them a better way.”<sup>15</sup>*

Q1: What did God ask of Abram? What promise did Abram receive from God?

Q2: Have you ever felt called by God in a similar way, where you had to leave something behind? What was challenging about it? How did it turn out?

- Hebrews 11:6 and 8-13

Q3: In what way does Abram’s faith inspire you?

Q4: Discuss whether faith requires a measure of the unknown, or “things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1). Or as the author McLaren phrases it: *“Faith is stepping off the map of what’s known and making a new road by walking into the unknown.”<sup>16</sup>*

- Mark 11:15-19

Q5: What do you think was behind Jesus’ righteous anger?

Q6: *“Share a story about a time when you observed or participated in a group that saw itself as blessed to the exclusion of others rather than for the blessing of others.”<sup>17</sup>*

- Back to Genesis....

Q7: When we read Genesis 16 or 20 and think about the journey that Abram and Sarai made, it is clear that at times their trust in God’s promises for their lives failed. But God continues to be

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<sup>15</sup> McLaren, B., 2014. We make the Road by Walking. 2nd ed. London: Hodder & Stoughton, Pages 29-30.

<sup>16</sup> McLaren, B., 2014. We make the Road by Walking. 2nd ed. London: Hodder & Stoughton, Page 31.

<sup>17</sup> McLaren, B., 2014. We make the Road by Walking. 2nd ed. London: Hodder & Stoughton, Page 32.

at work through them and sometimes in spite of them. Has God ever used you to bless others, despite yourself?

Q8: Consider the unique identity that God is calling Abram and Sarai to - *“us for them, us with them, us for the benefit and blessing of all”*.<sup>18</sup> *“Where in today’s world do you see people practising the kind of ‘otherly’ identity to which God called Abram?”*<sup>19</sup>

*“So the story of Abram’s and Sarai’s unique identity tells us something powerful about God’s identity too: God is not the tribal deity of one group of ‘chosen’ people. God is not for us and against all others. God is for us and for them, too. God loves everyone, everywhere, no exceptions.”*<sup>20</sup>

### **Further meditation**

Read Galatians 3:6-9. Soak in the idea that no matter your background, *“people of faith are blessed and favored by God”* (verse 9).

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<sup>18</sup> McLaren, B., 2014. *We make the Road by Walking*. 2nd ed. London: Hodder & Stoughton, Page 30.

<sup>19</sup> McLaren, B., 2014. *We make the Road by Walking*. 2nd ed. London: Hodder & Stoughton, Page 32.

<sup>20</sup> McLaren, B., 2014. *We make the Road by Walking*. 2nd ed. London: Hodder & Stoughton, Page 31.

## **Chapter 7: It's Not Too Late**

- Genesis 18:1-33

Q1: Who visited Abraham? Compare verses 1, 2 and 22.

*“The mature Christian becomes less dependent upon spectacular manifestations of God and more involved in intimate day-to-day fellowship. Previously, God had disclosed Himself to Abraham in more splendor and glory. This time God would not have been known, except through previous knowledge of Him and the eyes of faith. God was known by His promises, His word, rather than through a spectacular presence or splendor. What more intimate fellowship can there be than the sharing of a meal with God?”*<sup>21</sup>

Q2: Reflect on the way in which the relationship between God and Abraham is evolving between chapter 17 and 18. Can you relate to this process of growing into a more intimate fellowship with God in your own life?

Q3: Why do you think that Abraham and Sarah had to wait for a child for such a long time?

*“The words of our Lord speak as loudly to Christians today as they did to Abraham, “Is anything too difficult for the Lord?” (Gen 18:14). Here is the bedrock issue. The only reason for such unbelief is a failure to comprehend the extent of God’s ability to work in and through us. The other side of the coin is this: were the matter of having a son not impossible, the glory for such a miracle would not have been given to God. The delay in the birth of Isaac was intended both to necessitate and to nurture the faith of Abraham and Sarah.”*<sup>22</sup>

Q4: *“Share a story about a time when you almost gave up, but are glad you didn’t.”*<sup>23</sup>

- Genesis 22:1-14

Q5: Why do you think that Abraham objected to the destruction of two cities (Genesis 18), but not to the sacrificing of his own son?

Q6: Discuss the idea that Abraham simply expected that the God who gives human life also demands human life as a sacrifice, as was a common belief in the ancient world.

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<sup>21</sup> Deffinbaugh, Robert L. "Marks of Maturity (Genesis 18:1-33)" Bible.org, Genesis: From Paradise to Patriarchs, <https://bible.org/seriespage/19-marks-maturity-genesis-181-33>. Accessed 5 February 2020.

<sup>22</sup> Deffinbaugh, Robert L. "Marks of Maturity (Genesis 18:1-33)" Bible.org, Genesis: From Paradise to Patriarchs, <https://bible.org/seriespage/19-marks-maturity-genesis-181-33>. Accessed 5 February 2020.

<sup>23</sup> McLaren, B., 2014. We make the Road by Walking. 2nd ed. London: Hodder & Stoughton, Page 37.



*“The bigger our understanding about God, the bigger the mystery that we must acknowledge. Our faith must always be open to correction, enhancement and new insight. That’s why humility is so essential for all who speak of God.”<sup>24</sup>*

Q7: How did this event change Abraham’s understanding of who God was (verse 14)?

- Micah 6:6-8

Q8: What does the Lord require of us in this prophetic text?

Q9: What is one way in which you can practise “to be just and to love kindness” (or compassion) in your life?

### **Further meditation**

Read Acts 17:19-34. Consider how Paul is familiar with local common beliefs and uses it as a starting point for sharing the good news. What common beliefs in our culture can we acknowledge and honor and use as a starting point to reveal something about Jesus?

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<sup>24</sup> McLaren, B., 2014. We make the Road by Walking. 2nd ed. London: Hodder & Stoughton, Page 35.

## **Chapter 8: Rivalry or Reconciliation?**

- Genesis 32:22 - 33:11

Q1: Why is Jacob anxious to meet his brother again?

Q2: What is the result of Jacob's wrestling? Why does God give him a new name?

*“Like Jacob, we wrestle to get our own way by trying to cheat or defeat anyone who has something we desire, including God. Like Jacob, we grapple with changing old habits, even when those habits aren't working for us anymore. Like Jacob, we agonize through the long night, held in a headlock by despair, fearing that it's too late for us to hope for a new beginning.”<sup>25</sup>*

Q3: Can you think of a time when God gave you a new identity and set you free from behavior that caused rivalry?

- Genesis 50:15-21

Q4: Why were the brothers so scared of Joseph's judgement?

Q5: What is remarkable about what Joseph did? How did it reflect God's character?

- Matthew 25:31-40

Q6: How do you respond to this teaching by Jesus?

*“Blessing, power or favor is not given for privilege over others, but for service for the benefit of others. The weaker brother or sister, the one who is deemed ugly or dull or disfavoured or illegitimate, is always beloved by God.”<sup>26</sup>*

Q7: How can we serve *“these Brothers of mine, even the least of them”* (verse 40)? Discuss the needs in your neighborhood / workplace / church / family. Perhaps ask God to show you where and to whom you can make a difference.

- Luke 10:25-37

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<sup>25</sup> McLaren, B., 2014. We make the Road by Walking. 2nd ed. London: Hodder & Stoughton, Page 39.

<sup>26</sup> McLaren, B., 2014. We make the Road by Walking. 2nd ed. London: Hodder & Stoughton, Page 41.

Q8: How is the law (the rules given by God to Moses) summarized by this lawyer, this expert? How would you summarize the response Jesus gave to the question “And who is my neighbor”?

*“If we want to reflect the image of God, we will choose grace over hostility, reconciliation over revenge, equality over rivalry. When we make that choice, we encounter God in the face of our former rivals and enemies. And as we are humbled, surrendering to God and seeking to be reconciled with others, our faces too reflect the face of God. We come alive as God’s image-bearers indeed.”<sup>27</sup>*

Q9: Can you think of a time when you encountered God in the face of another person?

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<sup>27</sup> McLaren, B., 2014. We make the Road by Walking. 2nd ed. London: Hodder & Stoughton, Page 42.

## **Chapter 9: Freedom!**

Introduction: Read the paragraph on slavery in the days of Genesis on page 43 in the book.

- Read Exodus 1:1-14

Q1: Joseph had welcomed his brothers into Egypt to escape famine in their land to the north. What made the “sons of Israel” vulnerable in their new homeland?

Q2: What caused the Egyptian government to change its welcoming stance toward the Israelites?

- Read Exodus 3:1-15

Q3: What does the Lord say about the timing of this new call on Moses’ life? Why does God call him?

Q4: What was Moses’ response to God’s call to go to Pharaoh to bring the Israelites out of Egypt?

*“Often in the bible, when there is a big problem, God prepares a person or people to act as God’s partners or agents in solving it. In other words, God gets involved by challenging us to get involved.”<sup>28</sup>*

Q5: Have you ever felt called by God? How did you respond?

*“We are all like Moses in a lot of ways. We all have choices to make - who we will become, whose side we’ll stand on, whether we’ll give up after our failures and frustrations, whether we’ll have the faith to get up and keep moving forward when we sense God’s call. Life may not be easy - but it can certainly be an exciting path to walk, if we go through life with God!”<sup>29</sup>*

Q6: Can you think of another person in the bible whose life changed direction when God called him/her? What do you find inspiring about that story?

Q7: The author McLaren notes that God is on the side of slaves. Name some examples of slavery in today’s world. Consider both physical and spiritual slavery.

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<sup>28</sup> McLaren, B., 2014. We make the Road by Walking. 2nd ed. London: Hodder & Stoughton, Page 44.

<sup>29</sup> McLaren, B., 2014. We make the Road by Walking. 2nd ed. London: Hodder & Stoughton, Page 46.

- Read John 8:1-11

Q8: Why does the author McLaren include this bible text, in what way is it related to today's theme?

*“From this passage we learn that we do not accuse others unless we first thoroughly search our own hearts and minds to make certain that we are pure in every possible aspect (Matthew 7:3). Also, if we must admonish someone, we should do so as instructed in Scripture; we always look to God’s glory and never cause unnecessary division or harm (Matthew 18:15), but we do work to keep the church pure. Moreover, Jesus was the only sinless person in the temple scene, and, instead of condemning the woman, He looked ahead to His work on the cross and offered her life. Likewise, we should use every possible opportunity to forgive and to reach out with the gospel and the love of Christ, always remembering that we, too, are sinners in need of the Savior (Romans 3:23).<sup>30</sup>*

Q9: Consider the origin of the Passover meal, which was celebrated to remember God’s work of liberation from slavery into freedom. This meal was transformed when Jesus celebrated it with his disciples, the night before his crucifixion. Discuss our celebration of the Lord’s Supper. What are we called to when we participate? How does that change us?

### **Further meditation:**

Ask God how He might use you to stand on the side of the oppressed. If you feel resistance or discouragement, read the statements below:

- We enjoy our comfort and do not want to step out. But God is always calling us.
- We may think that we don’t have the right gifts or talents to respond to the call. But God only asks us to be available, to trust and to obey.
- We can become cynical or hopeless when seeing the immense suffering in the world. But saving the world is God’s work and He has already turned the tables. God asks us to be faithful and to do our part.

### **Further resources:**

Nefarious, Merchant of Souls (a 2011 American documentary about modern human trafficking, specifically sex slavery): <http://nefariousdocumentary.com/>.

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<sup>30</sup> Got Questions, “What did Jesus mean when He said, “He who is without sin can cast the first stone”?”, Got Questions, <https://www.gotquestions.org/without-sin-cast-first-stone.html>.

## **Chapter 10: Getting Slavery out of the People**

- Exodus 20:1-21

Q1: How did God introduce himself when giving the commandments (verse 2)?

*“Along with bread for their bodies, God gave the travellers inner nourishment in the form of ten commandments that would become the moral basis for their lives in freedom.”<sup>31</sup>*

Read the ten commandments as paraphrased in the book (page 51).

Q2: If you are familiar with the bible, can you think of a story where one or several of these commandments were broken? What happened as a result?

Q3: Verse 20 suggests that our fear (profound reverence) of God will keep us from sin. How do you understand the concept of fear of God? How can we grow in our fear of God?

*“We have much to learn from the stories of Moses and his companions. (...) Like them, we will receive what we need for each day, too - often in mysterious and sometimes even humorous ways, just enough for today, provided one day at a time.”<sup>32</sup>*

Q4: Can you think of a time when God provided what you needed for just that day?

- Matthew 22:34-40

Q5: How do you understand the relationship between the first and the second commands that Jesus summarizes the Law with? Is it possible to fulfill the one without the other?

- Hebrews 10:1-18

Q6: This text explains that *“by the one offering He [Christ] has perfected forever and completely cleansed those who are being sanctified”* (verse 14). There is no longer a need for offerings of atonement as in Old Testament times. In light of this, what is the meaning of our celebration of the Lord’s Supper?

Q7: What is meant by *“I will put my laws in their hearts”* (vs 16)?

### **Further meditation**

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<sup>31</sup> McLaren, B., 2014. We make the Road by Walking. 2nd ed. London: Hodder & Stoughton, Pages 50-51.

<sup>32</sup> McLaren, B., 2014. We make the Road by Walking. 2nd ed. London: Hodder & Stoughton, Page 50.

Read Jeremiah 31:31-34 and reflect on how God's communion with his people has changed under the new covenant.

## **Chapter 11: From Ugliness, a Beauty Emerges**

Introduction: After a wilderness journey in which the people of Israel learned to trust God as their Provider and Sustainer, they arrive at the promised land. To possess the land that has now been inhabited by other peoples, a war of invasion and conquest is initiated.

- Deuteronomy 7:1-11

Q1: Compare God's promise to Abraham in Genesis 12:3 "*all peoples on earth will be blessed through you*" with this text of conquest and "*you shall utterly destroy them*". Do you think it is possible to reconcile these contrasting images of God?

Q2: What reason is given for the total destruction of the "*seven nations*" residing in the land? If you are familiar with the books of Judges, recount what happens when Israel turns away from their God (see for example Judges 3:7-8).

*"To help some, is God willing to hurt others? (...) Today, as in the ancient world, many people sincerely believe that God loves us and wants peace for us so much that God has no trouble harming or destroying 'them' for our benefit. (...) We should also notice that where we see this kind of thinking embedded in the Bible, we also find important qualifications. For example, God's favour towards the insiders is dependent on the insiders living good and humble lives. If the insiders become oppressors, they should not expect God's help. And God gives the freed slave the right to conquer just enough land for themselves, just one time. They are never given a license to create an empire, expanding to enslave others as they had previously been enslaved. Even as they prepare for war, they are told again and again that after the conquest ends, they must treat 'aliens and strangers' as neighbors (...)." <sup>33</sup>*

Q3: Have you ever thought that God is for us at the expense of others? Do you see any modern-day examples in our world of this kind of thinking? Are there circumstances under which this idea is justified?

Q4: The author also suggests that the brutality found in many Old Testament Bible passages might simply be a reflection of Israel's understanding of God at the time. That after all the injustice and violence done to them, Israel expected God to help and avenge them. How do you respond to that idea?

- Matthew 15:21-39

Q5: How does Jesus understand his mission up until this point? In extending God's mercy to this woman and healing her daughter, what does Jesus model to his followers?

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<sup>33</sup> McLaren, B., 2014. *We make the Road by Walking*. 2nd ed. London: Hodder & Stoughton, Pages 56-57.



Throughout Jesus' life, we see a reinterpretation of the idea of vengeance, retribution and demanding 'an eye for an eye' (Matthew 5:38).

Q6: Compare Jesus' reading in Luke 4:18-19 (sometimes called Jesus' mission statement) with the original text in Isaiah 61:1-2. What verse did he omit from his reading?

### **Further meditation**

Read Psalms 137 and 149.

Meditate on the idea that we too were once God's 'enemies' (Romans 5:10) but that God's mercy was extended to us. We have received reconciliation. Now we can extend God's mercy to others.

## **Chapter 12: Stories that Shape Us**

Introduction: After Israel conquered and settled in the promised land, they quickly forgot about God and started to worship idols. A cycle of sin, foreign invasion and oppression, repentance and God's deliverance got repeated over and over again. Eventually, the twelve tribes united under king Saul, followed by David and Solomon. After Solomon's death, the kingdom split in two. Read the brief recap of this history on pages 63-64 in the book.

- 2 Kings 2:1-15

Q1: Why do you think Elisha insisted on staying with his master Elijah, even though Elijah pleaded with him to stay behind?

Q2: Elijah's offer in verse 9 was grand and perhaps tempting. What did Elisha ask for? What does his request tell us about his focus?

*"The idea of a double portion was not to ask for twice as much as Elijah had, but to ask for the portion that went to the firstborn son, as in Deuteronomy 21:17. Elisha asked for the right to be regarded as the successor of Elijah, as his firstborn son in regard to ministry. Yet Elisha had already been designated as Elijah's successor (1 Kings 19:19). This was a request for the spiritual power to fulfill the calling he already received."*<sup>34</sup>

- Read Acts 1:1-11

*"Many were still waiting for a 'son of David', a militant Messiah (...). They expected this warrior king to raise a revolutionary army, overthrow their oppressors and restore civil law and religious order."*<sup>35</sup>

Q2: Does it surprise you that the disciples were still asking: "Lord, are You at this time reestablishing the kingdom and restoring it to Israel?" (verse 6). Why or why not?

Q3: What is Jesus' response? What does Jesus want his followers to be focused on?

Q4: Have you seen the "power and ability" of the Holy Spirit (verse 8) at work, in other people or in yourself?

*"Instead of arming his followers with daggers, swords, spears, chariots and war horses, he armed them with faith, hope, service, forgiveness and love. When he healed people,*

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<sup>34</sup> Guzik, David. "Elijah's Ascension." Study Guide for 2 Kings 2, 2016, [https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/archives/guzik\\_david/StudyGuide\\_2Ki/2Ki\\_2.cfm](https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/archives/guzik_david/StudyGuide_2Ki/2Ki_2.cfm). Accessed 11 February 2020.

<sup>35</sup> McLaren, B., 2014. We make the Road by Walking. 2nd ed. London: Hodder & Stoughton, Page 64.

*he didn't tell them, 'I will save you!' or 'My faith will save you!' but 'Your faith has saved you.' Working from a fresh interpretation of the past, he freed them from both passive, pious complacency and desperate, violent action. His fresh interpretation empowered them for something better: faithful, peaceful action.*"<sup>36</sup>

Q5: Can you think of a person that embodies this *"faithful, peaceful action"*? What does that look like?

The author McLaren states: *"Whenever we engage with the stories of the Bible, we become members of the interpretive community."*<sup>37</sup>

Q6: Have you ever considered yourself an interpreter of the Bible? Can you think of a time when you received a new insight into a Bible story and then shared it with others?

### **Further meditation**

Read Psalm 23. Meditate on the idea of dwelling in the presence of the Lord, who refreshes and restores your soul.

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<sup>36</sup> McLaren, B., 2014. *We make the Road by Walking*. 2nd ed. London: Hodder & Stoughton, Page 65.

<sup>37</sup> McLaren, B., 2014. *We make the Road by Walking*. 2nd ed. London: Hodder & Stoughton, Page 61.

## **Chapter 13: The Great Conversation**

Introduction: Invasion, deportation, displacement, exile and return. The eight centuries leading up to the birth of Jesus were tumultuous for the people of Israel. Many of the books in the Old Testament were written down or re-edited during this time. Read the brief recap of this history on pages 67-68 in the book.

- Isaiah 1:1-15

Isaiah was a prophet who lived in Jerusalem during the time when the Assyrians were rising to power around 740 BC. He warned Jerusalem and her kings about their idolatry and spoke about the captivity that was to come.

Q1: Isaiah condemns the sacrifices and festivals, saying that God takes no pleasure in these acts of appeasement and wishes that the people would learn to do good. How do we understand this rebuke in light of the detailed instructions on sacrifices in the book of Leviticus?

Q2: Does Isaiah's warning seem relevant even today?

Q3: The author McLaren writes that: *"As the people changed and evolved, their understanding of God changed and evolved."*<sup>38</sup> Do you think that this idea could help us understand different and sometimes seemingly contrasting voices in the Bible?

- Romans 15:1-13

Q4: How does the Bible give us hope and confidence in God's promises (verse 4)? Can you think of a story that has encouraged you in this way?

- Matthew 9:10-17

Q5: In the mind of a pious Jew, Jesus was sinning by socializing with so-called sinners. What is Jesus' response to this idea?

Q6: Are there any religious rules today that you think Jesus would speak to and reject?

*"From Genesis to Job, the Bible is full of conversations like these - with differing viewpoints making their case, point and counterpoint, statement and counterstatement. (...) Wisdom emerges from the conversation among these voices, voices we could arrange in five broad categories.*

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<sup>38</sup> McLaren, B., 2014. We make the Road by Walking. 2nd ed. London: Hodder & Stoughton, Page 68.

- *First there are the voices of the priests who emphasise keeping the law, maintaining order, offering sacrifices and faithfully maintaining traditions and taboos.*
- *Then there are the voices of the prophets, often in tension with the priests, who emphasise social justice, care for the poor and the condition of the heart.*
- *Next are the poets, who express the full range of human emotion and opinion - the good, the bad and the ugly.*
- *Then come the sages, who, in proverb, essay and creative fiction, record their theories, observations, questions and doubts.*
- *And linking them together are the storytellers, each with varying agendas, who try to tell the stories of the people who look back to Abraham as their father, Moses as their liberator, David as their greatest king and God as their Creator and faithful companion.”<sup>39</sup>*

Q6: *“Share a story about an argument where both sides were partly right.”<sup>40</sup>*

Q7: How do you respond to the idea that the Bible is a library full of contrasting viewpoints, yet carries on an essential conversation? And that wisdom can be found when we listen humbly to all the different voices?

Q8: Which category of voices do you identify with most - priests, prophets, poets, sages or storytellers?

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<sup>39</sup> McLaren, B., 2014. *We make the Road by Walking*. 2nd ed. London: Hodder & Stoughton, Page 71.

<sup>40</sup> McLaren, B., 2014. *We make the Road by Walking*. 2nd ed. London: Hodder & Stoughton, Page 72.

## **Chapter 14: Promised Land, Promised Time**

Introduction: The prophets of the Bible that lived during the times of exile and return provided clear warnings that spiritual corruption would lead to downfall. But perhaps more importantly, they also gave hope. The exiled Israelites would indeed one day return and rebuild. They spoke of a Son of Man (Daniel 7:13) and a Sunrise (Luke 1:78) that would bring salvation and a way of peace.

- Daniel 7:9-28

Q1: Who is the one Daniel receives a vision about (verse 13-14)?

Q2: How does his dominion differ from that of the four beasts?

- Isaiah 40:9-11

Q3: Considering that Judah (the southern kingdom) was just invaded and brought into exile by the Babylonians, how do you think these verses would speak to the exiled?

Q4: In verse 9, they are reminded of God's presence - "*Here is your God*". Can you remember a time in your life when you needed to be reminded of God's presence?

Q5: God is depicted as a shepherd, able to comfort but also able to defend. How do you respond to the idea of the Lord being our Shepherd?

- Luke 1:67-79

Q6: In verse 74, Zacharias prophecies: "*that we, being rescued from the hand of our enemies, might serve Him without fear.*" What fear do you think he is speaking of?

Q7: Zacharias praises God for saving them from their enemies (verse 71). Have you experienced God's salvation? What have you been saved from, who/what are your "enemies"?

Q8: Can you think of other Bible passages that speak about moving from darkness into the light (verse 79)?

*"Prophets in the bible have a fascinating role as custodians of the best hopes, desires and dreams of their society. They challenge people to act in ways consistent with those."*<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> McLaren, B., 2014. *We make the Road by Walking*. 2nd ed. London: Hodder & Stoughton, Page 78.

Q9: *“Share a story about a time when you kept hope or lost hope.”*<sup>42</sup>

Q10: What is the meaning of hope for you? How does keeping hope help us to live life to its fullest?

### **Further meditation**

Look up the following passages. Reflect on the messages of these prophets. Is there one that speaks to you in a particular way? Thank God in prayer for providing us with visions of hope through the prophets.

- Jeremiah 31:33 (“I will put My law within them, and I will write it on their hearts;”)
- Ezekiel 36:26 (“I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.”)
- Joel 2:28 (“It shall come about after this that I shall pour out My Spirit on all mankind;”)
- Amos 5:24 (“But let justice run down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.”)
- Malachi 4:5 (“He will turn the hearts of the parents to their children, and the hearts of the children to their parents;”)

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<sup>42</sup> McLaren, B., 2014. *We make the Road by Walking*. 2nd ed. London: Hodder & Stoughton, Page 80.

## **Chapter 15: Women on the Edge**

- Isaiah 9:2-7

Q1: Read the reference to this text from Isaiah in Matthew 4:12-17. How would you describe the condition of people “*walking in darkness*”? What is the remedy?

Q2: The Messiah is also called “*Prince of Peace*” (verse 6) whose rule shall be one of peace (verse 7). What is meant by this peace? Do you believe that we can already experience it?

- Isaiah 7:14 and Luke 1:5-55

*“In a way, the stories of Sarah and Elizabeth are a picture of the experience of the Jewish people. The prophets had inspired them to dream of a better day. Their prophecies echoed the first promise to Abraham: that everyone everywhere would be blessed through Abraham’s descendants. But those promises and prophecies had been delayed and frustrated and delayed again, until it seemed ridiculous to keep the dream alive.”*<sup>43</sup>

Q3: Has there been a time in your life when a promise, dream or expectation seemed to remain unfulfilled longer than you could bear? Share if you wish.

Q4: What progression do you see in Mary’s responses (Luke 1:29, 34, 38)? How does Gabriel answer her question about how this could happen (verses 35-37)?

Q5: Have you ever experienced going from confusion to questioning to faith? Describe the situation.

Q6: Reread verses 32-33. What does it mean for us today that Jesus is a King, an eternal King, whose Kingdom will never end? Where do you think his Kingdom is today?

*“The Bible comforts and reminds those of us who have come to trust in Jesus Christ not to despair as if there was no hope. We have the revelation of our Lord that not only announces His sovereign reign but also charts the course of world events.”*<sup>44</sup>

Q7: How do you think the angel’s statement in verse 37 encouraged Mary? How could it encourage you today?

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<sup>43</sup> McLaren, B., 2014. We make the Road by Walking. 2nd ed. London: Hodder & Stoughton, Page 83.

<sup>44</sup> Ross, Allen. “The Glorious Messiah and the Messianic Age.” The Book of Isaiah, 2004, <https://bible.org/seriespage/6-glorious-messiah-and-messianic-age-isaiah-91-7>. Accessed 14 February 2020.



## **Putting into practise**

*“Therefore I urge you, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and well-pleasing to God, which is your rational act of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed and progressively changed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.” (Romans 12: 1-2)*

Present yourself to God every morning this week. See if a new awareness grows in you.

## **Chapter 16: Keep Herod in Christmas**

- Jeremiah 32:31-35

Q1: What is God accusing the “*children of Judah*” of?

*“The sacrifice of children for the well-being and security of adults has a long history among human beings. For example, in the Middle East there was a religion dedicated to an idol named Molech. Faithful adherents would sacrifice infants to Molech every year, a horrible display of twisted religiosity to appease their god’s wrath and earn his favor.”*<sup>45</sup>

Q2: Read Leviticus 20:2-5. The events in Leviticus took place approximately six centuries before the prophet Jeremiah lived. The people were warned, yet they did not ‘get the message’. Can you think of a modern day example of lessons not learned where the most vulnerable are ‘sacrificed’ in one way or another?

- Micah 5:2-5a

Q3: The prophet Micah speaks of ‘One’ who is of ancient days, who shall be born and who shall be Israel’s peace. Does the image of God coming to us in the form of a newborn speak to you?

Q4: Why do you think that so many in Israel, familiar with these prophecies, did not recognize Jesus as Messiah?

- Matthew 1:18 - 2:16

Q5: Why was Herod disturbed by the news that the magi brought? How did he respond?

*“Herod (...) models one way: violence is simply one tool, used in varying degrees, to gain or maintain power. The baby whom Herod seeks to kill will model another way. His tool will be service, not violence. And his goal will not be gaining and maintaining power, but using his power to heal and empower others. He will reveal a vision of God that is reflected more in the vulnerability of children than in the violence of men, more in the caring of mothers than in the cruelty of kings.”*<sup>46</sup>

Q6: How would you describe the power of Jesus? What is it made up of?

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<sup>45</sup> McLaren, B., 2014. We make the Road by Walking. 2nd ed. London: Hodder & Stoughton, Page 89.

<sup>46</sup> McLaren, B., 2014. We make the Road by Walking. 2nd ed. London: Hodder & Stoughton, Page 89.

*“To be alive in the adventure of Jesus is to side with vulnerable children in defiance of the adults who see them as expendable. To walk the road with Jesus is to withhold consent and co-operation from the powerful, and to invest it instead with the vulnerable.”*<sup>47</sup>

Q7: *“Share a story about a time when you were a child and an adult other than a parent showed you great respect or kindness.”*<sup>48</sup>

Q8: Discuss a current political change in your country of residence (a new law, a war, a budget decision) from the vantage point of how it will affect children and their mothers.

### **Further meditation**

Light a candle for those who are hurting or mourning this Advent season. Be reminded that God feels their pain and comes near.

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<sup>47</sup> McLaren, B., 2014. *We make the Road by Walking*. 2nd ed. London: Hodder & Stoughton, Page 90.

<sup>48</sup> McLaren, B., 2014. *We make the Road by Walking*. 2nd ed. London: Hodder & Stoughton, Page 91.

## **Chapter 17: Surprising People**

- Matthew 1:1-17

Q1: Why do you think this genealogy was included in Matthew's account? What does it tell us about Jesus?

Q2: Do you notice anything remarkable about the women who are listed?

- Luke 2:8-20

Q3: Why do you think God chose to announce the Savior's birth to shepherds - marginal people in those days?

Jesus came to us as a fragile infant. Yet, his life and death became the greatest gift to all mankind. Consider this Bible verse: *"But we have this precious treasure in earthen vessels, so that the grandeur and surpassing greatness of the power will be from God and not from ourselves."* (2 Corinthians 4:7)

Q4: Have you thought of yourself as a fragile vessel for a precious treasure? How can God's power be seen in fragility?

Q5: In what way would the birth of Jesus bring peace? How can we experience God's peace?

- Psalm 34:1-18

Q6: The psalmist sought the Lord (verse 4). What was the effect of his prayer?

Q7: Do verses 9-10 sound provocative considering the poverty and food shortages we see in our world? What do you think the author meant by it?

*"The poor were especially central to the life and ministry of Jesus. Jesus understood himself to be empowered by the Spirit to bring good news to the poor. (...) Jesus taught the rich people to give generously to the poor, and even though others considered the poor to be cursed, Jesus pronounced the poor and those who are in solidarity with them to be blessed."*<sup>49</sup>

Q8: Can you think of a story in the Bible where Jesus was on the side of the poor?

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<sup>49</sup> McLaren, B., 2014. *We make the Road by Walking*. 2nd ed. London: Hodder & Stoughton, Page 95.

## **Chapter 17A: The Light Has Come (Christmas Eve)**

- Isaiah 60:1-3

Q1: How do these verses relate to the promise given by God to Abraham in Genesis 12? You can also read Isaiah 42:6-7 for reference.

Q2: Where do you see the prophecy from Isaiah 60 being fulfilled today?

- John 1:1-5 and 9-10; John 3:19-21; John 8:12; John 9:5; John 12:35-36 and 46

Q3: List some of the qualities of the Light mentioned in these verses.

Q4: Discuss together why you believe that the world did not recognize the light (John 1: 10). Look up some of the different responses to Jesus' life throughout the gospels.

Q5: What does it mean to become "sons of Light" (John 12:36)?

Read the passage about Jesus as the Light on p.98 in the book.

Q6: How can we experience aliveness during this Christmas season?

### **Ending with a prayer**

*"Let us light a candle for the Christ child, the infant Jesus, the Word made flesh. Let our hearts glow with that light that was in him, so that we become candles through which his light shines still."*<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> McLaren, B., 2014. We make the Road by Walking. 2nd ed. London: Hodder & Stoughton, Page 99.

## **Chapter 18: Sharing Gifts (Sunday on or after Christmas Day)**

- Psalm 117

Q1: Praise the Lord, all nations. How can we see this in the birth of Jesus? And in the world today?

- Matthew 2:1-12

Q2: Why do you think the wise men came to worship the “King of the Jews”?

Q3: *“Who might be today’s magi - people from other religions (or no religion) who honor Jesus without wanting to leave the religion into which they were born?”*<sup>51</sup>

- Luke 2:25-32

Q4: Read verses 30-32 again. For whom is God’s salvation? To whom was the birth of Jesus a gift?

Q5: Is there someone in your life who has pointed you to the revelation of Jesus? Perhaps even simply by sharing or explaining something that expanded your understanding of who He is.

### **Further meditation**

*“Instead of looking for faults and errors by which other religions can be discredited, insulted and excluded, we can ask other questions:*

- *What good can be discovered in other religions? Let us honor it.*
- *What treasures have they been given to share with us? Let us warmly welcome them.*
- *What dangers do they face? Let us protect them.*
- *What gifts do we have to share with them? Let us generously offer them.”*<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> McLaren, B., 2014. We make the Road by Walking. 2nd ed. London: Hodder & Stoughton, Page 104.

<sup>52</sup> McLaren, B., 2014. We make the Road by Walking. 2nd ed. London: Hodder & Stoughton, Page 102.

## **Chapter 19: Jesus Coming of Age**

- Luke 2:39-52

Q1: What is your first response to this scene? What does it tell us about Jesus at the age of twelve?

Q2: What does Jesus' response (verse 49) indicate about his identity and mission?

- Luke 3:1-14

John was a Levite and the son of Zechariah, a priest. The priests among the Levites were given the privilege of doing service in the tabernacle. They also served as judges and teachers of God's law.

Q3: In what way did John deviate from the expectation of following in his father's footsteps? What do you think motivated him to do so?

Q4: For years, the Jews had used baptism in ritual cleansing ceremonies of Gentile (non-Jewish) converts to Judaism. How does the baptism that John advocates differ from the baptism that the Jews already knew (verse 3)?

Q5: What does it mean to repent (you could look at verses 8 and 10-14)?

A definition of repentance could be: *"To rethink everything, to question your assumptions, to have a deep turnaround in your thinking and values."*<sup>53</sup>

Q6: *"Share the story of your baptism, confirmation or another significant step toward transformation."*<sup>54</sup>

- Luke 3:21-22.

Q7: Why do you think that Jesus came to be baptized by John?

Q8: How does God the Father confirm Jesus in his identity? Discuss what the dove signifies in Jesus' life and ministry.

1 Timothy 4:6-16

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<sup>53</sup> McLaren, B., 2014. We make the Road by Walking. 2nd ed. London: Hodder & Stoughton, Page 109.

<sup>54</sup> McLaren, B., 2014. We make the Road by Walking. 2nd ed. London: Hodder & Stoughton, Page 110.

Q9: After Jesus' coming of age, he spent eighteen years in relative anonymity with his parents in Nazareth. But Luke says that Jesus "*continued to grow and become strong [in spirit], filled with wisdom*" (Luke 2:40). Discuss what step you can take to continue to grow strong in your faith.

### **Further meditation**

*"John's instructions are quite ordinary: he demands that people share, and that they be fair with each other, and that they do not be mean and cruel; that they be happy with what they get. These are things we teach our smallest children! Integrity in the ordinary things is still the best mark of one genuinely repenting; we often think that what God requires of us as an impossible, huge task. In reality, the things God tells us to do are very simple and straightforward."*<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> D. Guzik, 'Study guide for Luke 3', Blue Letter Bible, ©2000, [https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/archives/guzik\\_david/StudyGuide\\_Luk/Luk\\_3.cfm](https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/archives/guzik_david/StudyGuide_Luk/Luk_3.cfm), accessed 14 June 2020.



## **Chapter 20: Join the Adventure!**

- Isaiah 61:1-4

Q1: In Luke 4, Jesus reads these words from Isaiah in the local temple and then says that: *“Today, this Scripture has been fulfilled”*. It is sometimes called the mission statement of Jesus. Discuss briefly how this prophesy materialized through the life of Jesus.

- Luke 4:1-13

Look at the line of events in Luke 3 and 4 - first, Jesus was baptised, then led into the wilderness where He was tempted.

Q2: What are the results of these events? How do they prepare Jesus for his mission?

- Luke 4:14-30

Q3: Identify four groups of people mentioned in verse 18. Who are these people today? Are we among them?

Q4: Look up the meaning of the Year of Jubilee in Leviticus 25. What is this year of the Lord’s favor that Jesus is proclaiming? How would you translate this concept to our times?

Q5: Why do you think that the people in the synagogue got so angry at Jesus’ words? (Notice that the people that were helped and healed in the stories referred to in verses 26 and 27 are foreigners.)

- Luke 5:1-11

As you look at the first five verses, put yourself in the scene. Who is there? What sounds do you hear? What do you smell? What are your visual impressions? <sup>56</sup>

Q6: Why do you think Jesus gets into the boat?

Q7: In verse 4, how does the scene change? If you were Simon, how would you be feeling? What feelings and conflicts is Peter expressing?

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<sup>56</sup> Questions taken from: Intersociety Christian Fellowship of the USA, ‘Simon Peter: A Humbled Witness’, Intersociety, ©1995, <https://intersociety.org/bible-studies/luke-5>, accessed 17 June 2020.

Q8: Look at verses 6-7. What words and phrases in these verses indicate the size of the catch? Why is the size of the catch significant?

Q9: What is Simon's reaction in verse 8? Why do you think he says he is a sinful man?

Q10: What might Jesus be saying to you about an area of your life where you feel confident, or perhaps over-confident? What might he be saying to you about what trust in him means, or what faith is?

Q11: Notice the way Jesus responds to Simon in verse 10. What do you think it meant to Simon Peter? What does it mean to you?

Q12: How does the story end, in verse 11? If you had been one of these three fishermen, what characteristics of Jesus would have led you to leave everything to follow him?

Q13: What does it really mean to follow Jesus? How has Jesus shown his trustworthiness to be followed?

## **Chapter 21: Significant and Wonderful**

Introduction question: How do you usually respond when reading a miracle story in the bible, do you find them easy to believe or do you feel sceptical?

- John 2:1-12

Q1: Water is turned into wine at a wedding in Cana. John tells us that this was the first of the signs (miracles) that Jesus did. Why do you think that Jesus performed miracles? Read also John 20:30-31.

About water and wine...

*“Moses turned water into blood, showing that the Law (the wages of sin) results in death (Exodus 7: 17-21). But Jesus' first miracle turned water into wine, showing the gladness and joy of His new work. This acts out what John said in chapter 1:17: “For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ”. We could say that the water is like a relationship with God under the Old Covenant, and the wine is like a relationship with God under the New Covenant.”<sup>57</sup>*

Q2: How did the disciples respond to what Jesus did (verse 11)?

*“If you are sceptical about miracles, you can be left with a reduced world, a disenchanted, mechanistic world where the impossible is always and forever impossible (...) a small box where God’s existence doesn’t seem to make much difference. (...) Perhaps a miracle story is meant to shake up our normal assumptions, inspire our imagination about the present and the future and make it possible for us to see something we couldn’t see before. (...) Perhaps these stories can stretch our imagination, and in so doing can empower us to play a catalytic role in co-creating new possibilities for the world of tomorrow. Doesn’t that sound rather...miraculous?”<sup>58</sup>*

Q3: *“In what way are our lives like a wedding banquet that is running out of wine? What are we running out of?”<sup>59</sup>*

Q4: *“Can you imagine what 680 litres (180 gallons) of wine would mean in a small Galilean village. What might that superabundance signify?”<sup>60</sup>*

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<sup>57</sup> D. Guzik, ‘Study guide for John 2’, Blue Letter Bible, ©2000, [https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/archives/guzik\\_david/StudyGuide\\_Jhn/Jhn\\_2.cfm](https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/archives/guzik_david/StudyGuide_Jhn/Jhn_2.cfm), accessed 17 June 2020.

<sup>58</sup> McLaren, B., 2014. We make the Road by Walking. 2nd ed. London: Hodder & Stoughton, Page 119.

<sup>59</sup> McLaren, B., 2014. We make the Road by Walking. 2nd ed. London: Hodder & Stoughton, Page 120.

<sup>60</sup> McLaren, B., 2014. We make the Road by Walking. 2nd ed. London: Hodder & Stoughton, Page 120.

Q5: *“What might it mean for God to save the best for last?”*<sup>61</sup>

- Mark 1:21-28

Jesus restores a man who is unwell (with an unclean spirit). The story invites us to ask questions about our own lives:

Q6: *“What unhealthy, polluting spirits are troubling us as individuals and as a people?”*<sup>62</sup>

Q7: *“What in us feels threatened and intimidated by the presence of a supremely ‘clean’ or ‘holy’ spirit or presence, like the one in Jesus?”*<sup>63</sup>

Q8: *“Do we believe that Jesus can set us free?”*<sup>64</sup>

### **Further meditation**

Read this verse a couple of times in silence, giving emphasis to different words. See what it stirs in you and respond in a prayer.

*“But those who drink the water I give will never be thirsty again. It becomes a fresh, bubbling spring within them, giving them eternal life.”* (John 4:14)

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<sup>61</sup> McLaren, B., 2014. *We make the Road by Walking*. 2nd ed. London: Hodder & Stoughton, Page 120.

<sup>62</sup> McLaren, B., 2014. *We make the Road by Walking*. 2nd ed. London: Hodder & Stoughton, Page 121.

<sup>63</sup> McLaren, B., 2014. *We make the Road by Walking*. 2nd ed. London: Hodder & Stoughton, Page 121.

<sup>64</sup> McLaren, B., 2014. *We make the Road by Walking*. 2nd ed. London: Hodder & Stoughton, Page 121.

## **Chapter 22: Jesus the Teacher**

Introduction question: *“Share a story about one of the most important teachers in your life and what made him or her so significant.”*<sup>65</sup>

- Proverbs 3:1-26

Q1: What is the advice given in verses 5-6? Are you in a place where you can rely on the Lord with all your heart? Or is there anything that might be holding you back?

Q2: What is the promise given in verse 6? Have you experienced those straight paths? What did that look like?

- Jeremiah 31:31-34

Q3: What is this new covenant described in verses 33-34? How is this good news?

*“When we scan the pages of the gospels, we find Jesus teaching in many different ways. First, he instructed through signs and wonders. (...) Second, he gave what we might call public lectures. (...) Third, he taught at surprising, unplanned, impromptu moments. (...) Fourth, he saved much of his most important teaching for private retreats and field trips with his disciples. (...) Fifth, Jesus taught through what we might call public demonstrations. (...) Sixth, Jesus loved to teach through finely crafted works of short fiction called parables. (...) His parables drew his hearers into deeper thought by engaging their imagination and by inviting interpretation instead of reaction and argument.”*<sup>66</sup>

- Mark 4:1-34

Q4: Why do some “not see” and “not understand” (verse 11)? What does it take to receive Jesus’ teaching?

Q5: What characterizes the Kingdom of God as described in the two parables in verses 26-32? Which of these two parables speaks to you most and why?

*“Broadly speaking, the kingdom of God is the rule of an eternal, sovereign God over all the universe. (...) More narrowly, the kingdom of God is a spiritual rule over the hearts and lives of those who willingly submit to God’s authority.”*<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> McLaren, B., 2014. We make the Road by Walking. 2nd ed. London: Hodder & Stoughton, Page 128.

<sup>66</sup> McLaren, B., 2014. We make the Road by Walking. 2nd ed. London: Hodder & Stoughton, Page 124-126.

<sup>67</sup> Gotquestions.org, ‘What is the Kingdom of God?’, Got Questions, <https://www.gotquestions.org/kingdom-of-God.html>, accessed 3 July 2020.

Q6: Have you ever thought of the Kingdom of God as something that exists here and now? Have you seen it around you? Experienced it in yourself?

Q7: How does the Kingdom of God differ from the kingdoms of this world?

Q8: How do we seek the Kingdom of God?

**For further meditation**

*“Now having been asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, He replied, ‘The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed or with a visible display; nor will people say, ‘Look! Here it is!’ or, ‘There it is!’ For the kingdom of God is among you [because of My presence].’” (Luke 17:20-21)*

Reflect on the way in which Jesus - and thus the Kingdom of God - is present among us today.

## **Chapter 23: Jesus and the Multitudes**

- Ezekiel 34

Q1: What does this passage tell us about our shepherd God?

- Luke 5:17-32

Q2: Why do you think that Jesus' first response was to forgive the paralyzed man?

Q3: What did Jesus demonstrate by also healing him from his paralysis? What was the response of the crowd?

Q4: Who did Jesus come to call? Have you ever experienced the need to repent (to change your old way of thinking, to turn from sin and to seek God and His righteousness)? How did you arrive at that moment and what did you do?

- Luke 18:15 - 19:9

Q5: Name some of the people in these verses that mattered to Jesus. What do they have in common?

Q6: Why did Jesus associate with people that were considered notorious sinners in those days, such as tax collectors? Can you picture a modern-day scene of this kind? What would the character of Jesus look like and do in such a scene?

Q7: Look at some of the discussions that Jesus had with the pharisees, such as in Luke 14:1-6 and Mark 2:23-28. What does Jesus propose? What do you think are some of the "*religious rules*" of our time? How might they keep people from finding faith?

- John 7:40-49, Matthew 9:35-36

Q8: Reading these two passages, notice the difference between how the pharisees see the crowd and how Jesus sees the crowd. How would you describe these different perspectives?

Q9: "*Share a story about a time when you felt like one of the crowd, or when you behaved like one of the pharisees.*"<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> McLaren, B., 2014. We make the Road by Walking. 2nd ed. London: Hodder & Stoughton, Page 134.

## **Chapter 24: Jesus and Hell**

- Jonah 4

Q1: Why did Jonah get upset that the Lord did not carry out the destruction that he had predicted?

Q2: Is it right for Jonah to be angry? What does this story tell us about God?

Q3: Can you think of a story in the bible where God changed or postponed his judgement? Can you think of a story where He didn't?

- Luke 16:19-31

Q4: Why do you think the rich man ended up where he did in the story? What was lacking in his life?

Q5: Is it impossible to please God if we are rich?

Q6: Why do you think that the rich man's wish in verses 27-28 is not granted?

*“Jesus exposes the fallacy of trusting in signs to bring people to Jesus. We often think that if people would see a spectacular enough sign, they would be compelled to believe. But what creates faith unto salvation is hearing the word of God (Romans 10:17).”<sup>69</sup>*

Q7: Note the context in which Jesus tells this story. He was teaching about money. The pharisees (who had a love for money) scoffed at him (verse 14). Read the excerpt from McLaren's book below and reread the story. Do you have any new insights?

*“We might say that Jesus wasn't so much teaching about hell as he was un-teaching about hell. In so doing, he wasn't simply arguing for a different understanding of the afterlife. He was doing something far more important and radical: proclaiming a transformative vision of God. God is not the one who condemns the poor and weak, nor is God the one who favours the rich and righteous. God is the one who loves everyone, including the people the rest of us think don't count.”<sup>70</sup>*

Read this comment in closing:

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<sup>69</sup> Guzik, D., (2000). 'Study guide for Luke 16', Blue Letter Bible, [https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/archives/guzik\\_david/StudyGuide\\_Luk/Luk\\_16.cfm](https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/archives/guzik_david/StudyGuide_Luk/Luk_16.cfm), accessed 7 July 2020.

<sup>70</sup> McLaren, B., 2014. We make the Road by Walking. 2nd ed. London: Hodder & Stoughton, Page 138.



*“The purpose of this story was to wake up complacent people, to warn them of the danger of their current path and to challenge them to change - using the strongest language and imagery available. As in the ancient story of Jonah, God’s intent was not to destroy but to save.”*<sup>71</sup>

### **Further meditation**

Is anything separating you from God (in the way that riches can)? Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you in your thoughts as you consider this question.

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<sup>71</sup> McLaren, B., 2014. *We make the Road by Walking*. 2nd ed. London: Hodder & Stoughton, Page 139.

## **Chapter 25: Jesus, Violence and Power**

- Isaiah 42:1-9

Q1: What image does this prophecy give about the coming Messiah? Do you recognize Jesus in this image?

- Isaiah 53

Q2: This prophecy is brutally honest and describes a suffering servant that is crushed for our wickedness. How do you respond to this image of a Savior?

- Matthew 16:13-28

Q3: What is remarkable about Peter's response to Jesus' question (verse 16)? What do you think helped these disciples to recognize Jesus not simply as a teacher or prophet, but as the Messiah?

Q4: Notice how Jesus praises Peter in verses 17-19 and then sternly reprimands him in verse 23. How can Peter be so right and so wrong at the same time?

Q5: *"Share a story about a time when you were completely certain about something, and then you realised you were completely (or at least partly) wrong."*<sup>72</sup>

*"Since the beginning, Jesus has taught that the non-violent will inherit the Earth. Violence cannot defeat violence. Hate cannot defeat hate. Fear cannot defeat fear. Domination cannot defeat domination. God's way is different. God must achieve victory through defeat, glory through shame, strength through weakness, leadership through servanthood, and life through death."*<sup>73</sup>

Q6: Why do you think that the Jews were expecting a Savior that would overthrow the Roman oppressors?

Q7: Are there any modern misconceptions we have about Jesus that relate to violence and power?

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<sup>72</sup> McLaren, B., 2014. We make the Road by Walking. 2nd ed. London: Hodder & Stoughton, Page 145.

<sup>73</sup> McLaren, B., 2014. We make the Road by Walking. 2nd ed. London: Hodder & Stoughton, Page 144.

## **Chapter 26: Making It Real**

- Mark 2:1-19

Q1: Jesus responds to the faith of the four men and their paralyzed friend. Do you think that faith is necessary for Jesus to forgive, to heal in your life?

Q2: Levi followed Jesus. The other tax collectors and sinners in Levi's house were following Him. What made them willing to take that step of faith? What can we learn?

Q3: Jesus compares himself to a physician (verse 17). Have you ever thought of Jesus as a healer? Has there been a time in your life where you have experienced the healing presence of Jesus?

- Hebrews 11:1-8

Q4: Verse 6 states that it is impossible to walk with God without faith. Have you experienced the reward of God's presence when you have taken a step in faith?

Q5: How do you respond to the idea that our faith has an actual effect. Or as the author McLaren describes it: that our faith makes it real (see page 148 in the book)?

- 1 John 1:1 - 2:6

*“That question [Do you trust him?] has a peculiar power, doesn't it? ‘Do you trust him?’ is not the same as ‘Do you believe he existed?’ or ‘Do you believe certain doctrines about him?’ It's a question about commitment, about confidence. For Jesus, the call to trust him was closely linked to the call to follow him. If we truly trust him, we will follow him on the road, imitate him, learn from his example, live by his way.”<sup>74</sup>*

Q6: According to the passage in 1 John 1, what are some of the steps we can take to walk in the light, as God is light?

*“Because his message was and is so radical on so many levels, believing and following can't be treated lightly. They are costly. They require us to rethink everything. They change the course of our lives.”<sup>75</sup>*

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<sup>74</sup> McLaren, B., 2014. We make the Road by Walking. 2nd ed. London: Hodder & Stoughton, Page 149-150.

<sup>75</sup> McLaren, B., 2014. We make the Road by Walking. 2nd ed. London: Hodder & Stoughton, Page 150.

Q7: How does 1 John 2 describe the marks of someone who has come to know Jesus? Does it require that we are perfect in every way?

### **Putting into practise**

This week, try to let this verse echo in your heart: *“for we walk by faith, not by sight”* (2 Corinthians 5:7). Rest in God's promises.

## **Chapter 27: A New Identity**

- Matthew 5:1-12

Q1: Jesus begins his teaching by identifying those who are “*blessed*”, the kind of people that we should aspire to be like. Name some of these.

Q2: Do any of them surprise or stand out to you?

*“Jesus has been speaking for only a matter of seconds, and he has already turned our normal status ladders and social pyramids upside down. He advocates an identity characterised by solidarity, sensitivity and non-violence. He celebrates those who long for justice, embody compassion and manifest integrity and non-duplicity. He creates a new kind of hero: not warriors, corporate executives or politicians, but brave and determined activists for pre-emptive peace, willing to suffer with him in the prophetic tradition of justice.”<sup>76</sup>*

Q3: How does Jesus’ idea of a hero contrast with our common image of a successful person? Which of these images are you drawn to?

- Matthew 5:13-16

Q4: Jesus compares his followers to salt. Name some of the qualities of salt. Can you think of a person in your life that displays the kind of saltiness that Jesus speaks of?

Q5: Do the same for light - what are the qualities of light and how can the Christian community around the world be an effective witness by being light?

Q6: Can you think of a time when you did not conform to pressures around you and stood up for something you believed in?

### **Ending with a prayer**

Pray together and ask God for an opportunity this week to be salt or light to a person around you.

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<sup>76</sup> McLaren, B., 2014. We make the Road by Walking. 2nd ed. London: Hodder & Stoughton, Page 158-159.

## **Chapter 28: A New Path to Aliveness**

- Matthew 5:17-20

Q1: What is meant by “*the Law*” and “*the Prophets*” mentioned in verse 17?

Q2: What do you think Jesus meant when he said that he came to fulfill the law?

Q3: How is it possible to become more righteous than the scribes and Pharisees, who were so focused on obeying the Law? What did they lack in the eyes of Jesus?

- Matthew 5:21-26

Q4: Jesus quotes the sixth commandment “*you shall not murder*” and suggests a new approach. What is different about it?

*“As a first step beyond what the tradition required, Jesus calls us to root out the anger that precedes the physical violence that leads to murder. As a second step, he calls us to deal with the verbal violence of name-calling that precedes the physical violence that leads to murder. As a third step, he urges us to engage in preemptive reconciliation.”<sup>77</sup>*

- Matthew 5:27-37

Q5: Do you see a pattern in Jesus’ teaching? He calls us beyond appearances, into inner transformation. Have you experienced such an inner transformation, where you found the strength to remove yourself from a temptation or to break a bad habit?

- Matthew 5:38-48

Read page 165-166 in the book to understand more about the backgrounds of these examples that Jesus brings up.

Q6: How do you respond to these challenging teachings? Does it seem possible to live that way?

Q7: What do you think the effect would be if we lavished God’s grace and goodness on all people, regardless of how they treat us?

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<sup>77</sup> McLaren, B., 2014. *We make the Road by Walking*. 2nd ed. London: Hodder & Stoughton, Page 163-164.

Q8: *“Share a story about a time when someone knew you had done wrong, but loved you anyway.”*<sup>78</sup>

### **Putting into practise**

Is there any particular area in your life where you see that you need to move from (as the author McLaren puts it) *“not doing external wrong”* to *“transforming your deeper desires”*?

Ask Jesus to transform your heart, soul and mind. Use these Bible verses in your prayers if you like:

*“We are destroying sophisticated arguments and every exalted and proud thing that sets itself up against the [true] knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought and purpose captive to the obedience of Christ (...)”* (2 Corinthians 10:5)

*“So, as God’s own chosen people, who are holy [set apart, sanctified for His purpose] and well-beloved [by God Himself], put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience [which has the power to endure whatever injustice or unpleasantness comes, with good temper] (...) Beyond all these things put on and wrap yourselves in [unselfish] love, which is the perfect bond of unity [for everything is bound together in agreement when each one seeks the best for others]. Let the peace of Christ [the inner calm of one who walks daily with Him] be the controlling factor in your hearts [deciding and settling questions that arise].”* (Colossians 3:12-15)

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<sup>78</sup> McLaren, B., 2014. *We make the Road by Walking*. 2nd ed. London: Hodder & Stoughton, Page 167.

## **Chapter 29: Your Secret Life**

- Matthew 6:1-18

Q1: Why do you think that Jesus warns us not to do our good deeds publicly? What is the danger involved?

Q2: Can you identify three spiritual practises (disciplines) mentioned in this passage?

Q3: Have you practised any of these in your own life?

Q4: Do you practise them in the private manner that Jesus recommends? If so, do you experience the reward that Jesus mentions?

Q5: Discuss whether our motives matter when we do good deeds...

Q6: Read the four-part summary of the Lord's prayer (verses 9-13) in the book on page 170. How do you respond to this summary of Jesus' model prayer?

Q7: What do you think Jesus meant by "*storing up treasures in heaven*" (verse 20)?

Q8: What do you think are the advantages of developing spiritual practises in secret? What could the fruit look like?

Q9: Which spiritual practices would you like to develop (further) in your life?

### **Ending with a prayer**

Close your time together by praying the Lord's prayer:

Our Father, who is in heaven,  
Hallowed be Your name.  
Your kingdom come,  
Your will be done  
On earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread.  
And forgive us our debts, as we have forgiven our debtors.  
And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil.  
[For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.]



## **Chapter 30: Why We Worry, Why We Judge**

- Matthew 6:22 - 34

Q1: What do you typically worry about? Have you ever turned your worry into a prayer?

Q2: How do you respond to the idea that our heavenly Father knows and provides what we need?

Q3: Have you ever experienced God providing for you in unexpected ways? Share a story with the group.

Read the paragraph about the result of anxiety at a community level in the book on page 174.

Q4: Do you agree with this diagnosis of some of the wrongs in our society?

Q5: What is the antidote to anxiety, according to Jesus?

- Matthew 7:1 - 12

Q6: What, according to Jesus, is the problem with judging others?

Q7: Discuss what it means not to judge others. How does this relate to the idea that we should teach and admonish one another (Colossians 3:16)?

Reread verses 7-11.

Q8: *“How do you respond to the idea that our deepest problem is that we don’t know we are loved? In what ways does it help you to think of God’s love as fatherly, and in what ways does it help to think of God’s love as motherly? Are there ways that imagining God as a loving friend helps you in ways that parental images for God don’t?”*<sup>79</sup>

Q9: The text in verse 12 is sometimes called *The golden rule*. Do you think that this is a helpful rule to live by?

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<sup>79</sup> McLaren, B., 2014. *We make the Road by Walking*. 2nd ed. London: Hodder & Stoughton, Page 177.

## **Chapter 31: The Choice is Yours**

- Matthew 7:13-29

Q1: Read verses 13-14 again. How do you understand Jesus' teaching about the narrow gate? Who are those on the easy road that leads to destruction? What makes the road that leads to life narrow and hard to find?

Q2: Read verses 15-20 again. How do we recognise false prophets? How do we know the truth?

Q3: Read verses 21-23 again. What characterises the kind of people that Jesus knows and receives into his presence?

Q4: Read verses 24-27 again. Can you think of a time in your life when a 'storm' came? What did it reveal to you about the foundation of the house?

Take turns reading out loud the author's summary of Jesus' teaching on pages 179-181 in the book. Be receptive to how God wants to speak to you about one or several of these points. Write those down.

### **Ending with a prayer**

*"Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor stand in the path of sinners, nor sit in the seat of scoffers (ridiculers). But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on His law he meditates day and night. And he will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in its season; Its leaf does not wither; And in whatever he does, he prospers."* (Psalm 1:1-3)

Share in a prayer. Express to God your desire to walk with Him and to become firmly planted like a tree by streams of water.

## **Chapter 32: Peace March (Palm Sunday)**

- Zechariah 9:9-10

Q1: What does this prophecy teach us about the Messiah and his reign?

- Luke 19:29-46

Read about the historic context of this passage on pages 185-186 in the book.

Q2: How does the entry of King Jesus contrast with the regular processions by King Herod?

Q3: How did the crowd respond to Jesus' entry into Jerusalem?

Look at the different ways in which the crowds praised Jesus: 1) simply (with palm branches); 2) with dedication (laying down one of their few garments) and 3) specifically (for “*all the wonderful miracles they had seen*”).

Q4: Consider what that means for the way in which you praise God. Is there something you can learn from the crowd on Palm Sunday?

Q5: Read verses 41-44 again. Why do you think Jesus wept?

Q6: Discuss what happened to Jerusalem and the temple shortly after Jesus' death. (Read up online if you need to.)

*“No one understood the message Jesus brought to this world. No one learned from Jesus' message on peace and love. No one changed. They heard his words, but didn't understand, nor did they apply them to their lives. Hours before Jesus was arrested, His disciples were still arguing who was going to receive the greatest benefit for following Him. They were looking for rewards without having learned the lessons or applying them to their lives. They were still like those people Jeremiah was sent to. They all thought their only obligation to God was to worship at that stone temple. They allowed wood and stone to replace God's presence and His messages.”<sup>80</sup>*

Q7: In what way do we replace God's presence and His messages? Do we have any “stone temples” in our lives that we need to break down or look beyond? What keeps us from freely entering God's presence?

### **Further resources**

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<sup>80</sup> Herman, Dennis. Prophecies Fulfilled Proverbs to Malachi. Lulu.com, 2014.

Watch the visual liturgy *Scattered palms* by The Work of the People if possible (subscription needed).<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Luu, Phuc. The Work of the People. <https://www.theworkofthepeople.com/scattered-palms> (accessed 4 August 2020).

## **Chapter 32A: A Table. A Basin. Some Food. Some Friends. (Holy Thursday)**

In preparation: Ask those who join the bible study to read John 13-17 beforehand. If possible, set up and light 40 candles in the room where you meet.

- John 13-17

Read the shorter retelling of this story by the author on pages 188-191 in the book together.

Then read 39 sayings of Jesus, printed on pages 191-193 in the book together in silence. Extinguish a candle after each saying.

Conclude with a short prayer.

### **Further meditation**

Read this verse and reflect on the question what it means to *know* God, to *know* Jesus..

*“Now this is eternal life: that they may know You, the only true [supreme and sovereign] God, and [in the same manner know] Jesus [as the] Christ whom You have sent.”*  
(John 17:3)

## **Chapter 32B: Everything Must Change (Good Friday)**

- Psalm 22

Q1: This psalm may have been prayed by Jesus when he was on the cross (Matthew 27:46). Was there a time in your life that you felt forsaken by God? Were you able to turn your feelings into a prayer at the time?

Q2: *“How do you respond to the idea that ‘there couldn’t be any other way?’”*<sup>82</sup> That Jesus had to suffer and die on the cross...

Take turns reading the story of Jesus’ darkest hour.

- Luke 22:39 - 23:56

Q3: *“Share what the crucifixion of Jesus says and means to you today.”*<sup>83</sup>

Q4: On Palm Sunday, Jesus was welcomed into Jerusalem as the *“King who comes in the name of the Lord”* (Luke 19:38). On Good Friday, the crowds demand that Jesus be crucified. (Luke 23:23). How could this happen?

Q5: Jesus asked God to forgive those who crucified him. What does that teach us about who he was, what his path to peace looked like?

Q6: Do you believe that the path that Jesus showed can truly lead to change, in our lives, in our society?

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<sup>82</sup> McLaren, B., 2014. *We make the Road by Walking*. 2nd ed. London: Hodder & Stoughton, Page 197.

<sup>83</sup> McLaren, B., 2014. *We make the Road by Walking*. 2nd ed. London: Hodder & Stoughton, Page 197.

## **Chapter 32C: Doubt. Darkness. Despair. (Holy Saturday)**

- Psalm 77

Q1: This psalm starts out with doubt and despair, but there is a shift halfway through. What can we learn from the psalmist?

- Ecclesiastes 1:1-11

Q2: The idea that life is meaningless is not new, as we can see from this text. Did you ever consider what it was like for the disciples that day after Jesus died? Can you imagine that they felt doubt, darkness, despair?

Q3: Was there a time in your life that you questioned the meaning to it all, perhaps even God's goodness?

- Job 10

Q4: Do you find it shocking that this text can be found in the bible? Or does it perhaps feel refreshing?

Q5: Discuss whether death has the last word in our lives.

### **Further resources**

- Watch the visual prayer *But not held* featuring Walter Brueggemann by The Work of the People if possible (subscription may be needed).<sup>84</sup>
- Watch the film *La vita è bella* (Life is beautiful) on the self-sacrificial love of a father during WWII, even as he and his son are transported to a concentration camp.

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<sup>84</sup> Brueggemann, Walter. *But not held*. The Work of the People. <https://www.theworkofthepeople.com/but-not-held> (accessed 9 December 2020).

## **Chapter 33: The Uprising Begins (Easter Sunday)**

Introduction Q: Do you have a special memory from Easter Sunday - a feeling of excitement, a memorable worship service, a sense of hope?

- Ezekiel 37:1-14

Q1: *“Share a story about a time in your life when despair was replaced with hope.”*<sup>85</sup>

Q2: Reading this text, can you identify what brings life and who brings life?

- Luke 24:1-32

Q3: The women who visit the tomb find it empty. *“Two men in dazzling clothing”* appear to them. What do the men say about Jesus and how do they support that claim?

Q4: The disciples are trying to make sense of all that has happened. What does Jesus say of them (verse 25)? What does it take for us to see and believe in the resurrection of Jesus?

Q5: Jesus takes time to explain and interpret all in Scripture that points to himself. Discuss whether this kind of evidence has been important in your faith journey.

Q6: What led the disciples to eventually recognize the risen Jesus?

Q7: Have you ever experienced Jesus’ presence in the breaking of bread - either at church or in a home setting?

- Colossians 1:9-29

Q8: What is the result of *“knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom, and in understanding”* (verse 9)?

Q9: If you summarise this chapter, what did the death and resurrection of Jesus accomplish for us, all of God’s children?

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<sup>85</sup> McLaren, B., 2014. *We make the Road by Walking*. 2nd ed. London: Hodder & Stoughton, Page 209.



## **Chapter 34: The Uprising of Fellowship**

- Psalm 133

Q1: What does it mean to “ *dwell together in unity*” (verse 1)? Do you think that this is difficult? Why do you think God wishes for us to live together in unity?

Q2: Share a story of when you overcame differences with someone in your church or Christian community.

- John 20

The scene: The morning of his resurrection, Jesus appeared to Mary in her grief, just outside the tomb. She reported it to the others. A few other disciples also witnessed the empty grave. However, amidst the rumours that Jesus had risen from the dead, the disciples feared repercussions from authorities and hid behind barred doors.

Q3: What is the first thing Jesus said and did? How did the disciples respond?

Q4: Identify three ways in which Jesus prepared his disciples for the next step (verses 21-23). What does that teach us about the mission of the church?

Q5: Do you know anyone like Thomas, questioning what is not seen/proven? Or perhaps, you recognize yourself in him... How does Jesus respond to Thomas’ doubt? Do you think that doubt can help produce faith?

*“We learned something essential about what this uprising is going to be about. It isn’t just for brave people, but for scared folk like us who are willing to become brave. It isn’t just for believers, but for doubting folk like Thomas who want to believe in spite of their scepticism. It isn’t just for good people, but for normal, flawed people like you and me and Thomas and Peter. And I should add that it isn’t just for men either. (...) As we look back, we realise he’s [Jesus] been treating women with more respect than the rest of us have right from the start.”<sup>86</sup>*

Q6: *“How do you respond to the idea that Christian fellowship is for scarred and scared people - without regard to gender, status or achievement?”<sup>87</sup>*

- Acts 8:26-40

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<sup>86</sup> McLaren, B., 2014. We make the Road by Walking. 2nd ed. London: Hodder & Stoughton, Page 213.

<sup>87</sup> McLaren, B., 2014. We make the Road by Walking. 2nd ed. London: Hodder & Stoughton, Page 215.

In this passage, Philip obeys the instruction of an angel of the Lord and has a unique encounter with a high-ranked court official of the Queen of the Ethiopians.

Q7: What can we learn from Philip's approach?

Q8: Have you ever extended yourself to someone from a different culture? Share a story if you wish.

## **Chapter 35: The Uprising of Discipleship**

Introduction Q: *“Share a story about how you have been drawn towards discipleship through another person.”*<sup>88</sup>

- Psalm 25

Q1: According to this psalm, what kind of people are open to God’s guidance and teaching? And what does the Lord teach them?

Q2: Are there any verses in this psalm that could become a prayer for you this coming week?

- John 21:1-15

Q3: Why do we find some of the disciples in Galilee? Look for clues in Matthew 28:5-7.

Q4: *“That night they caught nothing”* (verse 3). How does this image speak to you in your life right now? Read Galatians 6:9-10 as an encouragement to one another.

Q5: Jesus chose to appear while the men were going about their ordinary lives and tasks. What can we learn from that approach?

Q6: In verses 5-6, the disciples receive an unexpected instruction from a stranger on the beach. Why do you think they followed the instruction? What was the result of this small step in faith?

Q7: The resurrected Christ appears and...makes breakfast (verse 9)! He serves them, just like he did on the night that he was betrayed, washing their feet. Have you witnessed this kind of servant leadership in people around you?

Q8: When Jesus was arrested, the disciples fled. Peter denied Jesus three times. Now Jesus appears to them in peace, gives Peter a chance to reverse the denial through declarations of love and then instructs Peter to feed his sheep. It seemed that he had not lost trust in them. How do you think this impacted them?

*“Small beginnings with unlikely people, given lots of time and lots of faith and lots of hope and love, can change the world.”*<sup>89</sup>

### **Further meditation**

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<sup>88</sup> McLaren, B., 2014. We make the Road by Walking. 2nd ed. London: Hodder & Stoughton, Page 220.

<sup>89</sup> McLaren, B., 2014. We make the Road by Walking. 2nd ed. London: Hodder & Stoughton, Page 220.

Consider in what way you need to be restored by Jesus. Take some time to talk to him about your perceived failures. Ask Him for peace and courage to carry on that which He is entrusting to you.

## **Chapter 36: The Uprising of Worship**

Introduction Q: “Share a story of a time when your heart was full of worship.”<sup>90</sup>

- Psalm 103

Read this psalm together as a prayer. Then add to the prayer, or see whether there is a song that springs up in your heart.

- Acts 2:41-47

Q1: Can you identify what elements were present in the early church gatherings?

Q2: Read the passage on the four functions of worship on pages 223 - 225 of the book. “How do you respond to the four functions of gathered worship - teaching, bread and wine, fellowship, and prayer?”<sup>91</sup>

- 1 Corinthians 14:26-31

Q3: In this letter, Paul the apostle is responding to a letter from the Corinthians regarding behavioural problems in the church. What problem is being addressed here?

Q4: According to this text, what should be the purpose of contributions that are made in a church gathering?

- Colossians 3:12-17

Q5: In this passage, what are the characteristics of a community of Christian believers?

Q6: It says: “wrap yourselves in love, which is the perfect bond of unity” (verse 14). What does a love that creates unity look like?

Q7: Inspired by this passage, what can each of us do to create a healthy community of worshippers? Is there a particular element that seems challenging to you?

### **Ending with a prayer**

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<sup>90</sup> McLaren, B., 2014. We make the Road by Walking. 2nd ed. London: Hodder & Stoughton, Page 227.

<sup>91</sup> McLaren, B., 2014. We make the Road by Walking. 2nd ed. London: Hodder & Stoughton, Page 227.

Thank God for the opportunity to gather today.

Then pray for Christians who are not able to gather freely for worship in their country. Pray that God will open doors for them to stay connected to the body of Christ. Ask God to strengthen their hearts through Scripture and songs.

For more information, see <https://www.opendoors.org/>.

## **Chapter 37: The Uprising of Partnership**

- Psalm 146

Q1: What theme(s) can you detect in this psalm?

Q2: Notice all the ‘actions’ in this psalm, the proclamations of what God does and is about. Can you see yourself partnering with God in these things?

- Matthew 10:16-20, 11:28-30, 28:16-20

Q3: Going back to Matthew 10:8, it says *“Freely you have received, freely give.”* What is it you have received?

Q4: Matthew 28:19-20 is sometimes called The Great Commission - an instruction and role given to us. Have you ever considered this to be a central part of your life? If so, how does that translate in your day-to-day life? Perhaps you can think of one example.

Q5: Discuss what it means to be *“wise as serpents and innocent as doves”* (verse 16). What does it take in the culture you live in to effectively share the gospel? (Read the quote below for inspiration.)

*“The apostle Paul also modeled the “wise as serpents, harmless as doves” technique. Paul lived in dove-like innocence in good conscience before God (Acts 23:1) and learned to deny his carnal desires so as not to jeopardize his ministry (1 Corinthians 9:27). But Paul also displayed serpent-like shrewdness when he needed it. He knew his legal rights and used the legal system to his advantage (Acts 16:37; 22:25; 25:11). He also carefully crafted his speeches to maximize the impact on his audience (Acts 17:22–23; 23:6–8).”*<sup>92</sup>

- Acts 16:11-40

Q6: Lydia is described as a worshiper of God (verse 14) and after responding to the things said by Paul (the good news of Jesus explained), she was baptized. How do we recognize people who are already worshipers of God, but who may not know the gospel message?

Q7: In this passage, we see the cost of going against the dominant culture/beliefs around us (verse 18) and perhaps even against the law (verse 21). *“Under what circumstances would you risk arrest, imprisonment or death?”*<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> GotQuestions, What does it mean to be wise as serpents and harmless as doves (Matthew 10:16)?, <https://www.gotquestions.org/wise-serpents-harmless-doves.html>, accessed on 21 August 2020.

<sup>93</sup> McLaren, B., 2014. We make the Road by Walking. 2nd ed. London: Hodder & Stoughton, Page 233.

Q8: What can we learn from Paul & Silas' attitude in such a difficult circumstances as torture and imprisonment?



## **Chapter 38: The Uprising of Stewardship**

Introduction Q: Share with the group about your cultural background and upbringing when it comes to financial resources. Was generosity a part of your family culture (and what did that look like)? Perhaps you were taught to never depend on others?

- Deuteronomy 15:1-11

Q1: What do you think is the reason that the Lord instituted this sabbatical year (or year of jubilee) when the people of Israel settled in the promised land? How would this instruction impact their society, the economy and individual people?

Q2: In this text, what attitude is expected when it comes to lending?

Q3: Discuss what it could mean that in return for generosity “*the Lord your God will bless you in all your work and in all your undertakings*” (verse 10).

- 1 Timothy 6:3-19

Q4: What is this contentment that Paul, the author of this letter, speaks of in verse 6? How does that lead to “*great gain*”?

Q5: Do you think that it is possible to be(come) rich without falling into “*foolish and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction*” (verse 9)?

Q6: Money and possessions are one of the most referenced topics in the bible. Did you realize that this topic is a big part of your faith journey? Have you ever developed a budget where you specify what percentage of your income you will spend, save and give (or a practise of doing so)?

Q7: How does the culture you live in view money and possessions? Are there any systems of jubilee in place (such as forms of redistribution or cancellation of debt or prison sentence)? What would your society look like without them?

- 2 Corinthians 8:1-15

Q8: Discuss some of the principles of giving described in this text (according to ability, in a relationship of equality). Do you see these principles at work in your church or in your society? Can you think of other healthy principles of giving?

Q9: Verse 15 refers to a passage about manna in the desert. Read Exodus 16:4-5 and 13-18. This was a time when the Israelites learned to depend on God for their daily bread (literally). Can you imagine being in such a situation of dependence? Why or why not?

### **Further meditation**

Read the following prayer from Proverbs 30:8-9:

*“Give me neither poverty nor riches; Feed me with the food that is my portion, so that I will not be full and deny You and say, “Who is the Lord?” Or that I will not be poor and steal, and so profane the name of my God.”*

Reflect whether you can join in with this prayer.

## **Chapter 39: Whatever the Hardship, Keep Rising Up!**

- Acts 9:1-25

Q1: Is there any particular part about Saul's conversion story that speaks to you? Explain why.

In the Lord's instructions to Ananias, the hardships that Saul would endure as a follower of Jesus are mentioned: *"for I will make clear to him how much he must suffer and endure for My name's sake"* (verse 16).

Jesus also warned people to count the cost of following him:

*"Jesus ended His description of the cost of discipleship with a breathtaking statement: "Any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:33). "Renouncing" may mean we give up something physically, but more often it means we let go emotionally so that what we possess no longer possesses us. When we become one of His, we cannot continue to belong to this world (1 John 2:15-17). (...) Those who are following Jesus simply for what they can get won't stick around when the going gets tough. When God's way conflicts with our way, we will feel betrayed by the shallow, me-first faith we have bought into. If we have not counted the cost of being His child, we will turn away at the threat of sacrifice and find something else to gratify our selfish desires (cf. Mark 4:5, 16-17)."*<sup>94</sup>

Q2: Are you familiar with the idea that following Jesus comes with a cost, with having to renounce certain things in your life? Perhaps you have already experienced such a sacrifice?

- 2 Corinthians 6:1-10; 11:22-33

Q3: *"How do you respond to the idea that we discover God's strength only through our weakness?"*<sup>95</sup>

Q4: When we experience hardships because of our faith, what can we do to persevere?

- Isaiah 40:27-31 (Let one in the group read this text aloud, slowly.)

Q5: *"Share a story about one of your greatest hardships."*<sup>96</sup> Did you experience God's strength and power in those moments?

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<sup>94</sup> GotQuestions, What does it mean to "count the cost" (Luke 14:28)?, <https://www.gotquestions.org/count-the-cost.html>, accessed on 23 August 2020.

<sup>95</sup> McLaren, B., 2014. We make the Road by Walking. 2nd ed. London: Hodder & Stoughton, Page 244.

<sup>96</sup> McLaren, B., 2014. We make the Road by Walking. 2nd ed. London: Hodder & Stoughton, Page 244.

## **Chapter 40: The Spirit is moving! (Pentecost Sunday)**

In preparation for this study, let each participant read through these images or different faces of the Holy Spirit. Look up the Scripture references if you are unfamiliar with the story.

- ❖ Wind - The Holy Spirit brings beauty out of deformity, order out of disorder, harmony out of confusion and newness out of oldness. (Genesis 1:1-2)
- ❖ Breath - God gave human beings physical life by breathing on them his breath of life. God gives us spiritual life by breathing on us the Spirit of God. (Genesis 2:7; John 20:22)
- ❖ Fire - God's Spirit appears as fire in a burning bush, calling Moses to a new task. (Exodus 3:1-5)
- ❖ Cloud - God's presence led the Israelites out of slavery into freedom in the form of a pillar of cloud and fire. (Exodus 13:21)
- ❖ Giving wisdom, strength, courage - Bezalel, Gideon, Samson and Isaiah were filled by the Holy Spirit for specific purposes. (Exodus 31:1-5; Judges 6:14 and 34; Judges 15:14; Isaiah 61:1-3)
- ❖ Water - John calls people to regret their sin and change their old way of thinking. He immerses and marks people with water. The Messiah would baptize with the Holy Spirit. (Matthew 3:11)
- ❖ Dove - Upon his baptism, the Holy Spirit descends on Jesus like a dove. (Matthew 3: 16)
- ❖ Wine - Jesus turns water into wine, *"infusing joy at a wedding banquet. Later, he promises people that if they trust him, they will experience rivers of living water springing up from within."*<sup>97</sup> (John 2:1-10; John 7:37-39)

Intro Q: *"Share a story about a time when you experienced the Holy Spirit in a special way."*<sup>98</sup>

- John 3:1-21

Q1: What does it take to see the Kingdom of God?

Q2: Describe in your own words what it means to be *"born again"* (verse 3).

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<sup>97</sup> McLaren, B., 2014. We make the Road by Walking. 2nd ed. London: Hodder & Stoughton, Page 251.

<sup>98</sup> McLaren, B., 2014. We make the Road by Walking. 2nd ed. London: Hodder & Stoughton, Page 253.

The Holy Spirit is promised throughout the Bible - through prophets, by Jesus and in letters to the early churches. Read the following Bible references to understand more about the promise of the Spirit.

- Jeremiah 31:33; Ezekiel 36:26; Joel 2:28-29; Acts 2:15-17; Acts 10:45

Q3: Why is the Spirit given?

Q4: To whom is the Spirit promised? Are these prophecies fulfilled today?

- John 14:16-17; John 7:38-39; John 16:7; Acts 1:4-5

Q5: What does Jesus promise his followers?

- Acts 2:38; 1 John 4:13; Romans 8:9; 1 Corinthians 3:16; 2 Timothy 1:14

Q6: How do we receive the Holy Spirit?

- Acts 2:1-41

The disciples are filled with the Holy Spirit and begin to speak in other languages about the mighty works of God. The crowd that gathers, Jews from many other regions and countries, can hear these words in their native tongue. If you have ever lived in a country where your mother tongue is not spoken, you know what it feels like to suddenly hear words that are so familiar and close to your heart.

Q7: What do you think this sign at Pentecost teaches us about who God is?

The author McLaren points out that this event reverses the ancient story of the tower of Babylon where the one language got multiplied and people got scattered and dispersed. He also suggests that at Pentecost a third way is born: unity and diversity in harmony.

Q8: Have you experienced unity and diversity going hand-in-hand in your Christian community?

Q9: How can a diverse (yet unified) church fellowship be an example, a witness to our society?

- Romans 6:1-14

*“For Paul, life in the Spirit means a threefold sharing in the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. First, as we turn from old habits and patterns, our ‘old self’, with all its pride, greed, lust, anger, prejudice and hostility dies with Christ. That former identity with all*

*its hostilities is nailed to the cross and left behind. In this way, life in the Spirit involves a profound experience of 'letting go' of what has been so far.*

*Then, Paul says, we join Jesus in the powerlessness and defeat of burial, symbolised by baptism. We experience that burial as a surrender to silence, stillness, powerlessness, emptiness and rest, a 'letting be'.*

*Then we join Jesus in the dynamic, surprising uprising of resurrection. The surrender, silence, emptiness and rest of 'letting go' and 'letting be' make us receptive to something new. Like a vacuum, that receptivity welcomes infilling and activation...and so we experience a 'letting-come' of the Spirit of God.”<sup>99</sup>*

Q10: *“How do you respond to the imagery of death, burial and resurrection with Christ?”<sup>100</sup>*

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<sup>99</sup> McLaren, B., 2014. *We make the Road by Walking*. 2nd ed. London: Hodder & Stoughton, Page 250.

<sup>100</sup> McLaren, B., 2014. *We make the Road by Walking*. 2nd ed. London: Hodder & Stoughton, Page 253.

## **Chapter 41: Moving with the Spirit**

To begin, watch this sketch video by Steve Thomason that explains the idea of the vine and the branches: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UeYp6L-LXSA>.<sup>101</sup>

- John 15:1-11

Q1: How does the Word of God cleanse us?

Q2: What is the fruit that Jesus talks about?

Q3: How can we bear fruit?

Q4: What happens when we bear much fruit?

- Galatians 3:19 - 4:7

Q5: From this text, why did God give Moses the Law? And what is the difference “*now that faith has come*” (3:25)?

*“We start in the heart - the wellspring of our desires. That’s where our problems begin, and that’s where our healing begins too. When we desire to be filled with the Spirit, the Spirit begins to transform our desires so that God’s desires become our own. Instead of doing the right thing because we have to, we do the right thing because we want to - because we are learning to truly desire goodness. Once our desires are being changed, a revolution is set in motion.”*<sup>102</sup>

- Galatians 5:1 and 13-26

Q6: How do we enjoy our freedom in a spirit of love (5:13)?

Q7: How do we walk habitually in the Holy Spirit, how can we let ourselves be guided and led by the Spirit? Use some practical thoughts from the book if you like.

- Colossians 2:6-7; 3:1-17

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<sup>101</sup> Steve Thomason (2013) The Vine and the Branches. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UeYp6L-LXSA> (Accessed: 26 August 2020).

<sup>102</sup> McLaren, B., 2014. We make the Road by Walking. 2nd ed. London: Hodder & Stoughton, Page 254.

Q8: Together, make a list of all the actions in chapter 3, verses 12 to 17. Then share whether there is a particular one that stands out to you, that you feel prompted to focus on at this time in your life?



## **Chapter 42: Spirit of Love: Loving God**

*“From Genesis to Revelation, or from the Garden of Eden to the New Jerusalem, the idea that our Creator desires to dwell with, commune with, and relate with humanity in spite of our sin, in spite of our mess—well, that’s pretty much the main theme of Scripture.”<sup>103</sup>*

Introduction question: How do you relate to the idea that the Creator of the universe wants to be in a relationship with you? Have you ever felt ‘in love’ with God?

- Romans 8:1-17

Q1: What does a Spirit-filled life look like? Where does the Spirit lead us?

Q2: Have you ever felt too small or unworthy to come into God’s presence, to speak with God? What does this text say to that feeling?

Q3: Is the idea of God as a parent helpful when you think of how to relate to God?

Read this text as an affirmation:

*“But now [at this very moment] in Christ Jesus you who once were [so very] far away [from God] have been brought near by the blood of Christ. (...) For it is through Him that we both [Jew and gentile] have a [direct] way of approach in one Spirit to the Father.”* (Ephesians 2:13,18)

*“When we speak of loving another human being, we naturally move towards that person in a special way. (...) Similarly, when we learn to love God, we appreciate God’s qualities. We honour and respect God’s dignity. We enjoy God’s presence and are curious to know more and more of God’s heart. We support God’s dreams coming true. And we want to be appreciated, honoured, enjoyed, known and supported as well - to surrender ourselves to God in mutuality.”<sup>104</sup>*

Q4: *“How do you respond to the comparison between human love and loving God?”<sup>105</sup>*

Q5: Can you think of a biblical story that illustrates God’s desire to have a relationship with his people?

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<sup>103</sup> Sprinkle, P. (2018) ‘Is having a personal relationship with Jesus a biblical concept?’, PrestonSprinkle.com. Available at: <https://www.prestonsprinkle.com/blog/2014/10/is-having-a-personal-relationship-with-jesus-a-biblical-concept> (Accessed: 26 August 2020).

<sup>104</sup> McLaren, B., 2014. We make the Road by Walking. 2nd ed. London: Hodder & Stoughton, Page 260.

<sup>105</sup> McLaren, B., 2014. We make the Road by Walking. 2nd ed. London: Hodder & Stoughton, Page 263.

How do we learn to love God? Read the suggested steps on pages 261-263 in the book.

Q6: Which of these steps feel new or surprising to you?

Q7: Ponder this text in silence and choose a step that you'd like to work on this coming week. Share in the group if you like.

- Read Psalm 116

Q8: In this psalm, can you identify some of the elements of a mutual relationship described in pages 261-263 in the book?

### **Ending with a prayer**

Pray this prayer of blessing over one another as you end your time together:

*“I pray that from his glorious, unlimited resources the Father will empower you with inner strength through his Spirit. Then Christ will make his home in your hearts as you trust in him. Your roots will grow down into God’s love and keep you strong. And may you have the power to understand (...) how wide, how long, how high, and how deep his love is. May you experience the love of Christ, though it is too great to understand fully. Then you will be made complete with all the fullness of life and power that comes from God.” (Ephesians 3:16-21, NLT)*

## **Chapter 43: Spirit of Love: Loving Neighbour**

- Acts 10

Q1: Why was it problematic for Peter to visit and befriend Cornelius?

Q2: How did Peter overcome this problem?

Q3: Notice the ways in which God prepared Cornelius to receive the message. What might this say about God's work in people around us?

Q4: Are there any people that you (perhaps unknowingly) consider "unclean"? People that you think may not be called by God, or would be beyond salvation? Or that you rather not reach out to?

- 1 Corinthians 13

Q5: What jumps out at you in the way love is described here?

*"The most excellent way, Paul said, is the way of love. (...) But if love remains a generality, it's just a word. That's why the New Testament is serious about translating love into practical, specific, concrete, down-to-Earth action."*<sup>106</sup>

Read the passage on all the 'one another references' in the Bible on pages 268-269 in the book.

Q6: Which of these 'one anothers' do you find most challenging?

Q7: *"Share a story about a time when someone affirmed one of your unique gifts or abilities, and when you appreciated the unique gifts or abilities of someone else."*<sup>107</sup>

### **Ending with a prayer**

*"Take a few minutes with each person around your table to identify and affirm some gifts or virtues you see in them. Have someone place a hand on that person's head or shoulder and pray for the Spirit to fill and empower that person in love."*<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> McLaren, B., 2014. We make the Road by Walking. 2nd ed. London: Hodder & Stoughton, Page 267.

<sup>107</sup> McLaren, B., 2014. We make the Road by Walking. 2nd ed. London: Hodder & Stoughton, Page 269.

<sup>108</sup> McLaren, B., 2014. We make the Road by Walking. 2nd ed. London: Hodder & Stoughton, Page 269-270.

## **Chapter 44: Spirit of Love: Loving Self**

*“You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”* (Mark 2:31)

Introduction Q: What idea of ‘loving yourself’ did you grow up with? A self-evident concept? Or perhaps it was discouraged as a dangerous thought, leading only to self-centredness and egoism?

The author of the book posits that practises of mature self-care enable us to love God and others more fully and joyfully. Then he goes on to explain:

*“Now our struggles with self are often struggles with pleasure, for the self is - among other things - a pleasure-seeking entity. (...) Pleasure, of course, was originally the Creator’s idea. By giving us taste, smell, sight and touch, God was making possible an amazing array of pleasures. (...) Again and again in the bible, we are reminded that our Creator has given us all things to enjoy richly, and that in God’s presence is fullness of joy. If that’s the case, why do we find so many warnings and rules about pleasure in the bible? Those rules make sense when you realise how easily all life’s great pleasures - food, drink, sex, owning, winning, resting, playing, working - can become addictive and destructive. When we indulge in pleasures without self-examination or self-control, great pleasure can quickly lead to great pain.”<sup>109</sup>*

Q1: Can you think of a rule or an advice that helped protect you from hurting yourself and others as you grew up?

Q2: Have you ever thought of obeying rules and practising self-examination and self-control as a form of self-care and self-love? How do you respond to this idea?

- James 3:13-18

Q3: This text contrasts wisdom and understanding of God’s ways with jealousy and selfish ambition. Describe in your own words the results of either path.

Q4: How is wisdom described in this passage? What are some of its characteristics?

*“We all need wisdom to know our limits and keep our balance, to know when to say ‘Yes’ and when to say ‘That’s enough’ or ‘That’s unwise’ or ‘This isn’t the right time’. (...) We need wisdom to monitor the difference between legitimate desires and dangerous temptations. We even need wisdom to keep different kinds of pleasure in a healthy and sustainable balance.”*

<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> McLaren, B., 2014. We make the Road by Walking. 2nd ed. London: Hodder & Stoughton, Page 271-272.

<sup>110</sup> McLaren, B., 2014. We make the Road by Walking. 2nd ed. London: Hodder & Stoughton, Page 274.

Q5: Did you ever ask for God's wisdom, to guide you through a decision or circumstance? How did that go?

- James 1:2-8

Q6: How do we gain wisdom, according to this passage?

- Romans 12:1-21

Q7: What do you think it means to "*present your bodies as a living sacrifice*" (verse 1)?

Q8: Which gifts have you yourself or others identified in you (verses 6-8)? Is anything withholding you from using them?

Q9: The author of the book writes: "*You learn self-examination, self-control, self-development and self-care - so you can better practise true self-giving toward God and others.*"<sup>111</sup> What does a life of love and service to others look like as described in verses 9-21?

Q10: Have you practised ways of self-development, such as learning about your personality and pitfalls or finding a better balance in life?

### **Further meditation**

A prayer for self-examination:

*"Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts; and see if there is any wicked or hurtful way in me, and lead me in the everlasting way."* (Psalm 139:23-24)

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<sup>111</sup> McLaren, B., 2014. We make the Road by Walking. 2nd ed. London: Hodder & Stoughton, Page 274.

## **Chapter 45: Spirit of Unity and Diversity**

In this study, we look at three bible passages that point toward the deep and dynamic nature of God, a God that is one and yet includes diversity.

- Proverbs 8

In this chapter of Proverbs, Solomon writes of wisdom as if she were a person.

Q1: *“They [the words of my mouth] are all straightforward to him who understands”* (verse 9). Do you agree that wisdom, as found in the Bible, is plain for those who trust God and honor his Word?

Q2: Can you identify some characteristics of wisdom?

Look at verses 22-31 again, then read this commentary: *“The antiquity of wisdom has a real and practical application. If the whole created order is founded on God’s wisdom, then to go against His wisdom is to go against all creation. (...) The created world is so marked by God’s wise and good design and arrangement that wisdom rejoiced in it. Especially, wisdom was happy with God’s creation of man (my delight was with the sons of men).”*<sup>112</sup>

Q3: Do you see God’s wisdom in the created world? Do you see unity? Diversity?

- John 17:1-23

Q4: Jesus prays: *“glorify Me (...) with the glory and majesty that I had with You before the world existed.”* (verse 5) What does this tell us about the nature of Jesus?

Q5: In verses 20-23, Jesus prays for the whole church in all times. What relationship of unity is an example to the church? Why did Jesus pray for this kind of oneness?

Q6: Discuss what unity in the church looks like. Is it the same as uniformity? How can diversity and unity exist at the same time? What examples of unity have you seen in your Christian fellowship?

- Ephesians 4:1-16

Q7: Consider what is meant by “oneness of the Spirit” (verse 3). What is our role in making sure this oneness marks our Christian community?

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<sup>112</sup> Guzik, D. 2017, In praise of Wisdom, Study Guide for Proverbs 8, BlueLetterBible.org, viewed 1 September 2020, [https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/guzik\\_david/StudyGuide2017-Pro/Pro-8.cfm](https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/guzik_david/StudyGuide2017-Pro/Pro-8.cfm).

Q8: List the elements of our faith that all believers have in common (verses 4-6). In light of these, how can we overcome differences?

Q9: Grace was given to each one of us, and different gifts. What is the purpose of the different gifts we have received?

This chapter in the book focuses on how a deeper understanding of the Trinity can give us new insights about who God is.

Q10: *“Share a story about how your understanding of God changed - suddenly or gradually - at some point in your life.”*<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> McLaren, B., 2014. We make the Road by Walking. 2nd ed. London: Hodder & Stoughton, Page 282.

## **Chapter 46: Spirit of Service**

*“The Spirit leads us downwards. That may come as a surprise to people who are raised in a culture that is obsessed with upward mobility. We climb social ladders. We rise to a higher standard of living. We reach for a higher position. We want to be on top.”<sup>114</sup>*

Introduction Q: Do you recognise being caught up in the culture of upward mobility? How do you handle this?

- Matthew 23:1-12

Q1: Why does Jesus warn the crowd: “do not as they do” (verse 3)?

Q2: Can you think of a story about Jesus that stands in contrast with how the scribes and Pharisees behaved?

- John 13:1-15

Q3: *“Jesus knew that his hour had come (...) He loved them to the end.”* (verse 1) Even though He was fully aware of the awful events that were to come that night and though he knew that his disciples would betray and desert him, Jesus loved them to the end, pouring himself out in an act of humble service. How can we prepare ourselves to have the mind of Christ, even when we do not ‘feel like’ serving others?

Q4: Jesus was fully aware of his divine origin and power (verse 3). It was from that position that he chose to step down and serve. How can we use our position and power to serve others? Share one concrete example from your life.

Q5: Often, God is described as being far above, at a great distance. Have you ever thought of God as being down below, in the places of greatest suffering and greatest need? Have you experienced his presence in those places?

- Philippians 2:1-11

Q6: This passage speaks about having the same servant-hearted attitude as Jesus. How did Jesus model this humility?

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<sup>114</sup> McLaren, B., 2014. We make the Road by Walking. 2nd ed. London: Hodder & Stoughton, Page 283.



Verses 3-4 say: *“Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit (excessive pride in oneself), but with humility, regard others as more important than yourselves. Do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.”*

Q7: How can we regard others as more important than ourselves and look out for the interests of others whilst also valuing and caring for ourselves?

Q8: Is it possible to *“do nothing from selfishness”* (verse 3)?

*“For it is [not your strength, but it is] God who is effectively at work in you, both to will and to work [that is, strengthening, energizing, and creating in you the longing and the ability to fulfill your purpose] for His good pleasure.”* (verse 13)

Q9: Read verses 12-13 in this chapter and discuss what healthy ambition looks like - how it is fueled and what it is aimed at.

## **Chapter 47: The Spirit Conspiracy**

*“Your mission, should you choose to accept it, is to conspire with the Spirit to bring blessings to others.”*<sup>115</sup>

- Ephesians 5:15 - 6:4

**Q1:** In this text, we are encouraged to make the very most of our time (verse 16). Did you ever have a kind of wake-up call or realization that led you to change the focus in your life? How did that go?

Paul addresses wives, husbands and children, explaining how we can bless those in our circle of family. Read the summary in the book on pages 288-289.

**Q2:** What can we learn from Paul’s letter regarding our family relations? Is there a particular sentence or idea that jumps out to you? That you would like to work on?

- Ephesians 6:5-9; Philemon 1:8-19

Paul reminds both slaves and masters that their true Master is in heaven. And that our goal is not to please other people, but to please God and to do his will.

**Q3:** Imagine this mindset in your work life, whether at home or in a workplace, how would that affect the way you deliver your work, or manage your team?

Paul called upon a church leader named Philemon to accept his runaway slave back as a brother and equal. In a culture where slavery was a social norm, the prescribed response would probably be punishment. To accept him back as an equal would be a real break with culture. It would mirror God’s grace.

**Q4:** Are there injustices in our culture or even in our workplaces? How can we mirror God’s grace and kindness in those situations?

- James 5:1-6

**Q5:** The Lord hears the cries of the unpaid laborer. He cares about unjust economic systems. Can you think of a story in the Old Testament that illustrates God’s concern for the financially oppressed?

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<sup>115</sup> McLaren, B., 2014. We make the Road by Walking. 2nd ed. London: Hodder & Stoughton, Page 288.

Q6: Who are the financially oppressed in our day and age? Are there ways in which you can be part of making a change, big or small?

- Hebrews 13:1-8

Q6: What are the circles of people mentioned in this text that we can bless? Is there a particular circle that you would like to pray for or help more often?

Q7: What does this text say about the “*love of money*” (verses 5-6)? How can we be free from it?

Q8: If there is time, speak about the other circles described in the book (neighborhood, vulnerable people, political leaders, critics/opponents/enemies, community of faith, nature) and share ideas about how we can partner with God to plot goodness there.

## **Chapter 48: Spirit of Power**

- Acts 3 and 4:1-31

Q1: Why were Peter and John arrested and jailed? Have you ever witnessed an aggressive or even violent response to teaching about Jesus and his resurrection?

Q2: When interrogated, Peter's defense is focused only on one message. What can we learn from this? Who / what gave him the confidence and boldness to proclaim this message?

The Jewish High Court is speechless, recognizing the authority in the teaching of Jesus and the miraculous power in the act of healing. But rather than allowing that realization to change their thoughts and hearts, they respond with empty threats. Then, for fear of the people, they let the men go.

Q3: In response to this event, Peter and John and the community of believers pray together. What do they pray in response to the threats?

Q4: Did you ever experience the power of the Spirit of God when speaking about your faith with others? Or simply when standing up for what was right?

- 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

In this community of believers, there were anxious expectations to witness the "Day of the Lord". This was a familiar expression in Hebrew Scriptures, referring to God's judgement against sinful people and God's eternal reign over His people.

Q5: How can we be prepared while we are waiting? How could this awakesness help us be more aware of the spiritual realm?

*"He [Jesus] promised that those who walk his road would experience push-back, even persecution. And he often described that push-back as demonic or satanic in nature. (...) In today's terminology we might call them social, political, structural, ideological and psychological forces. These forces take control of individuals, groups and even whole civilizations, driving them towards destruction."*<sup>116</sup>

Q6: Did you ever experience spiritual push-back? How did you handle this?

- 2 Timothy 1:1-14

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<sup>116</sup> McLaren, B., 2014. We make the Road by Walking. 2nd ed. London: Hodder & Stoughton, Page 294-295.

Q7: What is this gracious gift of God (verse 6)?

Q8: In what manner does the Spirit of God enable us to testify? How do you see these qualities in the life of Jesus? Can you think of a story to exemplify this?

- Ephesians 6:10-20

Q9: In this text, spiritual readiness is likened to an armor. Is this a helpful image for you? If not, how do you imagine being prepared to respond in a spirit of “*unintimidated power, unfailing love and a sound, non-reactive mind*”<sup>117</sup>?

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<sup>117</sup> McLaren, B., 2014. We make the Road by Walking. 2nd ed. London: Hodder & Stoughton, Page 298.

## **Chapter 49: Spirit of Holiness**

*“Jesus promised his followers three things. First, their lives would not be easy. Second, they would never be alone. Third, in the end, all will be well. But all is not well now, and that raises the question of how...how does God get us from here to there? How does God put things right?”<sup>118</sup>*

- Psalm 98

Q1: What is the Lord praised for in this psalm (verses 1-3)?

Q2: At the end of this psalm, there is rejoicing *“for He is coming to judge the earth”* (verse 9). Why do you think this is something that we could rejoice over? Do you share that joyful anticipation?

- John 14:15-18, 23-27; John 15:26-27; John 16:33

Q3: How does our genuine love for Jesus find its expression? And how will we know what is right and true?

Q4: How does Jesus describe our lives in this world? And how does he equip and encourage us?

Q5: Have you experienced the peace of Jesus in times of trial? Share this story with the group if you like.

- 1 Corinthians 3:9-15

Q6: What are we likened to in this image? And who is the foundation?

Q7: Think about the different building materials in verse 12. What could they represent? And what is the effect of fire on them?

Q8: Have you ever thought of the day of judgement as a refining fire, testing the quality and character and worth of each person’s work? How could this image change the way we live today?

*“And this hope [of God’s restorative judgement] also changes the way we see trials and difficulties in this life. If we see trials and difficulties not as a punishment for our wrongs, but as a refining fire to strengthen and purify us, trials become our friends, not our enemies.”<sup>119</sup>*

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<sup>118</sup> McLaren, B., 2014. We make the Road by Walking. 2nd ed. London: Hodder & Stoughton, Page 300.

<sup>119</sup> McLaren, B., 2014. We make the Road by Walking. 2nd ed. London: Hodder & Stoughton, Page 302.

Q9: “How do you respond to the idea that life’s troubles are like a refining or purifying fire?”<sup>120</sup>

- 1 Corinthians 15:20-28

Q10: How does this image of the final resurrection and God being “*all in all*” (verse 28) encourage you?

### Further meditation

Find a video showing the process of refinement of valuable transition metals, such as “*Refiner’s Fire - How is Silver Refined?*”<sup>121</sup>.

*“Imagine a refiner’s fire. As you picture that image of heat and purification, ask yourself what areas of your life are being purified these days. Hold those areas up to God.”*<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> McLaren, B., 2014. *We make the Road by Walking*. 2nd ed. London: Hodder & Stoughton, Page 304.

<sup>121</sup> Pastor Josh (2018), *Refiner's Fire - How is Silver Refined?*. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GF7GnfKQfTA> (Accessed 10 November 2020).

<sup>122</sup> McLaren, B., 2014. *We make the Road by Walking*. 2nd ed. London: Hodder & Stoughton, Page 304.

## **Chapter 50: Spirit of Life**

*“So many of us are afraid to even think about death, much less speak of it. That fear can enslave us and can rob us of so much aliveness. The Spirit moves within us to help us face death with hope, not fear...with quiet confidence, not anxiety.”<sup>123</sup>*

Introduction Q: *“Share a story about one of your significant encounters with death.”<sup>124</sup>*

- Psalm 90

This psalm is credited to Moses. It is a response to the decision by God not to allow any Israelite over twenty to enter the promised land, but to wander in the wilderness until their death (story found in Numeri 14).

Q1: Have you ever considered how the concept of time differs for an eternal God? Or how the length of our lives is so limited? Does your life feel long...or short?

Q2: *“Teach us to number our days”*, the psalmist says in verse 12. How could this prayer benefit us?

Q3: *“That we may cultivate and bring to you a heart of wisdom.”* (verse 12) How could we live our lives differently in light of our mortality?

- Luke 20:27-38

Q4: What does Jesus’ reply to the Sadducees teach us about life after the resurrection?

*“Jesus said that to God, all who ever lived are alive (verse 38). In that light, death is merely a doorway, a passage from one way of living in God’s presence in the present to another way of living in God’s presence - in the open space of unseized possibility we call the future.”<sup>125</sup>*

Q5: What idea of the afterlife did you grow up with? And what do you think today?

- Philippians 1:20-30

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<sup>123</sup> McLaren, B., 2014. We make the Road by Walking. 2nd ed. London: Hodder & Stoughton, Page 305.

<sup>124</sup> McLaren, B., 2014. We make the Road by Walking. 2nd ed. London: Hodder & Stoughton, Page 309.

<sup>125</sup> McLaren, B., 2014. We make the Road by Walking. 2nd ed. London: Hodder & Stoughton, Page 306.



This letter was written by the apostle Paul to “all the saints who are at Philippi”, probably whilst he was imprisoned in Rome, awaiting the verdict of the Imperial Court in his case. Despite his dire circumstances, Paul expresses much joy in this letter.

Q6: What is Paul’s goal, whether in life or death (verse 20)?

Q7: Can you identify with the feeling that Paul describes - being torn between the desire to “*leave this world and be with Christ*” (verse 23) and the desire to “*remain in the body*” (verse 24)? Why or why not?

Paul describes suffering for Christ’s sake as a privilege (verse 29). In the letter of James, it is described like this: “*Consider it nothing but joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you fall into various trials. Be assured that the testing of your faith [through experience] produces endurance [leading to spiritual maturity and inner peace].*” (James 1:2-3)

Q8: How do you respond to the idea that suffering in this world can be seen in light of eternal life with Christ?

### **Ending with a blessing**

End together by reading this encouragement from the book: “*As we walk this road, we not only remember the past, we also anticipate the future, which is described as a great banquet around God’s table of joy. When you pass from this life, do not be afraid. You will not pass into death. You will pass through death into a greater aliveness still - the banquet of God. Trust God, and live.*”<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> McLaren, B., 2014. *We make the Road by Walking*. 2nd ed. London: Hodder & Stoughton, Page 309.

## **Chapter 51: Spirit of Hope**

In this chapter, we explore what hope there is and what we can expect and look for in a world that often seems chaotic.

- Psalm 126

This psalm was likely written after the Babylonian exile (you can read more about this in 2 Kings 25 and onwards). The people rejoiced because the Lord had done great things for them and delivered them from their exile.

Q1: Do you think it is possible to experience that joy during ‘captivity’, whilst waiting for the Lord and his deliverance?

This psalm speaks of sowing and reaping. Sowing in tears refers to seeking God in prayer. Let us look at this verse from Hosea:

*“Sow with a view to righteousness [that righteousness, like seed, may germinate]; reap in accordance with mercy and lovingkindness. Break up your uncultivated ground, for it is time to seek and search diligently for the Lord [and to long for His blessing] until He comes to rain righteousness and His gift of salvation on you.” (Hosea 10:12)*

Q2: Discuss what that looks like, to “sow with a view to righteousness” and to “search diligently for the Lord”. Is this something that you practise in your faith life today?

- Revelation 1:9-19; 19:11-16; 21:1-8; 22:16:21

The author McLaren believes that there is a high cost to reading the book of Revelation outside its historical and literary context and suggests that Revelations be read as literature of the oppressed, written by people who have no freedom of speech and who find ways of saying the truth without endangering their lives.

Q3: How do you respond to this idea of reading Revelation?

Q4: Discuss the image of Jesus given in Revelation 19:11-15. How does it correspond to the Jesus we know from the gospels? Do you see any likeness between the entry into Jerusalem (Luke 19:29-44)?

Regarding the image of the New Jerusalem in Revelation 21:1-4, McLaren writes: *“All of this, of course, evokes the original creation story and echoes God’s own words in Revelation: ‘Behold!*

*I'm making all things new!' (...) It has always been about God descending to dwell among us."*

<sup>127</sup>

Now read John 7:37-38. The people of Israel celebrated the Feast of Tabernacles where they remembered how God provided for them in the desert and looked to the future, when God will *tabernacle* among them again.

Q5: In line with the hope of the Feast of Tabernacles, Revelation 21:3 says that God will live among us again. What will that look like according to the text? Can we already see signs today of God living among us?

Q6: In Revelation 21:6 and 22:17, it speaks of the water of life. Where can we find the water of life?

One of the central elements at the Feast of Tabernacles was the water libation ceremony (water is poured out on the altar as a prayer for rain and abundant harvest). It is during this ceremony that Jesus declared that He is the source of living water, that He is the Messiah.

Q7: How did the people respond to this proclamation? And how about today - are there any people around you that could be thirsty for the living water?

### **For further meditation**

*"What was true for Revelation's original audience is true for us today. Whatever madman is in power, whatever chaos is breaking out, whatever danger threatens, the river of life is flowing now. The Tree of Life is bearing fruit now. True aliveness is available now. That's why Revelation ends with the sound of a single word echoing through the universe. (...) That one word is Come!"<sup>128</sup>*

Respond with a prayer.

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<sup>127</sup> McLaren, B., 2014. We make the Road by Walking. 2nd ed. London: Hodder & Stoughton, Page 313-314.

<sup>128</sup> McLaren, B., 2014. We make the Road by Walking. 2nd ed. London: Hodder & Stoughton, Page 314.

## **Chapter 52: God in the End**

- Luke 15:11-32

Q1: Who do you think the younger brother represents in this story? And the older?

Q2: How would you describe the father in this story?

Q3: Look at verses 22-23. None of the four things brought to the younger son were necessities; they are all meant to honor the son and make him know he was loved. The father did much more than meeting the son's needs. Why do you think the father acted in this way?

→ Watch this clip titled: “Timothy Keller: Leading People to the Prodigal God” at <https://youtu.be/LHuyDLMTCJs> (10:23 min).<sup>129</sup>

Q4: How do you respond to the idea that as people, we try to get God’s attention by being really really bad, or by being really really good? Do you see this dynamic between children and their parents?

In this video, Tim Keller suggests that the story really is told to the older brother (the Pharisees) and concludes: *“If you believe [the gospel], everything that you could possibly want, is already yours. Eternal life, adoption into the family. Guaranteed citizenship in the new heavens and new earth, no suffering, no disease. The knowledge that you are the delight and joy of the only One in the universe whose opinion matters.”*

Q4: How can this understanding - that we are infinitely loved and have already received the inheritance - shape our relationships with God and with other people?

*“This short parable is one of the best windows into God ever composed, because it shows a gracious and spacious heart that welcomes all to the table. Can you see why it is good for us to pause as we walk this road to gather around a table to celebrate God’s love? At this table, we look back to Jesus, remembering all he said and did to help us see and enter God’s great feast. And at this table, we look around at one another, seeing one another - and being seen - with God’s eyes of love, as sisters and brothers, part of one human family. And no less important, at this table we look forward to a festive celebration that beckons us from the future. The story began in God’s creative love, and it ends in God’s creative love too...”*<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> Timothy Keller: Leading People to the Prodigal God (2014) YouTube video, added by Dan Berkland [Online]. Available at <https://youtu.be/LHuyDLMTCJs> [Accessed 27 October 2020].

<sup>130</sup> McLaren, B., 2014. We make the Road by Walking. 2nd ed. London: Hodder & Stoughton, Page 318.

- 1 Corinthians 15:50-58

In this chapter, the apostle Paul refutes the rumour that Jesus Christ would not be risen from the dead. The resurrection of Christ is a central element of the Christian faith - by it, the law is fulfilled, the power of sin is broken and death is defeated. It gives us the hope and assurance of eternal life.

Q5: What do you think is meant by *“flesh and blood cannot inherit nor be part of the kingdom of God”* (verse 50)?

Q6: Why is our labor in the Lord *“not futile nor wasted”* (verse 58)?

- Romans 8:31-39

God already gave us the most precious gift - the life of his son - so that we could have life. *“Will he not also give us all things?”* this text asks rhetorically (verse 32).

Q7: What does it mean to receive God’s inheritance? Is this something we receive in this life already? Could it impact our life today?

Q8: Is there anyone or anything that can separate us from the love of Christ? Share your fears or hope with the group.

*“The whole story flows towards reconciliation, not in human creeds or constitutions, but in love, the love of the One who gave us being and life. (...) If we have eyes to see and ears to hear, the great, big, beautiful, wonderful, holy, mysterious, reconciling heart of God waits to be discovered and experienced.”*<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> McLaren, B., 2014. We make the Road by Walking. 2nd ed. London: Hodder & Stoughton, Page 319.