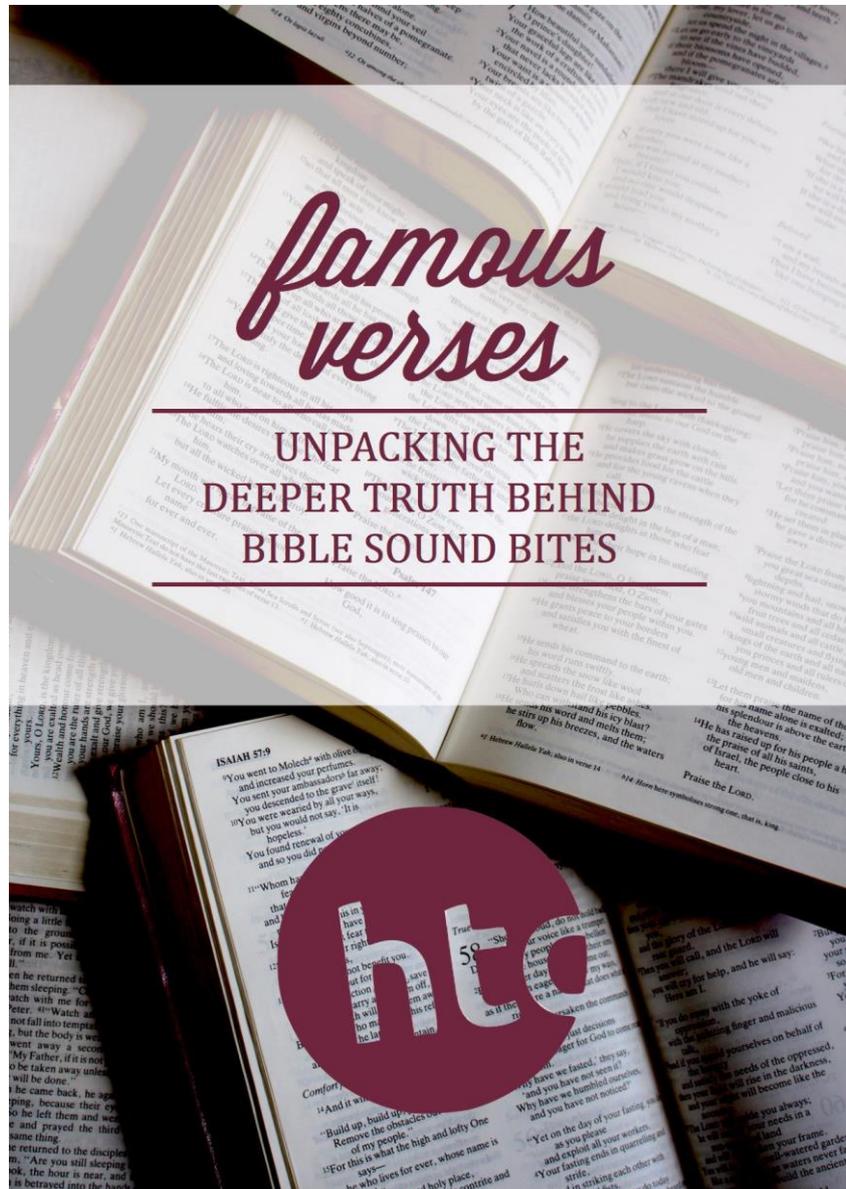


Holy Trinity Claygate



Small Group Study Material

Autumn 2017

Study 1: How can I be strong in God? – Joshua 1:1-9

Way in

Describe a situation where you (or someone you know) acted courageously... or, alternatively, describe a situation where you were full of fear. What was it about that situation that caused you to be filled with courage, or with fear?

Opening the Bible

You might be familiar with verse 9 of today's passage, which is often quoted on greetings cards / social media to encourage one another in our walk with God. In this study we seek to set the verse in its original context and explore what relevance it has for our own lives today.

Read Joshua 1:1-9

- you might also like to look back to Deuteronomy chapter 34 to help you answer the following questions to set the context for this passage:
 - where were the people of Israel, geographically, at this time?
 - what had happened to Moses, their leader up to this point?
 - who was Joshua, and what made him the right person to take over as leader?

- in Joshua 1:1-9, God speaks directly to Joshua. How does he describe the task that lies ahead for Joshua and the Israelites? (vv1-5)

- in vv 6-9, God tells Joshua three times to "be strong and courageous". What further instructions does he give Joshua in v7? and in v8? Why are these two things crucial to the success of Joshua's mission? What would it look like for us to put these instructions into practice in our own lives?

- God's promise to be with Joshua wherever he goes (v9) is linked to Joshua's commitment to obeying God's call, remaining obedient to the law, and getting to know God's word better. This is the only way that Joshua will be able to be strong in God, and avoid being terrified or discouraged in the task that lies ahead. What difference does this make to your understanding of how to apply this verse (v9) to your own life?

Small group reflection and prayer

- Discuss as a group how you can use these verses from Joshua to pray for one another – perhaps for a deeper understanding of God's calling in your own life, or for growing in obedience to his will. And then pray!
- Spend time in prayer together sharing things to give thanks for or any personal requests you may have. Also spend time listening to God, praying and giving thanks for your small group and what you have discussed during this session.
- Personal prayer: Who could you encourage this week by sharing these verses, in a way that is faithful to the context of the passage? Pray for this person, and write a letter or email to encourage them.

Study 2: How should I pray? – Philippians 4:4-9

Way in

How do you *feel* about prayer? Excited? Scared? Confused? Bored? Disinterested? There is no 'right' answer – be honest! – and explain your answer as much as you feel comfortable.

Opening the Bible

The letter of Philippians was written by the apostle Paul, who was in prison at the time of writing. He is writing to encourage the Christians in Philippi in their faith, and to remain committed to God.

Read Philippians 4:4-9

- does it surprise you that Paul, writing from prison, begins this section with a command to rejoice? How easy do you find it to rejoice in God, whatever the circumstances of life?

- how does Paul present prayer as the antidote to anxiety? How are we to pray?

- what promise does Paul hold out, if we pray in this way? Does he promise that our prayers will always be answered?

- do you recognise this experience of finding peace through prayer in your own life? In what ways would you like to grow in this area?

- how would you use these verses to answer someone who says:
 - “God isn’t interested in the details of my life – this concern is too trivial to pray about”

 - “I wouldn’t know where to start – I have no idea how to pray”

- in v9, Paul repeats a similar promise, that “the God of peace will be with you” (cf “the peace of God” in v7). What do his readers need to do in order to be assured of this promise (vv8-9)? How can we put these instructions into practice for ourselves?

Small group reflection and prayer

- Discuss together as a group what you have found to be an encouragement in these verses, and what has challenged you. Share a way in which you would like to grow in your own prayer life, and commit to praying for one another over the coming week as you seek to put this into practice.
- Spend time in prayer together sharing things to give thanks for or any personal requests you may have. Also spend time listening to God, praying and giving thanks for your small group and what you have discussed during this session.
- Personal prayer: Bring to God something that you are anxious about, and commit it to him in prayer, with thanksgiving – and remember that nothing is too small or too large to pray about. And then receive his peace to guard your heart and mind in Christ Jesus.

Study 3: Can I do everything? – Philippians 4:10-13

Way in

What are your priorities in life? How do you decide what to do, when there is not enough time to do everything?

Opening the Bible

As we saw in study 2, the letter of Philippians was written by the apostle Paul, who was in prison at the time of writing. He begins this section by thanking the Philippian Christians for a financial gift they have sent him.

Read Philippians 4:10-13

- what is Paul's attitude to the money he has received? How does this reflect his broader attitude to the circumstances of life?

- how does Paul describe the secret of his contentment, whatever the situation (v13)?

- to broaden our perspective of how Paul lived out this principle, look up the following verses from this letter to find out more about Paul's attitude to:
 - his imprisonment (1:12-14)

 - life and death (1:20-24)

 - his goal in life (3:7-14)

- what relevance does this verse (4:13) have to our own lives, bearing in mind how Paul himself lived it out? How is it an encouragement to us? How is it a challenge?

- are there situations in which we should **not** apply this verse to ourselves or to our fellow Christians? How can we distinguish between things that we can (and should) do in Christ's strength, and other things that we should not be focussing on?

Small group reflection and prayer

- As a group, read John 15:5, and meditate on the picture of Jesus as the vine and us as branches, strengthened and sustained by him. Pray for each other to remain in him, and to bear fruit in every situation, whether comfortable or challenging. Keep in touch with each other during the week and continue to encourage and pray for each other to remain faithful to Jesus and be strengthened by him.
- Spend time in prayer together sharing things to give thanks for or any personal requests you may have. Also spend time listening to God, praying and giving thanks for your small group and what you have discussed during this session.
- Personal prayer: Spend some time reflecting on your own attitude to good and bad circumstances in your life. Pray that Jesus would strengthen you to walk with him whatever situations you face.

Study 4: Does God love everybody? – John 3:16-21

Way in

Think of a loving relationship in your own life – perhaps with a spouse, parent or child, or a close friend. In what ways is your love for each other demonstrated such that other people notice it?

Opening the Bible

John 3:16 is one of the most famous verses in the Bible. In context, it forms part of a conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus – a prominent Jewish leader who has come to Jesus under cover of night, interested in finding out more about who Jesus is.

Read John 3:16-21

- from these verses, describe in your own words the reason why God sent Jesus into the world.

- how does John distinguish between the present state and future destiny, of those who believe in Jesus, compared to those who do not believe?

- how does John use the image of darkness and light to reinforce the point he is making?

- from these verses, how would you respond to someone who says:
 - “I’m not sure about Jesus – I don’t believe, but I don’t *not* believe either. He’s just not relevant to my life.”

 - “how can Christians say that God loves everyone, when the Bible says that those who don’t believe face condemnation and death? Surely that means God can’t be as loving as you say?”

- in light of what John says here, how should we view those who follow religions other than Christianity? If you were to have the opportunity to discuss these verses with someone of another faith, how would you approach this conversation without coming across as judgemental?

Small group reflection and prayer

- These verses are a reminder of the vital importance of sharing our faith with those who do not yet believe. Share with one another the name of one non-Christian friend or family member who you are praying for, and commit to praying regularly as a group for these individuals to come to faith. Pray also for boldness for one another as you seek to speak to them about Jesus.
- Think back over this series as we've looked at these famous verses from the Bible this term. Share with one another what you have found most encouraging and most challenging from these studies. Are there any transformations (whether big or small) that have happened to any of you as you've studied God's word this term?
- Spend time in prayer together sharing things to give thanks for or any personal requests you may have. Also spend time listening to God, praying and giving thanks for your small group and what you have discussed during this session.
- Personal prayer: Give thanks to God that he loved us enough to send his Son to die so that we could have eternal life. Spend time at the foot of the cross in thanks and praise.