

## Group Notes 9 October 2011

### *Rule of Life - Time*

#### Welcome - Ice Breaker

*Name one law that you think should be repealed (or one new law that should be introduced).*

**Word** – Nehemiah chapter 1 (*Please note this is the reading from the 8am and 10am services*)

What is a *Rule of life* and why do we need one? Is it some kind of legalism trespassing on our freedom in Christ? Well it's like learning to drive. You work really hard on passing your test, but once you are free to drive, you can start to get sloppy. You slip into bad habits... you may need an advanced driving test or a refresher course to sort you out. Can you get sloppy as a Christian too? There's the word discipline linked to the word disciple – do we need discipline to help us stay sharp for God? Bishop Jonathan thinks so and has asked the churches to distribute his *Rule of Life* – a list of helpful disciplines - to every church member in the Diocese.

#### Question 1:

- *How does the phrase "Rule of Life" make you feel?*
- *Do you think we get sloppy as Christians?*
- *Do you think Bishop Jonathan is right that lots of people in society and in church don't know any more what it really means to be a Christian today?*

A key discipline is about how we use our time. As disciples we need to dedicate time to God, spending time in prayer and developing our relationship with Him. In the past Christians would cultivate this by setting aside time specially to be with God, reading the Bible and praying. The idea wasn't to do your bit for God and then, having paid God off, take the rest of the day to yourself. Look at Nehemiah. His first reaction to bad news is to pray. When confronted with a difficult situation he immediately shares it with God. His prayer life is just that – a life lived in openness to God. Prayer was his default mode. The discipline of regular prayer is supposed to help us do this better.

#### Question 2:

- *Is your time basically your own out of which you may choose to offer God some time?*
- *Or is your time basically God's out of which he gives you time for rest, play, work and prayer?*
- *What works best for you personally as a daily rhythm of prayer / Bible reading?*
- *Is prayer your steering wheel? Or your spare tyre?*

Although our personal prayer life is the single most important part of our discipleship we cannot ignore the corporate dimension. So Bishop Jonathan's Rule of Life includes input at other levels too:

- One to one – find a mentor / spiritual director... Someone who is not scared to challenge you with awkward questions and say, "How's your prayer life at the moment?"
- Small group – join a group that prays together regularly so you know you are supported in prayer and so that you support others in prayer too. "Where two or three are gathered in my name...!" Could be your Cell Group of course!
- Church – regular worship, teaching, sharing in communion...
- Further afield - conferences, retreats, places where you can receive fresh input.

#### Question 3:

- *Which of these levels do you find most exciting and stimulating?*
- *Which level do you find most challenging and would prefer to ignore if you could?*

So what does it look like when we are sharing our time properly with God? Does it mean we mustn't do anything except pray 24/7? That we should be driven by guilt all the time in case we fall short? Surely it means that we are open to God and walking in his love all the time, doing the work he calls us to do, spending time with the family he's given us, enjoying the world he created and using the talents he has put in us – a fulfilled life rather than a driven one. This kind of life should look more peaceful, more balanced and more whole than the empty life of those who do not know God and the driven life of those who try to please God without His grace. The disciplines of prayer and learning, personal and corporate, are to help us cultivate our walk with God in our life as a whole.

#### **Question 4:**

- **Why pray when you can worry and take tranquilisers instead?**
- **So are you being fruitful? or are you just busy?**

We are not being asked to take on the whole of the Rule of Life in one go! That fails to recognise that we are all works in progress – God hasn't finished with us yet. Instead we need to pick out one or two aspects that we particularly need help with (or to be challenged about!) and seek God for them.

#### **Question 5:**

- **Look through Bishop Jonathan's list (sent out with these Group Notes). Which one, or perhaps two, lines of this week's extract from the Rule of Life do you particularly need to deal with?**

#### **Worship ideas for groups with no musicians.**

Lord of all hopefulness is a beautiful hymn which particularly brings out the idea of living our whole life in relationship with God. Read out the words, first asking people to pick out anything that especially speaks to them. Share those thoughts for a few minutes, then pray that the whole of our lives from waking to sleeping and through to waking again would be an act of worship for him.

*Lord of all hopefulness, Lord of all joy,  
Whose trust ever childlike no cares could destroy,  
Be there at our waking and give us, we pray,  
Your bliss in our hearts, Lord, at the break of the day.*

*Lord of all eagerness, Lord of all faith,  
Whose strong hands were skilled at the plane and the lathe,  
Be there at our labours and give us, we pray,  
Your strength in our hearts, Lord, at the noon of the day.*

*Lord of all kindness, Lord of all grace,  
Your hands swift to welcome, your arms to embrace,  
Be there at our homing and give us, we pray,  
Your love in our hearts, Lord, at the eve of the day.*

*Lord of all gentleness, Lord of all calm,  
Whose voice is contentment, whose presence is balm,  
Be there at our sleeping and give us, we pray,  
Your peace in our hearts, Lord, at the end of the day.*

#### **Works/witness.**

- Give thanks for a great start to the Alpha Course, now into week 3, and pray that God will speak profoundly to people about "Why did Jesus die?"