

Worship & Welcome

Tonight (sharing vision and prayer)

3 & 10 February, 7:45pm-9:30pm

- Time for group reflection, Q&A, discussion, prayer

Interactive: Sharing in two's or three's for a few minutes

- **Share one thing you see God doing at the moment in St Mary's?**



Start with thankfulness

- Our culture of serving as a church family is beautiful.
- There is such a love for people and a heart to support and care for one another.
- We are a growing church with a heart to make disciples and share Jesus.

Also, start in a spirit of genuine humility by recognising my/our need for God's grace.

- **Personally** - conscious of weakness, need for grace, mercy, repentance and transformation.
- **As a church** – So much to give thanks for and also so much still to see happen. We are deeply loved, but we are being invited to so much more which will only come through consecration and prayer. The word 'Prepare the Way' from 2024 remains and needs our urgent attention. We are in a John the Baptist moment of preparation for a move of God. (Luke 3:1-6)
- **Nationally** - church caught up in scandal, abuse and compromise. The Lord is uprooting unrighteousness. Society is broken and lost. Wind of God's holiness blowing through church and society. See Steve Uppal's prophetic perspective (All Nations Church, Wolverhampton) https://youtu.be/q65L47g_tE?si=9gww9hG06ZBlqEt9

I love St Mary's, yet perhaps we are not ready just yet, to see the breakthrough we want.

- Jesus is inviting us to get ready - to prepare for what He wants to do in us and the nation.
- 'Ready' signifies a posture and positioning our hearts, lives and priorities towards Jesus.

We may need to renew our longing for a move of God in our church and community. I know it must be hard to keep hearing about it and us not yet experience it. It is easy to become weary. God comes where He is wanted. May Jesus be at the centre of St Mary's.

Remember our vision:



Part of 'getting ready' is each of us renewing our heart for this vision, and connecting with the part we play in it.

Quiet moment of reflection

How can I connect with our church vision?





Some general reflections & priorities for St Mary's in 2025: *I am keen to discuss these reflections with others, which will form part of our conversations on 3 and 10 February.*

1. **Our prayer and worship culture** – A priority for this year is to grow in encountering God in a way that births a stronger prayer and worship culture as a church.
2. **Our welcome culture** - It would be great to renew our welcome and newcomer integration; to help people feel that sense of belonging, their call to serve and find friendship.
3. **The importance of wellbeing** - I know we do a lot as a church, which can be tiring. How can we both serve well and also make sure we honour God in our rest and wellbeing?
4. **Healthy, Holy & Humble Church** - I am conscious there has been stories nationally of toxic cultures and abusive leadership in churches. I want to look at our leadership culture, prophetic culture and other areas such as safeguarding and conflict resolution. We need to be transparent, accountable and healthy in St Mary's. Our PCC will be discussing this.
5. **Longing to grow and multiply** - It would be amazing to see us grow again this year across our Sunday congregations. Also, to plant in some way again and continue to multiply disciples, leaders and congregations as the Lord leads.
6. **Encouraging our youth** - It is time to empower and encourage our young people. We urgently need more people to step into leading our youth on Sundays.
7. **Good pastoral care** - Please let us know if you need support as we don't always know what is needed and when. The 'Pastoral Support' leaflet is available from the Welcome Area.
8. **Reviewing Sunday Services** - We are considering changes to some Sundays services, including how we do the offering, more community time, enabling worship ministry, worship for everyone, youth participation, welcome culture etc. We will consult as we make any changes.
9. **Need a financial breakthrough.** We have a £40K deficit again in 2025. We need to enable everyone to give biblically and generously, which is beyond the tithe of 10%. Tithing is the starting point for generosity, not the end point. There may be some not yet giving, and I am also working on a plan to communicate better on finance. I do believe if everyone gave their full tithes and offerings; there would be enough to not have a deficit.
10. **Responding well to Living in Love & Faith (CofE)** - My heart is to help us be both biblically inclusive and radically holy. We will remain faithful to the teaching of scripture on marriage and sexuality. This year will bring further national discussions and I want to keep us informed. I would recommend visiting the website of the Alliance. alliancecofe.org

Short discussion in two's or three's

What is your response to the above reflections and priorities?

For the church to be all we can be, **YOU are essential.**
At St Mary's, we believe that we are called to come, belong, serve and give. These are the basic practices of being part of the church family.

-  ENCOUNTERING GOD
-  LIVING FOR THE KINGDOM
-  LOVING DEEPLY
-  SHARING JESUS

Here is a snapshot of where we are at right now.

This is helpful context for seeing how we may need to get ready for God to move in us and the community.

COME	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We have 255 adults in the church family (133,000 in Epping Forest) • Average Sunday adult attendance is 55% of the church family (based on Oct 2024). • We have 94 under 18's in the church family. This is amazing! <p>Encouragement: People are coming to faith and the church is growing Challenge: Like many churches, a more regular pattern of attendance is needed.</p>
BELONG	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 45% of the church family are in one of our 10 Life Groups • We welcomed 25 newcomers in 2024. <p>Encouragement: We are constantly welcoming new people. Challenge: We are all part of the welcome of the church – speak to new people.</p>
SERVE	<p>We are making disciples by journeying with many people in relational communities, which would be amazing to become worshipping communities!</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 83% of the church family are serving in some way in one of the ministries of St Mary's on Sundays or midweek. • We impact the lives of approx. 1,000 different people every month. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Café Hope – team of 16 people serve over 300 people every week 2) Ignite – team of 40 people serve Sundays and mid-week. 3) Living Hope – team of 40 people serve across 7 outreach projects 4) Little Lambs – serving 50 local families and their young children 5) Counselling – over 100 people have had counselling since 2017. 6) Visiting Team – team of 11 who do pastoral visits. <p>... and much more including outreach, pastoral care and practical help. Encouragement: So many people serve so well. Thank you and well done! Challenge: Ask Jesus how He wants you to serve Him.</p>
GIVE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 43% of the church family gave financially in 2024. • The average gift was £164 per month. <p>Encouragement: God has provided our needs – thank you for giving! Challenge: Tithing is the minimum biblical call, and generosity goes further. Are you willing to increase you giving to be a gospel patron? I believe we can.</p>

Brief quiet reflection

What do you notice as you see this snapshot of where we are at now?

What might it actually mean for us to “get ready”?

Getting ready is about following (apprenticing) Jesus and orientating our lives more around Jesus.

1) “Be still and know that I am God.” (Ps 46:10)

We can get ready by being still and really getting to know God.

- I keep asking the question, “Lord, what do you want me to do?”
- I have noticed that to really get to know God there is an invitation to silence, solitude, worship and prayer. I am learning to wait, pray, be still and find out what God wants.
- I believe the starting place is not doing more or extra-activity, but in intimacy with Jesus. Making space for God both personally and together. Worship is not just for Sundays. God is not a project. Fruitful and healthy community and ministry flow from intimacy with God.
- Jesus at the centre, not the edge of life and church. This means slowing down for better relationship with Jesus. Being more still in His presence.
- Getting rid of what distracts us and making room for what draws us closer to God.

2) Surrender to the “slow-burn miracle of love”

We can get ready by surrendering to God’s timing and love.

- Preparing the way for the Lord and getting ready may take time; more than we appreciate.
- God’s timing and our obedience are linked.
- God’s timing is not the same as ours. Don’t rush what He is doing.
 - Israel spent 40 years in the wilderness preparing for crossing into the Promised Land.
 - Jesus lived in obscurity for 30 years before he emerged into ministry.
- There is a lot to take on board when we think about getting ready. We can’t do everything quickly. It can take time. We may need to go slow to grow.
- The main thing is keeping moving forward, not getting stuck
- I once felt the Lord say to me, “Church is a garden, not a factory.” We are like a wild garden and Jesus is the gardener. He prunes, He plants, He grow and He uproots. We are the branches and need to surrender to Him to be fruitful. (John 15).
- The “slow-burn miracle of love” is a phase our staff have found helpful this year, to remind us that love is the key and also that following Jesus can be slow as well as supernatural.

3) Take personal spiritual responsibility – you are essential

We can get ready by taking spiritual responsibility.

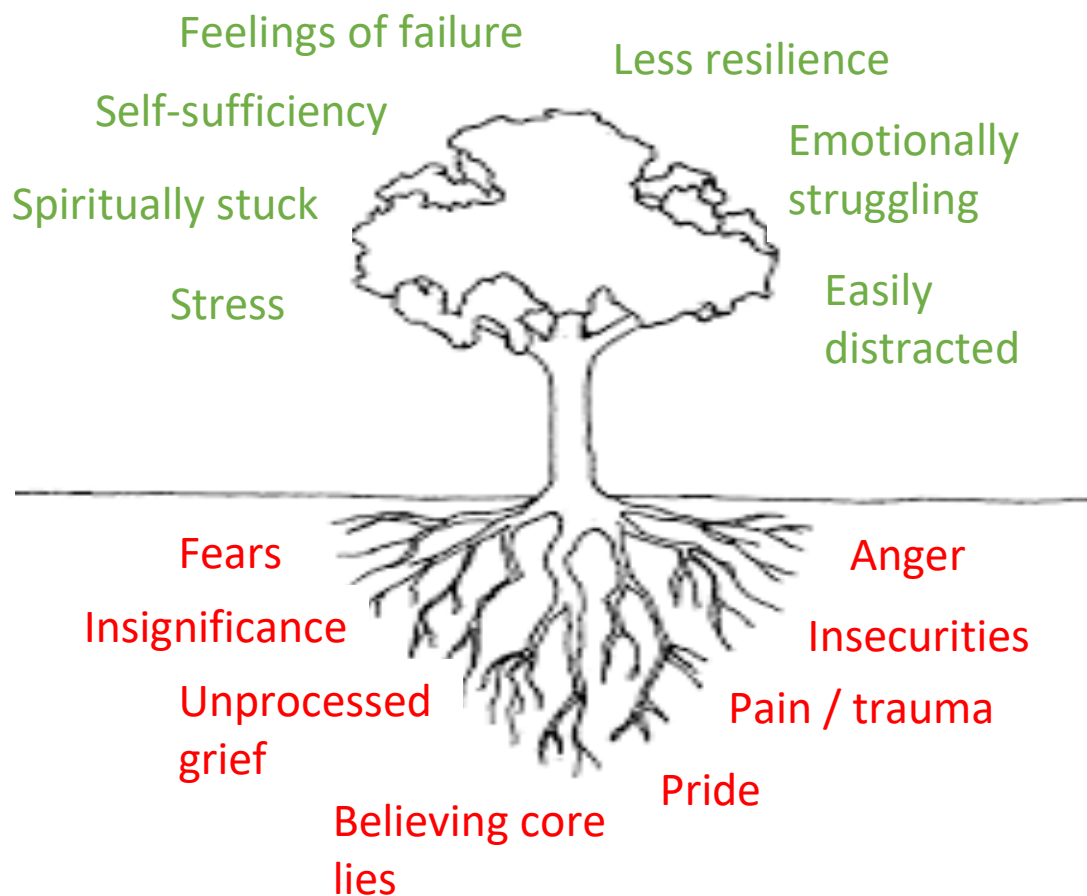
- You are part of all this. You matter! How you choose to serve, engage, give, worship, pray etc matter to our church and community.
- We all need to take responsibility to grow. A church where we apprentice Jesus calls for self-discipline in discipleship habits and practices. We can choose to embrace the cost of a kingdom vision that is not about us. This is part of Jesus call to us to “Follow me” (Mark 1:17).
- Jesus said to Paul, “Now get up, stand on your feet...” (Acts 26:16). It’s time for us to ‘get up’ spiritually and make the next steps.
- We can start by turning up the dial on prayer. Starting with the next step is better than trying to be perfect immediately.
- What is the next step for you in taking spiritual responsibility?

4) Do the hard “soul work” - heart preparation & formation

We can get ready through confession, repentance and inner healing

- There is ‘soul work’ for us to do. It is a dismantling, in order to be remantled.
- It’s not all about us. One of the biggest problems in church life comes when “me, my, I” is my primary concern. It is all too easy to be self-obsessed, self-reliant and self-righteous.
- We need to confess and repent of our own unconfessed sin and repent of our pride, anger, fear, people pleasing, busyness, disobedience, living in our own strength, perfectionism, self-sufficiency and so much more. Confessing our sin and humbly repenting is vital to your soul health. Revival is ever-related to holiness. Getting right with God and others is essential.
 - During sabbatical, I remember thinking, “I am not as I long to be; saturated with God.” I became deeply conscious of my weakness, need of God’s grace and root systems of sin in me that needed to be forgiven and healed. Along with that, were also unrieved losses and unprocessed griefs that needed healing. I felt stuck, weak and afraid, which also made it very difficult to be still with God. I noticed deep emotional roots that I also needed to process with God. Emotions like fear, insignificance, pain and disappointment. I was feeling vulnerable, abandoned, tired and frustrated. I was believing a lie that “It all depends on me”. I knew I needed God to deal with my roots.

The picture of a tree is helpful as our feelings are the leaves which we can see, but there are roots which we can’t easily see which are perhaps the real issue and need healing.



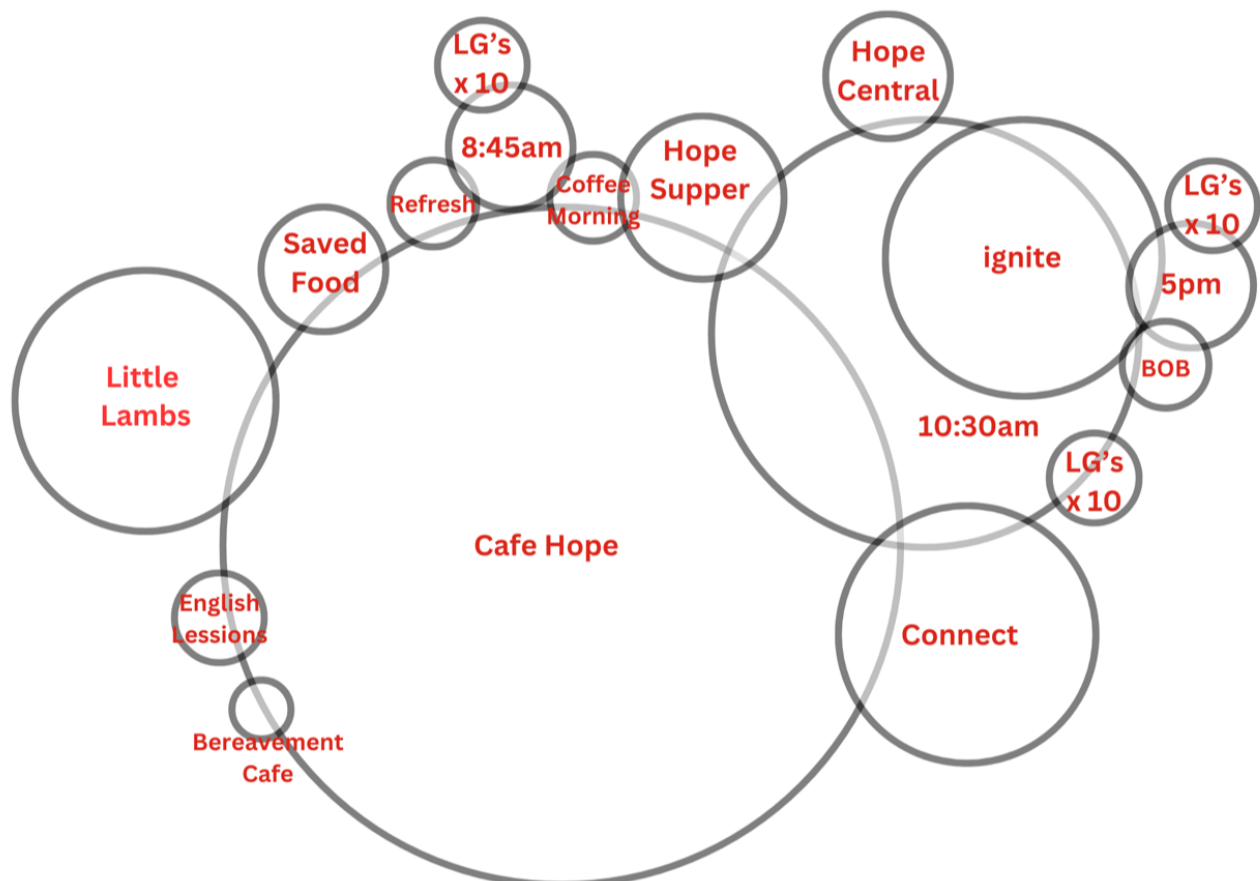
- Dealing with this is ongoing 'soul work' takes time, attention and is not easy.
- In terms of knowing where to start, you can talk with someone you trust, ask for prayer from the prayer ministry team, seek professional counselling help from a qualified Christian counsellor or speak to one of the clergy team. We are happy to point you to helpful resources that can help to start your journey to healing and freedom. We are also happy to listen and pray with you. Please ask for support if you feel you need it.
- You can also renew rhythms of spiritual life and patterns of self-care to help stay healthier.
- What soul work do you need to do?
- What does your 'tree' look like and how can you do the soul work you need to do with God?

5) Reimagining the ministry of all God's people

We can get ready by activating your spiritual gifts and making disciples

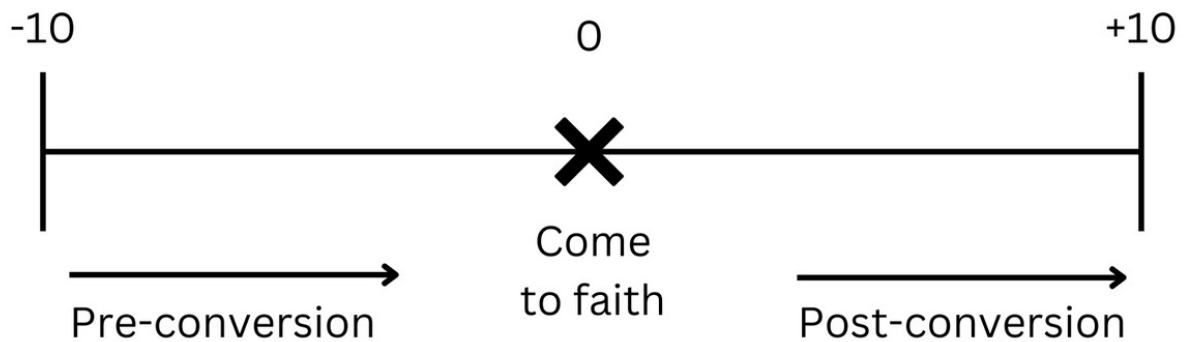
- After the dismantling comes restoration, renewal, revival remantling and reimagining! This is all about the ministry of all Believers as we grow in mission (being sent) and prayer (intimacy with Jesus).
- God loves to do extraordinary things through ordinary people. If everyone in St Mary's used their spiritual gifts in the power of the Spirit, amazing things would happen.

Right now, we are journeying with around 1,000 people a month in some way. The picture below is what it looks like. I think of it as an **apostolic mission map** of St Mary's, or to use the wild garden analogy; the **mission ecology** of St Mary's. This is what we are all part of. This is what we give, serve and pray for. Each circle is a discipleship community. We are making disciples everywhere. It takes time. Each circle represents many people following Jesus or on a pathway to Jesus.



We are currently discipling around 1,000 people per month. Most have not yet come to faith in Jesus, but we are helping them on the next step to that. Some journeys are short, and some are long. Some are far away, others are near to the kingdom. Everyone is somewhere on the pathway and all our mission is to help them move towards Jesus.

Discipleship Pathway



- We want to be disciples who make disciples. Many of us have no idea how to make disciples.
- A big question is; is my own discipleship worth reproducing? If every disciple was like me, would that be a good thing? So, we start with honesty – Lord, start with me! Help me to be a faithful disciple of Jesus. Then we can go on to make disciples.
- I believe the Holy Spirit wants to release the ministry of all God’s people. Everyone is part of God’s mission. Everyone can make disciples. Start with yourself first. Your spiritual gifts are needed to disciple the community so more people come to faith and follow Jesus.

6) Be ok with it not being easy: the cost of discipleship.

We can get ready by encouraging and building each other up.

- I have noticed that the closer you get to God, sometimes the harder it gets. We are not living for ourselves. We are not going to please everyone. We can’t help everyone as we accept our limitations. Building a life totally committed to Jesus through practicing sabbath, solitude, prayer, fasting, scripture, community, sacrificial giving, serving and witness won’t be easy. Following the way of Jesus can lead to trials, misunderstandings and difficulties. It feels a lot like dying to self. This is what Jesus said it would be like – not easy. We should not be surprised when it is tough.
- It may be easier to make peace now with the fact that not everyone is going to understand, and to adopt a mindset of looking to Jesus. He said the only way to follow Him was to deny yourself, take your cross and follow (Luke 9:23).
- Defiant joy is needed in God’s church. (James 1:2-4 says, “Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.” This is why we need one another.

7) “Overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.”

We can get ready by praying to overflow with the gospel-hope of Jesus.

- I have had this verse of scripture in my mind since last summer. “*May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit*” Romans 15:13. I really believe it is God’s word to us.
- This is a real call to pray, pray, pray – to content for what God has promised us.
- In 2023, God gave us a word about ‘Streams of Hope’. Just as the ‘Prepare the Way’ word remains, so does that word from 2023 – we are overflowing with streams of hope.
- Let’s put aside despair and get ready to overflow with hope. Freedom is coming! I want to rekindle the hope that God can move. Let God rekindle the dreams even from years ago. It’s time to get ready, time to come alive and be renewed in vision for revival.

A few closing questions:

Which of the seven ways of getting ready spoke the most to you?

What is my next step going deeper with this?

Closing response and prayer ministry

Don’t forget, while aimed at those involved in serving on ministry teams, the meetings on 3 and 10 February will be based on this vision and mainly be times for discussion, question and answer time, prayer and reflection.

If you have not yet read, *Saturated with God* (2023), please do so. Copies are available from me (£10)

