

SHARING GOD'S LIFE

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

Session 5. YES to fruitfulness (A personal Rule of Life)

INTRODUCTION

The leader's role in this session is support everyone in creating their own Rule of Life – however simple – to support them in their vocation, and in their ongoing response to God's three-fold invitation to share his life. Their Rule of Life will be a Focussed, Flexible Framework for Freedom and Fruitfulness! It is also important to agree some arrangements for accountability, so people can support one another in reviewing and revising their Rule of Life.

So in this session you will need to spend less time on the Word material and more time on the Work, so each person has time to prayerfully draft their own Rule.

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 some **evergreen leaves** (perhaps laurel, or bay, or ivy) in the centre of the table, and reflect together on what these might symbolise for Christians. Turn these thoughts into prayers of praise & thanksgiving; pray also for one another as you each begin to finalise your Rule of Life.

WELCOME (10 minutes)

These points will help you grow together on your journey:

LOOKING BACK: Ask people to reflect together on the last session, on any work they've done on Serving, in any of the categories mentioned on p.7 of the **Sharing God's Life** leaflet. You may have some Bible verses to revise; if you did some prayer-walking, you'll want to share your experiences.

HERE AND NOW: Invite everyone to say something about their experience as they look back over this course.

LOOKING FORWARD: Explain that in this final session everyone having the opportunity to create their own experimental Rule of Life, based on the Words and Works they've engaged with over the previous four sessions.

WORD: What does it say? (15 minutes)

Today's Bible reading is Psalm 1.

Before you come to Scripture, suggest that people both think of themselves as individual trees, and also of the whole group as a tree. In this image, the roots, trunk and branches of the tree could be seen as representing the three aspects of a Rule of Life – Loving, Loving and Serving – the purpose of which is to enable FRUITFULNESS.

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? (15 minutes)

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

HEAD

- Do a group brainstorm on the word 'TREE', perhaps writing all your ideas on a **big sheet of paper**. What spiritual concepts these words might represent?
- Think back to the images you considered in Sessions 2 & 3 – the vine (**John 15:1-8**) and the water channel (**John 7:37-39**). How do all these images enrich one another?

HEART

- Besides water, what else does a tree need in order to be fruitful? Invite people to get very specific about what that means for them personally.

HANDS

- Give everyone three long **pipecleaners** to sculpt into a tree with both roots and branches. If the GROUP was a tree, what might these roots and branches represent?
- Spend some time on the **colouring sheet** for this session. Or give everyone the sheet to take home.

HUNCH

- You might each take a moment to imagine what it would be like to be a tree planted by water, allowing the Spirit to speak through this image to your imagination.
- Use the **Lectio Divina** approach with **Psalm 1** or **Revelation 22:1-5**. Allow time for reflection; there won't be much time for sharing.

WORK: How does it apply? (20 minutes)

This is the time when everyone individually reviews and prayerfully reflects on what they've written in their Participant's Guide, using their ideas from the previous sessions as the basis for their new Rule of Life.

INDIVIDUALLY

- You might start by asking everyone to write down a statement about their Identity (Who am I?) and a statement about their Vocation (Why am I here?), then invite them to read their statements to the group. Their Vocation is a particular call to be fruitful; their Rule of Life will be designed to enable this fruitfulness – which represents a big YES to God's grace.
- Provide plenty of scrap paper, and some spare **Sharing God's Life** leaflets: people may like to write their Rule of Life in the space either on the back page, or on the reverse of their **Participant's Guide**.

- People may need reminding that it's about fruitfulness, not busyness; their Rule of Life might be about doing LESS rather than MORE – with a clearer focus on their Vocation.
- Suggest that people make a maximum of three individual commitments, one for each dimension of Sharing God's Life.
- If you have room, encourage people to spread out for 10 minutes or so, to help them focus as they reflect, pray and write.

IN 2s OR 3s

- As people finish writing, invite them to read or show their Rule to one or two others.

AS A GROUP

- Reassemble when everyone is ready, and ask each person to share ONE of their commitments with the whole group.
- Before you end, decide together how you are going to support one another as you each get used to your new Focussed, Flexible Framework. It may be that some people will meet in prayer pairs in triplets; others may like to try a **Walk'n'Talk** arrangement. But it is very important that you review your progress and your learning as a whole group: if your group is 'permanent', you might decide to use one meeting a term for this. If your group came together for this course, you could arrange to meet (for a meal?) once a term. Either way, the idea is that everyone has the opportunity to reflect on and learn from their experiences, and, on the basis of this shared learning, each person can revise their Rule of Life to support them in their onward journey. There are some '**Holy ground rules**' here.
- It may be that you decide to commit as a whole group to a particular way of Living or Serving together; this will also need to be reviewed regularly.
- You might like to memorise a final Scripture to emphasise God's purpose for each of you and all of you, for example John 15:16: '**You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit – fruit that will last.**' (New International Version)

CLOSING PRAYER (10 minutes)

Some suggestions – the 'DO' being the most important:

LOOK:

- If the group had a favourite video clip from this course, watch it again together as you celebrate the imagery of Sharing God's Life.
- If you each sculpted a pipecleaner tree, try to organise something to plant them in – some sand, clay, playdough, or florist's Oasis, with a strip of blue paper or fabric to represent water – and as each person to symbolically plants their 'tree', pray silently for their fruitfulness, or affirm John 15:16 over them (the 'memory verse' above).

LISTEN:

- Ask the group to close their eyes while you read aloud **Revelation 22:1-5**, then allow a moment's quiet before you lead the final section...

DO:

- Whatever else you do, make sure you include an opportunity for everyone to 'publicly' commit their new Rule of Life to God. This could be as simple as putting your written Rules on the table in the middle, allowing some silence, and praying the Diocesan prayer for Living the Mission of Jesus:

Glorious God, you have taken hold of us and made us your own.

*In the power of your Spirit give us grace to press on in your purposes,
loving one another, learning together and living the mission
of him who calls us onwards, Jesus Christ our Lord.*

Then you might end with the Lord's Prayer and/or the Grace.

- If you are doing this course as a whole church together, you might choose to end with the 'Affirmation of Commitment' from Common Worship (**CW Main Volume p.152**), with this ending:

*May Christ dwell in your hearts through faith,
that you may be rooted and grounded in love
and bring forth the fruit of the Spirit.*

