

SHARING GOD'S LIFE

SHARING GOD'S LIFE – A 2018 LENT COURSE FOR THE DIOCESE OF WINCHESTER

Session 2. Loving God & self, family & friends (Loving)

INTRODUCTION

The leader's role in this session is help people grasp the idea of a Rule (or Rhythm) of Life as 'a flexible framework in three dimensions of Sharing God's Life', as explained in the leaflet. You will then begin to explore the first ('Loving') dimension, which emphasises Passionate Personal Spirituality, and uses the vine imagery of John 15.

OPENING WORSHIP (5 minutes)

Some suggestions:

LISTEN: Use 'Prayers for Lent' sheet again – making sure everyone can see a copy.

Or listen prayerfully to someone's chosen **piece of music**, ending with the Prayer of Preparation from Common Worship (**CW Main Volume p.168**).

LOOK: Put a **bunch of grapes** in the centre of the table, and invite comments on what it might symbolise for Christians. Turn these thoughts into short prayers of praise & thanksgiving; pray also for one another as you explore your calling to fruitfulness.

WELCOME (10 minutes)

These points will help you grow together on your journey:

LOOKING BACK: Encourage people to reflect together on the last session, on any work they've done on Identity or Vocation, and on anything they've put into practice. If you memorised a Bible verse you'll probably need to revise it. Ideally they will all have looked at the **Sharing God's Life leaflet**.

HERE & NOW: Try another ice-breaker: for example (in the evening), 'What colour day have you had?' (There are more '**Ideas for ice-breakers**' here.)

LOOKING FORWARD: Remind the group of the overall structure of the course, as explained in the **Participants' Guide**. Today you will engage with the **Sharing God's Life leaflet**, focussing on the 'Loving' strand of your Rule of Life.

WORD: What does it say? (20 minutes)

Today's Bible reading is John 15:1-8.

Before you come to Scripture, everyone needs to be familiar with pp.2 & 3 of Sharing God's Life, so take it in turns to read a paragraph each.

In the leaflet, the Diocesan Rule of Life is referred to as 'a flexible framework' to support all of us in

our discipleship, both individually and corporately. In this session the flexible framework is compared to the structure which supports the branches of a grape-vine, enabling each branch to stay connected to the trunk of the vine, and thus to bear much fruit.

Explain this to the group before you engage with today's Bible passage.

Try starting with the 90-second **video clip**.

Encourage group members to express their reactions to this animation...

If possible, give everyone a copy of the double-spaced **Bible passage** in two translations – and a **pencil**. Allow a few minutes' silence for each person to reflect on the text, and to mark it in any way they like. (Some may have brought their own Bible, in another translation.) Then invite them to share their thoughts & feelings, either as a whole group or in 2s & 3s.

What does it mean? (30 minutes)

Choose one or two ideas from different sections, leaving plenty of time for the next (WORK) section:

HEAD

- What does it mean to abide/live in Christ?
- What does it mean to have Jesus' words abiding/at home in us?

HEART

- Sometimes the process of creating a Rule of Life involves some PRUNING – cutting back some branches and focussing on FRUITFULNESS rather than leafiness/BUSYNESS. Perhaps some people could share experiences of God's pruning in their lives...
- Display the picture of **Rublev's Icon of the Trinity** on your laptop (or TV) screen, or print off some colour copies. Invite people to imagine themselves as guests at this table, included in the inter-relationship of the three Persons of the Trinity – SHARING GOD'S LIFE! What might they experience? How would they respond?

HANDS

- Give everyone a clean **twig** a few inches long and invite them to let it represent their life as a disciple. How well connected are they to the Vine? What are the helps and hindrances to a stronger connection?
- Spend some time on the **colouring sheet** for this session. Or give everyone the sheet to take home.

HUNCH

- Go deeper with **Rublev's Icon of the Trinity**, inviting people to picture themselves as guests of the Trinity, open to the touch of each One of the Three in turn: how does God want to reveal himself to them? How does he want them to share the relationship of the Three in One?
- Use the **Lectio Divina** approach with **John 15:1-8**. Allow time for reflection; there may not be time for much sharing.

WORK: How does it apply? (10 minutes)

From this point on, group members will begin to imagine their own Rule of Life, with the Sharing God's Life leaflet as a guide. So this section is very important!

INDIVIDUALLY

- Allow time for people to reflect on the examples of 'LOVING' on p.5 of the **Sharing God's Life leaflet**, encouraging them to notice which of their current practices seem to be most fruitful. Which of the four

areas listed could do with a bit more prayerful attention – Loving God, Loving others, Loving myself or Loving life? Perhaps they are already sensing the nudge of the Holy Spirit somewhere...

IN 2s OR 3

- Some of this material may feel very personal, so encourage people to share their responses in pairs if that's more comfortable. Then suggest they pray for each other there and then, and/or during the week.

AS A GROUP

- Given the fundamental importance of being connected as branches to the Vine in order to bear fruit, it would be worth making everyone a copy of the **Spiritual Disciplines sheet**. People may like to share stories of their experiences in these areas.

- Memorise a Scripture about our connectedness to Christ, for example John 15:5 **'I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit.'** (New Living Translation)

- Consider organising a group outing to a local vineyard. There are several in Hampshire which offer tours...

Before you close, encourage people to make some more jottings in their Participant's Guide – however tentative. It's important to note the stirrings of the Spirit before they are forgotten...

CLOSING PRAYER (5 minutes)

Some suggestions:

LOOK: Display **Rublev's Icon of the Trinity** in print or on a screen, and perhaps play some quiet music, inviting people to respond silently to God's invitation to 'Come...'

LISTEN: Ask the group to close their eyes while you re-read aloud the passage from John 15, then allow some moments of silence before closing with The Grace.

DO: Give everyone a **twig** and ask them to hold the end which they think was connected (indirectly) to the trunk of the tree. Pray that, during the week ahead, you would each get more strongly connected to the God who shares his life with us.

