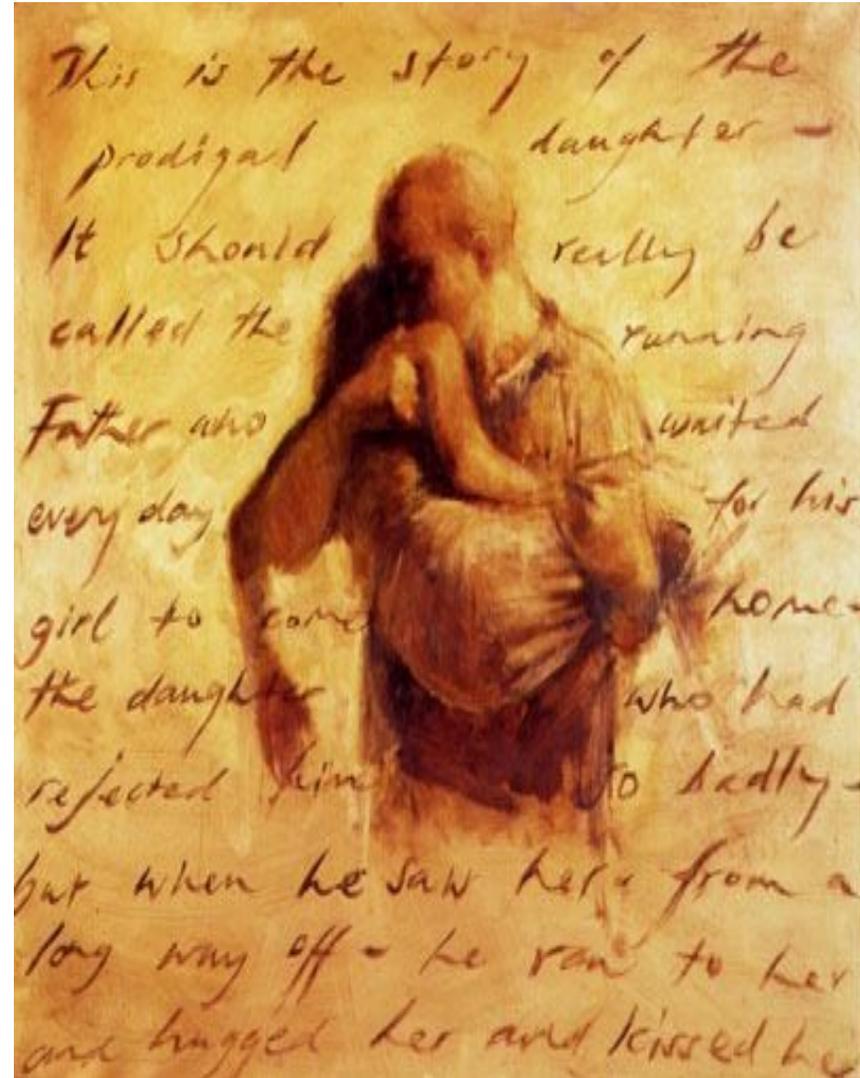




- 19 In their misery they cried out to the Lord,  
and he saved them from their troubles.  
20 God gave the command and healed them,  
so they were saved from dying.  
21 Let them give thanks to the Lord for his love  
and for the miracles he does for people.  
22 Let them offer sacrifices to thank him.  
With joy they should tell what he has done.  
23 Others went out to sea in ships  
and did business on the great oceans.  
24 They saw what the Lord could do,

- the miracles he did in the deep oceans.  
25 He spoke, and a storm came up,  
which blew up high waves.  
26 The ships were tossed as high as the sky and fell low to the depths.  
The storm was so bad that they lost their courage.  
27 They stumbled and fell like people who were drunk.  
They did not know what to do.  
28 In their misery they cried out to the Lord,  
and he saved them from their troubles.  
29 He stilled the storm  
and calmed the waves.  
30 They were happy that it was quiet,  
and God guided them to the port they wanted.  
31 Let them give thanks to the Lord for his love  
and for the miracles he does for  
people.  
32 Let them praise his greatness in the  
meeting of the people;  
let them praise him in the meeting  
of the elders.  
33 He changed rivers into a desert  
and springs of water into dry  
ground.  
34 He made fertile land salty,  
because the people there did evil.  
35 He changed the desert into pools of  
water  
and dry ground into springs of water.  
36 He had the hungry settle there  
so they could build a city in which to live.  
37 They planted seeds in the fields and vineyards,  
and they had a good harvest.

The fruit of  
the Spirit is  
love, joy, peace,  
patience, kindness,  
goodness, faithfulness,  
gentleness, self-control  
Gal 5 22-23



## DISCOVERING GOD'S MERCY

Bishop Steven Croft writes:

*This book aims to help you understand how much God loves you.*



One of life's biggest challenges is to grasp this one simple truth: God loves you. God loves you passionately, deeply and unconditionally. God's love for you does not depend on anything you do or anything you become. You cannot earn God's love. God knows you and God loves you. Love is a rich concept. There are many different words for love in the Bible. One of the main ones can be translated as 'steadfast love' or 'mercy' or 'covenant love'. It is love that is stronger than death and does not waver whatever the circumstances. It sounds as though it should be a very easy thing to understand God's steadfast love and mercy. But in fact God's mercy is very profound. It takes a lifetime to get to know it well. Last year I moved to Sheffield, and my house is on the edge of the Peak District. I've never lived near this part of England before and hardly know it at all. I thought at first the Peak District was quite a small place: something I could explore in a day or two. In fact, it's a vast area of natural beauty. It divides into around five different areas: the Southern Dales, the Western Moors, the White Peak, the Derwent Valley and the Dark Peak. Each is very different. Each will take many weeks to explore properly. I'm looking forward to that. In the same way, it takes many years to explore God's mercy: the depth and the ways and the constancy and the strength of God's love for you. This book and the short series of studies aim to take you further on that journey.

1 Thank the Lord because he is good.  
His love continues forever.  
2 That is what those whom the Lord has saved should say.  
He has saved them from the enemy  
3 and has gathered them from other lands,  
from east and west, north and south.



4 Some people had wandered in the desert lands.  
They found no city in which to live.  
5 They were hungry and thirsty,  
and they were discouraged.  
6 In their misery they cried out to the Lord,  
and he saved them from their troubles.  
7 He led them on a straight road  
to a city where they could live.  
8 Let them give thanks to the Lord for his love  
and for the miracles he does for people.  
9 He satisfies the thirsty  
and fills up the hungry.  
  
10 Some sat in gloom and darkness;  
they were prisoners suffering in chains.  
11 They had turned against the words of God  
and had refused the advice of God Most High.  
12 So he broke their pride by hard work.  
They stumbled, and no one helped.  
13 In their misery they cried out to the Lord,  
and he saved them from their troubles.  
14 He brought them out of their gloom and darkness  
and broke their chains.  
15 Let them give thanks to the Lord for his love  
and for the miracles he does for people.  
16 He breaks down bronze gates  
and cuts apart iron bars.  
17 Some fools turned against God  
and suffered for the evil they did.  
18 They refused to eat anything,  
so they almost died.



**25th November**

**Barren to fruitful, saved from frustration Mark 6 vs 1– 13 Ps 107 33–38**

**In our Gospel reading, Mark 6 vs 1–5 Jesus goes back to his home town.**

**What reaction did he get?**

**Is this fruitfulness or barrenness?**

**What was the result of their unbelief?**

**Why was Jesus surprised?**

**Mark 6 verse 7–12**

**Compare them to what happened when the disciples were sent out by Jesus.**

**How did he tell them to go out?**

**How did the disciples respond?**

**What was the result?**

**Take some time to go back through the booklet and the series.**

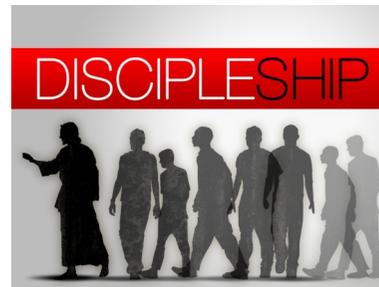
**Barren to fruitful. How does God want you to be fruitful in your Christian life?**

**Sick then well—Have you had an experience of healing?**

**Lost then found. Praise God for finding you. Pray for someone you know to be found by Jesus**

**Storm tossed then calm—Have you found a safe harbour?**

**Captive and then set free—Is there some area of your life which still binds you. Ask for prayer.**



Psalm 107 is a very long but beautiful Psalm. This term we are using Bishop Steven's book, "Exploring God's mercy". He explores five pictures from Psalm 107 and then links them to stories in Mark's Gospel. His aim is to help us to understand better the awe-inspiring mercy which our Creator God wants to shower on us. My prayer is that we will all take part in this journey over the next ten weeks as we explore, accept and learn to live in God's wonderful grace and mercy.

Please use this booklet to keep up with the journey, scribble down what you feel God is saying to you and Use the extra resources in the book in your daily prayers. Philip

**Prayers:**

Set free, O Lord, my soul from all restlessness and anxiety; give me that peace and power which flow from you; keep me in all perplexities and distresses, in all fears and faithlessness; that so upheld by your power and stayed on the rock of your faithfulness, I may through storm and stress remain in you, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Lord you spent your earthly days

Travelling on foot.

Your greatest journey was on a donkey

But you left behind a trail

Of hope and love and peace.

At least I know

That it is not the distance travelled that matters,

But the quality of the journey,.

In all my travels

Christ is before me

Christ behind me

Christ beside me

Christ at mine end

And at my departing

## 23rd September Lost and then found

Some wandered in wilderness and desert

**They lost their way home to a place where they could live**

They were hungry and thirsty and their life force ebbed away

Then they cried out to the LORD in their distress

**He saved them from an their troubles**

He led them by a straight pathway

**To a place where they could make their home**

Let them give thanks to the LORD For he is good Psalm 107 vs 4 -9

Take some moments to reflect on how your life was (or is) without God. You may be able to look back to a time when you were not a Christian. You may not be sure that you are Christian now. You may always had a faith but you may have had times when you wandered from God. How did you find your way home? Do you experience in your Christian life times of dryness and hunger and times when you don't know God's direction.?

*Most of us know what it's like to be lost or take a wrong turning. Most of us can remember a time when we had to miss a meal or two and felt hungry. Both of these feelings are symbols of what life is like without God's love and mercy.*

*For many people, life really is like being lost in a parched desert, stranded and unable to find the way home. There is a lack of direction in life and there is no way to navigate. Hunger and thirst set in: a longing for something more, something new, something that satisfies.*

*There is a sense in the dryness of daily life of restlessness and discontent. We long for something better. We have a sense of being not truly at home here.*

*Different people address that inner lostness in different ways. Some try and satisfy the spiritual hunger and thirst by trying to become rich only to find that physical food and drink do not satisfy. Some deal with their restlessness by constantly wandering from one place or relationship to another. Some imagine that if only they reach their next goal then everything will fall into place.*

*Others try to deaden the longing with drink or drugs or sex. Most people just give up and lose hope that things could ever be different. We learn to live with our lostness and our discontent. Spiritual hunger becomes a way of life.*

*Still others have no way to navigate through life: no strong principles or values; no moral compass; no way of choosing or making decisions. As their life goes on and difficulties come upon them they simply come to feel more and more lost. Sooner or later, the scrap heap gets them.*

## 18th November Chaos to comfort

Mark 4 vs 35—41 Ps 107 23—32

It's not difficult, then, to imagine that kind of physical chaos invading our lives. It happens to people we know. It is much more common, of course, to experience at some point inner chaos and being subject to forces beyond our control. In the present recession, many people have had their homes repossessed or their life savings affected by events in the global economy. The decisions that led to these events were taken in boardrooms in Manhattan or Kuala Lumpur, way beyond their own control. Still others lose their jobs and their futures because of decisions taken by multinational companies on the other side of the world they can do nothing about. The forces of chaos break in.

Many people's lives are affected by mental illness or conditions of various kinds, which disable them either in very public ways or more personal ones. It feels to people in those circumstances that the forces of chaos are just under the surface, waiting to break through. Others are drawn into addictions to habits such as gambling or the regular abuse of alcohol or drugs, which, as it were, unleash the forces of chaos within their emotional lives and work and families. Still other people are subject to multiple pressures of poverty and peer pressure and difficult family backgrounds. They often describe their lives as chaotic. As soon as one thing is put right or help is received in one area, the chaos and disorder pulls them down in a different direction. Still others experience chaos in their lives or health or bereavement or serious illness, redundancy or relationship breakdown.

The peace we can know in Christ is like the calm we experience when wind and waves are stilled. It is a place we can describe as a safe harbor. Everyone who becomes a Christian shares in this movement; from being storm tossed to being centred and having inner peace. Sometimes that movement takes many years. The storm and the chaos do not subside instantly.

As you look back over the story of your Christian life can you see how you have been travelling from being storm tossed and blown about to a place of peace and inner calm?

Is it possible to identify both a larger movement and more recent episodes where you have felt this?

What things in our lives make for chaos? What things make for peace?

## Remembrance

We will use themes from our series as we mark Remembrance Day today.

We will think of places in the world where war has brought chaos, we will think of places where God has brought healing and calm.

We will think of situations where men and women have given up their freedom for their principles or their faith and have brought freedom to millions.

We will think of situations where Christ has brought healing to broken lands



The Corrymeela Community was founded in 1965 by the Rev Dr Ray Davey assisted by a group of students from Queen's University, Belfast.

The seeds for the community were initially sown

during World War II, when Ray's experiences as a prisoner of war coupled with his witnessing of the Allied bombing of Dresden and its consequent loss of life, made an indelible impression on him.

*There is no place where God is not,*

*Wherever I go, there God is*

*Now and always he upholds me with his power*

*And keeps me safe in his love*

## 30th September Harvest Barrenness to fruitfulness

In John 15, with the wonderful image of the vine, there are again many references to 'bearing fruit'. Fruit in the Bible means a range of different things, It can mean a changed society (as in Isaiah 5), It can mean inner change: the fruits of the Holy Spirit (as in Galatians 5,22ff.); it can mean a great harvest for God's kingdom - the growth of the church (as in Matthew 9,37-38). Human life is also a search for fruitfulness, for abundance. This is sometimes distorted into a desire for an abundance of possessions or status or power or influence, However, there is also a deeply rooted, God-given longing in each person in creation to live a life that bears fruit, which makes a difference, and is given purpose and meaning through the fruit we bear. This longing to bear fruit and make a difference is seen in the desire to have children and see them grow to maturity, It is seen in people's longing for fulfilment in the work that they do, People long not simply to be employed or to have work that suits their gifts, but to be involved in producing or making something that is worthwhile. We see the same God-given longings in the creative arts; in cooking; in gardening; in design; in music, There is deep satisfaction in creativity and fruitfulness - in making and seeing the product of our labours. To make and produce different things is part of what it means to be human. This means in turn that many people are dissatisfied with their lives and own an inner restlessness because their lives feel barren. It may be a literal barrenness - the inability to conceive a child - which is one of the hardest challenges life brings. It may be a sense that the work we do is pointless and without meaning, or that the way we spend our time does not satisfy.

To become a Christian is to discover that God in his mercy and grace has not created us to be consumers in society or pew fillers in the church. God has called us to be partners and co-workers. He has meaningful work for us to do according to the gifts and abilities he has blessed us with. To be a Christian is to consecrate our lives to his service and seek to discover at each stage of our lives our proper calling to fruitful work. What kind of soil are we called to be? Barren? Or abundant?

## Sharing your story

As you look back over the story of your Christian life can you identify times when that life was barren and times when you have borne fruit? Where do you think you are in this present season?

What do the barren times have in common? What about the fruitful times? Are there lessons you can share with one another?

## 7th October In prison and now set free Psalm 107 10—16

I find visiting prisons a sombre experience. On my last two visits I've fallen into what seem at one level like normal, everyday conversations with prisoners only to realize part way through that only one of us is able to go home afterwards and resume normal life. For the other person, most of each day will be spent locked in a small cell with very little freedom allowed and very few visitors.

Most of us, thank God, never experience what it's like to be locked up and in prison. But most of us will find out what it means to be trapped in different ways by our circumstances and unable to escape them. It's very common to feel trapped by debt and by our financial circumstances. Many have been tempted to borrow beyond their means by banks who should have known better. Others fall victim to loan sharks who prey on the most vulnerable.

I've talked over the years to people who feel trapped in their jobs. Something they once enjoyed now seems a drudge. They have been passed over for promotion and life is going nowhere.

Others can feel very trapped at times in relationships that have seen better times or by the responsibilities of family life. Others feel trapped because negative emotions such as depression or anxiety make them a prisoner locked in their own home or into certain patterns of behaviour. There are many ways today of being a prisoner.

This Song of Freedom recognizes all these different ways of being trapped and held prisoner

Notice how the prisoners are held captive because of their rebellion (Psalm 107 vs 10, 11)... We make chains for ourselves through our choices or our wrong actions....

Take some moments once again to reflect on how your life was (or is) without God. You may be able to look back to a time when you were not a Christian. You may not be sure that you are a Christian now.

Tell part of your story to one another using the language of being trapped and in prison. What was it like? How has God set you free?

Can you see anything in your own life similar to Jacob Marley's chains or John Bunyan's great burden?

Do you experience in your Christian life now times when you feel trapped and like a prisoner? How do you deal with this?

## November 4th Chaos to calmness

Psalm 107 23—32 Matthew 7 vs 24—25

People who first sang this Psalm may not have known what it was like to be in a storm at sea. However every one of them would have known what it was like to be subject to forces of chaos in this world beyond their control: to be taken up to the heights and brought down to the depths. They would know what it feels like when your spirit or your courage melts away before these powerful forces of disorder beyond your own control. They would know that feeling when wisdom or skill disappears and you are left naked before the storm, at the end of your own resources.



They would have prayed to the LORD in those moments and many would have experienced salvation and God's mercy as peace and calm in the midst of life events that feel like storms. Many would have experienced the deep inner peace that comes from God's presence in difficult situations. Many would have known the stilling of the outer storms as order emerges from chaotic lives.

In many ways human life today is very different. We seem to have much more control over our environment. But the images of chaos and storms remain very helpful in making sense of life. Many people do experience chaos and storm in all kinds of ways. Natural disasters strike in different parts of the world and we see through our television screens or through relatives and friends caught up in those disasters the chaos that they bring to carefully ordered human communities. In our own country we are subject to greater and greater extreme weather events. Last year I was taken to visit someone in Sheffield who had been affected by the massive floods in the city a few years ago. I was shown the place six feet up on the living room wall in an ordinary home where the flood water reached in just a few hours. I was told of the chaos and devastation that followed.

*Several members of our congregation have come to Sheffield having escaped severe situations in their home countries.*

*Reflect on our Karen brothers and sisters and what they have left behind in Burma.*

*Think about those who have fled persecution in Zimbabwe, Nigeria and Cameroon.*

*If you were in their situation how would you react?*

"We have hope. A sure and steadfast anchor of the soul" Hebrews 6 vs 19

## All Saints Day 1st November

<sup>1</sup> We are surrounded by a great cloud of people whose lives tell us what faith means. So let us run the race that is before us and never give up. We should remove from our lives anything that would get in the way and the sin that so easily holds us back. <sup>2</sup> Let us look only to Jesus, the One who began our faith and who makes it perfect. He suffered death on the cross. But he accepted the shame as if it were nothing because of the joy that God put before him. And now he is sitting at the right side of God's throne. <sup>3</sup> Think about Jesus' example. He held on while wicked people were doing evil things to him. So do not get tired and stop trying. Hebrews chapter 12



We are just over half way through our series on God's mercy. Spend some time looking back through the booklet and underlining anything that has meant something to you. All Saints Day is a special day when we remind ourselves that we are not alone in our struggles but that many Christians have gone before us.

## 14th October Prisoners set free Mark 5 vs 1–20

Repeat Ps 107 vs 10–16

Refresh your memory from last week where we were looking at Psalm 107 vs 10—'Some of you were prisoners living in deepest darkness'

Did God bring to mind any areas in your life where you feel a prisoner?

Today we look at an incredible story from Mark 5 where Jesus meets a man who lived in a graveyard.



What kind of person would live in a graveyard?

5 vs 3– 5 Look at the description of this man. Pick out phrases to show how desperate he was.

(When I worked in prison I met many people who cut themselves, who yelled out, people who 'no one could control'). Tie in this description with Psalm 107—suffering vs 10, rebelled vs 11, worn

out vs 12 , serious trouble vs 13

The spirits in the man recognize Jesus and Jesus knows them. He commands them to go out into a herd of pigs.

Vs 15 After the incident the man is found sitting with Jesus with his clothes on and in his right mind.

There are lots of questions surrounding mental illness, spirits, and healing but the main message is that this man who was trapped, chained and lost is set free, made well and is even given a task by Jesus to go and tell his family 'what the Lord has done for you'.

Spend some time thanking God for what he has done for you. Maybe you or a family member struggles with mental illness, let the story reassure you that Jesus knows, Jesus cares and Jesus heals.

## 21st Oct Sick and made well Ps 107 17–22

Jesus healed the sick as a physical sign of God's love restoring all that is lost in an imperfect world. For that reason Christians from earliest times have prayed for the sick. The ministry of healing has been part of the life of the Church in every generation. The prayer and care for the sick has also resulted down the centuries in Christian involvement in the healing professions and in medicine and medical research. Sometimes our prayers for healing are answered directly in ways we cannot understand. Sometimes they may not be answered and physical healing is not given.

This too leaves questions for faith and difficult emotions. We need the love and care of others in those times more than we need neat answers to our questions. We need also to express our pain and grief and questions in prayer to God.

For the core dis-ease of the human soul, however, there is always healing in God's grace. When our souls are sick and diseased because of our sin and the choices we have made, there is always healing and forgiveness in the cross of Christ. Our relationship with God can be forged again because of his love and his grace and his salvation. That healing comes through the Word sent by God.

As a bishop, one of my roles is to license and institute vicars to parishes as they begin a new ministry there. The most solemn part of the service is where I read the licence aloud to the new vicar and then hand it to them with the words: 'Receive the cure of souls which is both yours and mine.'

The phrase 'cure of souls' is an ancient one. It means much more than 'care of souls', which might be expressed through love, listening and affection. It is about the gradual healing and restoration to wholeness that is at the heart of the Christian journey. This cure of souls is at the heart of ordained ministry and all Christian leadership. A local church should be a place where people are growing in spiritual health - where souls are being cured. The cure of souls does not only refer to the time when we come to faith. The cure of souls is a lifelong process. Throughout our whole lives Christ is calling us to deeper and deeper spiritual health and maturity. That journey is a journey from disease to wholeness.

## 28th Oct Sick and made well Mark 5 vs 21–43

In the story in Mark chapter 5 we meet a lady who has been sick for 12 years.

Vs 25 Look at the description of her. Can you imagine how she felt?



Vs 27—“She barely touched his clothes”. Why was she so timid?  
Vs 29 What happened? Compare the end of verse 26 with the end of verse 29.

Vs 30-31 What was Jesus reaction?

Vs 33 What does the

woman do?

Vs 34 Look at the beautiful words Jesus says to her.

Look back over the story of your Christian life.

How has your journey of faith been like a journey from spiritual sickness to spiritual health? What kind of medicine has God used?

How have you experienced the cure of souls?

If you can, share some examples of ways in which you have been healed from diseases of the soul. In what ways can you see you have become less proud or selfish or more open to others or more able to forgive?



What means has God used in this journey of healing? Was it the particular words of a friend or counsellor? Was it a moment of grace in the Eucharist or a passage of Scripture? Was it a specific prayer for inner healing?