

## ***The Naked Anabaptist: Study Guide***

This short study guide is designed for small groups who have read *The Naked Anabaptist* or are reading it together.

### **Core conviction 1**

Jesus is our example, teacher, friend, redeemer and Lord. He is the source of our life, the central reference point for our faith and lifestyle, for our understanding of church and our engagement with society. We are committed to following Jesus as well as worshipping him.

1. 'Example, teacher, friend, redeemer, Lord': with which of these designations of Jesus do you *least* identify? How might you explore this further?
2. What examples can you give of Jesus being 'the central reference point' for your life or your church? What examples can you give of him *not* being this?
3. Do you agree that in many places Jesus is worshipped but not followed? What are the implications of this?
4. Hans Denck wrote: 'No one can know Christ unless he follows after him in life.' Do you agree? Or is this a return to 'salvation by works'?
5. How do you respond to the proposal that we should drop the term 'Christians' and call ourselves 'followers of Jesus'?

### **Core conviction 2**

Jesus is the focal point of God's revelation. We are committed to a Jesus-centred approach to the Bible, and to the community of faith as the primary context in which we read the Bible and discern and apply its implications for discipleship.

1. Does a 'Jesus-centred approach to the Bible' inevitably mean that parts of Scripture are downgraded?
2. Think about Bible studies you have participated in. Have these avoided 'the pooling of ignorance'? How can Christians be resourced to discern and apply the implications of the Bible?
3. How can churches resist the default dominance of monologue sermons? Or should they even try?

4. What practical strategies can you suggest to ensure that biblical interpretation does not get stuck but leads on to application and discipleship?

5. Try out the practice of 'dwelling in the Word'. Choose a biblical passage and give each person a copy of this. Read the passage aloud, and then allow a period of quiet reflection. Now share with another person what struck you and listen to their reflection. Then tell the rest of the group what your reflection partner noticed (*not what you did*).

### **Core conviction 3**

Western culture is slowly emerging from the Christendom era when church and state jointly presided over a society in which almost all were assumed to be Christian. Whatever its positive contributions on values and institutions, Christendom seriously distorted the gospel, marginalised Jesus and has left the churches ill-equipped for mission in a post-Christendom culture. As we reflect on this, we are committed to learning from the experience and perspectives of movements such as Anabaptism that rejected standard Christendom assumptions and pursued alternative ways of thinking and behaving.

1. How much evidence can you find that your community is in post-Christendom?
2. Are Anabaptists too hung up on Christendom – unable to appreciate its huge benefits and locked into an unhelpful Christendom/post-Christendom framework?
3. What 'alternative ways of thinking and behaving' does the Anabaptist tradition offer? How might you learn from these?
4. How might you access the insights of other marginalised movements and check out whether they shared Anabaptist perspectives?
5. How helpful do you find the analogy of 'exile' to describe the situation of the church in the West? Are there other helpful motifs we could use?

### **Core conviction 4**

The frequent association of the church with status, wealth and force is inappropriate for followers of Jesus and damages our witness. We are committed to vulnerability and to exploring ways of being good news to the poor, powerless and persecuted, aware that such discipleship may attract opposition, resulting in suffering and sometimes ultimately martyrdom.

1. How can Christians avoid becoming associated with status and wealth if the gospel is effective in a society and wins many adherents? Should they try to avoid this?

2. In what ways does 'association with status, wealth and force' damage the witness of followers of Jesus?
3. What examples can you give of ways in which you or others have been 'good news to the poor'?
4. What opportunities are available to a church on the margins that were not possible for a dominant church?
5. How do western Christians engage with 2 Timothy 3:12?

### **Core conviction 5**

Churches are called to be committed communities of discipleship and mission, places of friendship, mutual accountability and multi-voiced worship. As we eat together, sharing bread and wine, we sustain hope as we seek God's kingdom together. We are committed to nurturing and developing such churches, in which young and old are valued, leadership is consultative, roles are related to gifts rather than gender and baptism is for believers.

1. Is it realistic in contemporary culture to practise mutual admonition? How would a church go about introducing this practice?
2. What role do eating and hospitality play in your Christian experience? How might you explore these practices in new ways?
3. How can your community find a healthy balance between consultation and leadership?
4. What kinds of people in your experience are in the greatest danger of being excluded? How can their voices be heard?
5. What difference would it make to your church if Hubmaier's 'pledge of love' was used regularly and thoughtfully when you share bread and wine?

### **Core conviction 6**

Spirituality and economics are inter-connected. In an individualist and consumerist culture and in a world where economic injustice is rife, we are committed to finding ways of living simply, sharing generously, caring for creation and working for justice.

1. What difference does it make whether we are motivated by charity or justice in our use of our resources?
2. Read together Acts 2:42-47 and Acts 4:32-37. Were those Anabaptist right who found here a biblical mandate for common purse community?

3. How in practice do spirituality and economic interconnect? Which has the greater influence on the other?
4. What might you do to resist the influence of individualism and consumerism on your own life?
5. What are the problems with the contemporary practice of tithing in many churches?

## **Core conviction 7**

Peace is at the heart of the gospel. As followers of Jesus in a divided and violent world, we are committed to finding non-violent alternatives and to learning how to make peace between individuals, within and among churches, in society and between nations.

1. Do you agree that 'peace is at the heart of the gospel'? If not, how important is peace in relation to the gospel?
2. Is the 'Just War' approach still applicable in the context of modern warfare? If it were applied, what difference would it make?
3. Is it important that advocates of non-violence should be able to demonstrate that this approach is effective?
4. What peace initiatives are you involved in, or might you get involved in?
5. 'Let the Christians of the world agree that they will not kill each other.' How do you respond to this 'modest proposal for peace'?

## **And finally...**

1. What aspects of the Anabaptist tradition do you find inspirational or challenging?
2. How might you respond to these?
3. What aspects of the Anabaptist tradition do you find least attractive? Why?
4. What topics in *The Naked Anabaptist* do you want to explore further? How will you do this?