

# The Mustard Seed

The Parish magazine of the church of St James, Brownhills

## A Family Following Jesus



www.stjameschurchbrownhills.co.uk

September 2024

Called by name & empowered by the Holy Spirit to share God's love with words and actions

## Apologies

You may have noticed that this parish magazine is thinner than usual and looks slightly different. This is because the computer that is used has finally given up the ghost. Hopefully it may be that data can be recovered and the magazine (and the weekly notices) will return to normality.

An article from our Vicar, Rev'd Gayle...

This September we're all able to take some time to further explore the callings, ministries and ways of serving the Lord that He would lead us into. We'll be doing this by using a tool called S.H.A.P.E.

### Do you wish...

- You could discover your gifts;
- You could live a more joyful and fruitful Christian life;
- You could serve God more fully;
- You could become the person God has designed you to be?

**Take part in exploring  
"Your SHAPE for God's Service"!**

### What will it involve?

We will help each other to explore our unique God-given "SHAPE," and how we can use this in His service.

We will look at: -

**Your: -**

- **Spiritual Gifts**
  - **Heart's Desire**
  - **Abilities**
  - **Personality**
  - **Experience**
- = For God's Service.**

(God's unique gifts to you)  
(what motivates and excites you; what you love to do)  
(your talents, knowledge and skills)  
(your character, personal qualities and strengths)

(your life experiences and what you've gained from them)

## **Why?**

Most of us are very aware of our own weaknesses and failings,

and so we lack confidence for our discipleship.

We need to discover more of our gifts and strengths, the way God has shaped us, and what we have to offer!

That way we can maximise our strengths to God's glory!

## **What will we do?**

There will be some input from me and our other preachers on Sunday mornings at the 10 am service, and during the week for each of our Life Groups. There will also be practical exercises, plenty of lively discussion and prayer.

Each person will be invited to do about an hour of Personal Reflection and activities to help you discover more about yourself. By the end of October, you'll have created a

picture of your "shape", and gained insights about how God has designed and grown you.

It's important to complete each of the tasks that you'll be invited to do, as they build on each other.

Throughout September and October, each member of church will have the chance to talk and think through how you might be using your "SHAPE" to serve God in the church, at work, with your family and friends, in the community and in your voluntary or leisure activities. Information about how you can have a talk with me or one of our lay leaders about this will be shared this coming Sunday morning (1<sup>st</sup> September).

## **A Key Scripture to Keep in Mind**

An indispensable truth to hold in mind, though, as we look to exploring our SHAPE is that in God's sight and in one another's we're to all be seen as being precious and valuable. As Paul wrote to the early Corinthian Christians: 'if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be?... As it is, there are many parts, but one body.

Our Lord calls us to dwell not in isolation but in community. You can do what I can't do and I can do what you can't do. Together we can do amazing things in Jesus' Name.

I pray then for us all that exploring our SHAPE will inform, challenge, encourage and bless each and every one of us.

With lots of love and many prayers in our Saviour Jesus,  
Rev'd Gayle

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## How are you? I hope you are well?

Everyone with me sends you greetings. Greet those who love us in the faith. Grace be with you all. Titus 3:15

I sometimes receive emails from complete strangers who ask me how I am, and sometimes they add that they hope I am well. The person adds a '?' although it is not a question (and I suspect they are not at all interested in my well-being, but in my money!)

'How are you?' is normally just a way of saying 'hello'. No-one really wants an answer and definitely not a long, detailed answer! It is curious that we sometimes start a conversation with a question we do not want answered, and other times when we do want to know how a person is, we never quite get through to them.

It is easier to say, "Yes, fine thanks, how are you?" - when we are not fine. Or we can throw the question straight back: "I am ok, what about you?." But sometimes we all need to be able to say, "I am not doing ok. I need to talk," when we need to have someone to talk to.

I like it that nowadays you can say a key phrase that sounds out a distress call. For example, victims of abuse can ask "Is so and so in?", in a pub or café and the staff will immediately know that that person needs help. There is also a silent hand signal that people in trouble can give, to alert others that they are in danger. This is also excellent, and may have saved many lives.

Perhaps in church we also need a way of being honest in our replies, whether it is: "I am not doing well and I want to have a rant" or "I am worried but I am not ready to chat now".

Anyway, how are you? Do tell.

## Let's run with perseverance

'Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race that is marked out for us.' (Hebrews 12:1)

With the Paris Olympics so recent, this imagery can really speak to us. The Christian is like a highly trained athlete, and the surrounding 'stadium' is filled with champions and heroes of the past; they watch US - and we draw inspiration from THEM.

Because we are in training spiritually, it is obvious that every 'sin' is to be treated in the same way as by a modern athlete - for whom drug-taking, indeed any form of cheating or breaking the rules, is out!

But Christ's athletes are also to be careful to shun 'everything that hinders.' The wrong running shoes? A faulty diet? In the Christian's case, if the problem area is not an actual sin, what is it? Why, it is anything that, while in itself may be legitimate, but which nevertheless is a weak point, and 'hinders' progress.

The artist Rubens in the 17<sup>th</sup> century created a painting of The S - the mother of Achilles in Greek mythology - dipping her son into the supposedly protective waters of the river Styx. But, because she held him by his heel, this single part of him was untouched by the water. Achilles grew to be a mighty warrior; yet, during a fateful battle, an arrow that pierced his vulnerable heel was the means of his downfall.

The Achilles heel factor affects every single one of us. There comes a moment when those who mean business with Jesus Christ become aware that the Holy Spirit is quietly speaking within: "You're blocking the blessing in your life at this weak spot of yours.... by holding onto this object... by entertaining this objective... by persisting in this relationship... by continuing this activity. Let it go."

What is this 'thing'? No one else can spell it out for us. It is between us and Christ alone. There need be no sudden crisis, no emotional surge. But the thing that 'hinders' is firmly - deliberately - to be discarded; no longer to have any part in our Christian living. And the sunshine of heaven smiles down upon us as we run on....

# On why you should never replace your hymn books

The Rectory  
St James the Least

My dear Nephew Darren

I am surprised you are considering buying a new set of hymn books for your church. I had assumed everything you sang would be projected on to one of those screens which are invariably placed to obscure the altar.

In my – fortunately limited – experience of such devices, they provide the projectionist with endless opportunities for showing the wrong hymn, or the right hymn but from another edition, which will contain either one verse too many or one too few. Should the hymn run to two pages, then the turnover always takes place some milliseconds after that verse has started, so that the congregation is faced with the snap decision of either trying to sing two lines at double time, or just to join in late, making a nonsense of the words.

When we decided to change hymn books some years ago, the reverberations made the consequences of that little event in Sarajevo seem insignificant. The proposal was to move from Hymns Ancient and More Ancient to the more recent version: Hymns Ancient and Slightly Less Ancient.

Colonel Wainwright said he would be happy so long as we continued fighting good fights and urging Christian soldiers onwards. The men wanted the hymns they remembered from school, the ladies those they sang at their weddings, and no

one would consider anything that dropped ‘thines’ or ‘wouldsts’. The basses in the choir wanted hymns they knew the tenors found difficult and those who couldn’t read music wanted more hymns sung in unison. When a rumour started that the books may con-

tain hymns written in the last 50 years, timetables were consulted for bus services to the next village.

Eventually we reached a perfect compromise: doing something which made no change whatsoever. Miss Simpson was charged with buying yards of sticky backed plastic and repairing the current books. She put a note on the front of every copy that if the page for the hymn they wanted was missing, they should share with the person sitting next to them – an experience which will be almost as traumatic as being invited to pass the peace. Yet another decision has thereby been deferred for a Church Council to make some time next century. Harmony reigns once again.

Your loving uncle,

Eustace

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## Sailing with the Spirit

On a calm, windless day, it can be frustrating to be in a sailboat. Your sails are ready to go, but with no wind and only calm waters, you aren’t going anywhere!

Some sailors try to propel their little boat forward by paddling with their hands. Others fret over the lack of wind. But others simply stay on land, and patiently wait. For it isn’t until a breeze blows up, and the sails fill out, that a sailboat can skim out towards the open sea.

This scene is similar as to how the Holy Spirit works in our lives. The Bible describes the Spirit as wind and some times, like the sailors, we may have to wait for His energising power to guide and move us onwards. There are occasions, from a spiritual standpoint, nothing seems to be happening – for weeks and months on end. During these waiting times we may wonder what purpose God has for us.

But while some of the people in the sailing club might have left their boats to do other things, they were also watching for signs of the coming wind. No one was packing up and going home! They were waiting with a purpose.

In our times of illness and waiting, we can also wait with a purpose. We can pray for the Church, our community and the world. We can pray that we will be ready for God to move us into the next course He has planned for us. And we can keep our sails ready, for the Spirit to blow afresh into our lives!

## And whatever you do!

In the church today we sometimes assume that discipleship is more about the sacred part of our life, rather than the secular as well. Are we aware of what God is doing in our school, workplace, with friends and family, on our street or in our leisure time? Whole life disciples spend every day with an awareness of the presence of Jesus in their lives. As the apostle Paul writes:

‘And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.’ (Colossians 3:17)

SO - we do ordinary things in the name or character of Jesus, i.e. acting in the same way that Jesus would do if He were in our place.

It’s helpful to think in terms of frontlines, the places where we spend most of our week:

Everyone has a frontline: young or old, working or not, sick or well. This could be our workplace, home, college, community or club.

This is where God has called us! God is at work on our frontline to shape and use us, making it a place where we can grow as a disciple and make a difference to those around.

As churches we need to be committed to helping each other see the significance of our frontlines in God’s purposes. Are we supporting one another, especially in prayer? As one teacher put it: “I spend an hour a week teaching Sunday school and they haul me up to the front of the church to pray for me. The rest of the week I’m a full-time teacher and the church has never prayed for me. That says it all.”

With less than 6% of the UK population now going to church, God wants to use us as salt and light wherever we spend time. Christians are exactly where

they need to be to serve Him, so that others might see what a disciple of Jesus looks like, as we grow as disciples ourselves.

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If we complained less, and praised more, we should be happier, and God would be more glorified. Let us daily praise God for common mercies. - Charles Spurgeon

## Walking is a great way to exercise

You may be young or old, working endless hours, or retired. But there is one exercise you can still undertake almost anywhere, for however long or short a time: walking.

According to health specialists, the simple act of walking “checks so many boxes – improving our brain, mental and musculoskeletal fitness, as well as our physical fitness.”

Here are five reasons why:

Walking raises your heart rate and makes you breathe faster.

It gives you the benefit of a moderate aerobic workout – without the stress on your joints. As for your blood sugar levels, consider this: after a meal your blood sugar level rises and your pancreas releases insulin to bring it down. But even a five-minute walk can help by blunting the spike in blood sugar. Try and keep your pace brisk – aim for 100 to 130 steps a minute.

Walking improves your bone density

Walking briskly engages the muscles along the back side of your body – the glutes, hamstrings and calves. They in turn put a bit of pull on your bones, which stimulates your bones to produce osteoblasts, which improves your bone density and reduces your risk of osteoporosis.

Walking improves your mood

It stimulates your parasympathetic nervous system (nerves that relax the body during stress) and stimulates your amygdala (that part of you which controls your emotions). And if you can walk near water (rivers, coast, in the rain) you get exposed to negative

ions in the air. These electrically charged molecules are excellent for your mental health.

Walking helps your brain

You will sleep better, and your brain will be in better shape for memory and cognition. Walking also stimulates creative thinking – studies have found walking is a great means for problem-solving.

Walking helps your body shape

An instant way to look younger is to stand tall. So walk with your head up, shoulders back, and lengthen your back, to stand up straighter. And with firmer muscles, your overall body shape will improve, which in turn will boost your confidence!

## THE PARISH OF BROWNHILLS WITH OGLE HAY

Called by name & empowered by the Holy Spirit to share  
God's love with words and actions

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