

SHARING GOD'S LIFE

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

Session 4. Serving in God's world (Serving)

INTRODUCTION

The leader's role in this session is help people recognise their particular role in Sharing God's Life with those outside the church, and to see how their Rule of Life could support them in doing that – serving others both in word and deed.

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 **loaf of bread** in the centre of the table, and reflect together on what this might symbolise for Christians. Turn these thoughts into prayers of praise & thanksgiving; pray also for one another as you explore what it means to share God's life more widely.

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 'Living a rooted life, Living an open life, Living a generous life or Living a shared life', and on anything they're putting into practice. If you've been memorising Bible verses, you'll need to keep revising them.

HERE AND NOW: Invite everyone to recall a situation in which they've noticed a person or people in need – either in their own experience or in the media.

LOOKING FORWARD: Remind the group of the overall structure of the course. Today you will be referring to the **Sharing God's Life leaflet** again, focussing on the 'Serving' strand of your Rule of Life.

WORD: What does it say? (20 minutes)

The Bible reading for today is Isaiah 58:6-12.

Before you come to Scripture, recap on the first two strands of Sharing God's Life. In this session you'll be focussing on what it means to live God's new life outside the church, in the everyday places where people spend most of their lives – home, work, neighbourhood, etc.

Serving God in his world means choosing to serve others, especially those who are disadvantaged or disempowered. Today's Bible passage brings a strong challenge – and a firm promise.

Try starting with the two-minute **video clip**.

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

If possible, give everyone a copy of the double-spaced **Bible passage** – 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

- Pick out all the verbs used in vv. 6, 7, 9b & 10a and list them on a **big sheet of paper**. How does God do these things for us, either literally or spiritually?
- Who in our community are 'the oppressed... the hungry... the homeless poor... the naked'? Whose responsibility is it to help them?
- What does v.12 mean? How might it be relevant to the streets where you live?

HEART

- Ask people to talk about their gut reaction to this passage, perhaps in twos or threes. What themes emerge? Where do these feelings come from?
- The promises of blessing in this passage are conditional: they will be fulfilled when God's people obey him. Has anyone found themselves to be blessed, perhaps surprisingly, as a consequence of this kind of obedience?
- Make a list on a **big sheet of paper** of all the specific things God's people are asked to do in vv. 6, 7, 9b & 10a. At a personal level, which feel most challenging? Invite people to dare to express their fears about the consequences of taking up these challenges.

HANDS

- Get a couple of **newspapers**, one local and one national, and give everyone a (news) page of each. What stories can they find which might describe similar situations of need as those referred to in Isaiah 58? You might cut out some articles (or headings) and stick them on a big sheet of paper; what could you, as a group or as a church, do to change any of these situations? Have you heard of other churches or Christian organisations who have brought about such changes?
- Ask people to draw one of the actions God asks for in vv. 6, 7, 9b or 10a. Then ask them to think who they could help in that way.
- Spend some time on the **colouring sheet** for this session. Or give everyone the sheet to take home.

HUNCH

- Spend some time in silence together, and invite the Holy Spirit to show you each what might be stopping you seeing or responding to the needs of the disadvantaged people in your community. There may be a need to repent of some unloving attitudes or inaction.
- Use the **Lectio Divina** approach with **Isaiah 58:6-12** or **Galatians 5:22-25**. Allow time for reflection; there may not be time for much sharing.

WORK: How does it apply? (10 minutes)

Now is the time for people to reflect on their own Rule of Life in relation to their own particular calling. There are plenty of examples of 'Serving' in the leaflet...

INDIVIDUALLY

- Allow time for people to reflect on the examples of 'SERVING' on p.7 of the **Sharing God's Life** leaflet, encouraging them to notice how they're serving already. Which of the five kinds of action might the Spirit be nudging them towards?
- Many of us are aware of simple ways in which we could reduce our global footprint – and yet we fail to act. Might this be the moment to begin to develop a new 'green' habit?
- 'Listening to others & telling God's story' (the fifth category) is the subject of the **individual booklet** written for the Winchester Lent Course 2016. It's a simple mini-course designed to help people become more confident in sharing their faith.

IN 2s OR 3s

- Encourage those in paid work to share their particular challenges together. How might God be inviting them to share his life in their workplaces? Suggest they pray for each other there and then, and/or during the week.

AS A GROUP

- You might agree to try prayer-walking around parts of your community for an hour or so during the week ahead, either alone or in pairs, and reporting back on your experiences next time. The **prayer-walking cards** suggest some guidelines.
- You could investigate what other churches or non-faith groups in your community are doing for the common good, and consider whether you might work with them.
- Might the group compose a letter to the incumbent/PCC making some new suggestions about how you might serve God together in your parish/community
- Memorise a Scripture about serving others, for example Micah 6:8: **'To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.'** (New International Version)

Allow time before you close for people to make notes in their Participant's Guide – ready for the final session, when they will be reviewing all their notes and drawing up their own Rule of Life.

CLOSING PRAYER (5 minutes)

Some suggestions:

LOOK: In advance, take some **photos** of the 'darkest' parts of your community – perhaps just some street signs in the area where property is least expensive, or the uncared-for places which most people avoid. Print some of the pictures, or make them into a slideshow, and use them as a way into prayer.

LISTEN: Sing, or listen to a recording of, or say together as a prayer, the song by John Bell: **'Will you come and follow me?'** ('The Summons')

DO: Shuffle a **pack of playing cards** and put them face down in the middle of the table. Take it in turns to pick up a card and to say a one-sentence prayer for people in particular kinds of need, either locally or further afield, depending on the card's suit:

- clubs (symbols of war) – those affected by war, or violence of any kind
- diamonds (symbols of wealth) – those in poverty, whether relative or absolute
- spades (symbols of work) – those who are unemployed, or in danger at work
- hearts (symbols of love) – those in abusive or broken relationships.

Continue until all the categories have come up a few times; close with the Lord's Prayer.

