

These notes give a gentle introduction to the subject of spiritual formation, and are intended to be used before hearing Sermon 2. They have been designed to be accessible to a wide range of people and, although they will be more fun to use in a group, they may also be used by people working on their own.

STUDY NOTES 1

THIS IS MY SONG

Popular songs reflect aspects of the culture, thinking and mood of their day. Even if the songs have no appeal for us, it's difficult to remain totally unaffected by the culture. The songs are therefore a useful barometer – a guide to pressures which might be shaping us. So, these questions are a bit of fun with a point!

QUESTIONS

What's the earliest popular song you can remember from childhood?

Are there other songs from your youth which have stayed with you?

What do the words of these songs say about 'the way the world is'? (About the world, people, God, life in general.)

How do they reflect the mood of the time in which they were written?

Is what they say *true*?

What do today's popular songs tell us about how the song-writers are seeing the world around them?

Is what they say *true*? As followers of Jesus, how may we respond?

Thinking of songs (of any sort, including hymns) which particularly appeal to you at the moment, do you think they are a window on how you are seeing life, or not?

(If taking 2 weeks, you could save this question for next time.)

Some people like to choose the music and songs or hymns for their funeral well ahead of time, in case they don't have the opportunity later. Do you know what you would choose, and why?

Apparently, some are keen to have a recording of Frank Sinatra singing 'I did it my way'. What do you think this might be revealing?

STUDY 1

Read Psalm 23.

Make a list of the things David's psalm tells us about his view of 'the way the world is'? (*as above*)

Is what his psalm says *true*?

How do you think the time when it was written differs from today?

STUDY 2

Read Mary's Song (Luke 1:46-55, also from verse 26 to see the context).

What does Mary's Song tell us about her view of 'the way the world is'?

How do you think this view might have affected her attitude to the role God was giving her?

OPTIONAL EXTRA

Consider writing your own Psalm, expressing what's in your heart to God. Would it be a psalm of praise? A lament? Or a bit of both?

Psalms are a form of poetry, and include lots of mixed emotions and thoughts. See for example Psalm 69, in which David pours everything out to God at a time when he's feeling overwhelmed. He's fed up with being falsely accused, gossiped about, shamed and disgraced, and his heart is breaking. So don't feel that what you write has to be 'pretty'! It can be real; God can cope!

Take as much time as you need. The end result will be between you and God – you will not have to show it to anyone.