



Diocese of Bristol
Creating connections

'CREATING CONNECTIONS' FIVE WEEK DISCIPLESHIP COURSE



www.bristol.anglican.org

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the Diocese of Bristol 'Creating connections' Discipleship Course resource.

The Discipleship course is themed around our diocesan vision, 'Creating connections', and leads participants to consider what it means to be a disciple connected to God, each other and our communities.

It is our prayer that, as small groups meet together across the Diocese to spend time exploring God's word through this resource, we would discover afresh what it means to be a follower of Christ bearing witness to His name.

Each session is accompanied by a leader's guide which includes the suggested elements of each session:

- A hospitality idea and introductory activity to help people to connect and build relationships with each other.
- A Bible study and prayer activity to help people explore and deepen their connection with God. Each study has been written by a different member of the Bishop's Staff Team.
- A topic question for groups to discuss and a challenge for people to undertake during that week, to help them to connect with the communities of which they are a part. Each topic's introduction has been written by Janey Hiller.

You are free to edit the session as you see fit to meet the needs of your group.

Each session is also accompanied by a participants' sheet which includes the questions for the Bible study. Again you are free to edit and adapt these questions as you feel appropriate.



WEEK 1 // What do we mean when we call God *Father*?

Bible study written by The Very Revd Dr David Hoyle, Dean of Bristol Cathedral

WEEK 2 // How now shall we live?

Bible study written by The Rt Revd Mike Hill, Bishop of Bristol

WEEK 3 // Holiness

Bible study written by The Ven Christine Froude, Archdeacon

WEEK 4 // Our identity in Christ

Bible study written by The Rt Revd Dr Lee Rayfield, Bishop of Swindon

WEEK 5 // I am who I am

Bible study written by Revd Canon Derek Chedzey

The leader's guide and the participants' sheet for each session can be downloaded from www.bristol.anglican.org.

HELPFUL TIPS

Good groups flow from thorough preparation and prayer.

Decide well in advance when and where you will meet and who will be invited to join the group.

Make sure you communicate clearly with group participants about when and where the meetings will take place and what they can expect from the five weeks.

If your church is hosting multiple groups then you might consider hosting a training evening for group leaders, and/or a celebration gathering for members of all the groups to come together after the five weeks to reflect on their journeys.

We recommend that you read through the five leader's guides before the five weeks begin so that you have a good overview understanding of how the five weeks fit together and what preparation may be required before each session.

**If you have any questions or would like any additional support please contact
Chris Priddy chris.priddy@bristoldiocese.org 0117 9060100**

SESSION GUIDE | LEADERS GUIDE

SESSION TITLE // What do we mean when we call God *Father*?

WRITTEN BY // The Very Revd Dr David Hoyle, Dean of Bristol Cathedral

BIBLE PASSAGE // John 14 verses 1-12

This leader's guide provides you with our suggested session outline for the first session of the 'Creating connections' Discipleship course. There is an accompanying participant's worksheet which should be printed and given to each group member during the session. You are free to lead your group through each of the elements that make up the session, or to skip over or alter elements that you do not think would be appropriate for your group.

HOSPITALITY -----



Chocoholics themed evening // As you gather for the first time serve a range of chocolate related goodies to your group as they arrive: mini chocolate bars, chocolate confectionery, truffles, biscuits, cakes and hot chocolate to drink.

CONNECTING WITH EACH OTHER -----



Who am I // Set a timer for 30 seconds. Invite everyone to introduce themselves and to share with the group as many interesting facts about themselves as they can within that time limit.

CONNECTING WITH GOD BIBLE STUDY -----



Title // What do we mean when we call God *Father*?

Written by // The Very Revd Dr David Hoyle, Dean of Bristol Cathedral

Worship Activity // 'Lord teach us to pray'

The Leader says

In the name of the Father
and of the Son
and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen**

The Leader continues

Lord teach us to pray

After a prayerful silence

O Lord, teach me to seek you,
and reveal yourself to me when I seek you.
For I cannot seek you unless you first teach me,
nor find you unless you first reveal yourself to me.
Let me seek you in longing, and long for you in seeking.
Let me find you in love, and love you in finding
St Ambrose

After a short silence

Immortal, invisible, God only wise,
in light inaccessible hid from our eyes,

most blessed, most glorious, the Ancient of Days,
almighty, victorious, thy great Name we praise.
Unresting, unhasting, and silent as light,
nor wanting, nor wasting, thou rulest in might;
thy justice like mountains high soaring above
thy clouds, which are fountains of goodness and love.

To all life thou givest, to both great and small;
in all life thou livest, the true life of all;
we blossom and flourish, like leaves on the tree,
then wither and perish; but nought changeth thee.

Great Father of glory, pure Father of light,
thine angels adore thee, all veiling their sight;
all laud we would render: O help us to see
'tis only the splendour of light hideth thee.

After a further short silence the Leader says

As Jesus taught us, so we pray

The Lord's Prayer is recited aloud by the group.

Bible Reading // John 14 verses 1-12



Thought //

To be shared with the group

We pray Our Father often. We are used to calling God Father and we get used to the idea that we are close to God the Father and that we know God.

Now you have looked at that passage of John's Gospel, what does Jesus say about knowing God?

What do we know? How do we know?

Let us think about some other passages:

Luke 10:22 [Jesus said] All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, or who the Father is except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him."

John 6:46 [Jesus said] Not that anyone has seen the Father except the one who is from God; he has seen the Father.

? Question

What is the difference between saying we know God the Father and that we know God the Son?

Look at the Gloria from our Eucharist:

Glory to God in the highest,
and peace to his people on earth.
Lord God, heavenly King,
almighty God and Father,
we worship you, we give you thanks,
we praise you for your glory.

? Question

Does that tell us that we know God? Or does it say we come to God in a different way?

What do other passages in the Bible tell us?

Exodus 34:29-30. Moses came down from Mount Sinai. As he came down from the mountain with the two tablets of the covenant in his hand, Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God. When Aaron and all the Israelites saw Moses, the skin of his face was shining, and they were afraid to come near him.

Isaiah 6:5. "Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!"

John 1:18. No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made Him known.

Or, if you like poetry (not everyone does) try this:

*I have seen the sun break through
to illuminate a small field
for a while, and gone my way
and forgotten it. But that was the
pearl of great price, the one field that had
treasure in it. I realise now
that I must give all that I have
to possess it. Life is not hurrying
on to a receding future, nor hankering after
an imagined past. It is the turning
aside like Moses to the miracle
of the lit bush, to a brightness
that seemed as transitory as your youth
once, but is the eternity that awaits you.*

And if you do not like poetry, try this. The Jewish writer Isaac Bashevis Singer thought about describing God and said:

It is as if you were to ask a bookworm crawling inside a copy of War and Peace whether it is a good novel or a bad one. He is sitting on one little letter trying to get nourishment. How can he be a critic of Tolstoy?

? Questions for discussion

Considering the Bible reading:

1. *Where are Jesus and the disciples? What is happening?*
2. *What difference does the setting make?*
3. *Philip asks to see the Father; do you think he really understands what he is asking?*
4. *Look at Exodus 33:18-20 Moses said,*
"Show me your glory, I pray." And He said, "I will make all my goodness pass before you,
and will proclaim before you the name, 'The LORD'; and I will be gracious to whom I will be
gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. But," He said, "you cannot see
my face; for no one shall see me and live."
 Does that passage help us understand?
5. Think about the very beginning of John's Gospel; what does John think we can know and see?

Considering 'knowing God as Father':

1. Why might it be difficult, or even a little dangerous, to say we know God?
2. Might it sometimes be misleading or unhelpful to call God *Father*, or to call God *All Powerful*, or to talk about God's *strong arm*, or God's *all seeing eye*?
3. If we do not know God the Father, who (or what) do we know?
4. So why do we call God Father, and what do we mean?

Prayer // An Invocation — St Symeon

This could be a set prayer to be read, or an interactive prayer activity for people to participate in.

If read, take a line in turn.

Come, true light.
 Come, life eternal.
 Come, hidden mystery.
 Come, treasure without name.
 Come, reality beyond all words.
 Come, person beyond all understanding.
 Come, rejoicing without end.
 Come, light that knows no evening.
 Come, unfailing expectation of the saved.
 Come, the raising of the fallen.
 Come, the resurrection of the dead.
 Come, all-powerful, for unceasingly you create, refashion and change all things by your will alone.
 Come, invisible, whom none may touch and handle.
 Come, for you continue always unmoved, yet at every instant you are wholly in movement; you draw near to us who lie in hell, yet you remain higher than the heavens.
 Come, for your Name fills our hearts with longing and is ever on our lips; yet who you are and what your nature is, we cannot say or know.
 Come, eternal joy.

Come, Alone to the alone,
Come for you are yourself the desire that is within me, and you have caused me to long
after you, the wholly inaccessible.
Come, my breath and my life.
Come, the consolation of my humble soul.
Come, my joy, my glory, my endless delight.

CONNECTING WITH OUR COMMUNITIES -----



Each week the evening ends with a community related question to discuss and an action for people to undertake that week.

This week's theme for connecting with our communities is '**Love thy neighbour**'.

Introduction to read //

Jesus told the tale of the Good Samaritan in response to a lawyer asking him, "Who is my neighbour?" Luke's gospel tells us that the lawyer asked the question because he wanted to 'justify himself'; maybe he wanted to be sure of who is neighbour was so that he could also be sure of who his neighbour wasn't.

Like this lawyer, sometimes we can be tempted to 'rule in' or 'rule out' those we think of as neighbours and in doing so we limit 'loving our neighbour' just up to the boundary of our comfort zone.

Our starting point for loving others is that God loved us first. His love is greater than we can ever imagine and overflows from His grace and mercy to us. It is this love that we are called to share with all.

? Question to discuss

How well do you know your neighbours and, how well do they know you?

Action for the week // Speak to your neighbours this week, have a conversation with them, invite them in for a cuppa.

SESSION 1 PARTICIPANTS' SHEET

SESSION TITLE // What do we mean when we call God *Father*?

WRITTEN BY // The Very Revd Dr David Hoyle, Dean of Bristol Cathedral

BIBLE PASSAGE // John 14 verses 1-12

SUMMARY OF THIS WEEK'S THOUGHT



We pray 'Our Father' often. We are used to calling God *Father* and we get used to the idea that we are close to God the Father and that we know God.

Having looked at that passage of John's Gospel we must consider what Jesus says about knowing God.

What is the difference between saying we know God the Father and that we know God the Son?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION



Considering the Bible reading:

1. Where are Jesus and the disciples? What is happening?
2. What difference does the setting make?
3. Philip asks to see the Father; do you think he really understands what he is asking?
4. Look at Exodus 33:18-20 Moses said,
"Show me your glory, I pray." And He said, "I will make all my goodness pass before you, and will proclaim before you the name, 'The LORD'; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. But," He said, "you cannot see my face; for no one shall see me and live."
Does that passage help us understand?
5. Think about the very beginning of John's Gospel; what does John think we can know and see?

Considering 'knowing God as Father':

1. Why might it be difficult, or even a little dangerous, to say we know God?
2. Might it sometimes be misleading or unhelpful to call God *Father*, or to call God *All Powerful*, or to talk about God's *strong arm*, or God's *all seeing eye*?
3. If we do not know God the Father, who (or what) do we know?
4. So why do we call God *Father*, and what do we mean?

CONNECTING WITH OUR COMMUNITIES



'Love thy neighbour'

Question to discuss

How well do you know your neighbours and how well do they know you?

Action for this week // Speak to your neighbours this week; have a conversation with them; invite them in for a cuppa.

PRAYER

An Invocation — St Symeon



Come, true light.
Come, life eternal.
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Come, invisible, whom none may touch and handle.
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Come, eternal joy.
Come, Alone to the alone,
Come for you are yourself the desire that is within me, and you have caused me to long after you, the wholly inaccessible.
Come, my breath and my life.
Come, the consolation of my humble soul.
Come, my joy, my glory, my endless delight.

SESSION GUIDE 2 LEADERS GUIDE

SESSION TITLE // How now shall we live?

WRITTEN BY // Written by The Rt Revd Mike Hill, Bishop of Bristol

BIBLE PASSAGE // Mark 8 verses 34-38

This leader's guide provides you with our suggested session outline for the second session of the 'Creating connections' Discipleship course. There is an accompanying participants' worksheet which should be printed and given to each group member during the session. You are free to lead your group through each of the elements that make up the session, or to skip over or alter elements that you do not think would be appropriate for your group.

HOSPITALITY -----



Great British Bake Off week // Invite your guests to bring a cake that they have made to share with the group and award a 'star baker' award to the cake that the group decides is best! Alternatively you could provide three different cakes from local shops and invite the group to vote for the best cake.

CONNECTING WITH EACH OTHER -----



Play 'I have never...' // Going one at a time each member of the group should share three statements beginning with the phrase 'I have never...'

Two of these statements should be true and one false. The rest of the group has to guess which is the false statement.

CONNECTING WITH GOD BIBLE STUDY -----



Title // How now shall we live?

Written by // The Rt Revd Mike Hill, Bishop of Bristol

Worship Activity // *Read Psalm 1 to the group*

Blessed is the one

who does not walk in step with the wicked

or stand in the way that sinners take

or sit in the company of mockers,

but whose delight is in the law of the LORD,

and who meditates on his law day and night.

That person is like a tree planted by streams of water,

which yields its fruit in season

and whose leaf does not wither—

whatever they do prospers.

Not so the wicked!

They are like chaff that the wind blows away.

Therefore, the wicked will not stand in the judgment,

nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.

For the LORD watches over the way of the righteous,

but the way of the wicked leads to destruction

Invite the group to quietly reflect on the words of this Psalm before sharing a word, verse or thought that stood out to them from the reading.

**Bible Reading // Mark 8 verses 34-38****Thought //***To be shared with the group*

Jesus was taught by Rabbis. Rabbis had disciples. They would be with their Rabbi to learn - not just from what the Rabbi said, but from the life he lived. Their way of learning was about a life lived together. For the Rabbi, discipleship certainly couldn't be delivered in a course!

Rowan Williams¹ writes that "discipleship is a state of being" and that a key aspect of discipleship is the art of 'staying' with Jesus, who shows us what God is like and teaches his disciples to live out the values of the Kingdom. What is meant here is that just as a rabbinic disciple would spend much time with his master, so discipleship means staying with Jesus - whether life is good or bad.

Discipleship is not a route to celebrity or popularity, neither is it a call to a life of 'easy believism'. It is about following Jesus into every one of life's situations and challenges. Disciples of Jesus are meant to sound and look different. In a way that provokes, they need to live in such a way that questions are raised for those who live life less-than-it-is-meant-to-be-lived! That's why Jesus tells us it has a cost.

So, discipleship means learning from Jesus, which primarily means being a reader and student of Scripture and then living the life that our studies reveal to us.

The heart of discipleship is our relationship with God through Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. As John Ortberg² tells us we do not become better disciples by trying harder. Rather we become better disciples by training harder. In the historic repositories of the Church are the spiritual training disciplines that will help. Please note that discipline and disciple bear a very close relationship.

These disciplines are – celebration, developing stillness, prayer, fasting, service, confession, learning the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and Bible reading/study. Some of the early spiritual teachers of the Church would have added suffering to this list! Not that we should strive to suffer, but that we should reflect on seasons of adversity in our lives so that suffering can become our teacher and not our self-destruction.

Many Christians today live their lives under the radar. Living in our culture it can feel very 'uncool' to own up to following Jesus. That said I can't think we shall make much progress unless our faith makes a difference and our followership reveals a wholesome distinctiveness. What's great is that God has not left us on our own with this challenge. He has sent His Holy Spirit to guide and strengthen us.

This involves the whole of life for the whole of our life here on Earth.

Notes

1. Being Disciples – Essentials of the Christian Life by Rowan Williams SPCK 2016
2. The Life you've always wanted by John Ortberg. Zondervan 1997

? Questions for discussion

Considering the Bible reading:

1. How would you define the term 'disciple'?
2. What is your experience of the spiritual training disciplines of celebration, developing stillness, prayer, fasting, service, confession, learning the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and Bible reading/study?
3. Can you describe situations where you have experienced the cost of being a disciple?
4. In what ways does your faith influence and affect the decisions and situations you are faced with in your everyday life?
5. How might you get together a spiritual training programme?

Prayer // *The group might pray the following prayer together*

If we had a fraction of the faith in you that you have in us
then this world would be transformed, Lord.

If we showed a fraction of the love that you show to us
then this world would be transformed, Lord

If we possessed a fraction of the patience that you display with us
then this world would be transformed, Lord.

If we shared just a portion of the blessings that we have received from you then this world
would be transformed, Lord.

If we showed as much trust in others as you have shown in us
then this world would be transformed, Lord.

If we claimed just a fraction of the power you promised to your Church then this world
would be transformed, Lord.

Transform us first, Lord, that we might transform this world through your love and your power.

CONNECTING WITH OUR COMMUNITIES

Each week the evening ends with a community related question to discuss and a challenge for people to tackle this week. This week's theme for connecting with our communities is **'Lend a hand'**.

Introduction to read //

"Love is verb; love is a doing word", so say the lyrics of the famous song, 'Teardrops', by Bristol band Massive Attack.

Love is often portrayed as a romantic sentiment or as human affection. Wonderful as these things are, God's vision of love is far higher, wider, deeper and richer than ours. God doesn't simply 'feel' love for us; He puts His great love into action by coming into our world as a servant king.

Jesus is our archetype of love in action; he traded in majestic for menial to show us how to love each other, regardless of how we ourselves might feel. To understand love as a 'doing word' humbles us – it says, "You first". Love in action lifts others up and follows the example Jesus so beautifully, clearly and humbly gave to us.

? Question to discuss

Why do we find it so hard to accept a genuine offer of help from someone?

Action for the week // Offer to clean someone's house; cut their grass; do their shopping for them; babysit the kids; or fix the broken fence for them.

SESSION 2 PARTICIPANTS' SHEET

SESSION TITLE // How now shall we live?

WRITTEN BY // Written by The Rt Revd Mike Hill, Bishop of Bristol

BIBLE PASSAGE // Mark 8 verses 34-38

SUMMARY OF THIS WEEK'S THOUGHT



Jesus was taught by Rabbis. Rabbis had disciples. They would be with their Rabbi to learn - not just from what the Rabbi said, but from the life he lived. Their way of learning was about a life lived together. For the Rabbi, discipleship certainly couldn't be delivered in a course! Our faith should make a difference and our followership reveal a wholesome distinctiveness involving the whole of life for the whole of our life here on earth.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION



1. How would you define the term 'disciple'?
2. What is your experience of the spiritual training disciplines of celebration, developing stillness, prayer, fasting, service, confession, learning the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and Bible reading/study?
3. Can you describe situations where you have experienced the cost of being a disciple?
4. In what ways does your faith influence and affect the decisions and situations you are faced with in your everyday life?
5. How might you get together a spiritual training programme?

PRAYER



The group might pray the following prayer together

If we had a fraction of the faith in you that you have in us
then this world would be transformed, Lord.

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then this world would be transformed, Lord

If we possessed a fraction of the patience that you display with us
then this world would be transformed, Lord.

If we shared just a portion of the blessings that we have received from you then this world would be transformed, Lord.

If we showed as much trust in others as you have shown in us
then this world would be transformed, Lord.

If we claimed just a fraction of the power you promised to your Church then this world would be transformed, Lord.

Transform us first, Lord, that we might transform this world through your love and your power.

CONNECTING WITH OUR COMMUNITIES



'Lend a hand'

? Question to discuss

Why do we find it so hard to accept a genuine offer of help from someone?

Action for this week // Offer to clean someone's house; cut their grass; do their shopping for them; babysit the kids; or fix their broken fence.

SESSION GUIDE 3 LEADERS GUIDE

SESSION TITLE // Holiness

WRITTEN BY // The Ven Christine Froude, Archdeacon

BIBLE PASSAGE // 2 Timothy 1 verses 1-14

This leader's guide provides you with our suggested session outline for the third session of the 'Creating connections' Discipleship course. There is an accompanying participants' worksheet which should be printed and given to each group member during the session. You are free to lead your group through each of the elements that make up the session, or to skip over or alter elements that you do not think would be appropriate for your group.

HOSPITALITY -----



Tea and biscuits week // You could opt to serve the standard English Breakfast tea with a Digestive biscuit or provide a range of fancy teas for guests to try and offer an interesting selection of biscuits.

CONNECTING WITH EACH OTHER -----



Bring and share hobbies // Invite guests to bring a prop that represents one of their hobbies and then to share with the group what they love about their hobby.

CONNECTING WITH GOD BIBLE STUDY -----



Title // Holiness

Written by // The Ven Christine Froude, Archdeacon

Worship Activity //

An Invocation is read:

*Into the dark world
a snowdrop comes,
a blessing of hope and peace
carrying within it a green heart:
symbol of God's renewing love.
Come to inhabit our darkness, Lord Christ,
for dark and light are alike to you.
May nature's white candles of hope
remind us of your birth
and lighten our journey.*

Kate McIlhagga

Bible Reading // 2 Timothy 1 verses 1-14



Thought //

To be shared with the group

God calls us with a holy calling: 'He has saved us and called us to a holy life - not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time' (1 Timothy 1 v 9)

Holiness is a life of total devotion to God. But what does that mean for us?

Here are some suggestions for the making of a holy life

1. Pray! Find a quiet place and set aside some time each day to pray, read your Bible and speak to God about your joys and sorrows knowing He will never leave you or forsake you.
2. Aim for the ideal of always keeping your tongue under control in challenging situations and ask God to help you find the self-control you need.
3. Be faithful in doing what you say you will do however difficult or inconvenient it may turn out to be.
4. Be a peacemaker. Seek out those where a relationship has broken down and try to sort things out - even if you don't succeed.
5. Focus your eyes on those you love. Sexual images are everywhere; if this is something you struggle with then share that with those that you trust and ask them to pray with and for you.
6. Don't worry! Pray about those things on your heart and mind that concern you, trusting that God will show you the way.
7. Before you go to sleep each night, review your day. Forgive those who have worried you and ask forgiveness for those things you have done wrong, and sleep knowing God has heard your prayers.

? Questions for discussion

Considering the Bible reading:

1. What words, images and thoughts come to mind when you consider 'holiness'?
2. Can you share an example of when you have sought to enact one of these marks of a holy life?
3. Which of these suggested marks of a holy life do you struggle with?
4. What could you do to overcome those struggles and who could hold you accountable?
5. What other marks of a holy life would you like to add to the suggestions made?

Prayer // *The group might pray the following responsory together*

Leader: *Choose this day whom you will serve;*

All: We will choose the living God.

Leader: *The road is narrow that leads to life;*

All: We will walk the way of Christ.

Leader: *Faith is not our holding on*

All: Faith is letting go.

Leader: *We offer more than words, o God;*

All: We offer you our lives.

CONNECTING WITH OUR COMMUNITIES -----



Each week the evening ends with a community related question to discuss and an action for people to undertake that week.

This week's theme for connecting with our communities is '**Saying thank you**'.

Introduction to read //

Have you ever noticed that amazing things happened right after Jesus said, "Thank you"?

At a remote gathering on a mountainside in Galilee, he gave thanks and a few loaves and fish became food enough for 4,000 families. At a tomb side in Bethany he gave thanks and Lazarus came out alive. And at a low table in the upper room in Jerusalem with his closest friends, he gave thanks before taking his journey to the cross that would change the course of human history.

When we give thanks – maybe not in such astounding circumstances as these three examples – what we're saying is that we know God is good and we're acknowledging that all good things come from Him. In a way, saying "thank you" to others reflects back the goodness of God that we've seen in, or experienced through, them.

? Question to discuss

Who are the community champions in your community? What charitable organisations are most active supporting people in your area?

Action for the week // Pick one of those people or organisations that you know are real champions in the community and write them a card to say thank you.

SESSION 3 PARTICIPANTS' SHEET

SESSION TITLE // Holiness

WRITTEN BY // The Ven Christine Froude, Archdeacon

BIBLE PASSAGE // 2 Timothy 1 verses 1-14

SUMMARY OF THIS WEEK'S THOUGHT



Holiness is a life of total devotion to God. But what does that mean for us?

Here are some suggestions for the making of a holy life

1. Pray! Find a quiet place and set aside some time each day to pray, read your Bible and speak to God about your joys and sorrows knowing He will never leave you or forsake you.
2. Aim for the ideal of always keeping your tongue under control in challenging situations and ask God to help you find the self-control you need.
3. Be faithful in doing what you say you will do however difficult or inconvenient it may turn out to be.
4. Be a peacemaker. Seek out those where a relationship has broken down and try to sort things out - even if you don't succeed.
5. Focus your eyes on those you love. Sexual images are everywhere, if this is something you struggle with then share that with those that you trust and ask them to pray with and for you.
6. Don't worry! Pray about those things on your heart and mind that concern you, trusting that God will show you the way.
7. Before you go to sleep each night, review your day. Forgive those who have worried you and ask forgiveness for those things you have done wrong, and sleep knowing God has heard your prayers.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION



1. What words, images and thoughts come to mind when you consider 'holiness'?
2. Can you share an example of when you have sought to enact one of these marks of a holy life?
3. Which of these suggested marks of a holy life do you struggle with?
4. What could you do to overcome those struggles and who could hold you accountable?
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CONNECTING WITH OUR COMMUNITIES



'Saying thank you'

? Question to discuss

Who are the community champions in your community? What charitable organisations are most active supporting people in your area?

Action for this week // Pick one of those people or organisations that you know are real champions in the community and write them a card to say thank you.

PRAYER

The group might pray the following responsory together:

Leader: *Choose this day whom you will serve;*

All: We will choose the living God.

Leader: *The road is narrow that leads to life;*

All: We will walk the way of Christ.

Leader: *Faith is not our holding on*

All: Faith is letting go.

Leader: *We offer more than words, o God;*

All: We offer you our lives.



SESSION GUIDE 4 LEADERS GUIDE

SESSION TITLE // Our identity in Christ; being true to who God has made you to be

WRITTEN BY // The Rt Revd Dr Lee Rayfield, Bishop of Swindon

BIBLE PASSAGE // Matthew 3 verse 13 – 4 verse 11

This leader's guide provides you with our suggested session outline for the fourth session of the 'Creating connections' Discipleship course. There is an accompanying participants' worksheet which should be printed and given to each group member during the session. You are free to lead your group through each of the elements that make up the session, or to skip over or alter elements that you do not think would be appropriate for your group.

HOSPITALITY -----



Cheese and biscuits week // Invite your guests to bring their favourite cheese to the table for all to enjoy. Provide biscuits for people to enjoy with the cheese selection that is assembled.

CONNECTING WITH EACH OTHER -----



Card Game // Play a card game together as a group. You could purchase a new and unusual one for the occasion such as UNO, Dobble or Fluxx, or simply open a pack of cards and invite guests to suggest their favourite card game to play. Play the game, enjoy one another's company and laugh together!

CONNECTING WITH GOD BIBLE STUDY -----



Title // Our identity in Christ; being true to who God has made you to be

Written by // The Rt Revd Dr Lee Rayfield, Bishop of Swindon

Worship Activity //

Read all, or selected parts, of Archbishop Justin's statement following the Daily Telegraph's disclosure that his father was not Gavin Welby.

This can be downloaded from <http://bit.ly/2iDOvQI>

We recommend that you print copies for the members of your group in advance of the meeting.

After the reading you may like to play Gabriel's Oboe to the group or to spend a time in quiet reflection.

The track is available on YouTube via this link <http://bit.ly/2j446Ju>

Written by Ennio Morricone, it is the theme tune from The Mission.

Invite your group to reflect whilst it plays and to use it to become more aware of God's presence with you.

Bible Reading // Matthew 3 verse 13 – 4 verse 11



Thought //

To be shared with the group

The baptism and the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness is found in all three Synoptic Gospels but only Matthew and Luke describe the three specific challenges put to him by the Devil, and their order is slightly different.

There are echoes here of Israel's time in the wilderness, her collective testing and disobedience, in contrast to the strength of character and faithfulness displayed by Jesus, God's anointed one. These provide different lenses to read the narrative through but are focused in Jesus' own sense of identity, significance and vocation. Jesus understands these both in relation to his people and in himself.

His own people have not been the blessing or light to the nations which is their calling as those chosen for this purpose. Jesus' own vocation became to reveal, through his teaching and actions centred on the coming of God's Kingdom, just what this entails. More than this Jesus himself was revealed as the Son of God in a way which transformed understanding of the nature of God and of human beings.

In Matthew's account of the baptism of Jesus, as the Holy Spirit anoints Jesus, the Father's voice declares to those present that Jesus is His Beloved Son. In Mark and Luke, the words are addressed to Jesus: "You are my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased".

At 30 years of age, Jesus the man from Nazareth experiences a personal and public affirmation which effectively opens the life and ministry which the Gospels record. It is from this deep appreciation of his identity as Beloved of the Father that he can resist the temptation to please himself or take shortcuts.

Jesus does not need to prove himself to be 'the Son of God' to the Devil, to the Sanhedrin, to Pilate, or indeed anyone. It is a given – a relationship mediated through the presence of the Holy Spirit. Jesus' significance as the Messiah flows from this solid foundation; he does not need his sense of significance or his vocation to prove his worth. His actions and words all spring from who he knows himself to be, in God and for God.

? Questions for discussion

Considering the Bible reading:

1. At his baptism by John the Baptist, Jesus identifies himself with his people and their vocation. At our baptism we are identified with him and his vocation.
Has this sense of a baptismal vocation been emphasized enough in our churches?
What difference could it – or does it – make to you?
2. Which of the Devil's temptations would you have found most difficult to resist and why?
How do you find yourself looking for your own significance or to prove yourself?
3. Archbishop Justin said that his identity was found in Christ and the way he handled the whole Daily Telegraph scenario was testimony to the reality of this. What has finding your identity in Christ meant to you? Are there events which have made it more concrete?
4. Jesus said to Simon that he would become Peter. Do you have a sense of God calling you to become someone else? Does this feel like more of the 'real you' or less?

Prayer //

If the group know each other well enough, pass around a sheet of A4 paper with 'What I see of Christ's way in (Name of member)' at the top of each page. Give time for people to write something at the bottom of each page, folding the page over to cover what they have written before passing on to the next person to write something.

(No-one should be able to read what another person has written).

When all are completed give the sheets to the person who is named on it. Each person then has time to read what has been written about them. Give an opportunity for each person to say what has affirmed them as being true to the person God sees them being/ becoming. If people are willing they may be encouraged to say a brief prayer in response to what has been written.

CONNECTING WITH OUR COMMUNITIES -----

Each week the evening ends with a community related question to discuss and an action for people to undertake that week.

This week's theme for connecting with our communities is '**politics**'.

Introduction to read //

Jesus could so easily have got involved in the politics of his day, but apparently he steered clear. As the much hoped-for Messiah, he was supposed to be the one who would liberate the Jewish people, to bring in a new regime that would establish their place on Earth as God's chosen people.

Jesus may not have got involved in politics, but he was absolutely interested in government; his Government, his Kingdom – the Kingdom of God – that was being brought about through him.

God's Kingdom is defined by peace, justice, mercy and righteousness. Our ultimate hope is that Jesus will return and bring with him a new Earth and Heaven where all the pain, brokenness, injustice and oppression around us will come to an end. In the meantime, what should we do?

We can either wait in silence or we can allow ourselves to be moved into action; to challenge, to pray or to serve others wherever we see peace, justice, mercy and righteousness being compromised.

? Question to discuss

Should faith and politics mix? What are the potential opportunities and challenges for the church being involved in politics? Do you know who your local MP is or councillors are?

Action for the week // Write to a local politician, thank them for the job they do and share with them one local issue that you are passionate about and would like to make them aware of.

SESSION 4 PARTICIPANTS' SHEET

SESSION TITLE // Our identity in Christ; being true to who God has made you to be

WRITTEN BY // The Rt Revd Dr Lee Rayfield, Bishop of Swindon

BIBLE PASSAGE // Matthew 3 verse 13 – 4 verse 11

SUMMARY OF THIS WEEK'S THOUGHT



In Matthew's account of the baptism of Jesus, as the Holy Spirit anoints Jesus, the Father's voice declares to those present that Jesus is His Beloved Son. In Mark and Luke, the words are addressed to Jesus: "You are my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased".

At 30 years of age, Jesus the man from Nazareth experiences a personal and public affirmation which effectively opens the life and ministry which the Gospels record.

It is from this deep appreciation of his identity as Beloved of the Father that he can resist the temptation to please himself or take shortcuts.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION



1. At his baptism by John the Baptist, Jesus identifies himself with his people and their vocation. At our baptism we are identified with him and his vocation.
Has this sense of a baptismal vocation been emphasized enough in our churches?
What difference could it – or does it – make to you?
2. Which of the Devil's temptations would you have found most difficult to resist and why?
How do you find yourself looking for your own significance or to prove yourself?
3. Archbishop Justin said that his identity was found in Christ and the way he handled the whole *Daily Telegraph* scenario was testimony to the reality of this. What has finding your identity in Christ meant to you? Are there events which have made it more concrete?
4. Jesus said to Simon that he would become Peter. Do you have a sense of God calling you to become someone else? Does this feel like more of the 'real you' or less?

CONNECTING WITH OUR COMMUNITIES



'Politics'

? Question to discuss

Should faith and politics mix? What are the potential opportunities and challenges for the church being involved in politics? Do you know who your local MP is or Cllrs are?

Action for this week // Write to a local politician, thank them for the job they do and share with them one local issue that you are passionate about and would like to make them aware of.

SESSION GUIDE 5 LEADERS GUIDE

SESSION TITLE // I am who I am

WRITTEN BY // Revd Canon Derek Chedzey

BIBLE PASSAGE // Exodus 3 verses 13-15

This leader's guide provides you with our suggested session outline for the fifth and final session of the 'Creating connections' Discipleship course. There is an accompanying participants' worksheet which should be printed and given to each group member during the session. You are free to lead your group through each of the elements that make up the session, or to skip over or alter elements that you do not think would be appropriate for your group.

HOSPITALITY -----



Grand Finale cake // It's the last week. Make, or buy a special cake with which to end the course. You could find out what everyone's favourite cake is or invite people to vote for the flavour of cake to be served.

CONNECTING WITH EACH OTHER -----



Highlight / Lowlight // Going one at a time, invite each guest to share with the group the highlight and the low point of their life this past week. Once everyone has shared pray a prayer of thanksgiving and petition.

CONNECTING WITH GOD BIBLE STUDY -----



Title // I am who I am

Written by // Revd Canon Derek Chedzey

Worship Activity //

The Leader says

In the name of the Father
and of the Son
and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen**

The Leader continues

Praise to you, O Christ, King of eternal glory.
I am the light of the world, says the Lord,
whoever follows me will have the light of life. John 8.12
Praise to you, O Christ, King of eternal glory.

After a prayerful silence another person prays

God is light.
In Him there is no darkness.
If we live in the light,
as God is in the light,
we have fellowship with one another

**and the blood of Jesus, His Son,
purifies us from all sin.**

*After a short silence, someone reads (or you could sing it or listen to it on YouTube
www.youtube.com/watch?v=6qydwzaeVa0)*

William Booth : O God of burning, cleansing flame (Send the fire)

O God of burning cleansing flame:

Send the fire!

Your blood-bought gift today we claim:

Send the fire today!

Look down and see this waiting host,

And send the promised Holy Ghost;

We need another Pentecost!

Send the fire today!

Send the fire today!

God of Elijah, hear our cry:

Send the fire!

And make us fit to live or die:

Send the fire today!

To burn up every trace of sin,

To bring the light and glory in,

The revolution now begin!

Send the fire today!

Send the fire today!

It's fire we want, for fire we plead:

Send the fire!

The fire will meet our every need:

Send the fire today!

For strength to always do what's right,

For grace to conquer in the fight,

For power to walk the world in white:

Send the fire today!

Send the fire today!

To make our weak hearts strong and brave:

Send the fire!

To live, a dying world to save:

Send the fire today!

Oh, see us on Your altar lay,

We give our lives to you today,

So crown the offering now we pray:

Send the fire today!

Send the fire today!

Send the fire today!

After a further short silence the Leader says

As Jesus taught us, so we pray
**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours now and for ever. Amen**

0After a further short silence the Leader says

**As Jesus taught us, so we pray
Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours now and for ever. Amen**

Bible Reading // Exodus 3 verses 13-15



Thought //

To be shared with the group

When Moses stands before the burning bush he asks an important question of God: 'Who are you?' It is an important question because it defines reality. How can Moses - or for that matter can we - share who God is if we do not have an answer that we believe and live out? Moses required a new understanding from God; he needed to experience God anew; he needed a fresh revelation of who God is. Interestingly God simply replies: 'I shall be who I shall be.'

At the same time, this answer indicates that God is constant; His nature is not arbitrary or inconsistent. He can be affirmed as the living God. In His answer, God indicates that

He has a relationship with His people not just looking back to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob but looking forward into the future. God's interaction with His people is both relational and continually being renewed.

It should come as no surprise when we look at the 'I am' sayings of Jesus in the Gospel of John that Jesus himself literally says 'I, I am'. John in his recording of the sayings, and Jesus in his words, is once again revealing the nature of God: 'Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.'" (John 14:6)

John points people to the revelation that Jesus is God and that his disciples are following the 'I am' of the Old Testament. The nature of God to create relationship with His people is a continuous journey of fresh revelation and fresh relationships. These are not different gods but different expressions of the one true God.

Bill Hybels suggests that new Christians need to develop the habit of setting time aside to listen for God's whispers and to read God's word. He calls this 'chair time', because it is about finding a comfortable quiet place where you will not be distracted and giving God 10 minutes of your time. If we do not talk and listen to God through prayer, silence and Bible reading how can we build a relationship with Him.

Psalm 46:10: He says, "Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth."

? Questions for discussion

Considering the Bible reading:

1. Read Mark 8: 28:

They answered, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others say You are one of the prophets." "But who do you say I am?" He asked. Peter answered, "You are the Christ."

Who do you say Jesus is?

And what do you believe about Jesus?

2. What does it mean for the Church that we as its members can have a relationship with the living God?
3. In what ways does God speak to you?
4. What images might Jesus use today to reveal his nature?
5. How do you create 'chair time' in your life and what difference has that made to your relationship with God?
6. How do you share your relationship with God with others?

Prayer // The leader prays

*Silence Us, That We May hear
Amid the crowds that clamour,
Amid the demands that call,
Amid the things that shout,
Silence us, that we may hear.*

*Amid the ceaseless rounds,
Amid the hurried pace,
Amid the countless journeys,
Silence us, that we may hear.*

*Amid the hasty thoughts,
Amid the speedy reactions,
Amid the swift communications,
Silence us, that we may hear.*

*Amid the powers that threaten,
Amid the people who manipulate,
Amid the robbers of our freedom,
Silence us, that we may hear.*

*Amid all our fellow workers,
Amid all our leisure-sharers
Amid all our homes and families,
Silence us, that we may hear.*

David Adam 'Power Lines' Triangle Books, 1992

CONNECTING WITH OUR COMMUNITIES -----



Each week the evening ends with a community related question to discuss and an action for people to undertake that week.

This week's theme for connecting with our communities is **'Random acts of kindness and holy mischief'**.

Introduction to read //

Everyone needs to know that they're loved and valued, and random acts of kindness may not change the world but they can be a simple way to connect people with the love of God. To get the message of God's kingdom and his loving-kindness across to people, Jesus often engaged in a little holy mischief himself.

He changed water into wine at a wedding; he talked at length with a 'forbidden' Samaritan woman whilst his disciples had gone to fetch food; he even 'blasphemed' in front of the teachers of the law by forgiving the sins of a paralysed man who'd been lowered through the roof for Jesus to heal!

Small, unexpected gestures can sometimes have the biggest impact, not least because kindness can be contagious; one act can so often lead to another, and then another...

? Question to discuss

In what ways have you blessed someone you don't know or been blessed by a stranger in a most wonderful way?

Action for the week // Carry out a random act of kindness to bless a stranger you meet this week.

SESSION 5 PARTICIPANTS' SHEET

SESSION TITLE // I am who I am

WRITTEN BY // Revd Canon Derek Chedzey

BIBLE PASSAGE // Exodus 3 verses 13-15

SUMMARY OF THIS WEEK'S THOUGHT



When Moses stands before the burning bush he asks an important question of God: 'Who are you?' It is an important question because it defines reality. How can Moses - or for that matter can we - share who God is if we do not have an answer that we believe and live out? Moses required a new understanding from God; he needed to experience God anew; he needed a fresh revelation of who God is. Interestingly God simply replies, 'I shall be who I shall be.' If we do not talk and listen to God through prayer, silence and Bible reading how can we build a relationship with Him.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION



1. Read Mark 8: 28:

They answered, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others say You are one of the prophets." "But who do you say I am?" He asked. Peter answered, "You are the Christ."

Who do you say Jesus is?

And what do you believe about Jesus?

- 2.** What does it mean for the Church that we as its members can have a relationship with the living God?
- 3.** In what ways does God speak to you?
- 4.** What images might Jesus use today to reveal his nature?
- 5.** How do you create 'chair time' in your life and what difference has that made to your relationship with God?
- 6.** How do you share your relationship with God with others?

CONNECTING WITH OUR COMMUNITIES



'Random Acts of Kindness & Holy Mischief'

? Question to discuss

In what ways have you blessed someone you don't know or been blessed by a stranger in a most wonderful way?

Action for this week // Carry out a random act of kindness to bless a stranger you meet this week.

WORSHIP



The Leader says

In the name of the Father
and of the Son
and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen**

The Leader continues

Praise to you, O Christ, King of eternal glory.
I am the light of the world, says the Lord,
whoever follows me will have the light of life. John 8.12
Praise to you, O Christ, King of eternal glory.

After a prayerful silence another person prays

God is light.
In him there is no darkness.
If we live in the light,
as God is in the light,
we have fellowship with one another
**and the blood of Jesus, his Son,
purifies us from all sin.**

After a short silence, someone reads (or you could sing it.)

William Booth: O God of burning, cleansing flame (Send the fire)

O God of burning cleansing flame:
Send the fire!
Your blood-bought gift today we claim:
Send the fire today!
Look down and see this waiting host,
And send the promised Holy Ghost;
We need another Pentecost!
Send the fire today!
Send the fire today!

God of Elijah, hear our cry:
Send the fire!
And make us fit to live or die:
Send the fire today!
To burn up every trace of sin,
To bring the light and glory in,
The revolution now begin!
Send the fire today!

Send the fire today!
It's fire we want, for fire we plead:
Send the fire!
The fire will meet our every need:
Send the fire today!
For strength to always do what's right,
For grace to conquer in the fight,
For power to walk the world in white:
Send the fire today!
Send the fire today!

To make our weak hearts strong and brave:
Send the fire!
To live, a dying world to save:
Send the fire today!
Oh, see us on Your altar lay,
We give our lives to you today,
So crown the offering now we pray:
Send the fire today!
Send the fire today!
Send the fire today!

After a further short silence the Leader says

As Jesus taught us, so we pray
The Lords prayer is recited by the group