



CALLED to **FRUITFULNESS**

A Resource for Group Study
SPRING 2023

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SESSION 1. Called to **TRANSFORMATION**

Opening Prayer

Loving God,

Guiding the people of Durham Diocese faithfully through the years:

We thank you for saints who have marked our path,

young and old, known and unknown,

from all places and all walks of life.

Help us to find your way in our generation:

transformed by your truth,

sharing your life,

blessing our communities.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord,

Amen

Introduction

Like many households, my family loves watching TV shows about transformation – garden makeovers and seeing plants begin to flourish and bloom, the restoration of wrecked houses to their original beauty or stories of sporting turnarounds (in particular the transformation of our local football team- who would ever have imagined that!)¹. At the heart of any transformation is the concept of growth, of being **enriched** and **flourishing** (often in spite of all expectations).

Transformation is at the heart of our vision as a Diocese (*'from the Tyne to the Tees and the Dales to the Seas, blessing our communities in JESUS' name for the transformation of us all'*) and echoes one of the big themes of the Bible – God's **promise** to transform, change to renew and create growth. Jesus invites us all – personally and as churches - to experience the transforming, renewing work of His Spirit in us AND invites us to be part of transforming the world around us.

Our first two sessions of this course focus on these two dimensions of Jesus' work in and through us – transforming us personally and using us as part of his work in the world beyond, working with him to bring hope and renewal to others.

Ice Breaker/Opener - Meeting a hero (The Dinner Party/Wedding Guest)

Imagine that you're a guest at a wedding, about to sit down with the other guests at your table. Which **significant person** (from the past or present) would you like to sit next to and get to talk to? What would you ask them and why?

- Split into 2s or 3s. Discuss with each other for 5-6 minutes
- Then get a couple of people to share their ideas with whole group
- Welcome and affirm everyone's contribution
- Summarise if there were any patterns or contrasts.

Link to the theme of today's session:

Often the sort of people we think of in an activity like this are people who've overcome a challenge or somehow been involved in a significant experience of transformation of the world around them (whether that be through something they've initiated, the life they've led or a change they've brought about). Often these seem very different to the sort of life we live, yet the Bible is really clear – God calls us all into his transforming work – transforming who we are, how we live and involving us in Jesus' work to transform the world around us. Today's passage describes some of this.

¹ Name withdrawn to avoid distressing some of our churches. Other football teams are also available!

Bible - 2 Corinthians 3:17-4:6

Note - These verses are part of a larger section on 2 Corinthians (the precise limits of which are not easy to define) where Paul enthusiastically explains the hope, purpose and promises to which we are called. It might help the group or the group leaders to read this larger section (2 Cor 3:1- 6:11) either before the session or after it.

¹⁷ Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. ¹⁸ And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another, for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit.

Therefore, since it is by God's mercy that we are engaged in this ministry, we do not lose heart. ² We have renounced the shameful, underhanded ways; we refuse to practice cunning or to falsify God's word, but by the open statement of the truth we commend ourselves to the conscience of everyone in the sight of God. ³ And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. ⁴ In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing clearly the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

⁵ For we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus's sake. ⁶ For it is the God who said, "Light will shine out of darkness," who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

Exploring the passage

In the verses we've just read, note how St Paul (the author of 2 Corinthians) repeatedly draws our attention away from ourselves and back onto the Lord/the Spirit/Christ as if he were encouraging us *'Forget about yourself and concentrate on him. Worship Christ the Lord!'*

Note also how the transformation within us that the verses speak of unfolds.

Firstly, an ongoing process, not a once-for-all event - 'we are being transformed' (3v18).

Secondly, it is a transformation done to us, not by us

- 'we are being transformed ... this comes from the Lord, the Spirit.'
- 'It is God who ... has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.'

...transformation is God's work, in us.

Thirdly, we have to play our part, too

- '**Seeing** the glory of the Lord' (so we have to look!)
- **Changing** our habits ('We have renounced shameful, underhanded ways ...') – practicing integrity and true godliness.
- **Living to proclaim** Christ and having proper humility ('We proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus' sake').

As God's transformation unfolds, we are being changed *from* one thing to another (literally, 'from glory to glory'). It is being changed from something good to something (much) better. But being changed does involve letting go of things that may, in themselves, be good and dear to us, which we can find difficult and even scary. Where this is the case it is for the sake of something vastly fuller and richer.

Ultimately, we are to be changed more and more into the likeness of Christ, and to be made more 'fit for purpose' as God's people in the world.

Questions for discussion

- How do you feel about change? In your own life, in Church, in the world? Does change excite you or frighten you?
- Can you think of an area of your own life where God is bringing about or has brought about a transformation of heart, habits or how you live or how you think? How did it happen?
- How can we 'see the glory of the Lord,' and allow God to shine in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ?
- What element of the passage do you find encouraging? What elements do you find challenging? Why?
- What does it tell you about Jesus?
- What is change 'from' and 'to' in the Christian life and in the life of the Church?

Application – Living it out!

- What do you and your church need to let go of in order to grow, develop, become more like Jesus and be better equipped to be disciples?
- What is the one transforming change God might like you to pray for or make space for addressing this Lent?

Prayers

At the end of each section use the refrain '*In a world of change and hope, of fear and adventure, faithful God, glorify your name.*'

Prayer

*In peace, let us pray to Jesus our Lord,
who ever lives to make intercession for us.
Saviour of the world,
be present in all places of suffering, violence and pain,
and bring hope even in the darkest night.
Inspire us to continue your work of reconciliation today.
In a world of change and hope, of fear and adventure, faithful God, glorify your name.*

*Lord of the Church,
empower by your Spirit all Christian people
and the work of your Church in every land.
Give us grace to proclaim the gospel joyfully in word and deed
In a world of change and hope, of fear and adventure, faithful God, glorify your name.*

*Shepherd and Guardian of our souls,
guide and enable all who lead and serve this community
and those on whom we depend for our daily needs.
Grant that we may seek the peace and welfare of this place.
Form us into the likeness of Christ and make us a perfect offering in your sight
Fill your Church with power from on high
In a world of change and hope, of fear and adventure, faithful God, glorify your name².*

Open prayer - Take some time to offer your own prayers in the light of today's passage - for our transformation, for the transformation of our churches, communities and the wider world.

² Prayers taken from *Common Worship* and <https://www.churchofengland.org/prayer-and-worship/worship-texts-and-resources/common-worship/daily-prayer/prayers>

SESSION 2. Called to **FRUITFULNESS**

Opening Prayer

*Loving God,
Guiding the people of Durham Diocese faithfully through the years:
We thank you for saints who have marked our path,
young and old, known and unknown,
from all places and all walks of life.
Help us to find your way in our generation:
transformed by your truth,
sharing your life,
blessing our communities.
Through Jesus Christ our Lord,
Amen*

Ice Breaker – Names in the hat

For this you will need -

- Some small pieces of paper
- Pens
- A hat (or similar).
- A watch or phone to act as a stopwatch

Hand around the bits of paper (3 each) and get people to right down either -

- An amazing place
- A significant sporting event or competition
- An important person

Split into two teams. Nominate one person to pick the cards out of the hat, **one at a time** – they have to describe the place, person or event **WITHOUT naming it** for the team to guess. They have to get through as many as possible in one minute. Any unguessed cards go back into the hat for the other team. Swap teams after one minute.

Link to today's topic -

Recap some of the places/people/events the group mentioned in the ice breaker. What words kept coming up as the group tried to describe each of these significant people/places/events? What do they have in common? Get the group to share some ideas.

One of the words that some people might associate with some of the things we were trying to describe could be **glory** – the glory of a place like the Grand Canyon or Niagara Falls, the glory of the world cup or the glory of a King or Queen.

Glory is one of the themes central to today's passage which is unusual for the perspective it gives on what glorifies and brings glory to God. The passage is from the last supper, as Jesus teaches and offers some final words to his disciples, the night before his crucifixion.

Bible – John 15:1-8

Get someone to read the whole passage or take it in turns to read a verse.

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. ² He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. ³ You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. ⁴ Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

⁵ "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶ If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. ⁷ If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸ This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

Exploring the passage

God's glory is hard to describe. We may think about a building, like our Cathedral, that echoes God's glory; or glory revealed in nature or new life; or a spiritual experience that means a huge amount to us... Lots of things reflect aspects of God's glory.

In John 15, Jesus says that what actually glorifies God is us bearing fruit and becoming his disciples. God's glory is revealed in us as we do this. Wow! I've never thought of myself as a vessel for God's glory, but maybe I should?

How does that work? What do I have to do to bear fruit or grow in discipleship? A tree doesn't decide, or choose, to bear fruit, it happens naturally. If trees are healthy, they will bear fruit.

So, it's not about us trying harder to be fruitful; we just have to be who we are in God. We know that God is a good gardener, who will prune us and give us what we need. We allow him to make us healthy – we just root our lives in God, and then we will receive all that he has to give us.

Some of us aren't good at receiving things – but God wants us to. That's how we flourish. If we receive from him, we will bear more fruit. So, by allowing God to change us, make us more fruitful, we bring glory to God.

The other thing that Jesus says brings glory to God is becoming a disciple. This is so much more than being a believer, or someone who has faith: My own definition of a disciple is someone who listens to Jesus and then does what he says. We follow and listen, but our lives and our actions are changed too.

David Watson (an Anglican vicar who wrote a great book on discipleship) said this –

"The vast majority of Western Christians are church members, pew fillers, hymn singers, sermon tasters, Bible readers... but not true disciples of Jesus. If we were willing to learn the meaning of real discipleship and actually become disciples, the church in the West would be transformed, and the ...impact on society would be staggering."

A disciple is someone who has committed themselves to Christ – to walking Christ's way, sharing Christ's love and truth with others. As we become disciples, we grow in Christ, and then we can help others to grow as disciples as well.

Just think about how God would be glorified if every single one of us lived as disciples of Jesus every single moment of our lives? We really would change our communities, and our relationships, and our society – and that glorifies God more than anything else we could do.

So, do you bring glory to God in your life? Are you bearing fruit and are you his disciple?

If, like the rest of us, you don't think you're quite there yet; don't tell yourself that you must try harder – ask God's Spirit to fill you with all the good things he has for you... and then be prepared for your life to change, as God takes you at your word and transforms you!

Questions for discussion³

- Can you describe a situation when you were aware of God's glory? How did it impact you? How did it change how you saw God or your own situation?
- Tell the group about someone you respect in the faith – someone who models being a disciple somehow. What is it about them that stands out for you?
- What does it mean to be **rooted** in God? Are there things we might need to be '**uprooted**' from? (i.e. things that stop us from being totally rooted in God).
- What good things do you think God wants to give us?
- Share something of how you have grown as a Christian over the years.
- Is your church community fruitful?
 - If so, describe what is working well. What are the different ways we should measure fruit?
 - If not, discuss what could change.
- David Watson comments that '*The vast majority of Western Christians are church members, pew fillers, hymn singers, sermon tasters, Bible readers... but not true disciples of Jesus*'. How true a comment is that? Do you agree? Why do you think this might be the case?
- How do you think Jesus would define discipleship?
- As a group, come up with your own definition of discipleship.

Application – Living it out!

- Jesus calls his disciples to remain in him. Identify one practical thing you could do to live this out this Lent?
- Discipleship is sometimes described as the process of growing in the likeness of Jesus, growing in love for Jesus and growing in the mission of Jesus. What's one thing you could do as a church to encourage and support this?

Prayers for discipleship & remaining in Christ.

Pray together

*Creator God,
You made us all in your image:
May we discern you in all that we see,
And serve you in all that we do;
Through Jesus Christ our Lord,
Amen.*

Open Prayer. Take some time to bring before God your everyday life – the situations and the people that you encounter day by day. Pray for God's grace to be a good witness and a loving and pure presence – knowing his way in each situation.

Pray together **St Patrick's prayer** to finish

*Christ be with me, Christ within me,
Christ behind me, Christ before me,
Christ beside me, Christ to win me,
Christ to comfort and restore me,
Christ beneath me, Christ above me,
Christ in quiet, Christ in danger,
Christ in hearts of all that love me,
Christ in mouth of friend and stranger.
Amen⁴*

³ Some groups may find it useful to select a few of the discussion questions rather than tackling all of them. Where this is the case, try to choose a mix that i. Reflect on how we live; ii. Reflect on the person of Jesus; iii. Reflect on the task of mission & discipleship.

⁴ Today's prayers are taken from the Everyday Faith website. Everyday Faith is a CofE initiative, providing loads of tools and resources to help us grow in what it means to be a disciple of Jesus, encountering, serving and making Christ known in our everyday lives. You can find out more about at <https://www.churchofengland.org/our-faith/everyday-faith>

SESSION 3. A Call for **ALL AGES**

Engaging with Children, Youth & Young Adults

Opening Prayer

*Loving God,
Guiding the people of Durham Diocese faithfully through the years:
We thank you for saints who have marked our path,
young and old, known and unknown,
from all places and all walks of life.
Help us to find your way in our generation:
transformed by your truth,
sharing your life,
blessing our communities.
Through Jesus Christ our Lord,
Amen*

Ice Breaker/Opener

- **Bring to mind** someone who has been a good influence on you: someone who has been a good example to you, who encouraged and affirmed you, or who you are learning (or learned) a lot from? Maybe (if you are older) someone who has influenced you for the rest of your life? Or (if you are younger) a person you think you will look back on with gratitude. How did they influence your life? What did they do, model or say to have that impact?
- **Tell the group** about them – in just 2 or 3 sentences (or a minute each)

Reflection – were there any common threads in our stories?

Introduction

In today's session we consider the question of age, and particularly youth. Childhood and youth have changed massively in recent years, but the Bible presents an **unchanging** picture of how God sees young people – his commitment to make himself known to them and enthusiasm for powerfully including them in his plan, irrespective of their experience or what others might expect.

Our Bible passage unpacks some of these themes as it describes a moment of national crisis and paralysis for the nation of Israel. Following years of difficulty with their neighbours, Israel finds itself facing the Philistine military who have lined up their forces on the national border, ready to invade.

Days of sabre rattling eventually culminate in a soul destroying challenge to settle the dispute by proxy: each nation putting forward a soldier to fight on their behalf on a 'winner takes all basis'. Given the Philistine champion's reputation as a man of colossal size and brutal violence, no one from the Israelite military has proven willing to volunteer.

At a time when power, status, and looks mattered hugely, God's intervention through an unexpected person tells us something vitally important about what he values, about where true strength lies, and about God's readiness to miraculously work with and through his people, just as we are, provided we trust him.

Bible - David kills Goliath I Samuel 17:32-34, 37, 40-51

³² David said to Saul, "Your Majesty, no one should be afraid of this Philistine! I will go and fight him." ³³ "No," answered Saul. "How could you fight him? You're just a boy, and he has been a soldier all his life!" ³⁴ "Your Majesty," David said, "I take care of my father's sheep...." ³⁷ The LORD has saved me from lions and bears; he will save me from this Philistine." "All right," Saul answered. "Go, and the LORD be with you."

⁴⁰ David took his shepherd's stick and then picked up five smooth stones from the stream and put them in his bag. With his sling ready, he went out to meet Goliath. ⁴¹ The Philistine started walking toward David, with his shield bearer walking in front of him. He kept coming closer, ⁴² and when he got a good look at David, he was filled with scorn for him because he was just a nice, good-looking boy. ⁴³ He said to David, "What's that stick for? Do you think I'm a dog?" And he called down curses from his god on David. ⁴⁴ "Come on," he challenged David, "and I will give your body to the birds and animals to eat."

⁴⁵ David answered, "You are coming against me with sword, spear, and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the LORD Almighty, the God of the Israelite armies, which you have defied. ⁴⁶ This very day the LORD will put you in my power; I will defeat you and cut off your head. And I will give the bodies of the Philistine soldiers to the birds and animals to eat. Then the whole world will know that Israel has a God, ⁴⁷ and everyone here will see that the LORD does not need swords or spears to save his people. He is victorious in battle, and he will put all of you in our power."

⁴⁸ Goliath started walking toward David again, and David ran quickly toward the Philistine battle line to fight him. ⁴⁹ He reached into his bag and took out a stone, which he slung at Goliath. It hit him on the forehead and broke his skull, and Goliath fell face downward on the ground. ⁵⁰ And so, without a sword, David defeated and killed Goliath with a sling and a stone! ⁵¹ He ran to him, stood over him, took Goliath's sword out of its sheath, and cut off his head and killed him.

Exploring the passage

God values younger people; he sees them for who they are and for their potential, not just their age, size and status; he honours their eagerness to learn and serve; he calls them not just to follow but to lead, to speak, to prophesy, to set an example for the whole church (including those who are older).

Questions for discussion

- 1) Have you ever felt that your abilities and skills were under-valued? Maybe you still feel like that. Allow space for people in the group to share a little bit of their experiences about what happened, and how it made them feel.
- 2) Describe the attitudes of the adults towards David in this story. If you look back a few verses you will see that other adults have also rubbished him – even his own big brother. What impact does this have/would this have had on David?
- 3) Identify the objects David uses in this story, to great effect. Notice their ordinariness – they were the tools and resources David had for his 9-5 job (shepherding). What are your 'staff, sling and stones' to be put to use for God's glory?
- 4) God had a real purpose for David's life. Throughout his life, he had lots of roles - shepherd, musician, soldier, king, husband, father, friend. God has different purposes for each one of us at various times on our lives. How might we discover what God has in mind for us, at different stages of life?
- 5) Reading this Bible passage reminds us just how much God values, honours and calls young people. In what ways does our church community value, support and encourage children and young people? Are there ways we could do things differently / better?

Application – Living it out!

- **Think back to the icebreaker (when we thought about the people who inspired us).** Is there any element of how these people helped, inspired or encouraged you that God might want you to 'play forward'?
- Think more generally about what you could do to encourage the young people you know into life in its fullness? Agree one achievable thing you / your church could do (in addition to what you already do) to honour the young people in your life / church / community?
- How could the generations in your church interact more to learn about and from each other?

Prayers

Psalm 145 speaks of all the generations knowing, enjoying and proclaiming with thanks the goodness and love of God. Read verses 3-12 together as a prayer,

*Great is the Lord and most worthy of praise;
his greatness no one can fathom.*
⁴ **One generation commends your works to another;
they tell of your mighty acts.**
⁵ *They speak of the glorious splendour of your majesty—
and I will meditate on your wonderful works.*
⁶ **They tell of the power of your awesome works—
and I will proclaim your great deeds.**
⁷ *They celebrate your abundant goodness
and joyfully sing of your righteousness.*
⁸ **The Lord is gracious and compassionate,
slow to anger and rich in love.**
⁹ *The Lord is good to all;
he has compassion on all he has made.*
¹⁰ **All your works praise you, Lord;
your faithful people extol you.**
¹¹ *They tell of the glory of your kingdom
and speak of your might,*
¹² **so that all people may know of your mighty acts
and the glorious splendour of your kingdom**

Intercessions - Take some time as a group to pray for

- **The young people known to your church** – for them to encounter Jesus personally and sense his call and gifting. For them to be salt and light. For them to enjoy following Christ all the days of their lives.
- **The young people of your parish** – children, teens, young adults. For your local schools, colleges and community organisations.
- The people who led us to Christ – giving thanks for those who encouraged and inspired us.
- For wisdom as to what part our Church should play in reaching out to and welcoming young people into the life of Christ.

Further Information

You can discover more resources and links related to **Engaging with Children, Youth and Young Adults** and **becoming churches for all ages** in the **Discover More** section at the back of this booklet

SESSION 4. 'Sent at Lent' – Called to **GROW**

Opening Prayer

*Loving God,
Guiding the people of Durham Diocese faithfully through the years:
We thank you for saints who have marked our path,
young and old, known and unknown,
from all places and all walks of life.
Help us to find your way in our generation:
transformed by your truth,
sharing your life,
blessing our communities.
Through Jesus Christ our Lord,
Amen*

Ice Breaker – The Starburst Game

For this icebreaker you'll need a big bag of Starburst sweets (double up if you have a large group). This ice breaker works a little bit like pass the parcel. Tell them the three possible tasks – if you get a...

- **Red** - Tell us about a place you'd love to visit and why
- **Purple** - Tell us something you appreciate about a friendship and why
- **Green** - If you had all the boldness in the world, what is the one thing you would like to try?

(1-2 sentences max).

Hand the bag round. Everyone takes a sweet without looking. If it's a Red, a Green or a Purple STOP and get them to do the task. Make it fun. Give them a clap. Keep it to a 1-2 sentence response.

Once you've run out of sweets (or if it's run its course), get the group to reflect..

- What surprised you?
- Were there any similarities or contrasts between what people shared?

Introduction

An icebreaker like this illustrates how different we all are even when we come from the same place and same church. That diversity is one of the most beautiful gifts of the body of Christ through which God displays his 'manifold wisdom' to the whole world (Ephesians 3:10) and has profound implications for our mission together. All are needed, all are called, all are included, all are sent and **all** are given grace. How amazing (and how challenging!)

Often, we think that mission is just for a select few – for the extrovert, the confident or perhaps even just the Vicar! But throughout the gospels we see Jesus wants to invite everyone and send everyone out as his ambassadors. For some this will mean taking his good news far afield. For others it means sharing his invitation with the people on our doorstep at work, school or across the garden fence.

At the end of the gospel of John Jesus gathers his disciples shortly after the dramatic events of his arrest, trial, crucifixion and resurrection. Speaking to them and knowing their fears and failures, he speaks peace over them, imparts the Holy Spirit and sends them all out to continue his mission.

Bible – John 20:19-30

¹⁹ On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!” ²⁰ After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

²¹ Again Jesus said, “Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” ²² And with that he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³ If you forgive anyone’s sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.”

²⁴ Now Thomas (also known as Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. ²⁵ So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord!”

But he said to them, “Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.”

²⁶ A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!” ²⁷ Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.”

²⁸ Thomas said to him, “My Lord and my God!”

²⁹ Then Jesus told him, “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

³⁰ Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. ³¹ But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

Exploring the passage

‘Sending’ involves a person or a thing being instructed to go from one place to another with a particular purpose. I send texts from my phone to my wife, to tell her that I love her. I send the kids from our house to their school, so they can learn and grow. I send the dog from inside to outside, because he’s emptied his bladder on my shoes...

Everything and everyone that is sent has a sender. The text will not send itself, my children will not skip merrily to school of their own volition, and my dog will not decide to punish himself for his unforgivable sin – in each case when one is sent, there is a sender.

We are the ‘Sent’ ones, and Jesus is our Sender:

- ‘See, I am sending you out like sheep among wolves’. (Luke 3:10)
- ‘And He sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to perform healing’. (Luke 9:2)
- ‘How will they preach unless they are sent?’ (Rom 10:15)

The word ‘Church’ (meaning you and I, gathering with Christ, not the buildings we meet in) comes from the Greek word *Ekklesia* – ‘a called-out assembly’. God has called us ‘out’ from the world, to him, making us representatives of Christ and His Kingdom, to be sent as salt and light OUT into the world. And yet so often our default is to call people IN to our buildings and meetings.

Jesus tells his disciples to ‘Go’, but the Church too often requires only that people would ‘Come’. In contrast to Jesus’ vision where he saves us to be sent out, not to stay in.

‘As the Father has sent me’.

Jesus knows what it is to be sent, to leave the place of comfort, familiarity, and safety of heaven, and step into the messiness, uncertainty and risk of humanity. Do you hear that same call today?:

"Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?" And I said, "**Here am I. Send me!**" (Isaiah 6:8)

When you hear the call of the Sender, what is your response?

Perhaps this Lent, we need to relearn what it is to be 'sent'. Perhaps we need to get back on the road and start to walk the journey of discipleship with Jesus. Faith is never required when we choose the comfort, familiarity and safety of staying in and sitting down. Faith that is 'living and active' is only birthed through the messiness, uncertainty and risk of standing up and stepping out.

Lord, here I am, Send me. Amen.

Questions for discussion

- Can you remember a time when you were sent on assignment or mission that took you out of your comfort zone? How did you feel? What was the result?
- As you wait in His presence, read his Word, and become open to hearing His call, **where or who** do you feel God is sending you to?
- What are some of the comforts, familiarities and safe things that might prevent us standing up and stepping out into the messiness, uncertainty and risk of the faith journey?
- Being 'sent' has personal and shared implications. How, where and to whom might God be sending our whole church at this time? What groups or places around us might he be calling us to engage with or invest in?
- What would help you talk more confidently about your faith in Jesus?

Application – Living it out!

- What one thing could we begin to do as a church to send one another out as the messengers of Jesus and support one another to do this?
- What one thing could we do *together* to connect with the people around us who might be furthest away from Christ?

Prayers

*Heavenly Father, who shone your light into our hearts so that we might see the glory of God in the face of Jesus
Shine your light into the hearts of the people around us - our neighbours, friends and families
That they might see the glory and truth, the grace and the love of your Son Jesus
Fill this earth with the light of Jesus*

*Heavenly Father, whose Son calls us together to go to the ends of the earth
Lead us to those nearby and far away, to the interested and opposed.
Make us good news, channels of your peace
Ambassadors and heralds,
Joyfully demonstrating and declaring the good news that God is for us and that the Christ has come!
Fill our hearts with the love and power of Jesus*

*Heavenly Father, who calls the church to serve and to shine as a light to the whole world
Give us grace to love and serve all
Give us faith to endure, to persist and to hope
Give us wisdom, to understand and to speak
Give us power, to demonstrate your care
Fill our churches with the Spirit of Jesus*

Open prayer. Take some time to pray for -

- One another – that we might be salt and light, declaring and demonstrating the good news of Jesus
- The people around us – that they might hear and know Christ
- The mission of your church – for ears to hear and readiness to respond to the sending words of Jesus.

Further Information - You can discover more resources and support to help you grow in **Mission and Evangelism** in the **Discover More** section at the back of this booklet

SESSION 5. Called to **CHALLENGE POVERTY**

Opening Prayer

*Loving God,
Guiding the people of Durham Diocese faithfully through the years:
We thank you for saints who have marked our path,
young and old, known and unknown,
from all places and all walks of life.
Help us to find your way in our generation:
transformed by your truth,
sharing your life,
blessing our communities.
Through Jesus Christ our Lord,
Amen*

Introduction

Have you ever watched a child eating dinner who carefully piles up on one side of their plate the things they don't want to eat or don't like the look of? The things that they know they should eat but are avoiding?

Lent for many is a time of giving up certain things – unhealthy things, or undertaking some form of 'fast' in order to help them focus on Christ or bring their lives before God. But fasting can also be expressed by making decisions to take on certain practices we *should* be committing to as God's people. This is what the prophet Isaiah had in mind as he prophesied to God's people, saying 'This is the kind of fasting I want...'

Ice Breaker/Opener

What's on your Plate this Lent?

For this activity you will need some paper plates and marker pens. If you don't have paper plates cut out some cardboard circles that are about plate sized. Give each person a paper plate and a pen.

Ask the simple question - : What's on your plate? (We're using this as a metaphor to help us think about the things that are facing us this Lent).

- What's on your plate that you would like to be released from?
- What's on your plate that you are avoiding, but would actually be really good to tackle?

For example - answers might include.. *'This Lent I want to get the grief of Covid off my plate. It's time to leave that behind!' or 'This Lent I want to face up to the challenge of becoming a bit more prayerful!'*

Give the group 3-5 minutes to draw their response: it could be anything, from trivial / amusing to serious - but get them to be as open as they can be, on the assurance that whatever they share stays in the room. Try to get everyone to think of at least one thing they could share with the group.

Invite people to share with everyone what is on their paper plate – no compulsion, sensitivity required⁵

⁵ Note to the group leader – Before sharing you might want to say 'please don't feel under any pressure to share anything really personal – it might be that you want to keep that between you and God. If that's the case, think of a simple thing that you would be comfortable sharing'. Go first as the group leader to model this/give an example Choose something that is simple, neither too lofty or too benign.

Bible - Isaiah 58: 6-12 (This is from Good News Bible)

⁶ “The kind of fasting I want is this: Remove the chains of oppression and the yoke of injustice, and let the oppressed go free. ⁷ Share your food with the hungry and open your homes to the homeless poor. Give clothes to those who have nothing to wear, and do not refuse to help your own relatives.

⁸ “Then my favour will shine on you like the morning sun, and your wounds will be quickly healed. I will always be with you to save you; my presence will protect you on every side. ⁹ When you pray, I will answer you. When you call to me, I will respond.

“If you put an end to oppression, to every gesture of contempt, and to every evil word; ¹⁰ if you give food to the hungry and satisfy those who are in need, then the darkness around you will turn to the brightness of noon. ¹¹ And I will always guide you and satisfy you with good things. I will keep you strong and well. You will be like a garden that has plenty of water, like a spring of water that never goes dry. ¹² Your people will rebuild what has long been in ruins, building again on the old foundations. You will be known as the people who rebuilt the walls, who restored the ruined houses.”

Exploring the passage

Lent is a time for fasting, which we normally see as giving something up for a few weeks. But this passage suggests a different way of looking at it: a way that is close to the heart of God, and a door into his presence, by making a personal commitment to do something practical about injustice and oppression.

For our light to shine in the world, we are called to work for justice; be alongside the poor and downtrodden in their need; to share of our plenty with those who have little (or nothing). In other words, *to be alongside others who have much more on their plate than we have*, possibly more than we can imagine

In our more economically deprived contexts, it may mean something different: it may be a call to find others who are facing similar challenges to ourselves, to be in solidarity with them and encourage them to get alongside us for the good of the whole community

Finding healing for ourselves entails becoming channels of healing for others. If we are to find God, our fasting must be characterised by living out his just and good purposes

Questions for discussion

1, We've started by thinking about what is on our plates. **Think about the kinds of people we read about in this passage from Isaiah. Imagine what they might have on their plates.** Talk about this together, bringing to mind..

- What you hear about in the media
- People who live in or near your parish and neighbourhood
- Anyone you know personally

2, What does this Scripture tell you about God's character and God's priorities and purposes?

3, The emphasis in this passage seems to be on **charity** - providing for the needs of the poor and oppressed. Churches are great givers of charity. This is a precious thing BUT needs to be examined thoughtfully. South African writer Thia Cooper suggests that 'Charity is only needed when a situation of injustice exists. On its own, charity is not enough; it leaves the person 'giving' with the power'.

- What might Thia mean by this?
- What are your reactions to being potential or actual holders of power? How should we, as disciples of Jesus, manage the dangers of this?

4, Look at **verse 12**, which refers to 'your people' – those for whom you have provided – themselves becoming builders and restorers of neighbourhoods and communities.

- What do you make of this?
- How might this give us a different vision for how we approach 'charity'?

Application – Living it out!

- If fasting is about giving things up, take the opportunity now to start identifying things you / your congregation need to consider giving up to make space for justice and social action
- Invite someone from **Durham Communities Together** to come and talk to you about different approaches to Challenging Poverty
- Suggest to the vicar and PCC that the church might take up a special Easter collection to support a local charity or community project, or a school in a nearby council estate (or similar)

Prayers⁶.

A prayer for an end to poverty

*Creator God,
you loved the world into life.
Forgive us when our dreams of the future
are shaped by anything other than glimpses of a kingdom
of justice, peace and an end to poverty.*

*Incarnate God,
you taught us to speak out for what is right.
Make us content with nothing less than a world
that is transformed into the shape of love,
where poverty shall be no more.*

*Breath of God,
let there be abundant life.
Inspire us with the vision of poverty over,
and give us the faith, courage and will to make it happen.*

Amen

Made in the image of God - A prayer for challenging poverty

*Loving God, you make us in your image.
Forgive us when we fail to see your image in each other,
when we give in to greed and indifference
when we do not question the systems that are life-denying.*

*As we are made in your image,
let us live in your image
and be Christ-like
in service, endurance and love.*

Amen

⁶ Prayers are taken from www.Christianaid.org.uk

STORY – From Charity to Justice!

Over the last year Space 4 community project in Houghton-le-Spring has been on a bit of a journey and one that we have seen in other projects that we support across the diocese. The project was established in 2014 to support people through provision of food, advice and social opportunities. Like many of our church-based organisations drop-ins and foodbanks are on offer.

The first big change came as staff and volunteers shifted from responding to food poverty through a parcel-based system to opening a food store that allowed people to choose their own food. In an interview with [Spark Sunderland](#) the manager Daniel Alcock explained ‘we want to give people agency – it’s a pay as you can, pay what you feel service’.

However, this wasn’t enough. Jade, who ran the food store, was angry that their actions were not tackling the causes. ‘I feel that we are being a sticking plaster, and not making a long term difference for people. It’s just giving quick relief for the issue but doesn’t make long term change’.

The staff and volunteers wanted to move beyond charity to justice as Jade explained, ‘By challenging injustice within our community we are giving people the voice to make the change needed to tackle the root causes’

In October Space 4 joined Tyne and Wear Citizens which includes institutions such as a schools, mosques, universities, mental health charities and other churches, all of whom want to challenge injustice. The project staff, volunteers and community members all took part in 2-day community organising training in the hub. The training taught them how to build power to take action on the issues that mattered to their community.

Kim, a local mum and volunteer said that the training made her reflect upon her role within Space 4 and within the community and ‘was excited about new doors opening, meeting new people and building knowledge and power between us’.

The shift from charity to justice is one we at Communities Together Durham are witnessing as we come to terms with the fact that much of our charitable giving, while important in the moment, does not create long term change.

Further Information

You can discover more resources and support to help you engage with **Challenging Poverty** in the **Discover more** section at the back of this booklet

SESSION 6. Called to **CARE** for **GOD's** **CREATION**

Opening Prayer

*Loving God,
Guiding the people of Durham Diocese faithfully through the years:
We thank you for saints who have marked our path,
young and old, known and unknown,
from all places and all walks of life.
Help us to find your way in our generation:
transformed by your truth,
sharing your life,
blessing our communities.
Through Jesus Christ our Lord,
Amen*

Introduction

COP26 Glasgow. Bio-diversity. Net-zero-carbon. Growing back green. Ring any bells?

All of these are phrases you might have heard over the past year or so – buzz phrases you might have heard flying around the media as the issue of the climate and environmental crisis has featured in discussion over the last couple of years. For the church however, the challenge of *caring for creation* [our natural world] has always been a concern and, on careful inspection, we find is deeply baked into both our understanding of God (a truth we declare every Sunday in the Apostles Creed – ‘I believe in God the Father Almighty, Creator of Heaven and earth...’), in his call to us and in the Bible’s vision for the renewal of **all things**, flowing from the victory of Jesus.

The opening chapters of the Bible point us towards this. The writer of Genesis Chapter 1 and 2 moves us quickly from ‘pre-time’ (when the universe is dark and void) to an intense period of creativity and change as God gives shape to the natural world, filling it with beauty, abundance, the promise of fruitfulness, inviting and charging humanity to become co-curators, guardians, participants and stewards of his creation.

Later, the story becomes darker as the humans’ tendency towards brokenness and short-sighted selfishness is revealed, and later still, the Bible moves to describe God’s promise to his people and vision for the renewal and restoration of his creation. Together these form a rich vision which long predates Greenpeace and Eco Church and which should put the people of Jesus on the front foot and in the centre of creation care, with a confidence that ‘the earth is the Lord’s’, that the earth is good, that we are a people of privilege and responsibility.

Ice Breaker

In this week’s session we are exploring what it means to *Care for God’s Creation*. In the early chapters of the Bible we find God pausing to rest and enjoy all the different elements of the natural world he has created, reflecting as he admires the eco system, seas, mountains, creatures (and humankind!) that ‘it is good!’ (Genesis 1v31).

Icebreaker activity - Share with one another a place you’ve visited or thing you do that helps you/has helped you see and enjoy how good God’s creation is. Describe how it affects you and what you value about it.

Bible - Genesis 1:26-31

Get someone to read the whole passage or each take it in turns to read a verse.

²⁶ Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.”

*²⁷ So God created mankind in his own image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.*

²⁸ God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”

²⁹ Then God said, “I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. ³⁰ And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move along the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food.” And it was so.

³¹ God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day.

Exploring the passage

A note on words - the words *rule* and *authority* (**Radah** in Hebrew) can, for some of us, have some really uncomfortable associations but it is worth noting how they are used in the Old Testament. Sometimes it's **neutral** or to describe factually e.g. 1 Kings 4:24 ('For he had dominion over all the region west of the Euphrates'); sometimes it recognises something potentially **negative** (e.g. Leviticus 25:43 where it's used to warn against the abuse of power – 'You shall not rule over them with harshness, but shall fear your God'), or it can be **really positive** – in **praise and thanks** at God's sovereignty (Psalm 72:8 – 'He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth').

Given the creative, life giving and beautifying tone that describes God's work in this chapter, it makes sense that the Bible is imagining that humans are intended to rule and use their resources in the same positive, generous manner - not for their own gratification, but in a way that honours and respects each other, God and the planet (God's gift, God's workmanship, God's possession) itself.

As you reflect on the passage, what do you notice about how the earth, eco system and cosmos is described? And what does it imply or describe of God – what he is like and values?

Questions for discussion

1. Why do you think that care for the environment has been so far down the list of Christian priorities for so long?
2. What do you think Genesis 1.26-31 has to say about our relationship to God and to the world that he created?
3. How might we 'have dominion' over creation in a *good* way? What is your view about the connection between being made in God's image and having dominion over creation?
4. What should we make of God's observation in Genesis 1.31 that the world was 'very good'? How does that speak to our decisions (personally and together) in using resources and caring for the planet?
5. How does our use of resources affect the lives and environment of other people (communities overseas and people in the future)?
6. How does the life of Jesus speak to you about how we respond? What would Jesus do? What would he say if we asked his perspective on our decisions and attitudes?
7. **What is one thing you think God might be showing you or saying to you through this passage and today's discussion?**

Prayers

Tearfund “Hope for Creation” prayer

Lord, make us people who recognise, nurture and act towards a more sustainable world for the benefit of all who draw life from this planet.

Raise up campaigners who will speak out for wisdom, restraint and compassion.

And teach us to partner you in protecting this precious world and the lives of our most vulnerable global neighbours.

Amen

From the Collect for Environment Sunday

Living God,

You call us to be good stewards of this earthly home

Strengthen us to care for your creation

Forgive us when, through our greed and indifference we abuse its beauty and damage its potential.

Empower us, through your Spirit to so nurture and love the world, that all creation sings to your glory.

Amen

Application – Living it out!

Application as churches

- As a church plan a climate Sunday or use a Creation tide service (in September) to get your whole congregation thinking about the environment, our responsibilities as Christians, God’s teaching on consumption and stewardship and the implications of environmental change for the poor and future generations.
- If you’ve not done so already, get your church registered with Eco Church <https://ecochurch.arocha.org.uk> and start exploring some simple things you can do to make your building and church activities greener.

Personal Application

- Have a go at figuring out your carbon footprint. The World Wildlife Fund have a great, simple ‘carbon calculator’ you could use - <https://footprint.wwf.org.uk/#!/> or you could try out Carbon Stewards more comprehensive one at <https://www.climatestewards.org/carbon-calculators/>
- Think about what you can do to reduce your carbon footprint – what changes you can make to how you shop, travel or use goods.

Further Information

You can discover more resources and support to help you engage with **Caring for God’s Creation** in the **Discover More** section at the back of this booklet

APPENDIX I. The value of icebreakers

Whilst some of your congregation will be really looking forward to joining a Lent group, lots of others will struggle – perhaps being nervous about opening up or being asked their opinion. For others, it might be simply because they are the ‘new guy’ and, having heard about the group on your website or from a friend, this is the first time they are risking connecting to the church!

Icebreakers are a simple and often fun way to begin helping people bond. It helps us to get to know one another and build connections that will grow beyond the course. And, for some people (who might find contributing to a formal discussion hard) their chance to contribute to the group. Often we find that groups who take the time to have fun, get to know one another or practicing listening to one another through an ice breaker are the groups that last longer, building stronger discipleship relationships that strengthen the wider church.

When you choose an icebreaker it's important to use icebreaker activities that are easy to learn, non-threatening and fun and appropriate for your group. A simple game or a ‘getting to know one another’ question are good icebreaker activities.

In this guide we've tried to give an icebreaker suggestion for each of the sessions but you should feel free to innovate and adapt. And it might be worth getting different members of the group to plan an icebreaker. Where you do this it will create ownership and is a small way to grow leadership skills. Try to give people a bit of notice if you plan to do this.

As the course progresses you may want to change the dynamics, moving from lighter hearted to ice breakers with a bit more meaning as the group's confidence in one another grows. Bear in mind the size of the group, and be flexible if there is a change in the numbers or an unexpected influx of new people



APPENDIX II. Using sung worship in small groups

Sung worship has always been a feature of the life of the church, often unlocking a deeper bit of our spirituality to God, or enabling us to express or connect to a truth about Jesus in a special way.

Whilst we have not included sung worship in the sessions included in this guide, we would encourage you to explore this where it is helpful.

Bear in mind.

- We want it to bless and help people, not hinder or embarrass them
- There are all sorts of ways we can do this
- There is no 'must'! These comments are simply for those groups who would find it helpful.

If the group would like to use sung worship here are three simple ways you might do this.

1. Live music or acapella – Great if you've got a piano in the room or a member of the group who can play guitar or who has the confidence (and ability) to tunefully lead. Choose really simple songs, that a number of the group will know and choose for the context (Handel's Messiah is less likely to work well in your living room than it would in Durham Cathedral!).

2. Singing along to You Tube, a CD or a song on Spotify. Again, choose simple songs that people will know or will find easy to pick up. And try to print out a copy of the words. Make sure your stereo/tv/etc is working and that your phone/speaker is charged up in advance. And be ready for the wifi breaking down!

3. Listening to a piece to help you move into prayer. This can work really well, especially as a route into a time of prayer, giving people the space to reflect, letting the lyrics of a song or hymn shape their thoughts.



APPENDIX III

Discover more

I. Find out more about **Engaging with Children, Youth & Young Adults** and **becoming a Church for All Ages**

Resources -

- **Buying a bus instead of a house** – a great short **video testimony** about Emily, a young Christian who made the decision to sink her life savings into buying a bus and starting a ministry to reach local young people. You can watch Emily's story at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g0nRE6VWN8bg&t=1s> or by googling *Emily Finch Bus Church* YouTube.
- Richard Rohr, ***Falling Upwards: A Spirituality for the Two Halves of Life***. This book explores how spirituality changes during our lifetime, and how in the second half of life we can embrace generativity in our relationships with younger people
- Rachel Turner has written several brilliant books on Christian parenting, becoming Churches who support families and resources on working with Toddlers. Check out her books at <https://www.wob.com/en-gb/books/author/rachel-turner> or the Parenting for Faith course at <https://www.parentingforfaith.brf.org.uk>
- [More than Worship more than Sunday.pdf](#) - A good starter on **intergenerational worship** from the Centre for Theology and Ministry
- **Open the Book** is a brilliant way for people from local churches to get involved with mission to their local primary schools. Loads of our churches have found this a simple, fun, doable way to connect to and serve their primary school. Take a look at <https://www.biblesociety.org.uk/get-involved/open-the-book/>

People to talk to –

- For more information on developing youth mission and intergenerational work, contact Andy Harris, Diocesan Leader on Youth Mission and Ministry: andy.harris@durham.anglican.org
- For help and info on developing children's outreach and mission contact Sharon Pritchard, our Diocesan Children's Advisor – sharon.pritchard@durham.anglican.org
- To talk about developing schools' chaplaincy, contact Catherine Simpson, our Schools Chaplaincy Development Advisor.



2. Find out more about **Challenging Poverty**

Useful websites -

- **Know Your Church Know Your Neighbourhood** is a brilliant tool for helping Churches to understand how their community is shaped or is changing. Communities Together Durham is an Ecumenical initiative which has helped loads of our churches to explore and connect to their parishes more effectively. Find out more at <https://communitiestogetherdurham.org.uk/contact/>
- **Growing Good** <https://growing-good.org.uk/>
- <http://www.theology-centre.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/People-of-Power-.pdf>
- **Some books to consider -**
- Sam Wells, *A Nazareth Manifesto* (Wiley, 2020)
- Al Barrett, Ruth Harley et al, *Being Interrupted: Reimagining the Church's Mission from the Outside*, In (SCM Press, 2020).
- Thia Cooper, *Controversies in Political Theology* (Canterbury Press, 2019).
- Shane Claiborne, *The Irresistible Revolution – Living as an Ordinary Radical* (Zondervan, 2016).

3. Find out more about **being part of God's mission**

- **'Cultivate'** is our Diocesan Strategy for planting new churches, communities and missional communities. The Growth team run some brilliant training and have lots of resources to help your church explore this. Contact Alistair.bianchi@durham.anglican.org to find out more.
- **Partnership for Missional Church** is a great resource for Churches needing help to discern their missional focus. Many of our Parishes have found this hugely helpful. Contact ruth.young@durham.anglican.org to find out more.
- **Mission Styles** is a brilliant tool for anyone asking 'but how can I share my faith?'. Take the free test online at www.missionstyles.org
- **Great Commission** is an amazing online hub with loads of resources for all things missional from starting a toddler group to living for Jesus in the workplace. Take a look at <https://www.eauk.org/great-commission>
- The **Talking Jesus Course** is a brilliant free resource to help us grow in confidence to share our faith. There are six encouraging sessions based on some short films, biblical principles and stories from real people who are talking Jesus in their homes, workplaces, schools and social lives. You can buy or rent the course from <https://talkingjesus.org/course/>. The Mission, Discipleship & Ministry team at Cuthbert House also have some copies on DVD available for churches to borrow. Contact ruth.young@durham.anglican.org to find out more.

4. Find out more about **Caring for God's Creation**

- The Church of England environment program have produced some great resources - You can find lots of prayers and resources for study and worship relating to Care for God's Creation at <https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2019-06/9-prayers-leeds-diocese.pdf>
- All Saints Lindfield recorded a great interview with **Ruth Valerio** (Tearfund, Environment writer and theologian). This an interesting and inspiring video which raised lots of helpful questions and gives practical ideas. Ruth is very easy to listen to and tremendously clear, biblical and positive. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S9xo-AM1aQo&t=1749s> or google 'Youtube, Valerio, God's Creation')
- Wheaton College have produced a really helpful **7 minute theological overview** providing a Christian perspective on environmental care. Find it by googling *Christians and Creation Care* Sandra Richter or through this link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AHnITrRgQ-E&t=62s>

APPENDIX IV. How to lead a discussion group

For this short course on Transformation, we are encouraging, wherever possible, that lay people lead the groups. This may be a new thing for some of you. You may not have led a small group before. Please don't panic! You will find that once you've done it a few times, your confidence will grow and you'll be ready to do it again another time.

Below are some tips to help you along. If you have led small groups before, these tips will act as a reminder of what make small groups work well.

I, Before you meet

Before you meet its worth considering three important tasks

- **Praying,**
- **Planning, and..**
- **Preparing.**

Be prayerful

- ✓ Bring before the Lord your anxieties about leading the group: ask for confidence and wisdom to do it well, not just for the sake of others but for yourself
- ✓ Pray about and for the people who will be invited to join in, and for those who sign up
- ✓ Pray that the time you spend together each session will be a step towards personal and church transformation
- ✓ Keep praying, right through to the moment people arrive the meeting starts

Be well-planned

- ✓ Be clear in your own mind about what these sessions are for: use the material provided to help you
- ✓ Spend time going through it beforehand, familiarising yourself with it, thinking about it for yourself and not just others
- ✓ Make a list of everything you will need to make the session work well, from refreshments and seating arrangements, to having enough handouts available
- ✓ Think about the people who will come along: is there anyone with particular needs (or foibles!) that need to be taken account of (for example, large print copies, gluten-free biscuits)

Be prepared

- ✓ Make sure everything is in place before people start to arrive (but don't fret about it - oversights happen, and that's ok)
- ✓ If it would help, ask someone else to work with you, to cover practicalities so you can be free to lead the group



2, When you meet

Really good discussion groups often have 6 important qualities. They are..

- Purposeful
- Informal – they build friendship and community
- Encourage everyone to join in
- Resist perfectionism
- Make space for silence
- Encourage Laughter



Be Purposeful

- Be clear when the meeting starts and ends, and stick to time as far as you can
- As you begin, tell people what the course, and the session, is for
- Explain briefly what the plan for the session is
- You might want to set a few guidelines. For example, it's important to respect one another, even if we disagree; to give everyone a chance to speak; to listen to one another

Be informal

- Create a relaxed atmosphere where people feel welcome and comfortable.
- Offer refreshments

Encourage participation

- The more people enter into the discussion, the better it will be
- Remind the group we are exploring the course and session themes together
- Keep an eye on those with the loudest voices, so they don't dominate the conversation
- Watch for those who are quiet and say nothing (or very little) and create opportunities for them to join in
- Watch yourself – this is not a lecture or sermon from you! (Or the vicar...) but a conversation for everyone to be part of

Allow imperfection, both..

- In yourself, so you can relax as you lead: this is not a test you have to pass!
- In others, who may be joining in a group for the first time or may be hesitant to say what they think. Resisting perfection makes it easier for others to volunteer to lead – they begin to realise they don't have to be superman! And whilst we do want to do things well – with care and commitment - being generous when things don't quite work out creates an environment of acceptance, where everyone knows they are welcome, as they are.

Make space for silence

- Don't feel you have to fill the quiet moments. Sometimes people need to think about what they want to say. Sometimes they need time to pluck up courage to speak
- Wait patiently for a minute makes space for people to think and to hear God.
- And remember, it's ok to not have all the answers!

Welcome humour as well as wisdom. God loves to hear us laugh!

3, After the meeting

- Spend some time reflecting on how the group went. Note anything you want to change before next week
- Consider chatting to one or two people who were there, to get feedback & check if there is anything that could be improved next time.
- If there have been difficult things to deal with, ask for guidance from someone more experienced. For example, how to deal with someone who has dominated the discussion and excluded others; how to encourage someone who hasn't joined in
- Think about whether there might be any follow up to do. For example: anyone in the group who might need encouragement and/or prayer
- Begin the 'Leading a Group' cycle again !

