

**St Stephen's, Canonbury**  
**Lent 2016 - Challenged to Change**

**Lent Reflection and Study Material**

**Lent 1:** Remember your first love

**Readings:** Revelation 2:1-7; Matthew 22:24-30

**Revelation 2:1-7**

"To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands: I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary.

4 Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love. Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place. But you have this in your favour: You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.

**Matthew 22:34-40**

Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

**Study material**

(Family friendly version follows at the end)

Begin by reading the 2 passages through. Is there anything that strikes you as particularly meaningful or puzzling or challenging? Just share any particular verses together or hold the words in prayer. Ask that God will help your understanding.

St John is in prison in Patmos when he has the vision now described in the Book of Revelation. Are there any times when you feel God has spoken to you through a vision or through giving you particular words of promise that have been important to you or were important to someone else?

The first few verses of the letter to Ephesus describe how the church has resisted heresy, rejected wickedness and endured hardship. In their 1st century pagan context it is easy to see the things they struggled against. But what about the church today? Are there ways in which we need to resist heresy, reject wickedness and endure hardship? If so, what are they and how can we do so?

But despite all the things they are commended for, there is something very wrong – they have 'forsaken their first love.' Clearly there are things that are missing from their life as a church. What do you think are the qualities that should mark out a Christian community as a loving community? Are there times you remember when you have really felt loved and cared for in a church?

The love we should have as Christians should be modelled on the love that God has shown towards us in Jesus. If this is going to happen, we need to take in the depth of this love. Is it really possible to understand? Do you remember any moments in your life when an experience of God's over-whelming love has sustained you and encouraged you and given you hope when you really needed it?

At St Stephen's we are very busy. Our time and energy is consumed by the things we do as individuals and as a community. But what would Jesus say to the 'Angel of St Stephen's' today? And particularly what would he say about the presence and practice of love within our community?

Finish by reading the Passage from Matthew. Read it slowly. Try to listen for the voice of Jesus in the words. Spend some time in silence asking that God will challenge us to change at St Stephen's and in our own lives.

Lord, challenge us to change,  
That we may be rooted in love,  
And that our first love – our love of you,  
May always be foremost in our lives;  
Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

### **Family friendly version**

If you are going to look at this material with children, use these questions.

Jesus says that the most important thing we should do is to love God with all our heart and mind and strength.

Think of 3 reasons why we should love God

Jesus then said that we must love our neighbour as ourselves. That means doing things for others that we would want done for us if we were in their situation.

Think of 3 ways in which you could show love to others.

In the sermon we heard about a church in Ephesus who had got so busy doing things that they had forgotten to love God and each other.

What happens when you are really busy?

Do you find it easy to lose your patience and be bad tempered with people?

What could we do to stop this happening?

God calls us to love people because of the love that he has shown to us in sending Jesus to live and die and rise again. God loves everyone.

Think of someone you find it hard to like and pray for them.

A prayer

Loving God,  
I want to be a person of love,  
Help me to love you more,  
And help me to love others as you have loved me;  
Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen