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Briefing 98: Wednesday 19th January, 2022.

Dear friends,

Firstly, a reminder that **HOPE EXPLORED** starts on Thursday evening at 7:30pm, in the lower parish room at St Nicholas.

If your faith needs a reboot, or you're still considering whether to become a Christian, or you have a friend who is searching for hope in this mixed-up world, then this 3-session course is for you.

Why not give it a go? Just let Mike and Evelyn know that you are coming on enquiries@saintnicholaschurch.org.uk or call me on 01438 213587 and I'll let them know.


HOPE EXPLORED
 WHAT'S THE BEST FUTURE YOU COULD EVER IMAGINE?
 Monday afternoons from 1:30pm on 17th, 24th and 31st Jan
 OR Thursday evenings from 7:30pm on 20th, 27th Jan and 3rd Feb.
 To book a place or find out more, email enquiries@saintnicholaschurch.org.uk or call Dave on 01438 213587

Hope Explored is an informal and relaxed 3-week course, looking at the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. We believe that in Jesus we find real hope and a joyful expectation for the future, based on true events in the past, which changes everything about our present.
 It's for anyone who wants to find hope, peace and purpose in life.
 It's run by ordinary Christian people local to you, and is completely free.
 You don't need to know anything about the Bible, you won't be asked to pray or sing.
 You can ask any question you like, or you can just sit and listen.
 Whoever you are, whatever you're thinking, **Hope Explored** is a place for you to discover the hope of a future that is better than you could ever imagine.
 Why not come and find out more?

So how are your New Year's resolutions going, particularly the spiritual ones about growing in your faith, your knowledge and understanding of God, and your Christ-like character? Have you managed to make some changes already? Or have the changes you were aiming for two weeks ago already proved too much of a challenge?

It's very easy to be discouraged and to give up. It's very easy to look at others and think that they are finding things so much easier and get downhearted. It's very easy to forget and be distracted as the things of everyday life take over. But that isn't unusual. That has been the lot of Christians from across the ages. Our times may be different, but the challenges remain the same. We battle, as the baptism service puts it, against our sinful selves, against the broken and painful world and against our enemy, the devil, who prowls around like a lion, looking for people to devour.

But if you feel overwhelmed, discouraged or downhearted right now, please don't give up. Over the weeks leading up to the start of Lent I'm going to encourage you to keep going, to redouble your efforts so that at the end of 2022 you might look back and rejoice in all that God has done in you and through you. But whilst the last 2 weeks have attempted to be practical in terms of what we might do, the following encouragements are entirely theological, focussing on who God is and on what God has done and is doing for us, right now. We'll start with Paul's words from Philippians 1 verse 6: **'I am confident of this, that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.'**

Paul is writing to the church in Philippi, a church which was downhearted because of the persecution and imprisonment of Paul, and a church that faced divisions within and opposition without. Yet despite these things Paul tells them that he is confident that God's work in them will bear fruit, and that it will continue until the day Jesus returns.

On what is Paul basing his confidence? On 2 things: that the Philippians really have trusted in Jesus, and that God always finishes what he starts. Let's consider the first one of those now. Paul was confident in the Philippian's faith. Having heard the gospel through Paul, they had repented and believed and been baptised in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. As a result, they were part of God's holy people in Christ Jesus, they had received grace and peace from God, they had been adopted into God's family and now were partners with Paul in the gospel. Because of this, Paul is absolutely certain that what God began he will bring to completion.

One of my friends has recently had a baby and from time to time he delights to tell me how well their daughter is doing compared to the expected gains in weight and development. There is no chart for Christian growth like that, but if we know that we have repented of our sin and believed in Jesus we can be sure that we are in Christ and that God's Holy Spirit is in us. And having been brought to new life through faith in Jesus Christ, we will grow. God has said it. Over time God will have his way in us, and we will gradually become more and more like Jesus. Of course, we help, support and encourage that growth by our prayer and Bible reading, and by regular fellowship in the church and with Christians, but the growth itself is God's work and he will see it through.

To paraphrase Taylor Swift, haters gonna hate, players gonna play, fakers gonna fake... **and Christians gonna grow.** It's in our new DNA. It's part of who we are in Christ. That growth may be slow, sporadic or erratic. There may be seasons of

decline, of regress, but over the length of our lives we will grow more like Jesus and we can be certain that God's work in us will be brought to completion on the day of Christ Jesus.

So Christian, do not despair. When you fail and fall, repent and start over. When you are discouraged, keep going, for your efforts are not in vain. God's plans often take a long time to come to fruition, but if you are in Christ you can change and you will grow. The work God began when you put your trust in Jesus, he will carry on to completion.

Dave

IMPORTANT STUFF – DON'T JUST GLANCE- TAKE IT ALL IN!

PRAYER GATHERINGS: Our next Prayer Gathering is on Wednesday 26th from 7:45pm. This will be both in-person and via zoom for those who can't make it in person. Our next 7-8am early morning zoom prayer will be on Tuesday 1st February. Why not put those dates in your diary now and commit to coming along?

The church will also be open for **visitors and private prayer** on Tuesdays from 2-4pm, Wednesdays from 12noon-2pm and Thursdays from 10am-12 noon. If you'd like to join the band of church sitters, please speak to Karen Walker.

COVID PROTOCOLS: A reminder. If you sit in a **masked** area of the church, please keep your face coverings on for **the whole service**. If you'd rather **sing** without a mask, please sit in the 'mask free' areas provided. Government advice is that we take a **lateral flow test** before meeting lots of people. We have some free kits in church. Why not take one and use it either on Saturday evening or first thing Sunday morning before you come?

READINGS FOR THE NEXT FEW WEEKS: The readings for the next 3 weeks are as follows:

23rd January: Matt 21:33-46 30th January: Matt 22:1-14 6th February: Matt 22:15-22

FLOWER ARRANGING: If you'd like to join the Flower Arranging Team at St Nicholas, please see Chris Chambers – full training is given. Sessions are on Thursdays 10am-12pm, and 7-9pm at St Nicholas.

EVANGELISM TRAINING ON SATURDAY 29th JANUARY from 9:30am-2pm in the Parish Room at St Nicholas - The London City Mission team are coming to help train us to go out with the Gospel whether that is door to door or reaching out to family and friends (see Karen Walker for more details). Lunch and refreshments will be provided.

LIVING IN LOVE AND FAITH. You'll have heard me mention this before, but the LLF consultation is now drawing to a close and we have until the end of April to make any comments on whether the Church of England should change its beliefs and practises surrounding marriage and gender. To help us think through these issues again, we're going to be running a **2-session course from 6pm-8pm on Sunday 27th February and 6th March**. We'll be looking at some of the LLF videos and materials, looking at the scriptures and considering how we might respond. If you'd like to come, please let me or Martin Bailey know.

If you'd like to take part in the full 5-session course, various courses will be running around the diocese, including an on-line course led by the Bishop of Hertford. The sessions are all on Wednesday evenings, from 7.30pm – 9pm. The dates are: 26th January; 2nd February; 9th February; 23rd February and 9th March.

You can follow this link to book a place: [LLF Eventbrite booking with more details available at Living in Love & Faith - Diocese of St Albans \(anglican.org\)](https://www.eventbrite.com/e/living-in-love-and-faith-dioocese-of-st-albans-tickets-28444444444). www.stalbans.anglican.org/living-love-and-faith/

Last year a working party from the PCC reviewed the course and materials and had this advice for anyone seeking to engage with it.

- 1: **do it with someone else from the church** so you can chat things through afterwards.
- 2: **do it with your eyes open to the internal biases of the course** such as the use of emotion in its storytelling, making personal experience equal with scripture when it comes to seeking truth, and presenting different points of view as equally valid without clear reasons why. These have been well documented.
- 3: **do it prayerfully**. The church is under huge pressure from within and without to change its teaching on these issues. Of course, if the church really has misinterpreted the scriptures for the last 2000 years, then we should change, but any change must be based on the scriptures, not emotion or personal experience, and so we need God's help to understand his Word correctly.

If you do sign up for the online course or something else in the diocese, do please let me know how you get on.