



Older  
People's  
Ministries

STUDY  
GUIDE

# Age to Age

Thirty discipleship conversations for those  
journeying through their later years



‘Blessed be the name of God from age to age, for wisdom and power are his. He changes times and seasons, deposes kings and sets up kings; He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding.’

DANIEL 2:20-21

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# Foreword

These Age to Age materials and resources brought to us by the Older Peoples Ministries Team of The Salvation Army reinforce the truths found in Scripture that relationships are an indispensable means of spiritual growth and that discipleship is of course fundamental to our individual Christian lives and our corporate life as believers and followers in the Church. None of that stops when we reach retirement! The command to ‘Go and make disciples’ was never time bound and so it is an ongoing privilege for us all to journey alongside others along paths of discipleship.

These unique reflections and biblical insights, written by and for Older Christians, highlight many of the issues and spiritual transitions that are experienced in later years. We pray that as you journey through ‘Age to Age’ you will be encouraged to connect together, to love God more, love God’s people more and lovingly impact the world for Jesus Christ.

**Commissioner Anthony Cotterill**

The Territorial Commander of The Salvation Army  
United Kingdom and Ireland Territory

We are so grateful to our friend Gillian Parish for the wonderful illustrations in this book.

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## Introduction Age to Age

Welcome to Age to Age, a Discipleship Resource written for older people to help them consider their Christian life and journey. The topics reflect the concerns and interests of people at this stage in their life and have been written in partnership with retired Salvation Army Officers and Salvationists to capture the experience and reflections of people who have journeyed the Christian path.

This resource was written to be used in a small group setting with four people coming together on a regular basis to encourage, support and hold one another accountable in a safe and relaxed environment. The suggestion of four people in a group comes from the reality that within a larger group some voices may not be heard. On a practical note, four people can easily be transported whether that be to a host's home or out for a social activity.

Age to Age sits very comfortably being used in a home environment where people can build friendships and learn how to support one another meaningfully in their Christian faith. Christianity was never meant to be a solo sport but always lived out in community, joined as a group of believers following the guidance of the Holy Spirit. However, this does not exclude this resource being used by a number of groups meeting at the same time within the Church building.

This resource has been produced so that there is minimal preparation required for those taking part or for the Commanding Officer/Church Leader. The only preparation would be for the activity for the relevant week, e.g. photos or game. It would be helpful for each member of the group to read through the topic before attending the group meeting.

This resource has been written using the experiences and commentaries of older people. We learn much from our peers and to know that others have walked a similar path often helps us in our ongoing journey of faith. Our thanks go to the many people who have written in their own words, or given thoughts and suggestions in the hope that the issues covered in this discipleship resource will bless and challenge each one of us.

Finally, Age to Age does not just refer to the age of the people it is intended for. It is about recognising the faithfulness of God to his people throughout the ages.

Welcome to the ongoing journey of faith.  
Let us travel and learn together.

God bless you,  
The Older People's Ministries Team

# Introductory Session

## The Trinity

Welcome the group and serve tea/coffee and refreshments around tables.

On this first session the teaching will be done by the Corps Officer/Leader. Please have the response and questions prepared for the group discussion which follows the teaching (see Appendices A and B).

**Groups will need a Bible and The Salvation Army Song Book available for each session.**

### Leader's Introduction

Welcome to the commencement of Age to Age. Age to Age is a Discipleship Resource which we are going to journey through and as we do so will hopefully bring us closer to God and one another.

There are two main themes to Age to Age. The first is to connect to one another. It might sound obvious but it is a vitally important thing for us, particularly in today's society where so many feel disconnected and isolated. There is evidence to suggest that loneliness seriously affects our health and well-being. One of the things that we want these groups to do is to ensure that we make a conscious effort to maintain regular, intentional communication with one another. This may be through phone call, text or email. Even if you feel this is a little 'over the top' please consider the other people in your group and see it as a contribution to them and the development of 'soul friendship'.

The second theme is to contribute. We know that there are two things that are recognised as giving people worth and value in life and providing a better quality of life to us all as we age. These are being connected and being able to contribute. Through the regular meeting of this group we hope that you will find value in the contribution that you can make - not only for others but for yourself also.

## Activity

 10 minutes

One at a time, participants introduce themselves with two truths about themselves and one lie. The group then guesses which statement is a lie. The crazier the truths are of course, the harder it is to discern which are truths and which is the lie. You have a few minutes to think of something - write it down if you want.

Well I hope you all learned something valuable there. Now I must say that for the sake of decorum that you are not allowed to try and blackmail anyone with any of the truths that we have learned here today!

Take a few minutes to decide on some of the practicalities of meeting in a group. On your table you will find some questions. Use these to inform your discussion

Now give out questions from Appendix A to each group.

## Teaching

Over the next few weeks and months we are going to spend time in groups learning and growing together. We will laugh together, perhaps cry together and we will support one another. A great way to start is by looking at God in the Trinity as Father, Son and Spirit living together in community as one. What better place could we look to see how community works than the divine unity of the Trinity?

We acknowledge that we are all individuals. We have different points of view, different backgrounds, we may be different in age or gender but what is it that brings us together to do this discipleship course - a desire to grow in our relationship with God?

So let us start our thinking by looking at Father, Son and Spirit and how they live in community and the benefits that this brings.

† Read Mark 1:9-11

Can you imagine the scene? Jesus, the Son of God is being baptised in the River Jordan. A special moment for anyone in life, but this takes on a whole new dimension as we hear how John can see heaven open up! There is a song called 'Holy Spirit Rain Down'. You may have sung it many times before, but imagine singing the words now in relation to what we read in Mark's Gospel. 'Open up heaven, open it wide, over our church and over our lives.'

The Triune God shows himself by opening up heaven wide, by sending the Holy Spirit as a dove to rest upon Jesus, the Son, and not only that but God the Father speaks to allow us to see the Trinity in action, all together in communion with each other. It really is a beautiful image and I hope you can imagine it and capture it as we think about how we commune with one another a little later on.

Gregory of Nazianzus (one of the 4th Century church fathers who defended the Doctrine of the Trinity) explained his feelings of his Triune God in this way:

‘No sooner do I conceive of the One than I am illumined by the splendour of the Three; no sooner do I distinguish them than I am carried back to the One.’

We cannot separate the Trinity, as God is the one true God, but we recognise the splendour of the Three within the Oneness of God.

Salvationist Doctrine Number 2 states that

‘We believe that there is only one God, who is infinitely perfect, the Creator, Preserver, and Governor of all things, and who is the only proper object of religious worship.’

Salvationist Doctrine Number 3 states that

‘We believe that there are three persons in the Godhead - the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, undivided in essence and co-equal in power and glory.’

Some people find the Trinity very difficult to get their heads around. You may be one of those people. Perhaps considering Gregory of Nazianzus' explanation may help you. Illumine yourself with God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, recognising each part but always being carried by the One God.

*God the Father* is our Creator. He created this wonderful world in which we live. Perhaps as we look at the night sky we concur with Louis Armstrong as he sang 'I think to myself what a wonderful world.' Creator God in everything that we see. Creator God in one another and our uniqueness that we bring to this world.

*God the Son*, Jesus, coming to earth to live as a man who 'emptied himself of all but love' as we read in Philippians 2:7. Jesus, the Son, identifies with our sorrows, our grief, our joy, our 'humanness'. Jesus, who washed the disciples' feet and came as a servant to show us the way to love, care and serve others.

*God the Holy Spirit*, sent as our 'helper'. The Spirit of God empowers and enables us. The Spirit of God leads us and guides us when we are filled by him and have the desire to live a 'Spirit-filled life'.

Yes, we can distinguish the three persons in the Godhead but Father, Son and Spirit live in unity with each other and we can experience the Unity of the Trinity. Geraldine Latty beautifully sings and invites us to the 'dance that all creation is invited to join, where the Father, Son and Spirit interact and combine; it's a dance where everyone can contribute to the whole, in the Spirit, through the Saviour to the Father.'

You may not class yourself as a dancer but we are invited to contribute, to join together in the 'dance of our God'.

Before we take some time to look at what community with the Trinity means to us,

† Read John 14:1-21

These beautiful words of Jesus invite us into communion and trust with God, Father, Son and Spirit. The Spirit of Truth is sent to help us and inspire us. Before we discuss in our groups and take a few moments to consider Community, let us pray that the Spirit of Truth helps us and gives us wisdom and grace to learn from one another.

#### Prayer

Lord God, Father, Son and Spirit, may you guide our conversations; give us wisdom as we start our journeys together. May we learn from you what true community is all about. Amen.

**Activity**

 20 minutes

Encourage the group to share in the Response and Questions in Small Groups (Appendix B).

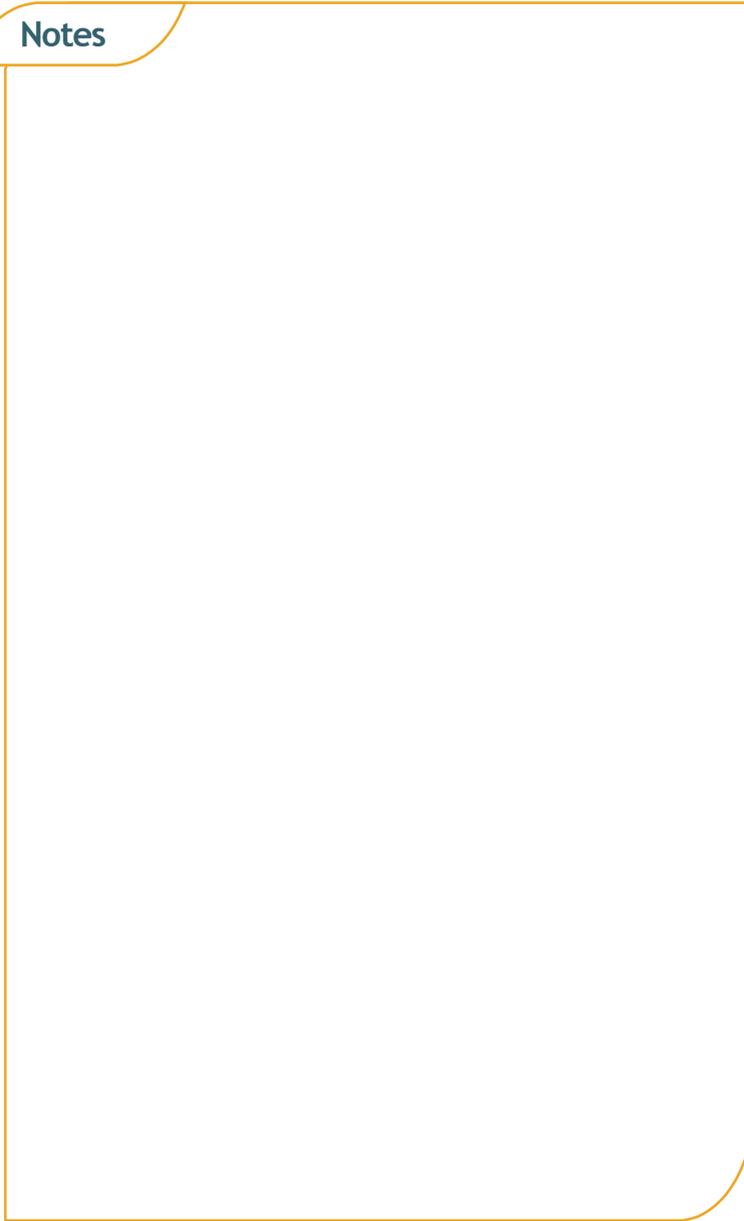
**Prayer**

Before leaving, join all the groups together to pray the Grace as a final benediction, again reminding us of the unity of the Trinity.

May the Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all, for evermore. Amen.

(It could be mentioned that should the groups struggle to pray with one another to start with that the Grace benediction or the Lord’s Prayer could be used within the small group settings.)

**Notes**





- 1 My Story
- 2 Passion and Talents
- 3 Gifts
- 4 Time and Talents

# Session 1

## My Story

### Aim

Think back to when you were children, with all the hopes and aspirations of life before you.

- To start to relax within the group
- To find out more about the life story of others within the group
- To start considering our story as a building block in our personhood

### Activity

 15 - 30 minutes

#### Scrabble

If there is time then play a game of Scrabble - set the amount of time that you will play e.g. 15 or 30 minutes depending on how long you plan this first session to be - use a timer if possible. (The remainder of the session should take about an hour.)

### Teaching

Our history plays a large part in who we are and how we are seen. The events that we have seen, activities that we have taken part in and perhaps most of all, the people we have interacted with have shaped us to be the people we are today.

As this first session is primarily about getting to know one another we will all have opportunity to tell something of our life. Use the letter tiles to spell out two or three key things about your life and each take ten minutes to tell something of your story. This is just about getting to know one another better and in some ways starting to write a new chapter in which we are all characters.

## Discussion

Take some of the Scrabble tiles from earlier and let each person tell their story - the letter tiles are simply there to provide some focus and perhaps give some ideas for consideration. It might be helpful to have a timer!

## Teaching

While these parts of our story influence who we are and have shaped us through our lifetimes, it is important to recognise that they do not define us, nor are they the 'be all and end all' of who we are. In a very real way our hi-'story' is still being written. While society tends to have an opinion of us based upon our career, our wealth, our education or significant achievements, we should reflect on the fact that God looks upon us and sees beyond our achievements, education and monetary wealth. God looks upon us and calls us: children, family, friends, the new humanity, saints, the promise, living stones, chosen and as a kingdom of priests. These titles of the kingdom refer to us all.

The story of Jesus as recorded in the Gospels is important in our understanding of who God is, how he interacts with his creation and what his essential plan for us is - to experience 'life in His name'.

'Now Jesus performed many other miraculous signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are recorded so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you might have life in his name.'

John 2:30-31

Throughout these sessions we will look at the way in which his story and our story are interwoven as a complex counterpoint and how we can more clearly discern the main theme that he wants to introduce in our lives during this moment.

## Reflection

Consider the titles of children, family, friends, the new humanity, saints, the promise, living stones, chosen and as a kingdom of priests.

- *In what ways does the life we live reflect the way God looks at us?*

Choose 1 or 2 of the titles above and reflect on the way that you experience that title in your life.

- *What events in your life story would you record 'so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ'?*

Consider writing these things down as a reminder especially during 'times in the desert' of God's unfailing provision in your life.

For the next session  
Bring something which reflects  
your previous occupation

## Notes

## Session 2

# Passion and Talents

### Activity

 10 - 15 minutes

Bring something to the group that reflects your previous occupation. As each member shows the object, the others have to guess which occupation this symbolises.

### Discussion

Think back to when you were children, with all the hopes and aspirations of life before you.

- *What was it that you really enjoyed doing?*
- *What was it that you wanted to be 'when you grew up'?*
- *To what extent have you continued doing this?*

Take some time to talk about this, trying to capture the essence of those things that used to bring you joy.

### Teaching

For many of us life will have been a series of 'have to's...' We have 'had to' do certain things to be able to exist within society. We have 'had to' find a job and work to pay the mortgage or the rent, pay bills, and put food on the table. Whether this job has been our dream job, or our nightmare job, we will have 'had to' do it.

Within our family life there will have been many things that we have 'had to' do. Children to look after, clothes to wash and iron, beds to make, vacuuming or sweeping the floor, cooking and washing-up, taking up our time and our energy, sometimes squeezing out the things we would have liked to have done. Of course some of these things may remain - instead of looking after your children, you may now be looking after your grandchildren, and you may have parents who are now older needing more support. But for many of us in this stage of life it will be a time when we do not have the pressure of a day job and the stress of an early morning commute and we can maybe re-evaluate what opportunities this 'new age' brings.

In The Salvation Army, there is a song, penned by General John Gowan that says, 'He came to give us life in all its fullness' based on John 10:10 and we assert that this 'fullness of life' is not limited to our first six decades but throughout our entire earthly life and through to our eternal reward.

Over the next few weeks we will explore the possibility of who you are and can be at this stage in life, but most importantly to be just who God meant you to be. That the skills, gifts, life experiences, challenges, attitudes and all the other factors that have been played out in your life over the years, may now come together and enable you to fulfil God's will and know life in all its fullness and experience deep joy. *'I once knew a family whose father had decided on the careers they would each have, and it had led for them to careers, which although relatively successful, were devoid of joy, devoid of fulfilment and devoid of passion. They had no passion for what they were doing because their career was imposed upon them.'*

Passion is one of the key motivators behind what we do, who we do it for and why we do it. We all have a different God-given passion - something that we care deeply about which drives us to want to make a difference in that area and contrary to what we so often hear, God wants us to enjoy working with and in those areas of ministry.

'Trust in the Lord, and do good; dwell in the land and cultivate faithfulness. Delight yourself in the Lord; and He will give you the desires of your heart.'

Psalm 35:3-4

God has designed us to minister in a specific area of ministry that we find motivating, that we find fulfilling, that gives a sense of meaning to us; and in order to reach 'all people, by all means' he gave us all different passions to accomplish this. Consider Paul:

'When God, who set me apart from birth and called me by his grace was pleased to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not consult any man...'

Galatians 1:15-16

We are all gathered here today because of Paul's God-given passion to reveal the truth to the Gentiles and to work outside of what he had previously understood as God's chosen people.

## Discussion

- *Can you think of a time when you had to do something and the phrase 'like a fish out of water' could have been applied to you?*  
(Humorous incidents gratefully received!)

We have all had those times when we have been asked to do something that did not fit well within our talents or skillset and we have struggled and felt like a 'fish out of water'. Talents and skills are given by God to everyone and in a sense, provide for the ongoing functioning and fruition of the world. Our lives are enriched by those talented in music and art, the skill of a wordsmith can bring us to tears or make us bellow with laughter, all talents that enrich our existence. Our lives are eased by the work of craftsmen and scientists and in God's audacious plan we are all meant to benefit mutually from the abilities that we have all received. (Remember, God's audacious plan of love is not the same as the warped world we find ourselves in, where some talents or skills, gifts or abilities are valued more than others.)

'If you think your talents are simply for you to make a lot of money, retire, and die, you've missed the point of your life. God gave you talents to benefit others, not yourself. And God gave other people talents that benefit you.'

Rick Warren

Just as each one of you has received a special gift [a spiritual talent, an ability graciously given by God], employ it in serving one another as [is appropriate for] good stewards of God's multi-faceted grace [faithfully using the diverse, varied gifts and abilities granted to Christians by God's unmerited favour].

1 Peter 4:10 (Amplified Version)

## Reflection

- *What are the things that come naturally to you and that you enjoy doing?*
- *Do you actually get to spend much time doing these things?*
- *To what extent do you get fulfilment and satisfaction from the things that you do? (Not, 'how satisfied are you with your life?')*
- *If you were to get engrossed in a conversation that kept you talking late into the night - what would you be talking about?*
- *What would your friends and family - those who know you best - say that you were really interested in or passionate about?*

## Prayer

🎵 Song 633, Verse 1

For the next session  
Ask the group to bring a  
precious gift that someone  
has given to them.

## Notes

## Session 3

# Gifts

### Activity

 10 - 15 minutes

Everyone to show a precious gift that someone has given to them.

- *What was the best present you were ever given and why did you love it so much?*

### Introduction

In this session we are going to look at gifts that are given to us. You may not feel ‘gifted’ but by the end of the session you will have had the opportunity to consider your gifts and how you can use them for God’s kingdom.

Many schools run ‘Gifted and Talented’ programmes. The idea is to help develop the gifts and talents children have been given helping them to excel in these. However, not all children make the grade to be part of such a scheme. Does this mean they are less gifted? No, not at all! There are some gifts that are difficult to pinpoint from an academic level, yet they ‘make the world go round’, to name but a few; love, kindness, gentleness, faithfulness.

### Discussion

- *Are you a gifted person?*
- *What has been the biggest gift someone has given to you? Not in the form of a present but in the form of themselves?*

### Teaching

† Read 1 Corinthians 12:1-11

Ask members to list the spiritual gifts again out loud.

You may think ‘oh yes, that’s the gift I’ve been given’ or quite possibly ‘oh no, I don’t want that gift!’

Do you like the story of Jonah? We can often think of it as a Bible story for children, and about a person who simply moaned a lot and did not get his own way. That may be true to a certain extent. However, did Jonah possess a spiritual gift? Yes, Jonah had been given the gift of prophesy. God had chosen him, but he wanted to run away! So badly did he want to run, that he ended up on a boat with men he did not know, thrown overboard, swallowed by a huge fish, spat out onto land and so the story continues. The message of this story could possibly be ‘Beware when running from your God-given gifts’!

Moses did not feel that he was an eloquent man, yet learned that the words he spoke, the miraculous things he witnessed, his faith in God and his wisdom to follow God were all gifts from God. You may say, 'Well I'm no Moses!' Good, you do not need to be, but you do need to accept your gifts and use them.

You may acknowledge your gifts and use them for God, however, there is a distinct possibility that you have more gifts that are untapped! Growing older does not mean that we use our gifts less; it means we have the wisdom of age on our side to say 'What next God?'

Have you ever had a moment when you know deep inside you that you need to say something to someone; perhaps a word of encouragement, reassurance or even a verse of scripture? This could be a gift of knowledge. Perhaps you have been in a situation when you have felt uncomfortable with people and you know that you need to be praying for God's protection upon that situation as there is a battle of spirits going on in the heavenly realm. You are discerning of the spirits! Ever had a moment when you just knew that you had to do something even though everyone else thought you were mad? You have the gift of faith!

God gives us gifts for certain times in our lives. Many years ago my friend knew she had to lay her hands on me and pray for healing. She had never done it before but she knew she had to. From that moment there was a journey of healing that took place in my body.

The only thing that stops us from accepting God's gifts is our own insecurities. We doubt that God could use us in such a way. We worry what others may think. What a waste of God's beautiful gifts. The gifts of the Spirit are given for all who believe in Jesus. When we use our God-given gifts we bring unity and diversity through the body of the church.

† Read 1 Corinthians 12:12-14

It is time to use your gifts. If you think someone else will do something, or you are not the right age, or someone will do it better, then it is time to get Satan off your back and look to Jesus for his guidance.

'Take my life and let it be, consecrated Lord,  
to thee, take my moments and my days,  
let them flow in ceaseless praise.'

Salvation Army Song Book 623

## Reflection

Look back at the spiritual gifts described in 1 Corinthians 12 and discuss the following:

- *Which of these gifts have you seen at work in your life or the life of others?*
- *Is there a gift that you do not understand?*  
(If so, speak to your Officer/Minister)
- *How do spiritual gifts help build the body of the church?*

Take a quiet moment to pray and seek God's leading for which gifts he has to give to you.

Pray for courage to discuss this with a trusted friend or your Corps Officer. You may find it helpful to complete a Spiritual Gifts Questionnaire. Your Corps leader will be able to provide this for you.

## Prayer

🎵 Song 601

## Notes

## Session 4

# Time and Talents

### Aim

The aim of this session is to look at the time that God has given us. As we get older how we spend our time changes and so do our gifts, so taking the 'time' to align these as disciples of Christ is worthy of our time.

Enough of the 'time!' 'Time's up!'

### Activity

 15 - 30 minutes

#### Who am I?

Play a game of 'Who Am I?' with everyone taking a turn. This can be done with 'Post-It' notes, or for added fun can be downloaded on a smartphone. Each player puts the Post-It note on their forehead and has to guess the name of the person on the Post-It note by asking questions.

### Discussion

#### Just a Minute

Everyone speak for a minute on the topic: 'The best day of my life'. Unlike the Radio 4 game, you can use hesitation, repetition but not deviation.

Take a moment to think of when you have used the term 'I have had the time of my life!' Maybe it was a holiday, birthday, party or wedding? If you struggle to think of a time when you have said this, then perhaps share a special moment in time.

## Activity

 10 - 15 minutes

Which of these quotes is your favourite and why?

‘Be attentive to time and how you spend it. Nothing is more precious. This is evident when you recall that in one tiny moment heaven may be gained or lost. God, the master of time, never gives the future. He gives only the present, moment by moment.’

Albert Einstein

‘Time you enjoy wasting is not wasted time.’

Marthe Trolly-Curtin

‘Time is lost when we have not lived a full human life, time unenriched by experience, creative endeavour, enjoyment and suffering.’

Dietrich Bonhoeffer

‘I wish it need not have happened in my time,’ said Frodo. ‘So do I,’ said Gandalf, ‘and so do all who live to see such times. But that is not for them to decide. All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given us.’

The Lord of the Rings, JRR Tolkien

‘For what it’s worth: it’s never too late or, in my case, too early to be whoever you want to be. There’s no time limit, stop whenever you want. You can change or stay the same; there are no rules to this thing. We can make the best or the worst of it.’

The Curious Case of Benjamin Button, Eric Roth

‘When I stand before God at the end of my life, I would hope that I would not have a single bit of talent left, and could say, “I used everything you gave me”.’

Erma Bombeck

## Teaching

† Read Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

There is a time for 'everything'. These words call us to action. To act, to do, to give of ourselves in certain ways, to dance...to mourn!

Accepting that there is a time for everything reminds us that changing times requires a changing response. With changing responses come changing gifts and talents.

In Isaiah 43 God reminds his people of how he delivered them through the Red Sea and brought them to safety in such a mind-blowing way! Remember, this is an epoch-making event in the history of the Jewish people - one celebrated to this very day. Yet God tells them to forget that, not to dwell on the past because he is doing a new thing.

We acknowledge that life has brought us on a journey to this point in time. It is good to give thanks to God for all he has done and all he has allowed us to do, but now it is time to look for a new thing, look at the gift of the 'present time' and where we find ourselves now.

† Read Matthew 5:13-16 (The Message)

There are many different ways to bring out the 'God-colours' in the world and to shine for him.

## Reflection

Quietly think about how you spend your time day by day.

- *If you spend a lot of time in the house on your own, how can you use that time for God? Perhaps you could ring someone and pray with them.*
- *If you spend a lot of time out and about, how can you use your time to bring the God-colours to the places you find yourself?*
- *If you are a grandparent picking children up from school can you pray for the school as you walk through the gates?*
- *As you shop can you 'God bless' those who serve you?*

## Reflection

Our talents are the gift that God gives to us...What we make of our talents is our gift back to God.'

Leo Buscaglia

Thinking about what we have discussed in the previous weeks:

- *What things will bring you delight and in turn delight and bless others?*
- *How can you offer your time and talents to God?*
- *Are you being generous with your life?*

## Prayer

🎵 Song by Judson Van de Venter

All to Jesus I surrender, all to him I freely give;  
I will ever love and trust Him, in His presence daily  
live. I surrender all, I surrender all.  
All to Thee, my blessed Saviour, I surrender all.  
Amen

## Notes



- 5 Loss of Identity
- 6 Maintaining My Essence
- 7 The Elder Statesperson
- 8 Seeing Myself as God Sees Me

## Session 5

# Loss of Identity

### Activity

 10 - 15 minutes

#### Wheel of Influence

Draw a circle on a piece of paper and write your name in it. Draw 5 spokes coming out from the centre and write at the end of each spoke a person's name who has influenced you and helped to make you who you think you are. Share with the group a brief explanation of why each name is there. Do not forget the bad influences too!

### Discussion

- *Did you/do you have a nickname? What was it and why?*
- *James and John in the Bible had - 'Sons of Thunder' as their nicknames - what do you imagine that said about them?*
- *What makes people who they are? Is it the job they have done? Is it the relationships they have?*

### Teaching

You may have seen the TV programme 'Who do you think you are?' where famous people examine their ancestors. Some seem to have interesting pasts and many are emotionally distressed when they see how the previous generations survived circumstances such as poverty and war. The actor Larry Lamb was very interesting as his mother had been adopted and so he knew very little about his birth family and yet often wondered where his love of the stage came from. Lamb found fame late in life and had always thought that he was the first member of his family to work in the entertainment business but he was thrilled to discover that he actually descends from a family of showmen who were relatively famous on the fairground circuit in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Lion tamers with fantastical names such as Jimmy Wildbeast and Martini Bartlett came to light as Lamb delved into his mother's family.

The question is often raised about nature or nurture... are we what our genes dictate, are we what our life experiences make us, or, as many people think, are we a mixture of both? What do you think?

Well, let us consider one stage further than that. 'Why do you think you are who you think you are?' Do I talk a lot because my dear Dad did? Do I like cakes because my Mum worked in a bakery? Do I love to sing because my old Corps Cadet Guardian [or youth group leader] taught me to? I know who I think I am... but why do I think I am like that? Who shaped me, who influenced me, just who and what has made me who I am today?

We are told that we must be very careful these days of identity theft. There are people who are only too ready to use our name and address, our bank details etc. to commit all types of frauds and swindles. They pretend to be us to gain all sorts of benefits. There are stories from the war time about doubles being used for people like Churchill to protect them; there are even people today who make their living as lookalikes for the Queen and other famous people. Identity theft however is the deliberate use of someone else's identity as a method to gain a financial advantage. We need to keep safe from such things but also in a changing world it is hard sometimes to hold onto our identities in a different way; who we really are as individuals. We are not just the person with the dog, the person with the blue curtains, the person who needs an eye test. We are still who we are when all alone, as well as when we are with others. It is one of the saddest things when people who have found their identities in their work then retire and find themselves at a loss. Our identity is not found in others, it is found in God.

Genesis 1:27 says,

'So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.'

Whatever our identity now we can be assured that it is rooted and grounded in the image of God himself. Others may have had influence on us, for good and bad, but we started off as his children. The verse goes on to say 'God blessed them'. Through all our days we are assured that God himself has watched over our developing identity and blessed us. No-one can steal that identity from us, no-one can pretend to be us before God. He knows and understands all there is about us, he knows our true identity. Throughout the journey of life God loves to see us become fully the person he planned us to be, to live life in all its fullness and part of that plan is to fulfil the potential of our identity in him, showing his love, care, patience, and joy, daily as we live for him.

With grateful thanks to Major Wendy Knott (Rtd)

## Reflection

- *If I could look at other people's wheels of influence, whose lives would I hope to see my name written on?*
- *Whose life can I influence today?*
- *What could I do in the next few weeks to enhance my identity so it is closer to the image of God I was created in?*

† Read 1 Corinthians 12:12-14

What am I that you should notice me?  
Made in the likeness of God?  
You have given me a place to be,  
Made in the likeness of God.  
Major Joy Webb

## Notes

## Session 6

# Maintaining My Essence

### Activity

 10 minutes

Each person needs to write their name on a piece of paper. This is passed around the group and each person writes one word to describe that person. When you receive the paper back, consider if they have captured your essence.

### Discussion

Time to get philosophical!

- *What do you think is the real essence of being human?*
- *What is it that sets us apart from other animals?*
- *We sometimes speak of people acting as inhuman; does this give us insight into the essence of humanity?*

### Teaching

Heard the phrase ‘I have my ups and downs’? Whether we like it or not, our reactions are just different depending on the way we feel each day. Some say it depends on which side of the bed they got out of or even which way the wind is blowing. If someone met you just once, would they think that whatever you were like that day was the real you? On good days that might be useful but on bad ones? Some people seem bubbly and outgoing when you first meet them but on subsequent meetings they may appear quiet and thoughtful... or the other way round. It is a good job for most relationships that people meet us several times before they endorse or revise their first impressions. What is the real you and who knows the real you? It can be really hard to maintain the real you when circumstances change around you. It can be so difficult to maintain a true representation of the essence of who we really are when we just do not feel like it. There may be a contrast between the essence of who we are (that intrinsic nature which determines our character) and our self-image (who we see ourselves as). To be really healthy we need to see a close link between the two, honestly seeing our areas of development and just as honestly seeing our worth.

Another word for 'essence' is 'soul'. Do people really get a glimpse of our soul? The Psalmist struggled with this idea of the soul being the essence of himself and yet also the essence of his relationship with God. Here are just three of the Psalmist's expressions regarding his soul; can you relate to them?

† Read Psalm 119:28

How often do people see this side of our essential selves, the weary, sorrowful side? Yet we know that is not truly 'us'. His strength within can help us to display our true selves, people who are strengthened in the Lord's strength, even in the darkest day. May we know that even on the 'get out of bed on the wrong side' days his strength can be a central part of our innermost being.

† Read Psalm 62:5

How often do we feel in need of rest for the soul? The very essence of ourselves comes to those dry, arid places and needs refreshment. It is found, the Psalmist suggests, through hope. Do we reflect this side of ourselves or even strive to develop it? Hope is something that we can practice; reminding ourselves daily of all the Lord has done and promised to do. The essence of ourselves needs to reflect the eternal hope we have in Christ.

† Read Psalm 103:1

Thinking back to the one word descriptions of the essence of ourselves, would anyone see us as people of praise? We sing 'Count your blessings, name them one by one' but is it an essential part of who we are? Recently solid empirical research has shown the psychological benefits of counting your blessings or as some have called it, keeping a gratitude diary. (Reflecting each day on 3 good things we have experienced) From the warmth of a safe bed to the laughter of school children as they pass, from the love of a pet to the welcome cup of tea, we can praise the Lord in our innermost beings for the good things of life. We then will be people of praise.

## Reflection

Be grateful about yourself.

- *What things are you grateful for?*

Think about your abilities. You may start with basic abilities/features that make up the essence that is you like your listening skills, your skills in cheering up people, your skills in being a good friend.

Think about skilful things like dancing, singing, writing - gifts that you have are there to enhance the world of people around.

Try starting a gratitude diary. (You could use a basic notebook) Reflect on all the things that have been good about today, reflect on what was good about them and how that affected your surface feelings and then your deeper self. You could start with basic material things like home and food; think too about people and places, memories and smiles. You can write whenever you like. Writing at the beginning of the day can help you start your day off with a more positive attitude. Writing at the end of the day can help you collect your thoughts, fill your mind with calm, and help you fall asleep. If you find it helpful try and incorporate it into your daily devotions, that way you will make it part of your soul, the very essence of who you are.

For the next session  
Bring a collection of  
images or pictures of  
prominent political  
leaders, prime ministers,  
presidents, politicians etc.

## Notes

## Session 7

# The Elder Statesperson

### Activity

 10 minutes

Looking at the images of politicians and world leaders as a group divide the images into two groups and discuss those who you decide are States-people-like and those who you do not consider to be so. Please enjoy a lively conversation about your reasoning but try and keep it amicable and do not get caught up in party politics.

### Discussion

- *What are the characteristics or attributes that you feel characterise an elder stateswoman/man?*

### Teaching

I have reflected upon those people who have stood out for me as people who epitomise what I would see as an elder statesperson and believe that there are certain characteristics that they display.

#### Consistency

There is a consistency to those people to whom we give our respect. They are people whose 'yes is yes' and whose 'no is no' but in a way that is not dogmatic or intransigent. We can see this consistency as a pattern of their lives, of their choices and decisions and of their advice. When times are changing, and isn't that just the case right now, we see elder states-people as standing out like a lighthouse of consistency in the storm with constantly shifting tides. This consistency also extends to being diplomatic in conversation, perhaps best described as 'speaking the truth in love' rather than simply agreeing with differing points of view and trying to keep the peace. We are urged to live as men and women who exude an integrity arising from an inner faith.

† Read Ephesians 4:14 -15

#### Positivity

Elder states-people always seem to be positive. They have the ability to be in any situation and find something positive to say about it. In a world of negativity this comes across as a 'breath of fresh air' or like a 'spring in a parched land'. Yet it is more than that, it is not just a way of looking at things and ignoring the reality, but rather looking at the reality

and seeing new possibilities that come from having a faith in God. It is seeing the world through the eyes of faith and not through the eyes of despair which makes a difference and sets people out as States-people-like in our Corps, churches and communities. It is about dreaming new possibilities. Among the first public words spoken by Jesus recorded in the Bible are of him reading the prophecy from Joel:

‘I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; and your sons and your daughters will prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions.’

Joel 2:28 (KJV)

Dreaming new dreams and seeing new possibilities only comes when we are prepared to lay down the shackles of a status quo ‘we’ve always done it like this’ mentality. It happens when we are willing to be open to the Spirit’s leading and to be bold in where the Spirit leads. The story of Ananias recorded in Acts 9:10-20 is an example where someone was prepared to follow the leading of the Spirit even through fear and uncertainty.

### Encouragement

En (make) courage (inner strength)

The etymology of the word encourage is literally to make inner strength. We so often think of an encourager as a ‘cheerer-upper’ with a word of humour but it is so much more than that. Real encouragers

lift the soul, provide hope for the future and develop resilience within us. When Moses was faced with the reality that he would never cross the Jordan into the Promised Land he was told:

‘But charge Joshua, and encourage him, and strengthen him: for he shall go over before his people, and he shall cause them to inherit the land which thou shalt see.’

Deuteronomy 3:28 (KJV)

In a very real sense he was passing on the mantle that had originally been his and on which he failed to deliver because of pride. Although this may have caused him some personal pain he nonetheless obeys God’s command to encourage and empower Joshua.

When I think back on those people who have encouraged me I recognise that they have not simply been ‘cheerful souls’ but have been men and women of God who have understood something of the circumstances (i.e. there is an established relationship), have understood something of the challenges that are being faced and have brought an understanding of God into that situation. Sometimes the words they have given have been most challenging yet they have been the most encouraging - literally making inner strength.

## Reflection

Think upon the heroes of faith who have been elder states-people in your life.

- *What are the characteristics that you would identify with them?*
- *Which of these characteristics do you need to develop under the guidance of the Holy Spirit?*
- *Which relationships should you develop in order that you are able to be an 'encouragement sent from God'?*

Make a list and pray for guidance.

For the next session  
You will need some good  
drawing paper and  
a sharpened 2B pencil  
for best results.

## Notes

## Session 8

# Seeing Myself as God Sees Me

### Activity

 10 minutes

Spend 10 minutes drawing a portrait of the person sitting opposite you in your group. Now you may not call yourself an artist, but give it your best shot. Try and capture those nuances that bring out their personality.

### Discussion

Take a look at the drawings and discuss how close the likenesses are.

- *Are there things there that quite clearly capture the person's identity?*

As a group discuss how you think other people perceive you.

- *What are the traits that others would give you? E.g. energetic, joyful, miserable, excitable etc?*

### Teaching

I am sure like me you have all used the phrase 'it doesn't matter what other people think of you' probably trying to comfort someone who has been on the end of some harsh words that have left them feeling excluded, hurt or sad. I think it is probably quite true to say that it does not matter what others think, but it is important to have an understanding of how God sees us and to reflect upon how we live within that light because God knows us more intimately than anyone else, even more than we know ourselves. He is our Creator after all. So as Paul suggests let us take some time to make a sober assessment of ourselves. (Romans 12:3 NIV)

#### God Loves You

Let us start off with a simple but profound truth - God Loves You. This is the overriding message of the Bible which has sometimes been called God's love letter to mankind. It is important in seeing ourselves as God sees us to recognise that God loves us. Some of us may have been brought up with a picture of God as vengeful, angry, judgemental and legalistic, reflecting the age when we were raised, which has skewed our understanding of how God sees us and in some cases leading to low self-esteem and guilt or seeking approval and overachieving. It is important to recognise a distinction between the truth that we are 'unworthy of God's love' because it is a gift beyond compare, and

the falsehood that 'we are worthless', they are two very different things. The overwhelming testimony of God's word is:

'I have loved you with an everlasting love;  
I have drawn you (to me) with unfailing  
kindness.'

Jeremiah 31:3 (NIV)

As a parent I want the very best for my children. I want them to become all that they can. I want them to be happy and contented. I want them to find fulfilment in life. I want to experience meaningful relationship with them. God is the same, but without the flaws of character that I have. He wants his children to experience 'life in all its fullness'. All of them!

#### You are a work of Art

In Ephesians 2:10, we are described as God's workmanship a word that could equally be translated as God's work of art. Michelangelo's 'pieta' is generally acclaimed as one of the greatest pieces of art in the world. On Pentecost Sunday 1972 a man took a hammer to it and tried to destroy it, knocking off Mary's left arm, snapping off the tip of her nose, and damaging her cheek and left eye. It took 10 months to restore the statue as workmen meticulously sorted more than a 100

fragments and used glue and marble powder to make a seamless restoration. The flaws are almost invisible, but they are there. We are God's work of art and while conceived in perfection however flawless we appear to be we have been damaged by our sin.

#### You are a new Creation

Unlike Michelangelo's artwork which could be patched up by craftsmen this option is not acceptable for God. God is The Master Craftsman and flaws and blemishes are just not his way of doing things. He is interested in perfection, and he takes broken, blemished and flawed people and re-creates them. He creates a brand new spiritual medium and makes us anew, he did not simply clean up our old nature, he made us something new, fresh and unique (see 2 Corinthians 5:17, John 1:13 and Romans 6:4) and he moulds us as clay before the potter.

'Yet you, LORD, are our Father.  
We are the clay, you are the potter;  
we are all the work of your hand.'

Isaiah 64:8 (NIV)

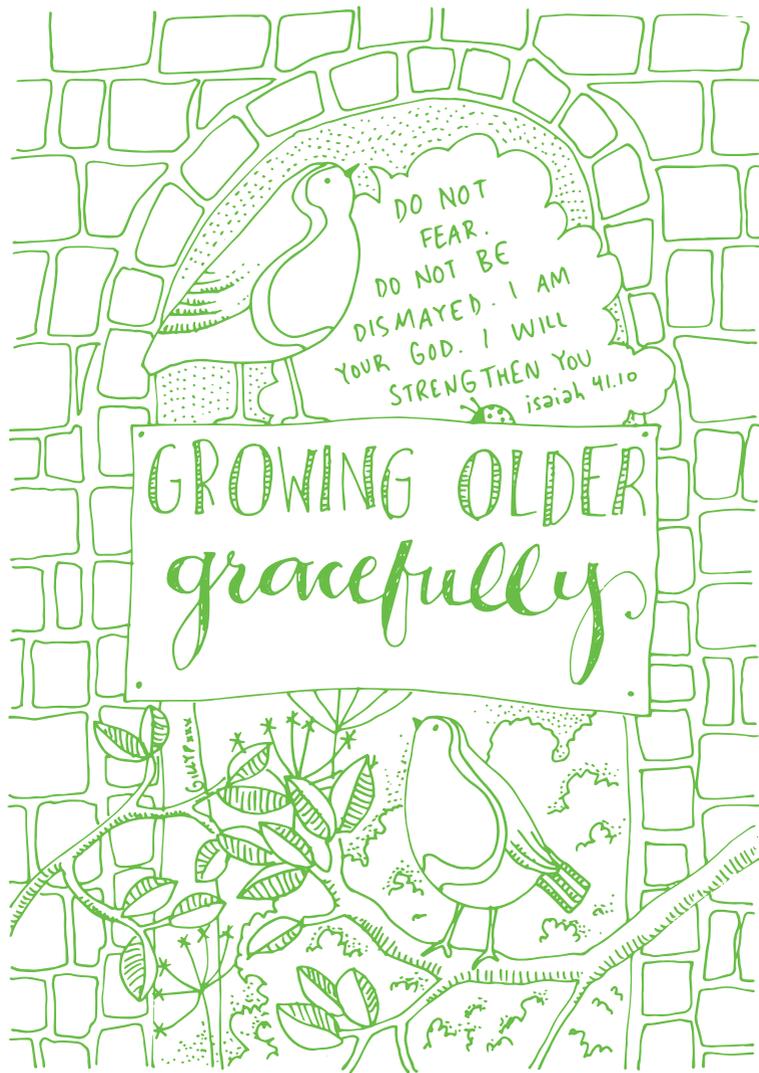
## Reflection

Write a love letter to yourself as if it were from God to you - his child and new creation.

- *What does it mean to walk in 'newness of life'? (Romans 6:4)*
- *Are there ways that you need to change in trying to comprehend how God sees you?*

For the next session  
You will need paper,  
pencil, colour pens.

## Notes



- 9 Being Prepared to Stand out for God
- 10 Widening my Circle of Influence
- 11 Sharing my Faith with My Peers
- 12 Growing Older with Grace

## Session 9

# Being Prepared to Stand Out for God

### Activity

 10 minutes

- *How do you stand out for God?*

Write it down and share with the group. You could write a poem or use that thought in some way to remind you.

### Discussion

Major Alison Thompson heads up the International Response Unit for The Salvation Army. When Alison was asked this question ‘What does it mean to stand out for God?’ here was her reply. ‘For me this means standing up for those who are the most vulnerable. It means helping people to live with dignity and how those who have been affected by conflict and disaster can achieve this.’

Ask yourselves the same question:

- *What does it mean to you to stand out for God?*

Now discuss what the word ‘vulnerable’ means to you.

### Teaching

Major Lorraine O’Neil believes that we need to change the image of what ‘church’ is to people in society. Lorraine believes ‘It is time for us to stop adding things to programme and time to change our mind-set in order that the church of Jesus Christ will be properly equipped to be the hands and feet of Jesus in this world.’

We must not be ‘Sunday’ Christians giving a segment of ourselves when we are in the company of other Christians, but whole-life disciples, being Jesus every day no matter where or who we are with. Often fear takes over when it comes to standing out for God but God says,

‘Do not fear for I am with you; do not be dismayed for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.’

Isaiah 41:10 (NIV)

How will people hear about Jesus if we do not take time to tell them? What about those in the Doctor's surgery, the supermarket, at the bus stop or perhaps more importantly our own family or friends?

Lorraine recalls, 'One day I decided that I needed to frequent the same coffee shop. I got to know the staff and they got to recognise me. One day I plucked up the courage to say that I and the church I belonged to wanted to pray for the coffee shop employees and the community around them. I told them that they served us well and in turn we wanted as a church to serve them through prayer. The gentleman behind the counter said "how lovely" with a big smile and went to fetch his father, the owner of the coffee shop. The father came and told me how thankful he was that we were prepared to pray for not only the coffee shop but the community also. He asked that we pray for relationships and for people to stop being so self-centred and more "bothered" about others.'

So that's what we did and the coffee shop started to overflow with customers who found a place of 'togetherness' in those walls. When returning to the coffee shop one day the young gentleman I had initially spoken to said, "Lorraine, have you seen what's happening? Your prayers are working!" He then brought two members of staff from the kitchen joyfully exclaiming that "this is the lady who prays for us".'

Both Alison and Lorraine speak about 'others'; people who are very different from one another; people from war-torn countries, people working day to day, people living insular lives, but all these people having one thing in common. They were all touched by the power of prayer.

'The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing.'

J F Kennedy

'You are here to be light, bringing out the God-colours in the world.'

Matthew 5:14 (The Message)

## Reflection

Standing out for God can be difficult and frightening, especially if there are people with a different outlook. However we do not live in isolation, but rather we are part of society and our voice will count.

- Think of a time when you stood out for God.  
*What was it like, how did it feel?*
- *Are you able to recognise how God sustained and strengthened you?* Claim that power once again.
- *What can you do from this point to bring out the 'God-colours' in this world?* E.g. offering to pray for someone; not going along with the crowd in conversation; signing a petition against human trafficking, etc.

## Prayer

Words by Howard A Walter, 1906

I would be true, for there are those who trust me;  
 I would be pure, for there are those who care;  
 I would be strong, for there is much to suffer;  
 I would be brave, for there is much to dare.  
 I would be friend of all - the foe, the friendless;  
 I would be giving, and forget the gift;  
 I would be humble, for I know my weakness;  
 I would look up, and laugh and love and lift.  
 I would be faithful through each passing moment;  
 I would be constantly in touch with God;  
 I would be strong to follow where he leads me;  
 I would have faith to keep the path Christ trod. Amen

## Notes

## Session 10

# Widening my Circle of Influence

### Discussion

Take turns in your group to give the qualities of a good friend. (This may be good listening/fun to spend time with/trustworthy/honest etc.)

Talk about a funny moment you have shared with a friend.

- *Which groups of people do you spend most time with?*
- *Why is it important to continue making friends?*

### Teaching

Major Yvonne Field from Sale Corps shares her experience...

'I took up horse riding three years ago when Ian, my husband, bought me six horse riding lessons for my 65th birthday. As a child I helped out at a local stable but could never afford lessons. Ian had no idea what he had let himself in for giving me such a super gift! I now volunteer at the yard three days a week and look after Jay, a nineteen year old horse who belongs to the yard owner. Last year he asked me to 'take her on' which meant giving lots of TLC and regular exercise. I love her to bits. In exchange, I do some yard jobs, make lots of brews for the staff and help out with the school ponies! What is even more amazing is how God has opened an incredible door of opportunity of friendship and ministry.

Often I am asked questions about faith. I've been asked to pray for someone, I've listened while someone shares a concern, burden or anxiety. Some of the staff have attended our Christmas concerts at Sale too. I'm also told that the language at the yard has cleaned up somewhat since I've been around which is interesting as I've never reacted to the occasional colourful expression! It's challenging, thrilling and a great privilege to enjoy friendship with lovely people of all ages. God is good!'

How interesting that Yvonne, who is so well known in the Salvation Army for writing music has now taken to horse riding, cleaning out stables and helping in a pony school. What a change from the life of a Salvation Army Officer. Yet what Yvonne has done is taken an opportunity and literally 'ridden with it'.

As we grow older there is a danger that our circle of friends is smaller than it once was, due to leaving work colleagues, people moving home, maybe a reduced range of activities that you carry out etc.

Widening our circle of friends is not only good for us from the perspective of our own health and well-being as well as society, but it is what Jesus calls us to do as his disciples when he said,

'Go into world and make disciples of all nations.'

Matthew 28:19

How will we ever be able to fulfil the Great Commission if we only talk to those we have always talked to and never been brave enough to widen our friendship group? If we do not take the opportunity to make friends and tell people about Jesus we may actually be falling short of fulfilling the calling of God on our lives.

You may not take up horse riding, but there will be some way that you can widen your friendship group and meet new people. Yes, it is scary. For those of us who are introverts, starting a new group or going to a new place can be extremely hard, but in those moments remember Joshua 1:9:

'Be strong and courageous.  
Do not be afraid; the Lord your God will  
be with you wherever you go.'

Joshua 1:9

Is it time to step out of the comfort zone and widen not only your circle of friends, but your circle of influence, your circle of mission, your circle of prayer, your circle of learning from others?

Through conversations Yvonne has made such an impact; people asking for prayer, coming to church and being careful not to use bad language. Let us always make time for conversation. It is exactly what Jesus did and he was great at making new friends and he surrounded himself with new people all the time. Jesus was always making new friends, from a tax collector to a fisherman. So let us open our eyes, be like Jesus and look for opportunities to widen our circle of influence.

With grateful thanks to Major Yvonne Field (Rtd)

## Reflection

Is it time to widen your circle of influence? What challenges does it bring? Why not start to make a list of opportunities, and try to think broadly? Think about your acquaintances, what needs to happen to start building meaningful relationships? Consider the following quotations:

‘Friendship is the hardest thing in the world to explain. It’s not something you learn in school. But if you haven’t learned the meaning of friendship, you really haven’t learned anything.’

Muhammad Ali

‘Find a group of people who challenge and inspire you; spend a lot of time with them and it will change your life.’

Amy Poehler

## Prayer

Lord, help us to be brave and make new friends. Help us to see not only how much we need others, but how they need us also. You taught your first disciples to live a life of love; now we ask for your help to do so that others will come to know you and trust you. Thank you for being the greatest friend of all. Amen

For the next session  
You will need a bag with a selection  
of random everyday objects in.

## Notes

## Session 11

# Sharing my Faith with My Peers

### Activity

 2 minutes per person

Take it in turns to take an object out and give it to the person on your left.

You will each be given a random object by someone else in the group. You then have two minutes to try and ‘sell’ that object to the others by outlining its benefits.

### Teaching

When I first started playing golf I used to talk about it to everyone. Why? Because for a time it was important to me, it made me happy, it made me fitter, I enjoyed it.

What things when you first started doing did you talk about to everyone? And how long was it before you stopped talking about it with excitement and enthusiasm?

Somehow, it never seems quite as easy to share my faith even though I have been a Christian far longer than I was a golfer (I use the term loosely) and it is infinitely more important to me. I don’t think I’m alone in this so we will look at some ideas for sharing our faith.

### Try sharing your faith with those you know first

We somehow seem to have associated sharing our faith with talking to strangers but let us not forget that we have a group of people around us who we already know and who know us where we will not have to try and start from scratch. Let us recognise that we may be a part of their life in order to share our faith with them. If our faith is important to us it stands to reason we would share it with those that we know and love the most. Strangely the people I used to talk about go to were *all* people I knew. Talking about something important to us is natural.

There is no one way to share your faith. What is natural for me may not be for you. While we may look at some of the spiritual giants that seem to evangelise effortlessly and regale us with stories of lives turned around please recognise that you are who you are for a purpose. You are unique and offer something that no-one else does. Your relationships, experience and life story is yours and yours alone, it cannot be denied and is more likely to resonate with those around you. Your story does not need to be exciting, innovative or dramatic. We may sometimes wish we had a dramatic 'road to Damascus' experience but our own reality of faith will be far more powerful to those we know and love.

Being yourself also applies to the way we share our faith. We start by living authentic Christian lives with integrity and a genuine Christian love and then lead on to explaining the reason why we live that life. In a world where people are very much seen as commodities the very act of spending time with people, getting to know them and their interests and building community and relationship is almost an act of ushering in the Kingdom of God in itself. Spending time getting to know people should never be seen as wasted time but may be the most valuable investment we can make.

### † Read Acts 17:22-34

Discuss the way Paul shares faith with the people at Athens:

- Starts where people are and with what they know. (Verses 22-23)
- Makes a connection with the Christian God (Verses 24-26)
- Presents the challenge of a new possibility (Verses 27-31)

In this passage the people did not all fall on their knees in repentance, far from it. Some scoffed and laughed and others said 'we would like to hear more about this' Verse 32, 'but some people joined and believed' Verse 34. It was part of a process.

### Be ready with your own testimony

Your personal testimony is a powerful story and is what you know best. Learn how to tell your testimony with a simple three-point plan.

- How your life was before you became a Christian
- How you became a Christian
- How by God's help your life has changed and become better since becoming a Christian

### It all starts with prayer

We have put this at the end in the hope that as it is the last thing we mention, it will be the first thing you remember to do.

Ask God for leading to those who could be on your 'influence list'. Start a list of people who you feel God may be asking you to share your faith with. Pray for them daily, not just that their daily needs would be met, but that by the grace of God you would play a part in their eternal destiny.

Pray for daily opportunities to share your faith. It is surprising how many more opportunities there are to share your faith when you pray for opportunities. Be faithful in prayer. Do not expect everything to happen straight away. Maintaining faithfulness in prayer will always be within the will of God, remembering that prayer is as much about aligning our will with God as anything else.

## Reflection

Spend some time in quiet prayer and reflection asking God to place on your heart people that he longs for you to interact with for the sake of the Kingdom of God.

Write their names on a piece of paper or in a journal and start regularly praying for them.

Start thinking about your testimony.

- *In what ways is your life different now that you have become a Christian?*
- *What was your conversion experience?*
- *Was it a definable event?*
- *Were you gradually aware of the influence of Christ in your life? Try and write it down if possible.*

## Notes

## Session 12

# Growing Older with Grace

### Activity

 5 minutes

You may remember the character Victor Meldrew from the TV Programme 'One Foot in the Grave'. He seemed to be the grumpiest of grumps about everything and everyone around him. His catch-phrase became known throughout the land, do you remember it? 'I don't believe it!'

What are the things around you that make you want to shout 'I don't believe it?' Is it when someone does not empty the bin, or you find another grey hair, or the fish and chip shop have run out of fish? You may wish to start your sentence by saying, 'I don't believe it when.....'

This is supposed to be a fun exercise as there are some things that make us exasperated that would not for someone else, but to acknowledge how we 'tick' so to speak can help us when thinking about growing older with grace.

Victor Meldrew does not exude grace and in the moments when he has to be kind and gracious to those around him the effort this takes appears to deflate him and take his energy completely.

We could use the descriptive word of Grumpy to best describe Victor's character.

### Discussion

- *What would be your descriptive word that people would use to describe your character?*

If possible share this with one another in the group but in a supportive, loving and compassionate manner please! And if anyone of you would be considered a 'grump', do not worry, God has not finished with us yet!

## Teaching

Philippians 1:6 says

‘Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.’

Philippians 1:6

So remember, God has not finished with us yet!

As we consider growing older with grace the words of a song by Connie Harrington and Shawn Craig come to mind...

‘Your grace still amazes me, your love is still a mystery, each day I fall on my knees because your grace still amazes me. Oh patient Father, you make me whole. You are the author and the healer of my soul. What can I give you? Lord, what can I say? There’s no way to repay you only to offer you my praise.’

This leads our thoughts again to Isaiah:

‘But God’s not finished. He’s waiting around to be gracious to you. He’s gathering strength to show mercy to you. God takes the time to do everything right - everything. Those who wait around for him are the lucky ones.’

Isaiah 30:18 (The Message)

If you have time to read the whole of Isaiah Chapter 30 you will see that this is a message of God’s exasperation and annoyance at a people who have gone astray. His own people are far away from him yet he draws them back and shows his graciousness to them in verse 18. In the NIV version it simply says that God shows them ‘his compassion’.

Possibly the key to growing older with grace is to grow in God's compassion. Grace can be translated as 'grateful and thankful'. When we cast our 'thought-net' wider than our own thoughts and perceptions, we live in the knowledge of others' lives. I write this as Christmas fast approaches and having spent a day in a Salvation Army church packing away left-over toys from the Parcel Appeal for next year. The lady who helped me is an asylum seeker. She has travelled from a war-torn country with her children, seeking safety and compassion. Her eyes are kind and her smile is warm towards me, despite being a stranger to her, as she retells the story of her finding Christ through the work of the Salvation Army and how she has just signed her covenant to become a Soldier in the Salvation Army. I am blessed to spend time with her and two other young women who have also sought refuge in our country. Their stories lie untold but they know that no-one should live with a price-tag attached to their life. They treat me with utter respect and compassion despite my ignorance of a life they know and have lived through. The terror, the pain, the isolation, the hunger for a better life, the travel from a distant land to this, their new home, is not displayed in anger or annoyance to me. No, what I see is a genuine compassion, a Christ-likeness, a grace that brings me tears of shame for the moments I feel a lack of grace towards others.

The lesson I was reminded of is that our circumstances cannot define who we are. Only Christ should define who we are and the verse from Philippians 1:6 reminds us that God who started a good work in us will complete it. We do not live this challenge on our own. Our attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus (Philippians 2). I have not travelled by boat, plane or lorry to flee a war-torn land. I have not had nails put through my hands. So what is my response? To grow older with grace, the grace that God gives.

Growing older brings its challenges: grief, loss, poor health, lack of finances and we may want to shout, 'I don't believe it!' and at times that is ok, God understands our humanity. However, let us choose to grow older in love, in compassion, in patience - in Grace.

## Reflection

Think of a time when someone has exuded grace to you.

- *Did this flow from a motivation of love or hate?*  
Discuss if you have time.

Take a moment to think back to the word that described you. Now think of a word that describes what you desire to be with God's help. In silence, pray this word over yourself, asking God to complete this work in your life.

Pray the 'Grace' together:

'May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all evermore. Amen.'

### For the next session

If possible bring some photographs of your extended family - thinking inclusively of those you consider family - whether blood relation or not.

## Notes



- 13 Praying for My Family
- 14 The Inspirational Grandparent
- 15 Dealing with Changing Times
- 16 Love One Another
- 17 Holy Discontent
- 18 Painful Family Experiences

## Session 13

# Praying for My Family

### Activity

 2-5 minutes per person

Each person to take a few minutes to talk about their extended family using the photographs if they have them (think inclusively of ‘children and grandchildren’, ‘brothers and sisters’ and ‘nieces and nephews’ whether blood relation or not).

### Discussion

- *What are some of the joys our families have brought us?*
- *What are some of the worries and concerns?*

### Teaching

One of the hardest passages in the New Testament to understand is Luke 14:25-27.

The intention in this passage is to stress that if we are a follower of Christ then we need to put him first in our lives. It helps us to get a clearer perspective when we think of the words of Jesus when he said,

‘Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things will be added unto you.’

Matthew 6:13

Later in Matthew the disciples point out that his mother and brothers are there probably wanting to see him (Matthew 12:46-50). He replies ‘Who are my mother and brothers?’ He goes on to say we are all part of God’s family as his followers. It is a wonderful privilege that we can know God as our Father and through Christ we are welcomed into the family of God. (See Romans 8:15) The designation ‘Abba’ would have been the normal way a child would have referred to his or her father, it would have indicated the closest of loving relationships and we, by the grace of Christ, are adopted and welcomed into his family.

My own children were adopted and before we were able to do so we had to have references, pass medicals, have our income checked, have lots of interviews etc. but God accepts us into his family just as we are! Whatever our earthly family situation we can all have the privilege of being part of God's family. Let us value our church family and cherish our brothers and sisters in Christ! In this context praying for my family becomes extended.

Lest we perceive that Jesus was cold-hearted to his earthly family, we see at Calvary the real compassion Jesus had for his mother. On the Cross, in his dying moments Jesus says to the disciple 'whom he loved', 'behold your mother' and to Mary 'behold your son'. In these simple words Jesus was passing on the mantle of provision for his mother to one of his most trusted disciples. We need to somehow seek to put God first in our lives, and trust that 'all these things will be added unto you' meaning that our love for our family (the Greeks used the word 'philia') will be embraced within our love for God (agape).

With grateful thanks to Major Heather Durrant

## Reflection

- *What does the relationship of Jesus with his family say to you about how we should pray for our own families?*
- *Do we need to reconsider the way we pray for our families?*

Praying for our families provides us with opportunities that we often do not have when praying for other people because we know them, we know their needs and some of their concerns. However, it is important that we recognise that in our praying as much of what we do should be directed to the eternal rather than just the temporary.

- Pray for the conviction of sin.
- Pray that they would experience salvation.
- Pray that they would know the peace of God that is beyond understanding.
- Pray that their relationships would be filled with God's presence.

## Reflection

These lovely words of Claire Coninger remind us of the absolute privilege that is ours in bringing our families into God's holy presence and 'pleading the blood of Jesus' for their eternal salvation.

♪ **Somebody Prayed For Me**  
by Robert Sterling & Claire Cloninger

*When my heart was so broken  
That I could not pray,  
When love wasn't easy to see.  
Someone was there, somebody cared,  
Somebody prayed for me.*

*Somebody went to the throne of heaven,  
Somebody lifted my name.  
Bringing me into His holy presence,  
Saying what I could not say.  
Somebody showed me the face of His mercy,  
When darkness was all I could see.  
Somebody pleaded the Blood of Jesus,  
Somebody prayed for me.*

## Prayer

♪ **Father I place into your Hands**  
**Songs of Fellowship 97**

- Let us pray together as we thank God for the joys which our families bring us.
- Let us thank God for the privilege of being part of his family.
- Let us pray for the family concerns which some of us may currently have.

## Notes

## Session 14

# The Inspirational Grandparent

### Activity

 5 minutes

Draw what you are able to of your family tree, going back at least a couple of generations if possible.

### Discussion

Many people today love to spend hours researching their ancestors and trying to find out as much as they can about them. These days you can even have a blood test and be told the ethnicity of your blood sample - 20% Scandinavian, 30% African and 50% Eastern European! People are often appalled at the humble circumstances many of their ancestors lived in but that was life for most people until really quite recently.

Share a few stories of special individuals on that tree; did you have a rogue, an eccentric, a Lord or a Lady?

Now put yourself at the top of a new page and draw the tree going downwards from your generation.

- Are there any stories to tell about them or is it all too current to talk about yet? Try to imagine what it will be like in 70 years' time when your name is researched, what tales will they tell about you?

Let us consider the word 'inspirational':

- Is there anyone on either list that comes under that heading? Are there people you know have inspired others to achieve, to live a particular lifestyle, to follow a particular profession or follow a faith?

### Teaching

One man I consider to be my inspiration is not a blood relative, in fact he had no children of his own but in many appointments as a Salvation Army Officer, including Head of a boy's Correctional Centre in Haiti, he and his wife were inspirational role models to many thousands. I met him when he was retired and a soldier at a Corps I was appointed to, at a time when my children were just becoming a bit more independent and I was looking to develop my pastoral ministry within my new timetable. He shared his books with me, and his time. His wisdom and love of studying God's word was a real inspiration especially because he always said 'study is nothing if it does not change you and the way you care for others'.

The shape of my ministry has been so different since the time he inspired me, always trying to learn so that my pastoral care could be better.

The writer to the Hebrews speaks about inspirational people:

‘Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith.’

Hebrews 12:1-2

He is referring to the list started in the previous chapter, using it to encourage the readers to persevere so that they might win the race of life. People like Abraham, Moses, Gideon, David, not forgetting the prostitute Rahab. These were people of faith, people who were able to do God’s work by faith and able to inspire others by their example of faithful living. We know they were not all perfect, they all were very human, but through faith they persevered and can,

the writer suggests, be used to inspire us to continue in times of trial. Can you imagine having your name on that list? Wow! And yet we can all inspire others to faithfulness, to endurance, to perseverance. It is about us being human and yet being prepared to be known for our faithful fulfilment of God’s will in our lives.

The writer to the Hebrews was writing to baby Christians in the early church; we have the opportunity to be inspirational to the next generations, blood relatives or not, by being one of a great cloud of witnesses.

How can that fit into your life? By offering care and concern, prayer and support, to those around you. By being human and yet showing your faithfulness to God’s will and purpose in your life? Maybe just a card or a word in season, or perhaps by just being who you are.

‘Preach the Gospel at all times.  
When necessary, use words.’

St. Francis of Assisi

With grateful thanks to Major Wendy Knott (Rtd)

## Reflection

- *Can you look back on the inspirational, life-changing influences you remember?*
- *Can you think how your influence may change someone else's life?*

## Prayer

🎵 Song 610

My life must be Christ's broken bread,  
My love his outpoured wine,  
A cup o'er filled, a table spread,  
Beneath his name and sign,  
That other souls, refreshed and fed,  
May share his life through mine.

## Notes

## Session 15

# Dealing with Changing Times

### Activity

 10-15 minutes

Think of the biggest change you have seen in your lifetime. Write this on a piece of paper, fold it up and place it in a hat or bowl. After a good shuffle ask each person to take a piece of paper and read it out loud. Guess whose this is and discuss.

### Discussion

We live in a changing world. Roles in society have changed and altered over the years, especially the role of women. We now have anti-discriminatory practice and legislation. We have lived through the sexual revolution and life as we once knew it and understood it is very different. Today we are going to consider the changes we have seen and experienced and how as disciples of Jesus Christ, we live in what can sometimes feel like a 'new world'.

Think about your family.

- *What was the role of your parents?*
- *Was your father expected to be the bread winner?*
- *Was your mother expected to give up work to look after the family?*

Think about yourself in your 20's/early 30's.

- *What was your role within the family?*
- *What about young parents now?*
- *What is their role within the family?*

(Your discussions may take you down 'boy/girl' roles. Theresa May, PM, and her husband have role reversals which may help with the current climate discussions. Was the queen influential in the reversal of traditional roles? Queen Elizabeth II was part of the Auxiliary Transport Service in World War II.)

## Teaching

Jesus met people just where they were. In John's gospel we read how Jesus talks about us being the branches and him being the vine. This reminds us to root ourselves in God. That will then mean we are rooted in love, in patience, in kindness and therefore our attitude will be more like that of Christ Jesus.

We live in a very diverse world. Many people in society have different values from ourselves and yet we are called to live in harmony with one another which can be difficult at times because we all see the world through different eyes.

In John 13:34, Jesus said,

'A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.'

As disciples of Jesus we need to learn to be loving of one another. This may mean that we try to see the world through a different lens, even if we do not always agree with the lens we are looking through. We may struggle with a family where the mother goes out to work and the father looks after the children. We may struggle with people from other countries who have different cultures to ours expressing this through customs and traditions that we do not understand. We may struggle with people who like body art (tattoos, piercings) simply because we grew up in an age where it was not so visible. We may struggle with people's use of language which may have been considered as 'colourful' in the past but now almost seems to be commonplace in conversation. We must be careful that seeing others' choices or cultural differences, the way they speak or act are not necessarily sinful but a way of that person expressing themselves. If we are honest with ourselves there will be something that we struggle with and that struggle will be different for each of us. However, as Disciples of Christ we have to follow his lead and live with his attitude towards others each and every day.

‘Dear friends, since God so loved us,  
we also ought to love one another.’

1 John:11

‘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.’

Matthew 22:37

Jesus makes it very clear that we need to love one another. Our interactions with others must be underpinned by love. A song by Andrew Lloyd Webber says ‘Love changes everything’.

Our world would be a different place if everyone allowed love to underpin every conversation, every interaction and every thought.

With grateful thanks to Major Alison Thompson

## Reflection

- *How are our lives changed by the principle of living a life of love?*
- *What are the challenges of doing this?*
- *How does our faith in Christ change our day to day behaviour towards others?*

## Prayer

Lord, in this quiet moment I ask you to challenge me about a situation that I can influence with regard to others. Help me to bridge the gap by having your attitude and your love I pray. Amen

### For the next session

Bring pictures of people whose lifestyle choice or perhaps the way that they choose to dress is different from yours. E.g. Punk Rockers, Reggae, people in the public eye, e.g. celebrities. Also bring a tea-light.

## Notes

## Session 16

# Love One Another

### Activity

 10 minutes

Look at the pictures that you have brought.

- *What do you see?*
- *What thoughts come to mind?*

Share these with the group.

### Discussion

- *Have you ever felt judged? Perhaps on the way you looked, your beliefs, your parenting, the house you lived in, your job choice?*
- *How does it feel to be judged on personal aspects of our lives?*

### Teaching

This is the story of a mother whose daughter shared with her that she was gay. This session is not designed to debate this as a theological discussion, nor to decide the rights or wrongs of other peoples' decisions. We will think about how we respond to others around us as Christians, considering our response and reactions to other people in light of how Jesus interacted with those he met. (Names have been changed.)

Kath grew up in a northern town of England and at the age of 17 found out that her brother Jack was gay. Jack was thrown out of the family home and left to fend for himself. Kath accepted and loved Jack. She was saddened at the treatment he received from others, some Christians, some not. Jack felt alienated from church but kept faith in Christ and now practices as a Quaker.

One day Kath's daughter, Charlotte, came to speak to her but she broke down in tears. Kath was horrified at what might be the problem, concerned that Charlotte may be ill or considering leaving university. Eventually Charlotte's sobs subdued and she uttered the words she had kept inside for a very long time, 'I'm gay.' Kath was relieved there was no illness, no dropping out of education, and actually felt this was not such a big ordeal but she could see that for Charlotte it was. She explained to Charlotte there were two main concerns for her as a parent. One was that Charlotte would be choosing to not have children and secondly she was concerned that her daughter may be treated as her brother had been many years before.

Kath's fear grew for how others would treat her. Sadly, in a conversation with a Christian friend, the friend spoke aggressively about her view on people who were gay which left Kath in tears. Months later when she spoke again to this friend, explaining the situation with Charlotte, the friend broke down in tears saying how sorry she was. She expressed her love for Charlotte saying she was still Charlotte to her and she would read more around the subject.

There have been many conversations since, mainly positive ones, some not so, but throughout it all Kath's prayer was this:

'Whatever people say about my daughter Lord, please let her relationship with you continue to grow, as that is so much more important than what people think or say. Amen'

This story is a snapshot of a long road. This road has brought many questions - faith questions and life questions.

As the world has changed, many things that were seen as controversial/unacceptable are now accepted as common practice. More people live together before marriage and divorce is common-place. Going back fifty years there was something of a stigma attached to both of these situations and others alongside. However, we live in a changing world and these situations are ones that are now more common place within our families and churches. You, yourself may be able to think of occasions when you have experienced things in your own life/church community that you may have struggled or disagreed with. What did you learn from

this? There may be trivial examples also which will make us smile. Perhaps considering back to the day when you wore the wrong colour socks as a bandsman and were made to march behind the band, or you were frowned on for going to the 'pictures'.

The way we react to one another is important. Our human nature can sometimes be judgemental even when we do not want to think of ourselves as judgemental.

Jesus warns us in Matthew 7:1-5 about how we view and judge other. He challenges us at looking at the speck in another's eye when we have a huge plank in our own.

'Do not judge, and you will not be judged.  
Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven.'

Luke 7:37

'It is the Holy Spirit's job to convict,  
God's job to judge and my job to love.'

Billy Graham

## Reflection

- *What would you do if you were in Kath's shoes?*
- *How would you support a friend in a similar situation?*
- *How would you want to be supported if you were in this situation?*
- *What does it mean to judge another person or to be judged ourselves?*
- *Why are we called to love and not judge? Do we find this easy in reality?*

Light a tea-light for someone who you find it hard to understand or love.

## Prayer

Lord, we are all so different in this world and sometimes we find it hard to understand one another when we have different views. Forgive us for the times we have judged others. May we love one another as you have loved us, living as a forgiving people because we know forgiveness. Amen

For the next session  
Someone to bring 'Monopoly Money'

## Notes

## Session 17

# Holy Discontent

### Activity

 10 minutes

Take turns dividing up the Monopoly money between the group.

- First, how you think it should be divided.
- Secondly, how you think world wealth is actually divided.
- Finally, divide the money as follows:  
One person has £73, one has £18,  
one has £8, one has £1.

Think about that for a moment.

### Discussion

At the start of 2015, Oxfam had warned that 1% of the world's population would own more wealth than the other 99% by next year. Mark Goldring, Oxfam GB's chief executive, said,

'This is the latest evidence that extreme inequality is out of control. Are we really happy to live in a world where the top 1% own half the wealth and the poorest half own just 1%?'

The Guardian, 13 October 2015

This session will explore how we can experience Holy Discontent and look at differences that we can make to bring justice to the world.

What are the things that happen to others that have always made you boil up with fury? The things that cause us 'holy discontent' may differ from person to person. Take time to share what makes you 'holy discontented'.

## Teaching

We often think of the Christian faith as being meek and mild-mannered, more concerned with forgiveness and keeping everyone on an even keel than rocking the boat. There are times however when the church should be at the forefront of concern and anger but it is always underpinned by compassion. This anger, or holy discontent is something that is enacted on behalf of others, it arises as the result of injustices inflicted upon people who so often have no voice. It is not self-serving nor self-pitying. At its heart is the outworking of the justice of God.

### † Read Isaiah 1:11-18

In the world we see so much persecution, hardship, poverty, sickness and injustice. Even something as universal as climate change adversely affects the poorest. Should we be content with seeing such things? According to the verse above the answer is a resounding 'No!' It would seem that over and above what takes place within our churches God is much more concerned with what is happening in the world. Perhaps when we get a true sense of understanding that salvation is for the world, not just for the privileged few, or God forbid, those who are like us, then we may begin to take justice seriously. For while there remains injustice the world is not reconciled. It is not reconciled to itself, man to man, and it is certainly not reconciled to God.

### † Read 2 Corinthians 5:18-20

There remains work to be done. William Booth, the founder of The Salvation Army understood this. In his last public appearance before being Promoted to Glory he was led to the podium in the Royal Albert Hall, barely able to see and he spoke these words:

'While women weep as they do now, I'll fight. While little children go hungry, as they do now, I'll fight. While men go to prison, in and out, in and out, as they do now, I'll fight. While there is a drunkard left, while there is a poor lost girl upon the streets, while there remains one dark soul without the light of God, I'll fight - I'll fight to the very end.'

These are words of a man who fought for 'others'.

The Salvation Army is called to 'Save Souls, Grow Saints and Serve Suffering Humanity'. Therefore, we cannot be content when we see injustice, inequality and unfairness. How can we be content as Disciples of Christ when we look and see our neighbour in want? How can we be content when we see men, women and children fleeing war-torn countries on boats that simply mean they will be 'the lucky ones' if they make it across the seas alive?

We should not become accustomed to images on our television screens of children starving, houses being bombed and attacks on those most vulnerable in society. We need to have 'holy discontent' and want to be a part of reconciling the broken society in which we live.

With grateful thanks to Major Alison Thompson

## Reflection

- *What hurts our hearts the most?*
- *What can we do as Disciples of Christ?*

Never think that prayer is the small, last thing that we can do. If our health, skills, abilities and resources mean that is the only thing we can do, know that prayer is what underpins change. There are many things you may be able to do to stand against injustice. You may be able to sign a petition against Human Trafficking, you may stand against those who are racist towards people seeking refuge in our country, write a letter to your local Councillor or MP about a concern that you have. But whatever you do to fight with 'holy discontent' make sure you pray and ask God's help with the task ahead. Learn to do right; seek justice.

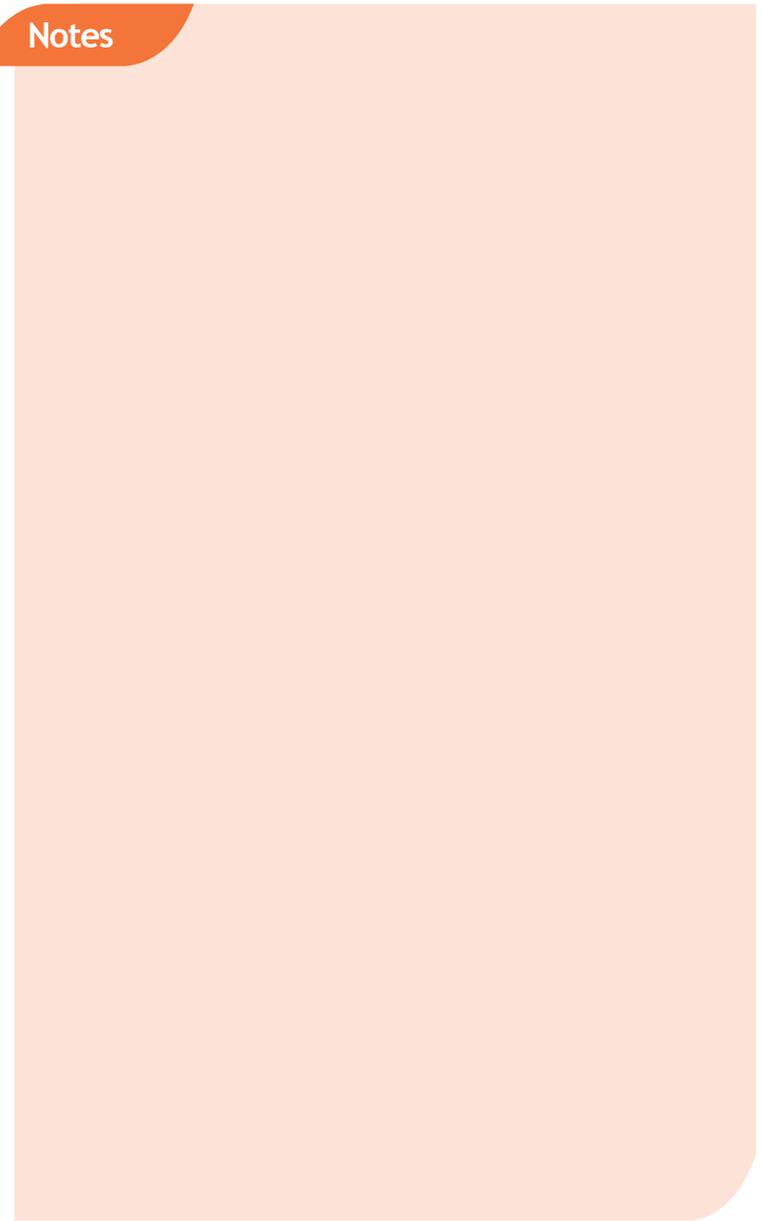
**Prayer**

Taken from The Serenity Prayer  
Reinhold Niebuhr (1892-1971)

God grant me the serenity to accept  
the things I cannot change;  
courage to change the things I can;  
and wisdom to know the difference.  
Amen.

For the next session  
Bring a pack of playing cards

**Notes**



## Session 18

# Painful Family Experiences

### Activity

 10 minutes

Place a pack of cards or a game in front of everyone; who is the first person to take control and make the first move? If you have time you can play the game.

### Discussion

- *How much do you like to be in control?*

You know what they say about a control freak who loses control? - you are left with just a freak!

When we feel stressed and out of control we often react in one of two ways - either we try to control everything, even the tiniest detail, or we just give up and let it all slide.

- *Neither response is very helpful, maybe somewhere in the middle is the answer?*

Where, along a scale of 1-10 would you put yourself in terms of having a comfortable amount of control over events and people around you? (A score of 1 being 'very happy to let others take control' and 10 being 'need to control everything'.)

Share your reasons for your answer and reflect on times when you have been pushed out of your comfort zone as the place of control has not been just where you would have liked it to be.

- *Also have there been times in your life when this has been more important to you than others?*

### Teaching

When families are young we have some control over them but from day one the power begins to move from parent to child increasingly as the years go by, although I am sure we have seen children that have been in control since day one! It is hard as we have to stand back and let them make their own choices, hard to watch them wear clothes that really do them no favours, choose friends that are not the ones we would have chosen for them, follow their dreams instead of ours. It is hard not to become a control freak at times when we just know that it will end in 'tears before bedtime'. As they become adults and move into more mature years it is so hard when we are unable to 'kiss it better'. In today's society so many things are acceptable that we were taught would bring unhappiness or harm but they have become part of everyday life for many. How we wish sometimes we could send them to bed and know that it would all be forgotten in the morning, or confiscate their favourite toy to bring about an apology.

Families bring much joy but also can bring much pain as we worry about them, if only we were back in charge! How our Heavenly Father must identify with our pain. His children, having been given control, free will, choose the wrong path so often, how he must long for them to go his way. It would have been so easy for God to stay in control, making sure we did only what is best for us, but he knew we needed to make our own mistakes in the hope that we would choose his way for ourselves. When hard stuff is going on in our families we have to remember that our role was to give them a good grounding in life, then to give them freedom to choose their way in life and support them when it goes right or wrong. We can daily offer them to God in prayer to help us never to be a control freak, just a loving, caring support whenever we can be. For those times when it is impossible to maintain a close relationship, prayer could be the only connection. It may be possible for you to share something of your own experiences on this theme or just to reflect yourself.

† Read 1 Timothy 2:1-4

How God must long for us to turn to him and live this ideal life, but how often we go our own way. Similarly, how often do we want others to do things our way, but they just do their own thing? Sometimes this causes us and the wider family real pain. We must make ‘supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings’ regularly and constantly for our families, even when things go out of our control, or maybe especially when things go out of our control. As you read this verse over a few times let God speak to you about your role as a prayer warrior and about your need to let go and let God take control. Then ponder on this verse from the psalmist and listen to what God has to say about control through this verse.

‘Let go of your concerns!  
Then you will know that I am God.’

Psalm 46:10 (GW)

With grateful thanks to Major Wendy Knott (Rtd)

## Reflection

All I once held dear, build my life upon,  
All this world reveres, and wars to own,  
All I once thought gain I have counted loss,  
Spent and worthless now, compared to this:

Knowing you, Jesus, knowing you,  
There is no greater thing,  
You're my all, you're the best,  
You're my joy and righteousness,  
And I love you, Lord

## Notes



- 19 Restoring Joy
- 20 Living the Uplifting Life
- 21 Beacons of Hope
- 22 The Contented Life

## Session 19

# Restoring Joy

### Activity

 5 minutes

#### Name in a bowl

Each player is given five small pieces of paper. On each piece the player writes a name of a celebrity or person that the group will know. Fold the paper and place in the bowl (or whatever you have available!) Each player takes a turn to pull out a piece of paper and describe the person on it, without saying their name. Each player is given 30 seconds to do this before moving on to the next player. When all the names are taken out of the bowl, count up and see who has won! Hopefully there will be smiles all round!

### Discussion

- *What moments in life have made you feel completely full of joy?*

No need to share this but: if you were to score yourself on a 'joy index' where would you be?

0 = Completely miserable  
10 = Absolutely joyful

## Teaching

‘Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation.’

Psalm 51:2

This is one of the most misquoted verses in the Bible often being quoted as ‘restore unto me the joy of my salvation’. While it may seem like a small difference, it is nevertheless profound. Joy is not simply a feeling of happiness that washes over us when we think of something nice, any more than peace is the absence of strife. It is one of the fruits of the Spirit and like all fruit it needs to be cultivated and nurtured, therefore it is about creating the right growing environment.

The starting point for true joy comes in recognising our salvation. We need to rejoice in what God has done for us (*thy* salvation) rather than in what we have done for ourselves (*my* salvation). Salvation is the free gift of grace of eternal life given to us from start to finish by a loving and extravagant God, unmerited and unearned. If that is not a reason to rejoice then what is? In a very real sense if we are able to leave the ownership of our salvation with a faithful God, it enables us to live lives of freedom and joy because we know that in our own strength we fail, but that God, all-powerful (omnipotent), is able to accomplish his purposes.

There are other things that we can intentionally do to create the right growing environment for joy which rebalances our attitudes.

Delight in the love and ongoing protection of God

† Read Psalm 5:11

The world can seem a very inhospitable and foreboding place and there is a temptation to worry about things and fret about situations that are beyond our control. Jesus himself said,

‘And which of you by worrying can add even one hour to his life?’

Matthew 6:27 (KJV)

Delighting in the loving nature of God very naturally leads us to praise which has been described as the language of faith. Faith says - I trust in God, whatever comes my way I have faith that He will hold me safe.

Consider the words of 🎵 Song 531

### Live life in the present

It is very easy to look back to former days and long for a return to the good old days. There is nothing wrong in remembering the past and recognising what has been, but it can become unhealthy when it leads to a resentful spirit or stunts our own personal development. I am sure we have all talked with someone who holds on to something from the past and seems unable to move forward or someone who constantly regrets relationships, abilities or things that were lost and as a result seems to live a diminished life.

There were many times when the Children of Israel lamented in the loss of what had once been. In Psalm 137, the Exiles were so busy lamenting what was lost that they were unable to be a witness of joy to their present. They were asked to sing the songs of faith and they cried ‘how can we sing the Lord’s song in a strange land?’

When the Temple at Jerusalem was being rebuilt following the return from the Babylonian exile we see a clear example of a group of people longing for the glory of the former days.

† [Read Ezra 3:10-12](#)

At that epoch-making event there were those who wailed because of the loss of what had been rather than recognise what had been accomplished. In 1979 Lena Martell got to 2nd place in the UK charts with the song ‘One Day at a Time’. In much the same way as being disgruntled by the past robs us of joy, so does an over-concentration with the future. Having our minds filled with the myriad of things we want to do in the days ahead brings unnecessary stress and strain. Or when we fill our heads with fanciful dreams of what might be that are not grounded in a reliance on God we become disillusioned when things do not happen the way we expect. Taking today, and living each moment as given by God, looking for and receiving his blessings and experiencing his salvation as a reality of each moment by moment will restore our joy and make us a witness of joy to those around us.

## Reflection

- *What things could help us delight in the love and protection of God? (E.g. devotional reading, journal, prayer diary) Sharing what works for you may help other members of the group.*
- *How does living life in the present in our walk with Jesus help to restore our joy?*

## Prayer

One day at a time sweet Jesus  
That's all I'm asking from you.  
Just give me the strength  
To do every day what I have to do.  
Yesterday's gone sweet Jesus  
And tomorrow may never be mine.  
Lord help me today, show me the way  
One day at a time.  
Amen

## Notes

## Session 20

# Living the Uplifting Life

### Activity

 2-3 minutes

Read the following story aloud

Once upon a time the animals decided they must do something heroic to meet the problems of a 'new world' so they organised a school. They had adopted an activity curriculum consisting of running, climbing, swimming and flying. To make it easier to administer the curriculum, all the animals took all the subjects. The duck was excellent in swimming. In fact, better than his instructor, but he made only passing grades in flying and was very poor in running. Since he was slow in running, he had to stay after school and also drop swimming in order to practice running. This was kept up until his webbed feet were badly worn and he was only average in swimming. But average was acceptable in school so nobody worried about that, except the duck. The rabbit started at the top of the class in running but had a nervous breakdown because of so much makeup work in swimming. The squirrel was excellent in climbing until he developed frustration in the flying class where his teacher made him start from the ground up instead of the treetop down. The eagle was a problem child and was disciplined severely. In the climbing class, he beat all the others to the top of the tree but insisted on using his own way to get there.

### Discussion

- *What things come easily to you that sometimes others find difficult and vice versa?*

### Teaching

Last session we considered restoring Joy, and this session continues the same theme of creating the right conditions for Joy, a fruit of the Spirit, to grow.

**Know who you are and live accordingly**

What type of person are you? Thinking back to the animal school we read about earlier - if you know that you are a squirrel - why try to be an eagle? That is not to say that you should not aspire to be the best squirrel you can be but in all honesty why try to be something that you were not created to be? God created you how you are for a reason with a purpose for your life. We so often look at others and think 'why can't I be more like them?' The answer? Because you were created to be 'the best you' in God's image and plan. 'For many years I would look at other people who were doing lots of travelling with their speaking and gaining lots of recognition and I envied them. Then one year I was asked to do a number of speaking engagements - I soon realised that I experienced far more joy with my own congregation than zooming around the country speaking to big crowds - it just wasn't me.' (Rtd. Officer)

Understanding how we function and trying to develop more into the person we were created to be will bring increasing joy and we will live as people of integrity.

‘You desire integrity in the inner man.’

Psalm 51:6 (NET)

### Spend time doing what you enjoy

We have often made a virtue of continuing to do something that we do not enjoy to the exclusion of things we do enjoy. What would it be like if we gave ourselves permission to do the things we actually liked; things that maybe are part of the way we were created; if we displayed ‘integrity in the inner man’? God created us to like and enjoy different activities and things. He designed us to be good at different things and to excel at them, so often we are pushed towards ‘average’. Why? Because as a rule, humanity likes uniformity and duty whereas God loves diversity and delight! So why not spend some time doing what you enjoy? If you do not know what you enjoy, find out. Why should not this stage in your life be a time when you rediscover those God-given attributes and delight in them? Why should not this be a time for new beginnings, learning new skills or re-discovering old ones? There is a wealth of evidence that suggests that learning a new skill in later life ‘kick-starts’ the brain and improves health and well-being.

You may say ‘I haven’t got time to fit anything new in, I’m already doing so much; I’m already tired’. Well that is fine - if you are enjoying it, but what if you are not? Maybe it is time to make an assessment of the things that you do and make sure there is time in your schedule to do things that develop your joy and provide you with an uplifting life. Most people do not feel tired when they are doing things they enjoy doing. The truth is that many of us find ourselves continuing to do things that we once enjoyed, or that we agreed to do for a time that we do out of a sense of duty. Asking for the guidance of the Holy Spirit, open your life to doing the things you enjoy, not just the things you feel you should be doing. Elsewhere in this series we have thought about the reality that we are all unique, consequently the things that develop our joy are also unique and let us remember that the ways and plans of God are far beyond our understanding. Who is to say that the interest that you have had in photography since you were a young man was not implanted in you by God so that you could be a witness of joy to the local camera club? Or that the fact you loved to dance as a child was not put there by God so that years later you could lead your dance partner to Christ?

## Reflection

- *Make an honest assessment of your joyfulness. Do you find fulfilment in the activities that you do?*
- *Are there things you have always felt that were important to you but that have been squeezed out by the pressures of everyday life?*
- *Is there something that you have always wanted to do 'if you had the time'?*

Look at your schedule and consider whether you can free up time for something that you were maybe intended to do.

Ask for God's guidance - and be obedient!

For the next session  
Source and bring some  
inspirational quotes or pictures.  
Come up with an inspirational  
quote of your own.

## Notes

## Session 21

# Beacons of Hope

### Activity

 10 minutes

Share any quotes that you have brought along, saying why they speak to you.

### Teaching

In the Jewish tradition, at the Festival of Passover, the family all sit around the table for a shared meal. It is customary for the youngest person (who has been instructed and primed on what to say) to ask four set questions starting with 'How is this night different from all other nights?' The oldest people in the family group answer the questions and in so doing teach the meaning of The Passover feast and in this way one of the stories of God's faithfulness is handed down from generation to generation.

The Bible is essentially full of hope. A hope, not based on a blind optimism which says 'everything will work out alright in the end', but rather, based on the experienced, shared, tangible faithfulness of God and the promises which he provides.

The world around us today appears to be almost devoid of hope. So often the prevailing atmosphere is of a society that has lost direction, has lost its mind and has lost all hope. Every bad or negative thing is broadcast around the world within minutes of it happening and it would seem that there is no time to process or filter that before something else comes up before us. For many, this leads to feelings of hopelessness and even despair. More than ever we need a generation of disciples, soldiers, warriors, call them what you will, willing to shine out as Beacons of Hope in the darkness. Be steadfast in your hope!

The hope of the world is Christ, live your life in such a way that hope is evident; live your life in such a way that Christ shines out.

† Read Philippians 2:14-15(NIV)

We need role models of steadfast hope in the world.

Remember your stories of faith and rehearse them  
There are many reasons why we have hope in God, but one of them is certainly that we have known God's faithfulness in the past and know his promise for the future.

'But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect...'

1 Peter 3:15 (NIV)

Looking back at times which have been personally difficult and recognising God's loving kindness through those times leads us to praise in our own lives and also presents us with a story of faith that is relatable to others. When the opportunity arises share that story with someone going through a similar experience and remember the purpose of sharing is not to show how YOU got through the experience but to display God's faithfulness to you through it.

A quick three point plan is:

- *How things were*
- *How you brought it before God*
- *What changed?*

## Discussion

Share some of the stories of faith within the group

## Teaching

### Be a Champion

There are many people who feel squeezed by every facet of modern life, who do not know where to turn, who find that their relationships are so fractured that they do not know who to talk to. Decide to be a champion to someone that you know. This could be in a formal way e.g. in a mentoring group or a prayer buddy system established at your corps, or could be informally by just living out your hope alongside somebody.

Start off by praying regularly for them; bring their needs before God every day, particularly their need for God's salvation or presence. Our prayers are so often focussed on the temporal that we forget to pray for the eternal.

Offer words of encouragement whenever possible; let them know you are praying for them.

Make sure they know that you value them.

### Live life as an ambassador of Heaven

We believe that Jesus wants us to live life in all its fullness making the most of every God-given moment while on this mortal coil but our hope is not confined to what we experience in this world but also looks forward with hope to the eternal world. This is not a 'cop out' as some people suggest, there is nothing in the Christian faith that implies that the life we now live is not to be valued. But let us be clear - we have a glorious hope that awaits us in constant, perfect communion with God that is beyond the realms of our understanding and we do ourselves, and more importantly, the world, a disservice when we do not point to this hope that we have through Christ and live our life accordingly.

## Reflection

Ask for the guidance of the Holy Spirit in directing you to those who are despondent and discouraged. Seek opportunity to live out your hope alongside them.

Reflect upon some of the times when you have struggled and how God has helped you through. Write a prayer of thanksgiving for the eternal hope that you have been given.

## Prayer

‘That we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope...the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost.’

Romans 15:4, 13

For the next session  
Bring a wrapped present of  
value no more than £2.00

## Notes

## Session 22

# The Contented Life

### Activity

 5 minutes

#### Swaps

All members to place their brought wrapped gift on the table. Then one by one choose a gift that you might like. When everyone has chosen a gift, the first person then swaps the gift they have chosen with someone else until everyone has swapped their gift. (You cannot hold onto the gift you have if someone wants it! You have to give it away and receive what you are given!) Continue this for another round of swaps. Then open the gift you are left with. It is not about what you might choose, it is about being thankful for the gift you have been given.

### Discussion

Have a mini award ceremony for a bit of fun (just the four of you). You know the sort of thing ‘and the award for the best cup of tea goes to...’

- *What are the things that you would have liked but never had? For once, and for a few minutes you are allowed to go wild with your wishes and to be a little selfish.*
- *What would you have liked?  
A big house? A Maserati car?  
(Perhaps a Rolls Royce is more your style.  
A jacuzzi or sauna, or both? An important job?  
Go on, be decadent for a moment  
and have a bit of fun!*

## Teaching

We are constantly bombarded (whether we recognise it or not) with adverts telling us about the things we need, things that would make our life better or the things we need to do. Many adverts are predicated on the fact that there is something missing in our lives. I sometimes wonder what the effect of all this can be. The constant barrage telling us we need more must contribute to the dissatisfaction we see in society. It is widely recognised that the countries where people report being the happiest are those countries where the gap between the richest and the poorest in society is not too wide.

There is a song which probably inspired this session that says 'content whatever lot I see, for 'tis the Lord that leadeth me.' Now the line is not 'whatever I see' but 'whatever lot I see' and they are two very different things. The word 'lot' in this instance would equate to words such as ration, portion, share, allowance, and 'see' to imagine, envision or foresee. In short, 'content - whatever I have or am going to have'. It is very personal.

When addressing the church at Phillipi, Paul writes:

'...for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation.'

Philippians 4:11b, 12

If you consider some of the experiences Paul went through and the sort of ministry that he undertook this is quite some statement. There were almost certainly times when Paul was hungry and with no fixed income and yet he was still able to say that he was content. In saying this Paul experiences something that many people in our society search for in vain - contentment.

There are many reasons why people feel discontented. Maybe one reason is this - we think we live in a meritocracy where people get what they deserve. But this clearly is not the case.

There may be a tendency as we get older to worry that we will not have enough resources to see us into our 'old age' and as a result we can become fixated on the accumulation of 'stuff'. We sometimes fail to trust God for our provision because the constant message that we hear is 'it's never enough'. Try and tune into the voice of God which simply states 'I will provide'. God knows what is best for our eternal soul.

The other thing that people get a bit obsessed with is recognition. We like to be recognised for the accomplishments that we have achieved. However, the reality is that we have all made some contribution to our communities (family, church, employment etc.) but not everyone gets the recognition. There are some who feel that they have been overlooked in what we might call 'the everyday gong ceremonies of life' yet can you name any of the winners of this year's Oscars, or Baftas? So maybe learn the message that 'recognition and fame is an illusion'.

There are some for whom the hurt of not being recognised has impacted them in a negative way and a discontentment has arisen because they do not feel valued by a community they feel they have given much to. Think for a moment on these words by Henri Nouwen:

'Every time you feel hurt, offended or rejected, you have to dare to say to yourself: These feelings, strong as they may be, are not telling me the truth about myself. The truth, even though I cannot feel it right now, is that I am the chosen child of God, precious in God's eyes, called the Beloved from all eternity and held safe in an everlasting embrace.'

from *Life of the Beloved* by Henri Nouwen

## Reflection

- *Are there things that you think you ought to get recognition for?*
- *Things that you have done which you think you ought to get praise for?*

List them, and thank God that you had the opportunity to do them, thank God for the blessing that they were to others, then consign them to things that have been recognised and accounted for within the Kingdom of God - mark them as 'Paid in Full'. For God is no man's debtor.

Make a sober assessment of what you need and what you have.

## Notes



- 23 Grief in Loss
- 24 Finding Meaning in Solitude
- 25 Trusting When the Way is Dreary
- 26 Trusting Through Failing and Declining Health

## Session 23

# Grief in Loss

### Aim

Grief and loss are not simply pertinent to the death of a loved one. Today's session will look at how we deal with loss in various forms, from the loss of role when we retire to the loss of loved ones moving away to the death of those we are close to.

### Discussion

When children leave the family home to set out on their own journey we often call this the 'empty nest' syndrome. For many it is a doubled-edged sword as the loss of someone in the house day after day is heart-breaking whilst at the same time the joy of seeing your loved ones fly to new heights is also heart-warming.

- *What has been your biggest loss?*
- *What has been your biggest gain?*
- *Were these linked in some way?*

### Teaching

#### Real Life Loss and Gain

Marjory and Clive soldier at Warrington Corps and this is their story.

Marjory and Clive are both retired and having lived busy working lives realised that the loss of employment due to retirement would hit them hard. So they prepared themselves and found roles where they could help others within the Corps at Warrington. Jesus came to give life in all its fullness, so the couple felt they needed to live life to the full as they entered retirement. This was their way of dealing with the loss of a role and the gain of retirement.

Both of their children were called to become Salvation Army Officers and they 'lost' both of them at the same time as they went to train in London at the William Booth College. The time came for their appointments to be announced. Their daughter was appointed to Perth. Both Marjory and Clive felt this was a long way from home but were comforted by the thought 'well it's not Australia!'

Their son was appointed to Thurso in North Scotland and now their thoughts started to turn to 'we're never going to see either of them!' There was sadness mixed with joy and pride of their children doing what God had called them to do, and both parents were comforted by the fact that at least their son and daughter were still within the UK.

Eventually their son was appointed to Canada, and despite their sadness both Marjory and Clive felt they could not stand in the way of God's calling on their children's lives.

What Marjory and Clive were experiencing was the double-edged sword of loss. They decided they had to keep themselves busy and involved in activities at their Corps and knew they had to accept the situation.

When talking about acceptance, Clive speaks of how it took 20 years to accept the death of his father. He would long for his dad to be around just to chat to. There is no social media in heaven so no opportunity to 'Facetime' his father as he does with his family in Canada.

Acceptance plays a large part in grief and loss whatever that loss may be. But acceptance can be hard even though death is inevitable for us all.

'For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you a hope and a future.'

Jeremiah 29:11

Clive has held onto these words over the years as he has learnt to accept not only the death of his father but also the death of friends and the loss of family to other parts of the world.

Acceptance played a part when Clive's mother also died. This time the acceptance was that he did what she requested him to do. Rather than staying by her bedside as she died, Clive's mother urged him to do his duty and go out with the Salvation Army band. This acceptance speaks of life continuing despite the loss and grief that life brings. Marjory and Clive use a three 'R' response as their way of dealing with changes and loss.

- **Rationalise:** Look at the situation you find yourself in. Consider the difficult and the good and see the reality of life for you now.
- **Reassess:** Life changes so take time to reassess your situation.
- **Readjust:** Look for new opportunities. Find a new focus. Surround yourself with supportive friends to talk to.

Marjorie speaks of comforting words from Hebrews,

'Never will I leave you,  
never will I forsake you.'

Hebrews 13:5

No matter what circumstance we find ourselves in, God is there. He never leaves us and he walks with us through both the mountain-top and valley experiences of life.

With grateful thanks to Clive and Marjory Samuel

## Reflection

- *As a Christian do you find acceptance easy or hard?*
- *As life changes due to loss, what are the hardest things to cope with?*

## Prayer

Words by Reinhold Niebuhr (1892-1971)

God grant me the serenity to accept  
the things I cannot change;

Courage to change the things I can  
and wisdom to know the difference.

Living one day at a time,  
enjoying one moment at a time;

Accepting hardships as the pathway to peace;

Taking, as He did, this sinful world as it is,  
not as I would have it;

Trusting that He will make all things right  
if I surrender to His Will;

That I may be reasonably happy in this life

And supremely happy with Him forever in the next.

Amen

## Notes

## Session 24

# Finding Meaning in Solitude

### Activity

 5 minutes

For a few minutes be ‘in solitude’. Close your eyes. Sit in your chair and put both feet on the floor. Put your hands on your legs, palms facing down. Take notice of your breathing, do not try to change it, just notice it. Become aware of your thoughts, acknowledge what is troubling you, or making you joyful (these thoughts that immediately spring to your mind may be the way God is urging you.) Repeat in your mind the words from the Psalm ‘Be still, and know that I am God’. Rest in God’s presence. (At the appropriate time, the host for today will say ‘Amen’).

### Discussion

As a child did you ever play hide and seek? Take turns to talk about your favourite hiding places as a child.

- *Did you always want to be found?*
- *How did you feel as a child when you were on your own?*
- *Have you ever been lost?*

Discuss the difference in being lost to playing hide and seek. Playing is fun, being lost is scary. In a similar way there is a big difference in being and feeling alone to the practice of solitude.

### Teaching

‘Hide and seek is a game whereby you generally aren’t left on your own for a long time. I have a friend who played hide and seek at a Summer School one year. It was the adults that had to hide and the young people had to find them! There were adults hidden in trees, in cupboards, in huge packing boxes and the young people had difficulty in finding everyone. My friend spoke about how playing hide and seek, whilst fun, had also been a moment of “time out” in a busy week. She had taken a book with her and managed to remain hidden for 45 minutes and had enjoyed the quietness of being alone, where no-one knew she was simply reading, simply being.’

Solitude is a positive withdrawal which is intentional. Similar to my friend's experience solitude is a withdrawal from a situation for a specific purpose. While withdrawing from a situation one is drawn towards something else, a place of prayer and reflection. You have now made a conscious decision resulting in an intentional move towards the presence of Almighty God. Solitude done in this way allows the changing of one's mind from the worldly to the heavenly. It allows time for a new focus and a new direction.

Mark 6:31 gives the words of Jesus to his disciples on what was a very busy moment after he had fed over 5,000 people.

'Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.'

Jesus knew that the disciples needed to simply 'be' and change their focus from 'doing' to 'being'.

Life is busy for many; volunteering, helping with grandchildren, appointments and many other things that take our time and energy. Technology means that we are constantly available so it is important to remember the words of Jesus. Take some time to not be so available, just for a while, and sit in solitude with God.

Susanna Wesley, the mother of Charles and John Wesley, had a growing family with children pulling at her apron strings from morning till night yet she knew the importance of solitude. She would pull her apron over her head and it was then that her children recognised that she was in 'solitude' with God. Susanna would pray there and then, surrounded by her nineteen children. She needed two hours a day with God on her own so that she could fulfil her role as mother to the best of her ability.

It is often said that in a crowded room you can still feel very alone. Solitude is not about being lonely or alone. Solitude is an awareness of God and the connection with the divine.

There are many times in the New Testament where we read of Jesus spending time in solitude. Perhaps look them up this coming week. (Luke 4 is a good one to start with when we encounter Jesus in the wilderness.)

Solitude is a spiritual discipline that when practiced will allow you to have more peace, strength and hope to fulfil daily life than you could possibly ever imagine.

With grateful thanks to Major Alison Thompson

## Reflection

Some people find it very difficult to be quiet, but to get us started on our journey of solitude we are going to have 5 minutes of silence. In that silence it is entirely up to you what you do. You may simply close your eyes and reflect on the scripture for today. You may even fall asleep, do not be worried if you do, God is still there in our sleeping moments. You may want to read a passage of scripture, the choice is yours. But be intentionally still in the presence of God.

‘Be still and know that I am God.’

Psalm 46:10

## Prayer

Be still and know that I am God  
Be still and know that I AM  
Be still and know  
Be still  
Be.  
Amen

For the next session

Bring in some recent news stories which have affected those involved in a negative way.

## Notes

## Session 25

# Trusting When the Way is Drear

### Activity

 10 minutes

Look at the news stories that you have brought and consider the consequences on those in the stories.

- *What will the changes be?*
- *How will it affect them?*
- *What support could they use?*

### Discussion

Each share how you coped with a couple of difficult times you have been through.

- *Who helped you through these? What lessons have you learnt?*
- *Have you since been able to help others going through similar experiences?*

## Teaching

The first song I ever sung as a solo whilst a child was 'Simply trusting every day' (song 892) with the line in verse 3 'praying if the path be drear' which links to the theme for today.

† Read Luke 24:13-35

Here we see two disciples on this road, full of dejection, grief and confusion at the events they have recently witnessed with the death of their Lord and master. They were so preoccupied with this that they did not realise Jesus was actually walking alongside them. Sometimes we can be so full of our problems that we do not see the wood for the trees, as it were, or get any perspective on things. We can also, without intending to, shut God out. He wants to share our sadness and difficulties with us, and is the 'Christ of the human road'.

When they sat down and broke bread with him they recognised that it was Jesus himself who was their companion. Sometimes it is only when we stop, and spend time in worship and prayer that our eyes can be opened to God's presence, and we need to invite Him to share with us in both our joys and in our sorrows.

Jesus then left them but they had been touched and reinvigorated, and quickly got on their way again but this time returning to share with the other disciples. It is easy to focus on the negative, and our newspapers etc. do just that. Paul encourages us in Philippians 4:8-9 to look to the positive

'Whatsoever things are true, honourable, of good report, think on these things.'

With grateful thanks to Major Heather Durrant

## Reflection

Being a Christian is no insurance policy against having problems in our lives; the important thing is to know that God is with us throughout. One of my favourite songs is 'I'm in His hands' (song 848) and the words remind us that our challenging experiences can help us trust God into the future. Verse 3 says

'In days gone by, my Lord has proved sufficient,  
when I have yielded to the law of love's  
demands, why should I doubt that he will ever  
more be present to make his will my own,  
I'm in his hands'

Talk about times in your own experience when the words of this song have been true.

I sometimes like to change the last line of the chorus into the future tense 'his way is best you'll see'. Let us learn to trust him into the future, and thank him for his presence with us in the past, whatever that past has brought us through.

## Notes

## Session 26

# Trusting Through Failing and Declining Health

### Activity

 10 minutes

#### Systems

List as many of the twelve organ systems of the human body as you can.

#### Word Search

The Word Search on the next page contains nineteen words - one of which is repeated - that are increasingly familiar in an ageing population. The repeated word is 'replacement' and it is linked to two other words in the puzzle. Solve the puzzle and chat about what one word you would add to characterise old age in your mind.

F	U	D	B	G	O	A	D	S	C	M	T	A	S	Z
P	I	C	R	Q	N	Z	R	O	I	I	K	S	R	R
A	T	C	E	T	E	I	L	T	R	G	E	H	O	R
L	R	P	A	F	E	D	R	E	H	N	H	T	T	X
T	E	L	T	D	S	I	D	A	I	R	N	T	C	W
N	A	S	H	C	Q	N	D	L	E	Y	I	O	O	J
E	T	R	L	M	E	F	E	B	Y	H	Y	T	D	B
M	M	V	E	S	Z	N	E	Y	Z	M	D	T	I	P
E	E	R	S	Q	O	S	E	R	U	T	N	E	D	S
C	N	H	S	L	C	H	R	O	N	I	C	F	P	U
A	T	S	N	O	I	T	P	I	R	C	S	E	R	P
L	F	E	E	N	K	L	Y	Y	P	O	C	W	U	H
P	P	J	S	I	X	V	J	L	E	U	O	A	G	T
E	I	X	S	V	Q	J	Y	J	O	G	N	G	Q	K
R	H	E	U	M	A	T	I	S	M	H	C	Z	Y	Y

## Discussion

- *Did you know that when we are born we have 270 bones? By the age of about 30 this number has gone down to 206 as they fuse and join together.*
- *Did you know that we start losing our memory recall at about the age of 35, but our clever brains compensate for this by developing new strategies? We are constantly changing.*
- *What are some of the things that you can do better now than when you were, say 20? (There will be things, but maybe you need to think outside of the box).*

Although we may feel we have little to offer the Lord because of our changing health, we can share, care, and understand life with much to give in helping others.

## Teaching

The Bible tells us that,

*‘Moses was 120 years old when he died, yet his eyes were not weak nor his strength gone.’*

Deuteronomy 34:7 (NIV)

One translation of that text says ‘his eye was not dim, neither were his teeth moved.’ (Douay-Reims), and another says ‘his vitality had not left him’. However we phrase it, Moses lived to a very vigorous old age!

Thanks to better nutrition, healthier lifestyles, the NHS and the grace of God, an increasing number of people in the UK are enjoying a healthy and adventurous old age. Good on them! Blessed are they that go trekking in the Himalayas in their nineties, take up body-building in their eighties, or just learn to swim in their seventies.

However, for most people our advancing years bring physical limitations and sometimes failing health and diminished bodily strength. As one retired officer put it to me 'I have recently come to the conclusion that at the age of seventy-eight there are some things I can no longer do that I used to do when I was fifty-eight!' This realisation had evidently come as a surprise to her.

To some extent I can identify with those who are facing declining health.

I have lived with a chronic illness for 10 years. For much of the time I do not need to think about it, but I am aware of the limits it sets on my strength, and sometimes on my patience. It is always in the background. Apart from some long breaks for treatment, or frequent spells when I have had an infection or been in hospital, I have been able get on with life; travelling and working on the assumption that it is better to plan ahead than wait to see how I feel.

For many people the physical effects of declining health are less distressing than the isolation and loneliness that illness can bring. Those who are confined to their home or to a care home might well feel isolated, and even forgotten. Loneliness is possibly the worst of all the epidemics that older people are likely to encounter.

The advancing years do not just bring wisdom; I have seen many people come to a new spiritual maturity, with more time for God, prayer and study of the Bible. And more time to encourage others in their faith.

I have discovered six simple rules that help to offset the disadvantages of living with declining health:

1. Trust God and your doctors to take care of you. Both have an important role to play!
2. Use your energy wisely and well.
3. Enjoy the energy you have! You can always have a rest later if you need it.
4. Take an interest in the world outside of yourself and your own setting - even if it is only through TV or the internet, and pray about the things that interest you.
5. Refuse to view yourself through the lens of your illness or limitations.
6. Be kind to yourself and to others, and receive the kindness of others with grace.

With grateful thanks to Lt. Col. Ian Barr

## Reflection

† Read Psalm 103:1-4

Discuss things to be thankful for:

- Think about Remembrance
- *What things comfort you in ill health; where have prayers been answered?*

These verses help us to come near to the Lord who understands how we feel. The mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting (Age to Age) to those that fear him.

There was a Colonel on Head Quarters whose wife was at home, confined to bed. What could she do while her husband was at work? She started a Bible class in her own home. God blessed that ministry in spite of failing health. Many people came closer to God because of her teaching.

- *What could you do?*

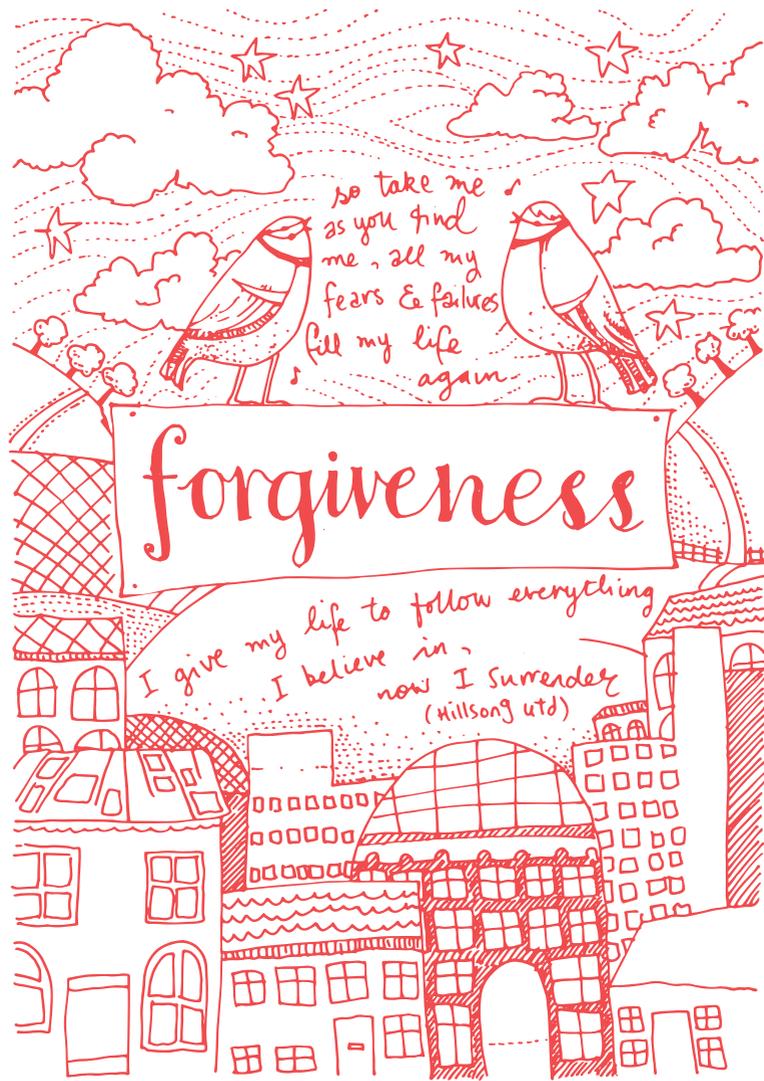
## Prayer

🎵 Song 30

‘He giveth more grace as our burdens grow greater’

For the next session  
Bring a game of Jenga

## Notes



- 27 Oops - That was Embarrassing!
- 28 Laying Down Regrets
- 29 Giving Up Guilt
- 30 Time for a New Me!

## Session 27

# Oops - That was Embarrassing!

### Activity

 10 minutes

Play a game of Jenga (wooden blocks). Look out for that brief feeling of embarrassment when you are the person who was the one who caused the tower to fall over.

### Discussion

- *What has been your funniest most embarrassing moment?*
- *What has been your most painful embarrassing moment?*

We will have all experienced embarrassing moments in our lives. Some of these will have been funny and some not. Some will have needed some forgiveness from others and possibly some where we have needed to forgive ourselves.

### Teaching

† Read John 8:1-11

This is one of the most incredible stories in the New Testament and it starts from a point of indescribable embarrassment. A woman ‘caught in the very act of adultery’ is brought before Jesus. In a time, a place and a community run very much as a Theocracy with morality and law-keeping as fundamental tenets of the day, this was serious stuff. The experts in the law are baying for blood. You can imagine the ridicule and the taunting that is levelled at this woman as she is brought before a crowd and ‘all her dirty washing’ is made public. The woman is caught in a compromising situation and there are serious consequences, sin is always a serious matter and sometimes in the light of our limited understanding of the grace of God we may minimise the outcome and effects of our sin. (The fact that there is no mention of the man in this situation confirms the brokenness of our values, our outlook and our world).

### Discussion

 5 minutes

- *How does the woman feel at this point?*
- *Have you ever felt swept along as part of a crowd?*

## Teaching

In the midst of all this chaos Jesus kneels to the floor and starts writing in the dust. How bizarre! We will never know what he wrote or fully understand what he was doing but there are two things that I think happened. The first was that he drew the attention of the crowd upon himself. You can easily imagine people craning their necks to see what he was writing and whispering amongst themselves, 'what's he up to now?' In doing so he deflects attention away from the woman. Secondly, he looks into her eyes. He sees the embarrassment, the shame, the remorse and perhaps the regrets that haunted her. And as he does so he smiles, he smiles at her with the smile that he reserves for those who are hurting, those who have reached the end of their tether, and those who have nowhere else to turn. It is a smile of unsurpassed love.

As the shouting persists he stands and calls out words that have echoed throughout the years; words that we can probably all recite but that somehow we may have at times had difficulty in obeying - 'let whoever is without sin cast the first stone'. One by one people leave, and Jesus and the woman are left alone. He says something that is remarkable. 'Neither do I condemn you - go, sin no more.' In much of our thinking we might have expected Jesus to say 'are you sorry for your sins?' or perhaps 'Do you repent of your actions?' But before the woman had asked for forgiveness, or pleaded for mercy Jesus showed compassion. He demonstrated unsurpassed love.

## † Read Romans 5:8

We do not have to plead with God for his forgiveness, he delights when we recognise our sins and turn away from them (repent) with the aim of sinning no more. It is like a parent recognising in their child's eyes that they are sorry for something that they have said or done, the look says more than words. Some may have felt she got away lightly and did not pay the price for her sin, but maybe that is the point, none of us do, none of us can -

'There was no other good enough to pay the price of sin, he only could unlock the gate of heaven and let us in.'

Song 203

We all have a history, we all have 'dirty washing' that we would rather was hidden away, times we have fallen short of God's standard. So hear Christ's word, the one who created you... 'neither do I condemn you - go sin no more'.

## Reflection

There are times when we not only need to consider forgiving others but also forgiving ourselves. Take some quiet moments to thank God for his forgiveness and allow that forgiveness to flow over you so that you can forgive yourself for the embarrassing painful times in your life. Accepting the forgiveness of Christ allows you to forgive yourself and then forgive others.

- *Have there been times when you have been numbered among the accusers?*
- *Perhaps wanting to act as judge, jury and executioner?*

It happens. Ask his Spirit to permeate over those occasions and for healing peace of mind to come to all those involved.

## Prayer

Using the words of the song  
'Mighty to Save' by Hillsong United

Everyone needs compassion, a love that's never failing,  
let mercy fall on me. Everyone needs forgiveness,  
the kindness of a Saviour, the hope of nations.  
Saviour, he can move the mountains, my God is  
mighty to save, he is mighty to save. Forever Author  
of Salvation, he rose and conquered the grave,  
Jesus conquered the grave. So take me as you find me,  
all my fears and failures, fill my life again.  
I give my life to follow, everything I believe in,  
now I surrender. Amen

## Notes

## Session 28

# Laying Down Regrets

### Activity

 5 minutes

- *Is there one thing that you would like to do while you have the opportunity?*
- *When everyone has shared - ask the question to each one 'what is stopping you'?*

Start putting together an action plan to make it happen! Just do it!

### Discussion

Many of us get to a stage in life when we look back and think about certain things we wish we had done, and may also regret doing things we wish we had not done. We may wish that we had made some different choices or that things had turned out differently.

- *Have you experienced a bitterness that has altered the course of your life journey?*

If this is too personal to share, perhaps try to share the feelings that come from this experience.

### Teaching

Often our lives take a certain journey because of the life situations we find ourselves in and we may regret the course our lives have taken at times. There are so many things that we could possibly live in regret over due to the shaping of our lives from that point on.

Val and David Jones have been officers for many years and have dealt with many people whose lives have been shaped by others and who live in regret. One day David went to visit a lady who was known to be very difficult and openly hostile towards men. While visiting this lady David heard the story of a father who had neglected to keep this lady safe from the hands of a sexual predator when she was only a child. As David listened to the sad story unravel he could see why this lady could not even cope with a man shaking her hand, let alone embracing her. The lady pushed people away and regretted doing this but had no other way of coping with everyday life and the anger had become all-consuming. David spoke about forgiveness with this lady but she struggled to forgive the father. She regretted being born into a family that did not keep her safe. The lady lived a life of regret at not only her abuse but how she had subsequently lived a lonely, angry existence since being a child.

Forgiveness is hard, especially in such difficult circumstances. Val and David believe that when you forgive it does not mean that you forget the situation you have lived through, or that you dismiss the offence as unimportant but that it does not consume you

anymore. Val says, 'We must all journey to forgiveness for the wrongs that have been done to us. You must take the journey to forgiveness to be free.'

For many the journey to forgiveness may have taken such a long time that the person you need to forgive has actually died and you are unable to speak to them personally. Val encourages the writing of letters in such situations. This is a therapeutic way to deal with feelings of hurt, feelings of regret and feelings of disappointment. Val encourages this letter then to be burned, shredded or ripped up or as David puts it, 'Post it in the post of no despatch.'

The idea of writing a letter can also be used to write the things you wish you had said to someone you loved but never had the opportunity. Regrets come in many forms,

'Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one. For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.'

Matthew 6:12-14

...and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.

We may also regret things that we have left undone, things that we dreamed of achieving, relationships that were not all that they could or should have been. We may regret the way our lives have turned out. You are reading this and are a part of this group so irrespective of what your life has been up until now and whatever regrets you carry, your life is not over and God still has plans for you. They may not be the fulfilment of the dreams you had in your youth but they are God's plans and they will not be found wanting.

Relationships can be restored, it may not be easy but there are possibilities and your responsibility is to do what you can. When you have done what you can but the other person continues to hold a grudge 'let it go'.

'If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.'

Romans 12:18

If after all you have read and thought about you still have in your mind regrets about the way things have turned out, then try and give yourself a break. Release that which holds you back and try to move on. We cannot live in the past, we cannot continuously look back with regrets, we bring them to Jesus and then we move on. We look for a new relationship with him that underpins and forms the basis of all other relationships and all we do and hope for.

With grateful thanks to Lt Cols. David and Val Jones

## Reflection

- *Do you need to write a letter to 'post in the post of no despatch'?*
- *Do you need to attempt to restore a relationship or to let go of one?*

Ask God to speak to you about 'where do I go from here'?

## Prayer

Father God, help us to live each day in the fullness of your love, light and freedom. We lay at your feet our feelings of regret, the feelings of bitterness and the feelings of disconnect with others. From this moment on we choose to live full lives, free from the feeling of regret, free from the 'what ifs' of life, safe and secure in your love. Amen

## Notes

## Session 29

# Giving Up Guilt

### Activity

 10 minutes

- *What is your guilty pleasure?*

Write it on a piece of paper, fold it up and place in a bowl. Pass the bowl around the group and take it in turns to read the guilty pleasure and try to guess who that belongs to.

### Discussion

- *Do you think that there is more or less guilt in society now than there was fifty years ago?*
- *If you think there has been a change, why would you think that has happened?*

### Teaching

Having a guilty pleasure is one thing but today we will be thinking about the feeling of guilt.

The feeling of guilt is defined as

‘A feeling of worry or unhappiness that you have because you have done something wrong, such as causing harm to another person.’

Oxford English Dictionary

In ‘Long Lost Families’ shown on ITV, we often see the depth of guilt that has been carried by parents for many years. We see families reunited. These stories are of people who have lived with guilt for way too long. In one of the programmes it shows a man who has been looking for his birth mother. Not only does he find his birth mother, but finds that she married his father and they have gone on to have three other children. The guilt that both parents had carried for forty years was so apparent. What was the response from the son? When asked by his mother ‘do you forgive me?’ He simply replied ‘there is nothing to forgive.’

Guilt eats away at people. We all know this without even having to say it out loud. You have felt that in your stomach, have you not?

## Discussion

Consider Judas.

- *Have you ever tried to feel the anguish of Judas as he is wracked with guilt having handed over Jesus to the authorities?*

Discuss your thoughts around Judas, his actions and the consequences of those actions.

## Teaching

Did Judas know that his thirty pieces of silver would bring about the death of his friend? Yes, he betrayed him, yes he let Jesus down, and yes he was so low that he even gave Jesus away with a kiss but we cannot fully understand his motives. We do know he chose the wrong way. And then it was too late; too late to turn back the clock; too late to stop them taking Jesus; too late. Judas did not understand the victory of or the Kingdom of Jesus, he misread the situation. Realising his mistake, guilt took over his entire being. Judas was in deep sorrow and anguish.

Matthew 27:3-10 tells us that Judas returned the money to the priests and committed suicide by hanging himself. Judas alone. Judas, the guilty one, now dead himself. Even someone who had walked with Jesus, eaten with Jesus, followed Jesus, made a mistake. It simply can happen to anyone. None of us are exempt.

You may have made mistakes yourself in the past, we all do. You are not on your own. Jesus died to bring forgiveness of sins. Even as he hung on the cross he shouted out:

‘Father, forgive them,  
for they do not know what they are doing.’

Luke 23:34

But the grace of God is bigger than just cancelling out the ‘mistakes’ of sin. Consider the parable told in Luke 15 of the lost son. He wilfully and intentionally goes against the wishes of the father and gets lost. He is consciously moving away and causing pain to the father. Some of us have lived lives like this. We have caused pain to others and to God; we have knowingly and wantonly sinned. But the grace of God is a thousand, thousand times stronger than the love of the father who when he saw the son returning in the distance ran to him, kissed him and blessed him once again with the status of son-ship.

‘If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.’

1 John 1:9

‘But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.’

Romans 5:8

With grateful thanks to Lt. Cols David and Valerie Jones

## Reflection

‘Guilt is not of God, but freedom is of God.’

- *What does this statement mean to you?*
- *Have you ever experienced the relief that freedom from a specific guilt brings?*

Take some moments to quietly pray, asking for God to remove any guilt that remains within your soul, believing that you are free, bought by the precious blood of Jesus Christ. Thank God for the forgiveness that he freely and lavishly bestows upon you, and go ‘and sin no more’.

**Prayer**

🎵 Song 458

From every stain made clean,  
from every sin set free;

O blessed Lord,  
this is the gift that thou hast promised me.

And pressing through the past of  
failure, fault and fear,

Before thy cross my soul I cast,  
and dare to leave it there.

**For the next session**

Bring some photos of new starts in your life. Bring a photo of you as a baby. You could also bring photos of the first day at a new school, wedding day, new baby, new job or whatever you have. You could also bring documents of new starts e.g. a Junior Soldiers promise, Soldiers Covenant - discuss the significance of these.

**Notes**

## Session 30

# Time for a New Me!

### Activity

 10 minutes

Today is a new day! Start the session by giving thanks to God for something he has blessed you with today. (New day, life, health, friends, etc.)

Lay the photos you have brought face down on a table, mix them up, then try and guess who is who when they are turned over. Share the documents and explain what it meant at the time.

### Discussion

Discuss the new starts you have had in life.

- *How did they make you feel; nervous, excited, a bit of both?*
- *Would you describe yourself as a person who enjoyed new things or are you much happier with the status?*
- *If you could change one thing about yourself what would that be? (New hip or hairstyle, smaller nose or new routine, etc.)*

† Read Psalm 139:14

### Teaching

‘Every day we begin to write a new page, so that life never needs to feel old.’

Major Catherine Wyles: Growing Old Gracefully

Over the last few sessions we have looked at ‘Forgiveness’. Accepting forgiveness means that we move forward from the past and into the new. Catherine’s words are a reminder that today is a new day, a new chapter, an adventure and we do not have to be held by past sin and sorrow.

Daytime TV is full of programmes which are based on renovation. You may like ‘Homes under the hammer’ or ‘DIY SOS’. A house is taken charge of, it is renovated, painted, new furniture added, a new front door perhaps and ‘ta-da’, a new renovated home. A few years ago there was another programme called ‘10 years younger’, where women and some men gave themselves over to also go under some form of renovation. Nipped, tucked, teeth straightened and whitened, lipo-suction and all manner of remedies to make these people look younger and then again, ‘ta-da’, a new renovated, possibly younger-looking person. The problem with these programmes that we sometimes fail to see is that even when something is renovated, whether that is a house or a person, it is still the same house essentially and still the same person, they just look a little different.

As Christians it is not so much the outside that matters as the inside. Dallas Willard speaks about putting on the character of Christ in his book *Renovation of the Heart*. Willard reminds us that it is the renovation of the heart as a Christian that is paramount to being a follower of Jesus Christ. Only when our heart is aligned to Christ's can our attitude be that of a true disciple.

† Read [Philippians 2:5](#)

‘There are no easy formulas, definitive “how to’s” for growth into Christlikeness. Such growth depends on constant seeking. But there are many things we can do to place ourselves at the disposal of God and God’s promise to us. Jeremiah 29:13 is a reminder of that when it says “you will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.”’

Dallas Willard

† Read [2 Corinthians 5:17](#)

Accept that we are made new in Christ Jesus and that with our renovated hearts we need to seek God and his direction for our lives. That includes letting go of the past and forgiving ourselves, forgiving others and letting go of guilt which we have thought about over the past few weeks. There may have been times when we just want to hold on to past hurts, past guilt, past

sin but if we do this we will stop ourselves from moving forward with Jesus. Only when we walk fully in the freedom of Christ will we be able to help others to do the same.

Our hearts have been renovated! We are made new in Christ Jesus. Surely that makes our hearts shout ‘Hallelujah!’ which means God be praised!

‘The way to get as many people into heaven as you can is to get heaven into as many people as you can that is, to follow the path of genuine spiritual transformation of full throttle discipleship of Jesus Christ.’

Dallas Willard

So it is time to free ourselves, if we have not already done so, to enable us to free others. It is time for a new you and a new me. The old has gone, the new has come.

## Reflection

† Read Philippians 12:1-2

- *Why is it hard to let the past stay in the past?*
- *What can we do when memories of sin rear their heads and the devil tries to shame us?*
- *Are there things that you need to let go of in light of today's session?*

Ask God to bring to your mind those things - in order that you may lay them down.

- *Are there things that you need to change from this moment on?*

## Prayer

🎵 Song 861

No guilt in life, no fear in death,  
this is the power of Christ in me;

From life's first cry to final breath,  
Jesus commands my destiny.

No power of Hell, no scheme of man,  
can ever pluck me from his hand;

Till he returns or calls me Home,  
here in the power of Christ I'll stand.

Amen!

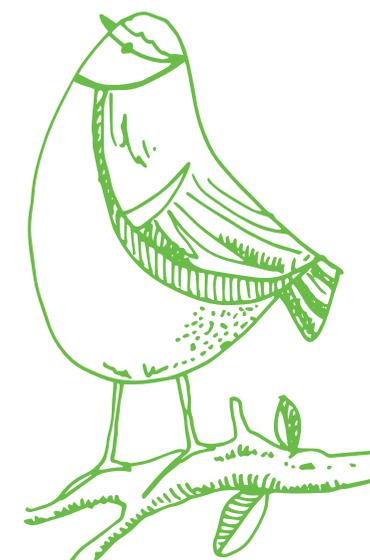
## Notes



# Appendices

A Planning Questions

B Response and Questions in Small Groups



# Introductory Session Planning Questions

1. *When and where you will meet for your first meeting?*

2. *Who will be responsible for ensuring that materials are brought to each session?*

3. *How long will the meeting last?*  
(You will have material for around an hour, but you need to factor in coffee and chatting.)

4. *Will you meet in different places or the same place each week?*

5. *Does everyone have a list of the preferred contact details for each member of the group?*  
Make sure everyone knows who they will be contacting and when.  
(This is for regular contact throughout the week.)

## Introductory Session Response and Questions in Small Groups

- *How does the interaction of Father, Son and Spirit encourage us to live in community with others?*

(Answers might include the fact that we are united despite our differences/Together we are stronger therefore able to accomplish more/Taking our lead from the Trinity)

- *Which part of the teaching spoke to you the most and why?*

Perhaps it was the Bible verses, quotes or doctrines.

- *What would be your hope for sharing in a community small group as we journey through this discipleship course?*

† Read Matthew 28:16-20

Pray for one another (silent or spoken)

# About The Salvation Army Older People's Ministries

The Older People's Ministries Team based at the seven Service Centres across the Territory have been established to support Corps and the communities they serve in understanding, reaching and meeting the needs of older people. Contact the team to talk to us about other resources and services.

**Email:** [olderpeoplesministries@salvationarmy.org.uk](mailto:olderpeoplesministries@salvationarmy.org.uk)



Even from everlasting to  
everlasting you are God.

PSALM 90:2



Older  
People's  
Ministries

[salvationarmy.org.uk](http://salvationarmy.org.uk)



# Age to Age

Age to Age is a discipleship resource written for Christians experiencing the later years of life. Week by week, with the experienced voices of other older Christians we will encounter relevant topics and issues through discussion, activities and Biblical teaching to help nurture our continued journeys as disciples of Jesus.

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*‘Age to Age reinforces the truths found in Scripture that relationships are an indispensable means of spiritual growth, discipleship and central to our Christian lives.’*

**Commissioner Anthony Cotterill**

The Territorial Commander of The Salvation Army  
United Kingdom and Ireland Territory



**Older  
People's  
Ministries**

[salvationarmy.org.uk](http://salvationarmy.org.uk)