
MONA VALE ANGLICAN CHURCH

BIBLE STUDIES



THE CHURCH

MONA VALE ANGLICAN BIBLE STUDIES – THE CHURCH

Study 1: The Gathered Church.....	2
Study 2: Church and Unity.....	5
Study 3: The Church and Community.....	8
Study 4: The Body of Christ.....	11
Study 5: Belonging to the Church.....	13
Study 6: Church and Mission.....	16
Study 7: Church and the Sacraments.....	19
Study 8: Church and Glory.....	22

STUDY 1: THE GATHERED CHURCH

THE DEFINITION OF CHURCH

Write down a list of words that pop into your mind when you think of the word ‘church’

How does our society use the word ‘church’?

How does the Bible use the word church? The Greek word the Bible uses for church is ἐκκλησία. ἐκκλησία can be translated into English with the words assembly, gathering, congregation, or church.

Have a look at these verses and discuss how the Bible uses the word ‘church’

- Acts 19:32
- 1 Thessalonians 1:1
- 2 Corinthians 8:1
- Colossians 1:24
- Hebrews 2:12
- 1 Timothy 3:15

What makes the ‘church’ of Acts 9:31 different from the other uses of the word ‘church’?

How does the Bible’s use of the word ‘church’ differ from the way our society uses the word ‘church’?

Does the Bible use the word 'church' for the building Christians meet in (See Rom 16:5)?
What are the implications of this?

The Bible defines church as the gathering of God's people in his presence. God is present amongst us when we gather together around his Word and by his Spirit. So when we are gathered around the word of God we are in church. Now this means we are in church more than what happens on Sunday. So if this is how the Bible defines church then when are we in church week to week? Using this definition is church the parish, congregation, Bible study, denomination, one to one meeting, can you think of any others?

GATHERING AND SCATTERING

If the word 'church' means to assemble or gather then God's work of salvation is to gather his people together around himself to form the Christian church. Gathering into church is how God's saves his people because we are coming into his presence. Have a look at these verses and discuss how God is gathering together his people to save them at each stage of history.

- Deuteronomy 4:10-14
- John 11:51-52
- Ephesians 1:9-10
- Revelation 7:9-10

If gathering together is how God saves his people then how does God exercise his judgment? The opposite of gathering together is scattering. God exercises his judgment by scattering people away from his presence and across the face of the earth. Have a look at these verses and discuss how God is scattering his people across the face of the earth in judgment at each stage of history.

- Genesis 3:22-24
- Genesis 11:7-9
- Deuteronomy 28:63-67 (compare Deuteronomy 30:1-3)
- Matthew 12:30
- Mark 14:27

Try and draw the movement of God gathering to save and scattering to judge

If gathering is how God saves and if scattering is how God judges then what does that mean for our weekly Sunday gatherings and Bible study gatherings?

If we decide to go or not to go to those gatherings what does that mean?

Gathering together in church is how God is saving us. When we come to church we are coming into the presence of God. Heaven will be one great big long church and we can enjoy a taste of that when we meet in church here and now on earth. So when someone says they are a Christian but decides not to go to church what does that say?

THE HEAVENLY CHURCH AND THE EARTHLY CHURCH

Church exists in two parts the heavenly part and the earthly part. When we put out trust in Jesus we are united to him spiritually and we join the heavenly church. At every moment and in every place every Christian is part of the heavenly church. Read these passages and discuss how the Bible describes the heavenly church.

- Ephesians 2:4-7
- Hebrews 12:18-24

The heavenly church is expressed in the earthly church. Every time we meet on earth we are expressing on earth the heavenly church. We are the complete church of God in that geographical location. Read these passages and discuss how the Bible describes the earthly church.

- 1 Corinthians 1:1-2
- 1 Thess 1:1
- Revelation 2:1

If the earthly church is an expression of the heavenly church then how should we think about our weekly gatherings as Christians? What significance do they have in God's grand scheme? How should we treat our earthly church gatherings?

STUDY 2: CHURCH AND UNITY

Is division a good thing or a bad thing? Is unity always good?

THE UNITY OF BABEL

Read Genesis 11:1-9

What did men decided to do in a plain in Shinar? What type of unity did they create?

How did God respond to their unity? What was his judgment upon them?

In the tower of Babel is unity a good thing or a bad thing?

Can you think of any contemporary examples of this type of unity? What should our response be to this type of unity?

THE UNITY OF CHURCH

Thinking about what we learnt last study about gathering and scattering how does God create unity for church? Yet how is this possible when we are so different and so sinful?

In Ephesians chapter 2 Paul speaks about how it is possible for the Jews and the Gentiles to be united in church. **Read Ephesians 2:11-22.**

What are some of the differences that Paul lists between the Jews and the Gentiles? How do these act as barriers to unity? How do you think the Jews and the Gentiles might have felt towards each other in the early days of Christianity?

How does the gospel of Jesus Christ make unity possible? What is it about the work of Jesus that removes the barriers?

What is the common identity of every person who belongs to the church? How does our common identity strengthen our unity?

Can you give an example of where you have seen the gospel give unity to a very diverse church?

Is it possible for a church to find its unity in something other than the gospel? If so, then what might some of those things be? What happens when one of those things are threatened? How is it possible to ensure that the gospel is what gives unity to a church?

GOOD AND BAD DIVISION

Read Luke 12:51-53

In this passage what did Jesus say that he came to do?

Why does this make us uncomfortable?

Read Romans 16:17

When is division a good thing? When must we create divisions?

Read 1 Corinthians 1:10-13

When is division a bad thing? What causes these divisions? Can you give some examples of when you have seen division in the church?

Read Ephesians 4:1-6

How can we actively maintain the unity that God has given us?

LOSING THE BASIS OF OUR UNITY

Is it possible for a church to lose the basis of its unity?

Read Revelation 2:1-7

What has the church in Ephesus forsaken?

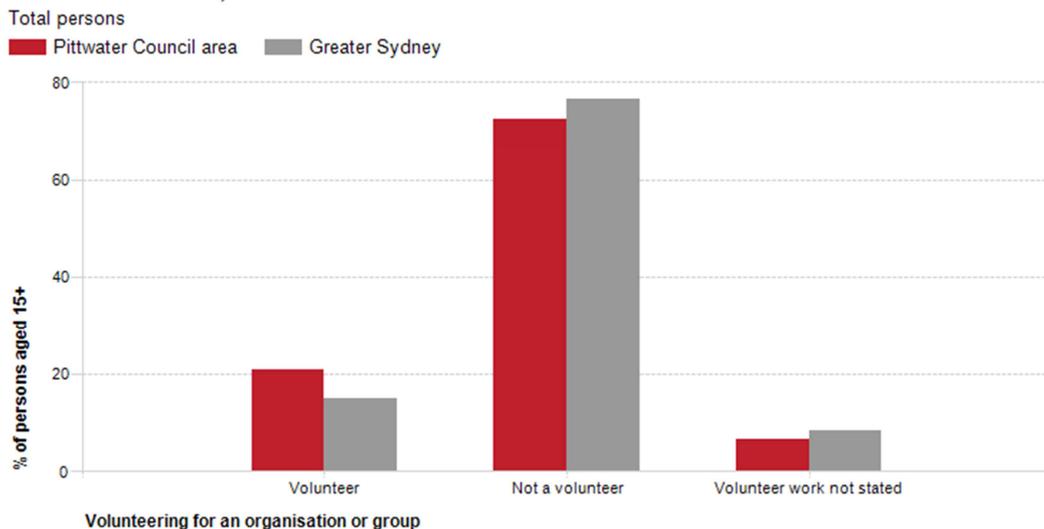
What will happen if they do not repent? (Hint: The lampstand is a symbol of the presence of Jesus. See Rev 1:12-13)

When is it possible for a church to lose the basis of its unity? How can we guard against this?

STUDY 3: THE CHURCH AND COMMUNITY

In 2012 Pittwater council adopted a social plan called “Live, Connect, Participate.” The social plan aims to enhance the liveability, strengthen connections and facilitate participation across the Pittwater community. The number of people who are doing volunteer work within the community has increased by 1.5% between 2006 and 2011 and is 6% greater than the rest of Sydney.

Volunteer work, 2011



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Census of Population and Housing, 2011 (Usual residence data)
Compiled and presented in profile.id by .id, the population experts.

.id
the population experts

Where can you see the Pittwater community in action? What is it like? What are its strengths and what are its weaknesses?

Before the creation of the world community existed. The Trinity is a community of 3 persons – Father, Son and Holy Spirit, each person in loving dependent relationship with the other. When God created us in the Garden of Eden he created us in his image and therefore he created us to be in relationship. Read Genesis 2:18. What was the problem for Adam that God sought to address?

We were made to be in relationship and community. How can you see this desire in people’s lives today?

THE FAMILY OF GOD

When someone believes in Jesus Christ they enter into the family of God. How do these verses describe that process? What is the new identity that is given to the believer?

- John 1:12-13

- Romans 8:14-17
- 1 John 3:1
- 1 John 5:1-2

What are the characteristics of a good family?

When a person believes in Jesus Christ they are adopted into the family of God as a child of God. We are given a new identity and a new community to belong to. Read these passages and discuss what the family of God is like and how it is to shape our behaviour.

- 1 Timothy 3:12
- Ephesians 2:19-20
- Ephesians 5:1-2
- Galatians 6:10
- 1 John 3:10
- 1 Corinthians 12:26

THE FAMILY OF GOD AND OUR EARTHLY FAMILIES

Now that we have been adopted into God's family what place does that leave for our biological families? **Read Mark 3:31-35.**

Who came to visit Jesus while he was teaching?

When Jesus poses the question, 'Who are my mother and brothers?' who does he identify as his mother and brothers? Why?

Where does Jesus see his primary place of belonging? Does this understanding apply to all who follow Jesus?

If our primary place of belonging is to the family of God does that mean we should abandon our biological families? **Read 1 Timothy 5:3-4, 8**

What do these verses teach us about the responsibilities that we have to our earthly families?

So how do we hold together our primary place of belonging with the family of God and our ongoing relationships with our earthly families? How have you seen this done effectively? Where have you seen this tested?

A COMMUNITY OF LOVE

If church is to be the family of God then it is important to know what a good family of God looks like. A great place to look is the book of Acts because it depicts what church looked like when it all started. **Read Acts 4:32-35.**

What did the early church do with their possessions? Why? What does that demonstrate about their community?

How did they relate to each other? In v32 what does it mean to be one in heart and one in mind?

The church community is about sharing our lives with each other. Have a look at these verses and discuss how they describe the church community.

- 1 Thessalonians 2:8
- Galatians 6:2
- Romans 12:15-16

How can we strengthen our church community? What are the barriers that are stopping us from doing this?

Can you give some examples of when you have experienced the church as your family? What are some of the practical things that make for a strong church community?

STUDY 4: THE BODY OF CHRIST

Draw a picture of your body and then either rub out or scribble out different parts of your body. Talk about how having that part of your body missing would change the way you lived your life.

The New Testament often describes the church as the body of Christ. Read these verses and discuss how the body of Christ fills out our understanding of the church.

- Colossians 1:18, 2:18-19
- Romans 12:4-5
- Ephesians 4:15-16, 5:23-34, 29-30

The New Testament uses the metaphor of the church as the body of Christ extensively. Yet in a couple of those passages it explores the metaphor at much greater depth. One of those passages is 1 Corinthians 12 which we will spend some time looking at.

Read 1 Corinthians 12

Where do our gifts come from and what are they given for?

What are the different types of gifts that can be seen in the church? Is this an exhaustive list in vv8-10? What are some of the other gifts that you have seen?

What are your gifts and how can you be using them to serve the body?

In verses 12 to 13 who belongs to the body of Christ? How do we know that we belong to the body of Christ?

Paul says that the body is made up of different parts (v14). What are the different parts that he is referring to?

Why might one part start to believe that they do not belong to the body? Which parts would be most tempted to believe this? Which parts would be less tempted to believe this? Have you ever been tempted to believe this about yourself?

What is Paul's answer to a part that does not believe they belong to the body? What is it about the nature of the body that addresses this belief (vv17-20)?

In v23 Paul says that the parts we think are less honourable should be treated with special honour. What are those parts for us? How can we treat them with special honour?

In v24 he says that the presentable parts need no special treatment. What are those parts for us?

What is Paul's ultimate goal for the church when he gives this instruction?

How can we affirm those people who do not believe they are part of the church because of the gifts and abilities that they have?

Why is belonging to the body of Christ so important for the church?

In vv28-31 Paul orders different gifts. After we have just read about equality of all the parts why does he do this? What is the order based upon? What are the greater gifts that we should eagerly desire?

Are we functioning as a harmonious body at Mona Vale Anglican? What are the things that we are doing well? What are the things that we can improve on?

STUDY 5: BELONGING TO THE CHURCH

Church attendance in Australia has been in decline for the last 50 years. In 1966 1 in 4 Aussies attended church (2.6 million) but in 2012 that number has dwindled to 1 in 14 (1.6 million). In the recent ABS religious statistics it showed that while 64% of Australians tick the Christianity box only 9% are actively practicing and regularly attending a church.

This trend is not limited to Australia but is seen around the Western World. The US reports monthly church attendance of around 25%. In Canada, less than 21% of the population attend church weekly. In Britain only 16% of people report going once a month. Is church attendance important for a Christian? What does a Christian's attendance or non-attendance at church reveal about that person?

Read 1 Peter 2:1-10

In verse 4 who is the living stone and how does Peter describe what God has chosen him for?

In verse 5 how are Christians described? What role do they play in God's house?

Sometimes the spiritual reality that we belong to God's spiritual house does not match the way that we feel. Do you feel like you belong to God's spiritual house? If our feelings do not match our spiritual reality what are some of the ways that we can change this? What does it look like to belong to a church?

In vv9-10 we are given a new identity. What is that new identity? Who do we belong to? What implications does that have for how we live our lives and our attendance at church?

Read Acts 2:41-47

What are the activities of the early church? What was the level of commitment to these activities and to each other? How was this level of commitment evident?

How often did the early church meet together? Where did they meet? How does this compare with how often we meet together? Did the early church meet together too often?

When outsiders looked in on their church community what was their response?

When we look at the New Testament there are a number of different activities that happened when the church met together. Have a look at these verses and list the different activities that happened and why they are there.

- Acts 2:42
- 1 Timothy 4:13
- James 5:13-16
- 1 Corinthians 14:26
- Colossians 3:16
- Romans 12:13, 15

When we look at all these different activities happening in church it is not possible to do all of these for a couple of hours on a Sunday. Therefore, during the week we meet together in Bible study groups and one-to-one relationships. How do these activities complement what we do on a Sunday and provide a fuller expression of what we see in the passages above? How have you personally benefited from a Bible study or a one-to-one relationship?

Read Hebrews 10:19-27

How is it possible for us to draw near to God? Where does this happen (i.e. where is the house of God)?

What might it look like for someone to hold unswervingly to the hope that we profess (v23)?

How can we spur one another on toward love and good deeds? Can you give some examples? When might we do this?

In verse 25 the author warns not to give up meeting together. Why does he give this warning?

What is a sufficient reason for someone not to meet together in church on a Sunday?

- I'm sick
- My child has a friend's birthday party

- I have to work
- Kid's sport is on
- I'm tired
- My partner has gone into hospital
- I'm going to the beach

In verses 26 and 27 the author uses very strong language. Is he saying that giving up the practice of meeting together regularly in church is sinful? Why or why not?

A member of a certain church, who previously had been attending services regularly, stopped going. After a few weeks, the pastor decided to visit him. It was a chilly evening. The pastor found the man at home alone, sitting before a blazing fire. Guessing the reason for his pastor's visit, the man welcomed him, led him to a big chair near the fireplace and waited. The pastor made himself comfortable but said nothing.

In the grave silence, he contemplated the play of the flames around the burning logs. After some minutes, the pastor took the fire tongs, carefully picked up a brightly burning ember and placed it to one side of the hearth all alone. Then he sat back in his chair, still silent. The host watched all this in quiet fascination. As the one lone ember's flame diminished, there was a momentary glow and then its fire was no more. Soon it was cold and "dead as a doornail." Not a word had been spoken since the initial greeting.

Just before the pastor was ready to leave, he picked up the cold, dead ember and placed it back in the middle of the fire. Immediately it began to glow once more with the light and warmth of the burning coals around it. As the pastor reached the door to leave, his host said, "Thank you so much for your visit and especially for the fiery sermon. I shall be back in church next Sunday."

by Dr. John MacArthur

Do you agree?

STUDY 6: CHURCH AND MISSION

"The Church must send or the church will end."

By Mendell Taylor. Bethany Nazarene College Professor.

Do you agree or disagree? What type of sending is the church engaged in? Are we sending?

CHURCH GROWTH AND MISSION GROWTH

When the Bible speaks about an individual church it does not speak about that church growing in the number of people attending. In all of the letters written to the churches on not one occasion does the author instruct a church to grow in numbers. The Bible speaks about the church growing in quality and maturity and an example of that is in Ephesians chapter 4

Read Ephesians 4:1-16

In the opening verses what sort of behaviour does Paul envisage for the church?

In verse 11 Paul lists the different gifts that have been given to people within the church. What is the goal of these gifts? What will they guard the church against?

Describe what a mature church looks like? How can you tell that a church is growing in maturity? How can we structure our activities so that we are growing in maturity?

In the Bible there are passages that speak about growing in numbers but rather than being associated with individual churches they are associated with the gospel or the Word of God going to the ends of the earth. The book of Acts is where we can see this happening. Read these verses and discuss how this growth was happening in Acts. Who was taking the gospel to the ends of the earth? What happened to the new converts after they became Christians?

- Acts 2:41
- Acts 4:4
- Acts 5:14
- Acts 6:7
- Acts 9:31
- Acts 11:21
- Acts 14:21

Describe the process in the book of Acts that led to many people becoming Christians – before, during and after.

Read Matthew 28:16-20

When the disciples saw Jesus on the mountain they worshipped him. This is the church! They are gathered together in the presence of God. But there are still many people in the world who do not experience church because they have not come into the presence of God to worship him. Jesus knows this so he sends his disciples out into the world to create new churches so they can be gathered into his presence and worship him.

If the disciples are already gathered together in church what will they have to do if they are going to fulfil the Great Commission?

On what basis does he send his disciples out into the world?

What are they to do when they go?

When do they begin God's mission and when do they end?

Oswald J. Smith was a Canadian pastor, author and missions advocate, and he said "*Any church that is not seriously involved in helping fulfill the Great Commission has forfeited its biblical right to exist.*" These are very strong words. Are they too strong? How can we go out from the church in fulfilment of the Great Commission?

ATTRACTIVE AND MISSIONAL CHURCH

Many Christians will try to attract people to their churches through a variety of means. Some of these things are:

- Lots of fantastic events
- Games and activities
- A traditional church building
- Social community

Can you think of any others?

But what is the orientation of God's mission in the Great Commission and the Book of Acts and how does that compare to this type of attractational church?

What are some of the ways that we can help to fulfil the great commission in Mona Vale?

The Bible does speak about being an attractational church. But let's have a look at what people are attracted to.

Read Matthew 5:14-16

What does Jesus instruct his followers to do? What is the light?

What happens when people see the light? What is the attractational element of this type of church?

Have a look at an example of where this happens. **Read Acts 2:46-47**

How are people responding to the Christians in Jerusalem? What is attracting the non-believers to the church?

But one key difference in the church of Acts chapter 2 and us is that they were meeting in the temple courts where everyone could see them. They were living transparent lives so that people could see God at work in their midst.

How can we make our church community transparent to Mona Vale?

STUDY 7: CHURCH AND THE SACRAMENTS

A sacrament is defined as a Christian rite that is believed to have been ordained by Christ and that is held to be a sign or symbol of a spiritual reality. In the 39 Articles of the Anglican Church Article number 25 explains the sacraments for the Anglican Church. Read the Article and discuss what the article says about the sacraments?

XXV. Of the Sacraments.

Sacraments ordained of Christ be not only badges or tokens of Christian men's profession, but rather they be certain sure witnesses, and effectual signs of grace, and God's good will towards us, by the which he doth work invisibly in us, and doth not only quicken, but also strengthen and confirm our Faith in him.

There are two Sacraments ordained of Christ our Lord in the Gospel, that is to say, Baptism, and the Supper of the Lord.

Those five commonly called Sacraments, that is to say, Confirmation, Penance, Orders, Matrimony, and Extreme Unction, are not to be counted for Sacraments of the Gospel, being such as have grown partly of the corrupt following of the Apostles, partly are states of life allowed in the Scriptures, but yet have not like nature of Sacraments with Baptism, and the Lord's Supper, for that they have not any visible sign or ceremony ordained of God.

The Sacraments were not ordained of Christ to be gazed upon, or to be carried about, but that we should duly use them. And in such only as worthily receive the same, they have a wholesome effect or operation: but they that receive them unworthily, purchase to themselves damnation, as Saint Paul saith.

John Calvin was one of the key figures during the reformation and he believed that the sacraments helped us in our faith. They were never to be disconnected from the Word. In the Bible we read about the promises of God, and the sacraments are the seals which guarantee the faithfulness of God to his promises.

Every time we partake in the sacraments the Spirit of God works with the Word of God to strengthen our faith in the promises of God. The sacraments are intended to be an aid to strengthen our trust in the promises of God. So we will look at each of the two sacraments and try to discover what promises the sacraments communicate.

BAPTISM

In Acts chapter 2 Peter is in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost. He is preaching the gospel to groups of people who have gathered around. When we arrive at verse 36 the gospel has been preached and the time has come for a response from the crowds. Read Acts 2:36-41

In verse 36 how does Peter conclude his gospel presentation?

How does the crowd respond to Peter's words? What instructions does Peter give to them?

In verse 38 Peter gives the instruction to be baptised. The greek word for baptism is 'βαπτίζω' and it is defined as 'to use water in a rite for purpose of renewing or establishing a relationship with God.' From verse 38 what is the promise that the action of baptism symbolizes? Why does baptism symbolize this promise?

When Peter says that they will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit is it because they have been baptized or because of something else? (Does someone need to be baptized to receive the Holy Spirit?)

Here is another example of Baptism in the Book of Acts. Read Acts 8:26-39

What are the steps that led to the Ethiopian being baptized?

Why did the Ethiopian want to be baptized? Why was Philip happy to do this?

Who can be baptized? Why is baptism helpful? When should we do it?

Baptism happens as a sign that a person has put their faith in God's promise to forgive sins through the blood of Jesus. It is a symbol that God has washed that person clean from all of their sin. It serves to strengthen that person's faith and all who witness it.

But what about infant baptism since the Anglican Church practices infant baptism? It is not possible for an infant to have faith in the promises of God because they do not have the mental capacity to do so. So on what basis are infants baptized? They are baptized on the basis of the faith of their parents in the promise of the forgiveness of sins. That is why in the Infant Baptism service for the Anglican Church the parents are asked to make affirmations of their faith. Read these verses and discuss who is being baptized?

- Acts 10:1, 23-27, 43-48
- Acts 16:30-34

THE LORD'S SUPPER

Jesus is having his last meal with the disciples before his crucifixion. It is also the Passover. What is the Passover meal? Why did the Jewish people celebrate it?

Read Luke 22:14-20

In verse 19 what does Jesus do and why? In verse 20 what does Jesus do and why?

Jesus uses the bread and wine as symbols for the promises of God. What are those promises? Why are they important?

In 1 Corinthians chapter 11 we can see the Lord's Supper being practiced within the Corinthian church. **Read 1 Corinthians 11:18-34**

What is the problem with the Corinthian church when they are celebrating the Lord's Supper? Why is this such a problem?

What are the promises that the symbol of this is meant to point towards? How is the behaviour of the Corinthians undermining those promises?

In verse 27 what does it mean to eat the bread or drink the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner? What is a worthy manner?

What is the Lord's punishment for this behaviour? Why is it so severe?

When you celebrate the Lord's Supper at church what are the promises that it is pointing you towards? How does it serve to strengthen your faith?

How can we celebrate the Lord's Supper in a better fashion? Who can celebrate the Lord's Supper and where?

STUDY 8: CHURCH AND GLORY

What does the ideal marriage relationship look like? What are its characteristics?

In the Old Testament Ezekiel chapter 16 depicts the relationship between the Lord and the nation of Israel like a marriage relationship. **Read Ezekiel 16:1-42**

In verses 1-5 how does the Lord describe what happened to Israel when she was born?

In verses 6-14 what does the Lord do for Israel as she grows and then becomes of age? What is happening when she is described as being dressed in fine jewels and clothes? How did she become a queen?

In verses 15-34 what did Israel do? How did she engage in prostitution? Who did she engage in prostitution with? What is this talking about?

In verses 35-42 how will the Lord punish Israel? Why will he do this? What was missing from the relationship between the Lord and his people?

The marriage relationship between the Lord and Israel is destroyed because of Israel's unfaithfulness. Yet a pattern has been put into place between the Lord and his people – a marriage relationship. When we get the end of Ezekiel chapter 16 there is still a glimmer of hope. Read Ezekiel 16:60-63

What is the hope for God's people?

We must look forward for a new marriage relationship where sin has been atoned for and the Lord's people are faithful to the marriage relationship. **Read Ephesians 5:22-33**

Who is Christ married to? How did the marriage happen? Why is this marriage successful compared to the marriage between the Lord and Israel?

In verses 31-32 what does Paul say that all marriage points to? Why is this important?

Are we in danger of succumbing to the temptations that Israel did?

Read 2 Corinthians 11:1-4

Who has the Corinthian church been promised to? What is the nature of their relationship?

What is the Corinthian church in danger of? Is this a danger that we could be faced with? How can we ensure that we do not go down the same path?

In verse 3 what does Paul want from the church? How can we show sincere and pure devotion to Christ? What would it look like in our individual and corporate lives?

The marriage relationship between Jesus Christ and the Church that we enjoy now is a foretaste of the glory that we will enjoy in the future. **Read Revelation 21:1-10**

Who is the wife of the lamb (Jesus Christ)? What is this day describing?

For those who are part of the New Jerusalem how will God treat them? What does this reveal about the nature of the relationship between God and his people?

If this is the future of Mona Vale Church how does that change the way we view our church?

How does that change our involvement in the church?

How does that change the way we treat people in the church?

How does that change the way we relate to people outside the church (especially when we take into account verse 8)?

How do you feel about having this as your future?