

THE BETA LENT COURSE

By Fraser Watts, Sara Savage and Ruth Layzell
(Adapted by Marcus Ramshaw)



Introduction.

Some Church groups may wish to use an adapted version of Beta as a Lent course, condensed into five weekly sessions. A Lent version of Beta is available in downloadable PDF format. The Bible readings and prayers have been taken from the Revised Common Lectionary to reflect the season of Lent and a number of other adaptations are made.

To use Beta as a Lent course the sequence of the course changes to

Session 1, Relationships

Session 2, Sin and Atonement

Session 3, Depression

Session 4, Suffering and Wholeness

Session 5, Forgiveness and Reconciliation.

Guidance for running a 'Find Out More' Session 1

For Administrators and Facilitators

This first 'Find Out More' session should last approximately 90 minutes. The above section outlined the Administrator's tasks, and to re-cap, these include organising for Session 1 the following:

1. Welcome meal or refreshments (40 min.)

You will have decided what kind of catering you want to provide for Session 1, and from this point forwards these guidance notes will assume that you have carried that out with aplomb!

It is helpful to have Helpers greet people at the door and show them to the buffet or

seating. If a meal has been provided an easy (and non-pressurising) way to recoup the cost is simply to put a basket with a label 'contributions for dinner' on or near the table. Some churches may wish to use name badges for Session 1 so that guests can learn each others' names. This is not necessary, but do so if this is customary for your church or organisation.

2. Facilitator's introduction to Beta (5 min.)

After the meal or refreshments, once people are seated in chairs arranged for a good view of the screen, the minister may wish to welcome everyone.

We recommend that the appointed Facilitator(s) then lead Session 1 so that people can meet them.

The Facilitator, after introducing him/herself, will simply re-cap, in their own words, the short introduction to the Beta course (already given, for example, during prior church notices) along with any other relevant comments the Facilitator wishes to make. (The short 'Introduction to Beta' is available on the website).

3. Show the Taster video

Show the Taster video (26 min.), already pre-tested for any sound or visual difficulties.

4. Discuss responses to the video in twos and threes (5 min.)

Afterwards, the Facilitator then invites people to form into groups of twos or threes for a brief informal discussion. The Facilitator can suggest some discussion points, such as:

- * What was your response?
- * Did anything in particular connect with you?

5. Close

The Facilitator invites people to decide whether they would like to participate in the rest of the course. Don't 'make a meal' out of this; encourage people to take the course, but let this be an unpressured choice. If Beta doesn't seem relevant or appropriate for some individuals at this point, reassure them that they can always sign up at a later date. Formally close Session 1 (with a

prayer, or whatever seems appropriate), and invite people to mingle, or have a cup of coffee, before leaving.

The Administrator needs to provide a sign up sheet for Beta.

The Administrator will then organise the dates and venues, and communicate this with the signed-up participants.

In summary, the key aims for the 'Find Out More' Session 1 are to provide an opportunity:

- * For people to enjoy time together (with a meal or refreshments).
- * To see the Taster video (26 min.) that provides excerpts from each of the teaching sessions.
- * To discuss in groups of twos or threes responses to the video.
- * To decide whether or not they want to sign up for the rest of the Beta course.
- * To receive practical information concerning course venues and dates.

Facilitating Beta— General Principles for Sessions 2-10

Training Video for Facilitators and Helpers

Facilitators and Helpers, watch the Training video Part 1: General Principles Pause the video after 'General Principles', at Part 2: 'Modelling how to facilitate the course'.

Discuss:

- 1. What are your hopes for your forthcoming Beta course?**
- 2. Facilitators, how would you describe your usual style in leading small groups?**
- 3. What kind of support would you like your Helper to give you?**
- 4. When do you think you can schedule in praying for your Beta course?**
- 5. Do you think it might be difficult for you to keep group discussions within a set time frame?**

(If so, how can your Helper support you in this?)

Watch the rest of the Training video (now or at a later date), from Part 2: 'Modelling how to facilitate the course' to the end.

Discuss:

Facilitator and Helpers

- 6. What might be your biggest concerns about running a Beta course?**
- 7. How do you react to dominant people in a group you are facilitating?**
- 8. How do you react to shy people in a group you are facilitating?**
- 9. How you would feel if someone**
 - * Started crying?
 - * Expressed a need for help?

10. Do you think you might have a need:

- * To be needed?
- * To give people advice?
- * To solve people's problems for them?

11. What changes do you think you might need to make in your usual style in order to facilitate beta?

12. To whom would you be able to turn for advice while facilitating Beta?

- * Your minister?
- * Pastoral carers in your church?
- * Others?

Facilitators now need to read the Administrator's and Facilitator's Manual in full, and to study the Session Outlines and Notes.

General Principles for Facilitators and Helpers

The Facilitator

After Session 1, the running of Beta is in the hands of the Facilitator (with support from the Hosts and Helper). This section presents material in the Training video in slightly greater detail. Reading this section after you have watched the Training video will reinforce the principles you need to apply in order to lead a Beta course successfully.

Facilitator's Tasks

To prepare to run a Beta course, Facilitators have three main tasks:

1. In preparation, watch and discuss the Training video with your Helper. Schedule in 1½ to 2 hours for this in order to include the previous section's discussion. The next task is to study this manual carefully.
2. Pray for the people on your upcoming Beta course with your Helpers and your minister. (Involve the Hosts as well, if they wish.)
3. Each week, familiarise yourself with the Session Outlines. Use these outlines in conjunction with the Participant's Booklet and videos for each session. Going over the material in advance will help Facilitators feel more confident in their role, and will enable them to keep the sessions on schedule. It is a good idea to practise running each session so that you can make smooth transitions. It will be especially important to make smooth transitions when the video instructs you to 'Pause for group discussion', or 'Pause for Bible Study' or 'Creative Reflection'. The elements in each session come in slightly different orders, so practice for each week will be necessary. Smooth transitions will allow the participants to relax into the flow of the sessions. When starting out, you may need to schedule in one hour of preparation each week.

The roles of Hosts, Facilitators, and Helpers

Hosts

Each course needs one or two venue Hosts to look after the practicalities of the room, TV, and meal or refreshments. Hosts should make sure there are enough chairs with a clear view of the TV, the room temperature is comfortable, the video tape is tested and pre-set for each session, and the

volume is set to a generous level so that all can hear clearly. Encourage your Hosts to greet and welcome the participants when they arrive for sessions. A relaxed and welcoming atmosphere will get each session off to a good start. The venue Hosts, in dialogue with the Facilitator and Administrator, will also need to decide in advance whether to provide a meal at the start of each session, or whether simply to serve tea and coffee (perhaps with a dessert). A meal adds around 40 minutes in addition to a session. Sessions (without the meal) take a full 90 minutes. Factors influencing whether a meal is served every week will include agreeing a reasonable start and finish time as well as the Hosts' and participants' preferences.

Facilitators

It is important that the Facilitator has prior experience in leading home groups or other small groups. Home group leaders, pastoral carers, counsellors, ministers, teachers, experienced lay workers, and people with a background in psychology will make good Beta Facilitators. The Facilitator will need to use the downloaded Outlines and Notes in conjunction with their own Beta Participant's Booklet to lead participants through the sessions. Facilitators should not attempt to give the multi-media teaching themselves. The workload would be overwhelming—and doing so may disrupt the overall balance of the Beta course!

Helpers

The Helper's role is to support the Facilitator. A Helper does not need to have prior experience of leading groups; in fact being a Helper is a good way to get some initial experience in leading small groups, or indeed future Beta courses. Specific guidance for Helpers is given in the next two sections.

Principles

Prayer

Prayer is the first task for those involved in running a Beta course: Facilitator, Helper, and Hosts. Pray for the people in your Beta course. Every day is not too often. Perhaps the Facilitator and Helper (and the Hosts if appropriate) will get together before each session to pray for all the participants. Helpers, be sure to pray for your Facilitator, and to offer feedback and encouragement. Prayer will encourage a climate of mutual pastoral care among those leading the course. Undoubtedly, prayer undergirds all growth in God's Kingdom. While the minister or priest is not necessarily present at Beta, he or she plays an important role in praying for those on the course, and in being available to give support or advice to those facilitating the course. Beta will raise participants' awareness of their own and others' pastoral needs. Some people will want to speak to their minister privately as they go through the course. In short, the minister will need to be ready to take on new pastoral needs.

Worship

Many home groups begin with a time of worship. However, with Beta, we have included times of worship and meditation during the teaching videos, within the Creative Reflections. Your sessions will not be lacking in times of worship, although in Beta these worship times may be taking a new form. If you want to add extra times of worship to Beta sessions, you will need to schedule in extra time. If you decide to do so, it would be best to have extra worship either at the beginning or the end of a session. Be sure to have your group's agreement to any extra time commitments, including worship or meals.

Ideal setting

As previously mentioned, the ideal setting is a 'home group' setting in a person's living room with enough comfortable chairs, and a video/TV (ideally with a large size screen, of perhaps 24" or more). A living room provides an informal atmosphere where the implicit 'social norms' foster a degree of personal interaction. A comfortable church room may also work well. In contrast, holding Beta in a church sanctuary, or other large public meeting place, can feel more formal.

Size of Beta groups

It is important to ensure that a Beta course comprises between 8-12 participants (including Helper and Hosts, if participating). Groups of 8-12 are good for open discussion, learning and prayer, and for getting to know each other at a deeper level.

A group with many more than 12 people will change the nature of the interpersonal dynamics for the participants; the course will feel more like a class rather than a home group. Larger numbers can feel unwieldy for the Facilitator, and the venue may be too crowded for participants to gather in groups of three during the Bible studies.

With less than 6, participants might feel a bit exposed. This smaller number might work in some situations, but you will need to judge whether this will be a good dynamic for the particular people coming.

If the room or the TV set is small, it is wise to cap a group at 8 or 10 participants. Getting the numbers right will require some forward planning, but this is essential. You can always run Beta multiple times in your church to accommodate the numbers.

Who is Beta for?

Beta is designed for Christians who are seeking to develop their faith, personal lives and church community. This doesn't mean you should you turn away people who are not Christians. Session 1 involves watching the Taster video, and if a 'seeker' or non-Christian decides to participate in Beta after watching the Taster video, you can trust that the course, which is rich in Bible study and Christian teaching, will help them to understand the relevance of the Christian faith to everyday life.

Principles of facilitation

The overall aim of the Facilitator is to provide people with a good experience of Christian fellowship. By following the outline and content of the session, the Facilitator will provide an experience of Christian fellowship, which focuses on developing:

- * Christian faith
- * Our personal lives
- * A sense of community

The kind of atmosphere the Facilitator should set is welcoming, non-judgmental and relaxed. Your role is to serve your participants, to give them 'space to be', rather than to be their teacher or to 'set them to rights'. The people who come are like 'honoured guests'. Your role is to guide the sessions so that participants feel safe, and can move through the content of each session at a suitable pace.

When leading the group discussions, do assure your participants that there is no such thing as a wrong answer. You will never have to say to your participants 'No, you got that wrong'. If someone says something really bizarre, you can always say 'that's interesting', and then simply move on to the next thing. You don't have to correct them publicly.

The Facilitator is not required to be an expert on the material. Your role is to draw out what others think or feel, and importantly, to keep the session to time. By keeping to the suggested time frames in the session outlines you will maintain momentum and prevent the sessions from getting derailed by conversation that goes off topic. You do not need to allow every discussion point to be exhausted or fully resolved. If a group discussion starts to go over the suggested time, simply say 'thanks for that; its now time to move on to the next part of the session'. In doing so, you will be serving the group's interests, and you will maintain the balance the Beta material provides. If a vibrant, meaningful discussion goes over the allotted time, the Facilitator is presented with a difficult choice: do I allow this discussion to go over time for the sake of the people involved? Or do I keep the session to time? In the short term, it might feel right to let the discussion go on. However, there is a balance to strike. In the long run it will better for the whole group if the Facilitator generally steers the discussions so that the sessions are kept to time. The Facilitator can always 'bracket' an unresolved topic and suggest another time when the participants can explore it more fully. In doing so, participants will ultimately feel confident that the sessions will be run in a way that respects their time boundaries.

While giving each Beta session a strong lead, keeping a firm grasp on the time, you can act in a relaxed manner. As the Facilitator you are simply one of the group—a fellow human being, a fellow Christian. You are serving the group by keeping discussion within appropriate time boundaries. Within that, be yourself! Your personality is the right personality to do this. Once the group has warmed up, do contribute one or two of your own comments in each session,

but be careful not to dominate, or to be the one with the 'right answer'.

It is important that you allow your participants to be themselves. You encourage people to speak up, but you do not require people to speak if they

don't wish to. You do not allow any one person to dominate the others. What you aim for is open, honest, non-threatening discussion. There is an important balance here to strike. Discussion or sharing which leaves people feeling over-exposed is more appropriate in a one-to one session with a minister, counsellor or trusted confidante, so don't solicit this kind of deeply personal sharing. Beta is meant to provide a place where people feel it's safe to talk honestly without getting shot down or becoming over-exposed.

Religious ideas

Let people explore their own ideas. Don't have a strong 'take' on which religious ideas are acceptable and which are not. Do not correct someone's theology. Even if someone says something 'heretical', the Facilitator can respond 'That's interesting—I've never heard that before'. This kind of cue is used in the Alpha course, and signifies that the comment in question is idiosyncratic. Simply move on. Don't get drawn in to religious debates. You can allow the Beta material and Bible studies to eventually place oddball comments back into a more balanced theological context.

Beta ground rules

The ground rules for Beta are to be modelled by the Facilitator, and are thus fostered among the participants. Beta ground rules are similar to the rules for all healthy relationships.

1. Boundaries

Boundaries are about safety. People feel safe and free to act if they know what the ground rules are. Boundaries are also about realistic demands. Not all behaviour is acceptable; boundaries are needed:

* Time boundaries

Keep to the start time and finish time of the Beta sessions (with a bit of flexibility).

* Appropriate containment of own material

Participants are not required to divulge personal information. Each person draws their own boundaries, deciding what to say and what not to say.

* Boundary of confidentiality

If someone in the group does decide to share something, then everyone else will not share with others outside the group any personal information which you have heard here, unless it is with their explicit and unpressured consent.

2. Acceptance

The Facilitator and the participants need to demonstrate acceptance of each person, as they are, where they are, without the need to correct, give advice, or score points.

3. Attention, Listening, Respect

When a person speaks in a Beta session, they need space for their voice to be heard. It is a mark of respect to give another person space in this way. We all need to be listened to with attentiveness and respect, particularly when we are unsure or inarticulate. Listening encourages us to see the other person as they are, not as we think they ought to be. The greatest barrier to love may be

our inability to see other people as they really are, not as extensions of our own needs or wishes. This practice of listening and respect helps us to develop love of our neighbour.

4. Genuineness

At the same time, we don't have to pretend to agree when we don't. We don't all have to be the same, or have the same opinion. Of course, our differences should be expressed in such a way that shows respect towards others.

Interactions within the group It is the task of the Facilitator to foster healthy interactions within the sessions. You don't allow any one person to dominate. If someone does, listen to them, then say, "Thanks for that, now let's move on to hear what others have to say". If a person continues to dominate despite your efforts at deflecting, have a light-hearted word with them in private: "It's good to hear from you, but let's make space for the others to talk too". Repeat as necessary. Don't worry if some people talk more than others—that is what extroverts naturally do! Invite those who are quiet to speak in a general sort of way: "Anyone else like to say anything?" but don't put individuals on the spot: "You there in the corner!"

Advice giving

If someone feels compelled to give advice, say, in a light-hearted way: "We don't have to solve each other's problems here, let's just support each other where we are". Speak to the 'advising' person afterwards if it becomes a frequent occurrence.

What a Facilitator doesn't do—therapy

Beta sessions are not therapy sessions! Facilitators are not counsellors; you should not try to solve people's problems. The aim of Beta is to provide a Christian framework in which to 'sit with' the complexity and challenges of our human experience, and to help people to connect to the pastoral resources that are available (both within the church and beyond). We live in an age that expects instant answers, and perhaps the biggest challenge for Facilitators will be resisting the temptation to try solving other people's problems. Beta does not provide snap solutions to personal problems, but it does help us to see them in a new way, to experience the support of our fellow Christians, to find ways forward which can help us to grow.

This download is an adapted version of the Beta course specifically for Lent. You will need to show the Beta video sessions in the order outlined here. Here you can find all the information you need for the Facilitator leading the course. You may wish to use the Participants booklets as well.

Session 1 Relationships

Outline and Notes

1. Hosts: meal or tea and coffee on arrival

Hosts and Helper to greet people upon arrival and makes sure the participants are acquainted with each other.

2. Facilitator: Welcome and introduction to course (7 min.)

Facilitator makes sure he/she has these notes and the Participant's Booklet open and ready. Facilitator introduces him/herself, the Helper, and invites each person to introduce themselves. Facilitator reads out or paraphrases:

* Beta, the second letter of the Greek alphabet, implies a second step. Being in relationship with God through Christ is the first step of the journey.

Then we seek to live our relationship with God in a way which shapes us to become more and more Christ-like, so that we bring wholeness, through building community, to ourselves, others, our work, and our world. It can be far from easy!

* Christians are supposed to be the redeemed people of God.

* How do we live that out?

* How do I love my neighbour?

* What does love look like?

* Why do I struggle to do what I know I should do?

* Why do I find it so hard to forgive?

* Why am I depressed or defeated by the stresses in my life?

* How do I become more whole?

* We are essentially relational...

* In Scripture, human beings are portrayed as relational beings.

* Made by a relational God, made for relationship—with himself, with each other and with the world. This is a recurring theme in the course.

* In relationship we are made whole. Christ's body, the Church, is intended to be a community in which individuals and the very nature of relationship are restored. We need to know what wholesome relationships and healthy communities look like so that we can be co-workers with God in bringing in his kingdom.

* We are whole entities.

* We need to understand ourselves holistically. Our spiritual, physical and emotional lives are intertwined. We cannot separate our spiritual lives as Christians from our thoughts, emotions or bodies.

* We need to understand our own humanity. This course draws on insights from psychology, in particular psychology based on empirical research. These insights are brought into dialogue with the Christian perspective. The Bible and psychology often overlap in what is central to us as human beings.

* The Bible is not being replaced by psychology—instead there is a dialogue.

* Each Beta session will have:

* Bible study.

* Teaching sessions on video.

* As well as discussion, creative reflections using the arts, and prayer.

* Beta sessions are a time to learn, to reflect, and to discuss.

* They are not counselling sessions. You will not be required to divulge private information to the group. Later we will unpack the Beta ground rules that help

the sessions to be a positive experience for growth in the Christian faith, in personal development and pastoral care.

* Sessions are planned, but there are no pre-determined answers.

We will learn from each other. In this process the Holy Spirit works through us.

During the season of Lent we have time to reflect on our own spiritual health. It is a time of self-examination and reflection. Over the next forty days we will be discussing some of the problems we face in our day to day lives and how our faith can help us grow.

3. Bible study (15-20 min.)

Divide your group into around 3 groups of twos or threes, and work through the Bible passage below, with accompanying discussion points. Ask each small group to choose a note-taker and spokesperson.

Appoint one person from your group to report back to the whole group.

Instructions on the Christian Life

6 “Beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by them; for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven.

² “So whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be praised by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. ³ But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, ⁴ so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.^a

⁵ “And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. ⁶ But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.^b

⁷ “When you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard because of their many words. ⁸ Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

⁹ “Pray then in this way: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.¹⁰ Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.¹¹ Give us this day our daily bread.^c ¹² And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.¹³ And do not bring us to the time of trial,^d but rescue us from

a Other ancient authorities add *openly*

b Other ancient authorities add *openly*

c Or *our bread for tomorrow*

d Or *us into temptation*

the evil one.^{e14} For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; ¹⁵ but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

¹⁶ “And whenever you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces so as to show others that they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. ¹⁷ But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, ¹⁸ so that your fasting may be seen not by others but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.^f

¹⁹ “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust^g consume and where thieves break in and steal; ²⁰ but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust^h consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Discuss

1, What does this passage tells us about how we should relate to people in our church congregation and in the wider community?

2, How difficult do you find it to follow these words from Jesus? What particular challenges does they throw?

3, Are there times when it may be suitable to make a show of piety? Can you think of any?

4, Do you find it annoying when people make a show of their lifestyle? How do you respond to such behaviour?

4. Discussion: Large group (10 min.)

Bring the whole group together and ask a spokesperson from each group to share points raised during their Bible study. Jot down these comments on a flipchart.

The Facilitator can mention any of these points if they are not raised in the group discussion:

- * Differences among human beings are complementary.
- * We are created for relationship.
- * Relationship is at the heart of what goes wrong with humanity.
- * Losing trust in God’s goodness, Adam and Eve act independently, impacting also:
 - * Relationships between people.
 - * Relationships with the environment.

e Or *from evil*. Other ancient authorities add, in some form, *For the kingdom and the power and the glory are yours forever. Amen.*

f Other ancient authorities add *openly*

g Gk *eating*

h Gk *eating*

- * God uses relationship to restore our relationships:
 - * With himself.
 - * With each other.
 - * God's essence is relational. It is in his nature to seek after us.
- In relationship with God, our true nature is restored.

5. Video teaching (24 min., including 5 min. for small group discussion)

Turn on pre-tested, pre-set video.

Part way through, pause (or stop) video at 'Pause for discussion'

Re-group into twos and threes. Discuss: (5 min.)

- * To whom did you feel most attached when you were growing up?

- * How did that person make you feel?

Re-start video.

Stop the video after 'Love is the accurate estimate and supply of another's need'

6. Large group brainstorm (5 min.)

Facilitator asks the group:

- * What qualities in a relationship do you think people need in order to be, to grow, and to learn?

Whole group to brainstorm—put comments on flipchart).

7. Facilitator-led Discussion (10 min.)

Facilitator should read out or paraphrase the section in the Participant's Booklet on healthy relationship.

This begins with the section Boundaries at the bottom of page 9 and ends with the section Ground

Rules on page 11.

8. Creative Reflection (4 min.)

- * Listen now to this music and think about the questions on page 11 of your Booklets.

Restart video, and play to the end.

(We recommend allowing the video to run to the end of the credits. The music chosen gives participants a bit of 'space' in which to process the material, and make the transition back to the group.)

9. Homework (4 min.)

Facilitator read out:

- * Each session has homework assignments in your workbook. You can do these during the week in your own time, using a private journal. The assignments are meant to help you deepen and apply something of what you have learned during the session.

* The homework is private, it is for you; homework material is not publicly shared in the Beta sessions.

Facilitator should read out the homework assignment in Participant's Booklets on page 11.

10. Prayer (5 min.)

Use the prayers provided below, or pray in a way comfortable for your group. Be sure to keep in mind time boundaries.

Dear God,

You made each one of us in your own image, as precious in your sight as a pearl of great price. Open our eyes to see your Spirit in all your people, Strip from us our pride and our prejudice, So that during this Holy Season of Lent We may come to glimpse your presence in the lives of those with whom we live, work and worship, Through Jesus Christ, Our Lord. Amen.

Ash Wednesday Collect

Almighty and everlasting God,
you hate nothing that you have made
and forgive the sins of all those who are penitent:
create and make in us new and contrite hearts
that we, worthily lamenting our sins
and acknowledging our wretchedness,
may receive from you, the God of all mercy,
perfect remission and forgiveness;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

Total time = 90 minutes
(not including meal or refreshments)

Session 2 Sin and Atonement

Outline and Notes

Before this session begins, the Facilitator will need to collect stones for the Creative Reflection from a garden or driveway (at least one stone per person). You can give each person their stone when they arrive with instructions to keep it for the Creative Reflection.

You will also need to provide a focal point for prayer; a small cross, a lit candle, or a picture of Christ will suffice. Place this at a convenient space in the room (on a coffee table, for example).

1. Hosts: meal or tea and coffee on arrival
2. Facilitator: Welcome, review and overview (5 min.)

Facilitator reads out or paraphrases:

Review

* So far in the Beta course we have explored our social, relational nature and the social nature of God, who is a community of persons.

Overview

* The first part of this session is about sin. No doubt some of you will groan when you hear that. Sin is not a popular idea. It often makes no sense to many people.

* Part of the problem is that you can't really understand sin unless you first believe in

God. Sin arises in the context of our relationship with God. The state of sin is one of

being estranged from God. Particular sins are doing what God does not want done. So, the idea of sin does not make much sense to a secular society that has no belief in God.

* Even for Christians, who believe in God, the idea of sin often means very little.

Today we will reconnect the idea of sin with personal experience.

* Part of the task is to get back to the authentic Christian meaning of sin—what the

New Testament means by it.

* The New Testament usually talks about sin (singular) whilst people generally talk

about sins (plural).

* 'Sins' direct our attention to particular actions

* 'Sin' directs our attention to the general state we are all in: 'the human predicament'

* Christian thinking about sin focuses on the human predicament more than the

wrong things we do.

3. Bible readings (5 min.)

Divide your group into around 3 groups of twos or threes, and work through the Bible passage below, with accompanying discussion points. Ask each small group to choose a note-taker and spokesperson.

Appoint one person from your group to report back to the whole group.

The Temptation of Jesus

4 Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. ² He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. ³ The tempter came and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.” ⁴ But he answered, “It is written,

‘One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’ ” ⁵ Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, ⁶ saying to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, ‘He will command his angels concerning you,’ and ‘On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.’ ”

⁷ Jesus said to him, “Again it is written, ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’ ”

⁸ Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor; ⁹ and he said to him, “All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.” ¹⁰ Jesus said to him, “Away with you, Satan! for it is written,

‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.’ ” ¹¹ Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.

Discuss

1, What do you think was the hardest temptation Jesus had to endure? What sins do you think the Devil was trying to draw him into?

2, Of the three kinds of temptations, which do you struggle with in life? Physical Needs? Power? Vanity?

3, What are good ways have you found in strengthening your willpower?

4, Immediately after being tempted angels came and waited upon Jesus. Can you recall how you felt after consciously choosing not to give in to a moment of weakness?

5. Large group discussion (5-10 min.)

Facilitator brings the small groups together. Ask one person from each small group to report back to the whole group. Facilitator writes ideas onto the flipchart.

6. Video (31 min. + 2 Creative Reflections of 4 min. each = 39 min.)

Turn on pre-tested, pre-set video.

Part way through, pause (or stop) video at ‘Pause for a time of quiet reflection’.

Facilitator to read out:

* Each of you has been given a stone, and I'd like you to hold it in your hand now. Let your stone tell you something about how sin as an orientation affects your life. Let the characteristics of the stone speak to you about sin: sharp, cold, heavy, small, light, dark, cracked, dirty....

* Is sin—as an orientation in your life—seen in the hard kind of sin which is callous or seeking power? Or in the soft kind of sin which is lazy and pleasure seeking? Or both?

Either way, sin is an obstacle, and like a stone, harmful when used against other people or oneself.

* What would happen if you gave up this 'soft' way of self-indulgence in order to meet your own needs, or this 'hard' way of controlling other people? Would you be willing to let go of this if you could? Do you feel you would get what you need if you did?

* Ponder this awhile, and if it feels appropriate to you during this meditation, you can

bring your stone to a focus point (perhaps a candle or small cross set up in an accessible part of the room) as an enactment of giving this aspect of your life to God.

Facilitator to re-start the video (for Creative Reflection music and visuals).

Video teaching continues.

Later on in video, pause (or stop) video at second 'Pause for a time of quiet reflection'.

Facilitator read out:

* I'm sure most of us try to control our lower nature; we try to do the right thing.

* Make a fist and grasp it really tightly.

Pause.

* It's a lot of effort. This is what it is like to live under law, using our own efforts.

Pause.

\$ How many of you feel like giving up even this simple effort of clenching your fist?

Like St. Paul we can 'will what is right but we can't do it'.

\$ What can we do? St. Paul gives us a clue in Romans 7—where he is in despair over

the struggle with his lower nature—and then leaps to 'But thanks be to God through

Jesus Christ our Lord!' (Romans 8:25). It seems that he has finally let go of the struggle, and placed the struggle into the hands of Jesus Christ.

* While you listen to this music again, keep clenching your fist.

* Then gradually relax your fist.

* You can use this movement as a way of praying, "Jesus Christ, I turn this struggle

with my sinful nature over to you". As the saying goes, we need to 'Let go and let God'.

Re-start video (for Creative Reflection music).

Stop video after end credits.

]

7. Large group discussion (10 min.)

Facilitator read out:

* Having listened to these ideas about sin as part of the human predicament, let's

review what has struck people so far.

Facilitator jots down comments on the flipchart.

Facilitator can recap key points (if not brought up in brainstorm) such as:

* Sin is unpopular and often misunderstood

* The Bible talks more about sin as a condition, part of the human predicament

* Sin as a condition is rooted in alienation (from God)

* There are 'soft and hard' aspects to sin

* There is a compulsive aspect to sin; there is also an element of free will

* Feeling excessively guilty about being a sinner is not what Christianity is about

* The purpose of bringing sin to light is so that we can be set free from it

* The atonement has many facets and different understandings are valid, resonating with different human needs

8. Facilitator-led concluding comments (5 min.)

Facilitator to read out or paraphrase:

\$ You can find all these different strands concerning the atonement in the New

Testament. However, what was perhaps the most powerful experience for St Paul was

his sense of his new life 'in Christ'. Before his conversion, you sense that he had been

ground down by the powerful conflict between his Super-ego (or religious conscience) and the dark impulses of his Id (or lower nature). His Ego had not been strong enough to keep the peace between his Super-ego and his Id.

However, once he was living in Christ, he found in him the inner resources that he had not been able to supply himself. Living in Christ, the old conflict between Super-ego and Id had been overcome.

*(In the end, release from sin doesn't come through obsessively paying attention to it,

or trying harder. As many great Christians have said, it is far more helpful to look up to God and find your inspiration in him, than to be preoccupied with your sins and failings. The Christian message is not about our being miserable sinners, but about how we can be liberated from our compulsive sinfulness. In serving Christ, we find that we are released from sinfulness.

9. Homework (2 min.)

Facilitator points out Homework assignment on page 31 of the Participant's Booklets.

10. Prayer (5 min.)

Use the prayers provided below, or pray in a way comfortable for your group.

Dear God,

You can see into the very depths of my being. Through your eyes you see what I try to hide from myself and from others. And you offer to take away all that hurts me in myself. Help me to break away from my sins, so I am no longer caught in the vicious spiral that clouds my conscience and hardens my heart. Strengthen me in my struggle with temptation that my heart may rest within the purity of your love. Through Jesus Christ, Amen.

Almighty God,
whose Son Jesus Christ fasted forty days in the wilderness,
and was tempted as we are, yet without sin:
give us grace to discipline ourselves in obedience to your Spirit;
and, as you know our weakness,
so may we know your power to save;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

Total Time = 90 minutes
(not including meal or refreshments)

Session 3 Depression

Outline and Notes

If Facilitators did not manage to fill in the Next Steps handout last week, do so now

1. Hosts: meal or tea and coffee on arrival
2. Facilitator: Welcome, review and overview (5 min.)

Facilitator to read out or paraphrase:

Review

So far we have looked at our relational nature; and God as a relational God. In the last session we went to look on the thorny problem of sin and how God provides us with a way of responding to it through the Atonement

Overview

* We turn now to face some of the struggles of human experience. In this session, we

look at depression. We look at the insights psychology has to offer, and the resources

we can find in the Christian faith.

* Depression is a great modern affliction, pervasive and disabling. Depression is on the

increase; we are 10 times more likely to suffer depression than our grandparents.

* Despite its prevalence, our approach to depression as Christians is sometimes medieval:
* THE FLOGGINGS WILL CONTINUE UNTIL MORALE IMPROVES.
* It is quite common for people to think it is wrong for Christians to be depressed; that they should simply try harder. More floggings. This kind of pressure only makes things worse.

* Let us first see how depression arises, and what resources there are within Christianity to combat it. Then we will ask whether any good can come of it. The causes of depression are as complex as the symptoms, and include biological factors. However, we will concentrate here on thought processes and social circumstances.

* Triggers:

* Depression is often precipitated by stressful events, especially those that people find threatening and which remind them of past problems.

* For example, current marriage problems might echo the unresolved past pain of a childhood marked by parental conflict. The current marriage problems evoke, and have to ride, the emotional 'waves' of earlier, unresolved problems. Or perhaps the stress of becoming unemployed echoes past failures in school. Past and present pain collide, and it can all become too much.

* It's likely that most of us here have experienced some degree of depression. We all know what it is like to feel 'down'.

* What does depression feel like?

3. Readings (10-15 min.)

* Read the poem 'Torpor', in the Participant's Booklet, page 44. What words or

phrases connect with your experience? Underline those words or phrases.

* Then read Psalm 102:3-7 and 2 Corinthians 1:8 on the same page of the Booklets.

* Underline words or phrases that again evoke the experience of depression.

4. Large group brainstorm (5 min.)

After allowing sufficient time for the readings, ask:

* What words or phrases from these scriptures and poem evoke the experience of depression?

Write the words or phrases onto the flipchart.

5. Video (26 min.)

Start video.

After Creative Reflection (the Bench Dance), pause/stop video at 'Pause for silent reflection'.

Facilitator:

* Does any part of your story accord with the Bench Dance story?

Use this time for silent, not shared, reflection of 1-2 min.

Resume video

Stop video after end credits

6. Facilitator-led material (5 min)

Facilitator to read out or paraphrase:

Integrity

* Not everything about depression is bad.

* There can be an impressive integrity about some forms of depression, a determination not to flinch from seeing the dark side of life, but to see it openly and

honestly. Jesus sometimes wept over the world (Luke 19.41), and we will sometimes

weep too.

Soul-making

* Painful though depression can be, people have perhaps become excessively scared of it, and unwilling to be strengthened through personal suffering. Paradoxically, that means that people can actually suffer even more from depression. Depression can strengthen people's characters, deepen their soul life, and bring them closer to God.

Change

* Depression can be a powerful signal that life is being lived in the wrong way, with a

lack of purpose or fulfilment, in impossible circumstances, or with wrong values or

priorities. Depression tells us that, in some way or other, we are 'missing the mark'.

Used wisely, it can be a 'wake-up' call to live life better, a call to find a new heart and

mind—which is what repentance means.

7. Bible study (10 min.)

Divide your group into around 3 groups of twos or threes, and work through the Bible passage below, with accompanying discussion points. Ask each small group to choose a note-taker and spokesperson.

Appoint one person from your group to report back to the whole group.

The Woman Caught in Adultery

8 ¹ while Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. ² Early in the morning he came again to the temple. All the people came to him and he sat down and began to teach them. ³ The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery; and making her stand before all of them, ⁴ they said to him,

“Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery.⁵ Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?”⁶ They said this to test him, so that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground.⁷ When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, “Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.”⁸ And once again he bent down and wrote on the ground.^{f 9} When they heard it, they went away, one by one, beginning with the elders; and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him.¹⁰ Jesus straightened up and said to her, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?”¹¹ She said, “No one, sir.”^s And Jesus said, “Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again.”

Discuss

- 1, What do you think Jesus was writing on the ground?
- 2, Is there anyone in the story you identify with in particular and why?
- 3, What do you think is the most important part of this story and why?
- 4, How do you think the women felt both during and after this event?

8. Large group discussion (10 min.)

Bring groups together in one whole group and summarise these losses on flipchart.

Facilitator can draw out any of the following, for example:

- * Jesus’ mother Mary became pregnant before she was married to Joseph (a serious accusation in an honour culture).
- * Childhood trauma: the massacre of the innocents; Mary, Joseph and Jesus had to flee to Egypt to escape Herod’s jealous rage and take refugee status.
- * Continual misunderstanding of Jesus’ calling by his family and band of disciples.
- * No marriage, no children.
- * From the onset of his ministry: no remunerative employment, no home.
- * His own mother and family thought he was ‘out of his mind’.
- * Growing resistance and rejection by his own people (in Nazareth, his home town; in Galilee; in Jerusalem; by the Pharisees, Sadducees and temple authorities).
- * His disciple Judas betrayed him to the religious elite.
- * The religious elite handed him over to the pagan Romans, and agitated for his execution.

r Other ancient authorities add *the sins of each of them*
s Or *Lord*

* His disciples slept as he contemplated his forthcoming death in the garden of Gethsemane.

* All his disciples fled when he was arrested.

* Peter, one of the disciples closest to him, denied him three times.

* Humiliation and mockery at the hands of the Romans.

* Imprisonment.

* Torture (though flogging).

* A slow and agonising death.

* His death seen as a 'curse'.

* The experience of being abandoned by God.

Facilitator to ask:

* How did Jesus manage to cope with these losses?

* What resources did he have?

Put comments on flipchart

* Think about: "Therefore he had to become like his brothers and sisters in every

respect, so that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to

make a sacrifice of atonement for the sins of the people. Because he himself was tested by what he suffered, he is able to help those who are being tested." (Hebrews 2: 17-18)

9. Facilitator-led summary (7 min.)

Facilitator to read out or paraphrase:

* To summarise this session, we have looked at how depression is helped by:

* Social support (a confiding and intimate relationship with God, and with others)

* Realistic thinking

* Hope

* Meaning

* Freedom from guilt, anger and meta-depression (being depressed about being depressed).

* Our Christian faith can help provide these resources.

* Depression is not all bad, and can be helpful to us in: developing integrity, soul-making, and provoking us to change our lives.

* Sometimes we may need professional help with depression, especially if the following are present:

* A serious depression lasting for more than a few weeks

* There are physical symptoms (loss of appetite, sleeplessness, no energy)

* Marriage problems

* No one person or organisation can provide us with all we need in terms of the

pastoral care of our own souls. It's best to think about developing a patchwork quilt of

self—pastoral care.

Facilitator can remind participants about the Next Steps handouts (or hand it out now if it didn't happen last week).

* Your Next Steps handout has some useful initial contact information. Some of you might want to follow up some of the issues raised so far in this course with, for example:

- * A talk with the minister.
 - * Receiving prayer ministry or help in arranging a regular prayer partner.
 - * Spiritual direction.
 - * Counselling within a Christian perspective.
 - * Privately arranged counselling.
 - * Marriage or relationship counselling.
 - * A visit to your GP—if depression has lasted for more than a few weeks or there are physical symptoms such as loss of appetite, sleeplessness, no energy.
- * There is also a reading list for each session at the end of your Participant's Booklets.

10. Homework (2 min.)

Facilitator to point out assignment in Participant's Booklet, page 52.

11. Prayer (5 min.)

Use the prayers provided below, or pray in a way comfortable for your group.

Dear God,

You told me that I must love my neighbour as myself, but how can I love my neighbour when I do not love myself? In my times of darkness and self-doubt deliver me from myself, from the prison of my mind. When I cannot be reached by my friends help me find the strength to reach out and see your love made manifest through your Church, through Jesus Christ, Amen.

Almighty God,
you show to those who are in error the light of your truth,
that they may return to the way of righteousness:
grant to all those who are admitted
into the fellowship of Christ's religion,
that they may reject those things
that are contrary to their profession,
and follow all such things as are agreeable to the same;
through our Lord Jesus Christ,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,

Be sure to keep in mind time boundaries.

Total Time = 90 minutes

(not including meal or refreshments)

Session 4 Suffering and Wholeness

Outline and Notes

1. Hosts: meal or tea and coffee on arrival
2. Facilitator: Welcome, review and overview (9 min.)

Facilitator read out or paraphrases:

Review

In this lent course we started by looking at ourselves as relational beings made in God's image, and the Christian life as a life that seeks restoration of relationship with God, with others, and within ourselves. We have seen how sin can both help and hinder us in this process and, in the last session we have discussed how depression can lock us out of healthy relationships.

Overview

* Today we look at suffering, that thorny reality we all would rather avoid.

Humans

have never enjoyed suffering. However, we live in an age that has become quite

intolerant of suffering. In the rich countries of the West, we expect to be happy and

free from suffering, so when it does arise, we are appalled. And so the age old religious 'problem of evil' is brought into even sharper focus: Why does God allow this?

* People who suffer can generally be divided into 2 broad groups. There are those for

whom life is good most of the time, but occasionally goes wrong. For example, a fulfilling job comes to an end; a happy marriage goes wrong in unforeseen way.

* And then there are those for whom life has been difficult most of the time.

This has

been the situation for the vast majority of people over human history, and is still the

case outside the developed world.

* Animals as well as humans suffer, yet with our developed self-consciousness, as

humans we suffer with heightened awareness and distress. Suffering is also intensified by our cultural expectations that we should be free of suffering. The 'why' question

concerning suffering wells up from deep within us, and cannot be silenced by intellectual arguments. A mother whose promising and admirable young son has been killed an

accident cries out 'Why?'

* The Bible does not provide a simple answer. There is a deep tension running within

the Jewish-Christian heritage: God is all powerful—but even those who belong to Him sometimes suffer dreadfully, and it can seem as if God has deserted them. The Bible speaks honestly about this.

* In the time of Jesus, etched upon the Jewish national consciousness was the terrible memory of the invasion by the Babylonians, and the current oppression of the Roman occupation. Yet the prophets had promised an end to suffering one day. The hope of

Israel was a very pragmatic hope: that one day God's Kingdom—his rule—would come in fullness to the earth. An end to suffering and an end to sin was envisaged. All of Israel would live in peace.

* Isaiah prophesied this hope at a time of invasion and devastation, when many in Israel may have felt that God had abandoned them forever.

3. Bible reading (5 min.)

Assign one person to read out Isaiah 63:17-19, 25, on page 74 of the Participant's Booklets.

4. Bible study (15-20 min.)

Divide your group into around 3 groups of twos or threes, and work through the Bible passage below, with accompanying discussion points. Ask each small group to choose a note-taker and spokesperson.

Appoint one person from your group to report back to the whole group.

A Man Born Blind Receives Sight

9 As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. ² His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" ³ Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him. ⁴ We^a must work the works of him who sent me^b while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. ⁵ As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." ⁶ When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man's eyes, ⁷ saying to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see. ⁸ The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask, "Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?" ⁹ Some were saying, "It is he." Others were saying, "No, but it is someone like him." He kept saying, "I am the man." ¹⁰ But they kept asking him, "Then how were your eyes opened?" ¹¹ He answered, "The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and said to me, 'Go to Siloam and wash.' Then I went and washed and received my sight." ¹² They said to him, "Where is he?" He said, "I do not know."

a Other ancient authorities read *I*

b Other ancient authorities read *us*

¹³ They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. ¹⁴ Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. ¹⁵ Then the Pharisees also began to ask him how he had received his sight. He said to them, "He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see." ¹⁶ Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not observe the sabbath." But others said, "How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?" And they were divided. ¹⁷ So they said again to the blind man, "What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened." He said, "He is a prophet."

¹⁸ The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight ¹⁹ and asked them, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?" ²⁰ His parents answered, "We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; ²¹ but we do not know how it is that now he sees, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself." ²² His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus^c to be the Messiah^d would be put out of the synagogue. ²³ Therefore his parents said, "He is of age; ask him."

²⁴ So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and they said to him, "Give glory to God! We know that this man is a sinner." ²⁵ He answered, "I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see." ²⁶ They said to him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?" ²⁷ He answered them, "I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?" ²⁸ Then they reviled him, saying, "You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. ²⁹ We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from." ³⁰ The man answered, "Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. ³¹ We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. ³² Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. ³³ If this man were not from God, he could do nothing." ³⁴ They answered him, "You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?" And they drove him out.

³⁵ Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?"^e ³⁶ He answered, "And who is he, sir?"^f Tell me, so that I may believe in him." ³⁷ Jesus said to him, "You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he." ³⁸ He said, "Lord,^g I believe." And he worshiped him. ³⁹ Jesus said, "I came into this world for judgment so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind." ⁴⁰

c Gk *him*

d Or *the Christ*

e Other ancient authorities read *the Son of God*

f *Sir* and *Lord* translate the same Greek word

g *Sir* and *Lord* translate the same Greek word

Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, “Surely we are not blind, are we?” ⁴¹ Jesus said to them, “If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, ‘We see,’ your sin remains.

Discuss

1, The man was blind from birth, how do you feel Christians should respond to people who have had handicaps or hardships from birth? Does your Church family do enough in this regard?

2, Do you think your Church family takes suffering seriously enough?

3, The blind man regained his sight but was still not accepted by the Pharisees who drove him out. Have you ever overcome suffering and received a response from others which you didn't expect?

4, This passage maybe used by some people to imply sin and suffering are linked. How would you respond to someone who held this attitude?

5. Large group discussion (5 min.)

Facilitator to draw out the main points and write them on the flipchart.

* Reactions to suffering:

* 1. Jesus' disciples

* 2. Ourselves

* As a group, what are our common reactions to suffering? What emotions does this produce?

* Perhaps anger at God seems a strange thing to find in the Bible. But even God's most faithful prophets argued with Him concerning their own and others' suffering.

* Can you see similarities here with the experience of depression, the experience of stress, the experience of bereavement and sudden change (e.g. confusion, disorientation)?

6. Video (26 min. plus 7 min. small group discussion)

Start video

Pause video at 'Pause for discussion'

Divide the group into the smaller groups of twos or threes.

Facilitator:

* What aspects of life—your own or others—show the 'Now' of God's kingdom?

What aspects show the 'Not Yet'?

Resume video.

Stop video after end credits.

7. Facilitator-led material (7 min.)

Facilitator to read out or paraphrase:

- * What does Christian wholeness look like?
- * Christian wholeness looks like the resurrected Christ, the one who has gone through suffering.
- * Jesus, the true, authentic human being, reveals to us who we can be. In him we see a person who is not afraid of suffering. He chose his suffering wisely, and used it powerfully for the good of others. He trusted that God would vindicate him. Through him, we have a down payment on our own resurrection, on our own transformation, both now and in the age to come. We will go the way he has gone; we will go into suffering, yet the transforming, resurrection power of Christ will be with us.
- * Times of suffering can break what is false in us. Suffering may mean the collapse of the self-confident, polished persona (or mask) we present to others—and would like to believe in ourselves!
- * Suffering may mean that we have to encounter what Jung calls the 'shadow', the unacceptable side of ourselves that we try to hide. We will explore this theme more in the next session. Suffering acts like a call for a deeper, more authentic way of living.
- * The resurrected, glorified Jesus bears the scars of his crucifixion. He is a wounded healer. Similarly, the suffering in our own life can become a resource for others, when we plant our suffering into God.
- * 'But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, to show that this all surpassing power is from God, and not from us.' (2 Corinthians 4: 7)

8. Homework (2 min.)

Facilitator to point out the homework assignment on page 81 of the Participant's Booklets

9. Prayer (5 min.)

Use the prayers provided below, or pray in a way comfortable for your group.

Dear God,

I know you had to be crucified before you could rise again. Keep your flame of hope burning in my heart, that even in my darkest night, you will cause a fire that will never die away. Help me respond to the wounds of your world, where lives are overcome with tragedy, teach me not to ask you why you have let this happen without asking what is it that you want me to do?

Almighty God,
whose most dear Son went not up to joy but first he suffered pain,
and entered not into glory before he was crucified:
mercifully grant that we, walking in the way of the cross,
may find it none other than the way of life and peace;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

Be sure to keep in mind time boundaries.

Total time = 86 minutes

(not including meal or refreshments)

Session 5 Forgiveness and Reconciliation

Outline and Notes

In advance of this session, Facilitators will have filled out, to the best of their ability, the Next Steps handout (on page 37 of this Manual), following the guidance found in Section 5. Photocopy the form (four sides) for each of the participants in your group, to hand out at the end of this session.

1. Hosts: meal or tea and coffee on arrival
2. Facilitator: Welcome, review and overview (5 min.)

Facilitator reads out or paraphrases:

So far, we have talked about our relationship with God and with his children. We went on to look at how sin tests the nature of this relationship and how Christ offers us a new way of forging relationships through the Atonement. We have looked at how depression and suffering are aspects of life which we all encounter at various moments. As we come to the end of Lent and prepare for Holy Week our thoughts naturally turn to the last moments of Christ's life and the lessons we can draw from his own suffering.'

Overview

* Our response to the atoning death of Jesus is to confess our sin—to 'tell things as

they are'—and to receive God's forgiveness.

* God's mercy, love and forgiveness provide the starting point.

* Early on in the Bible, in Exodus, God reveals his identity as 'merciful and gracious'

(Exodus 34:6). This means that God shows mercy even to those who have violated

relationship with him, and who have no means of restoring it.

* God makes the first move towards us. God has already forgiven us before we

repent:

* 'While we were yet sinners, Christ died for the ungodly' (Romans 5:6).

* We enter into that forgiveness when we turn to him. The word 'repent' (metanoia

in Greek) means 'to turn'—to turn away from sin, and to turn towards Christ.

We are

reinstated in a relationship that is life-giving.

* 'He offered his life for sinners and with a love stronger than death he opened wide his arms upon the cross.'

(From Eucharistic Prayer G, Common Worship (2000), Church House Publishing, p. 201,)

3. Video Part 1 (6 min.)

Start video.

Pause/stop video at 'Pause for Bible study'

4. Bible Study (15-20 min.)

Divide your group into around 3 groups of twos or threes, and work through the Bible passage below, with accompanying discussion points. Ask each small group to choose a note-taker and spokesperson.

Appoint one person from your group to report back to the whole group.

Jesus Prays in Gethsemane

³⁶ Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples, "Sit here while I go over there and pray." ³⁷ He took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be grieved and agitated. ³⁸ Then he said to them, "I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and stay awake with me." ³⁹ And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want." ⁴⁰ Then he came to the disciples and found them sleeping; and he said to Peter, "So, could you not stay awake with me one hour? ⁴¹ Stay awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial;^e the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." ⁴² Again he went away for the second time and prayed, "My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done." ⁴³ Again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy. ⁴⁴ So leaving them again, he went away and prayed for the third time, saying the same words. ⁴⁵ Then he came to the disciples and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? See, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. ⁴⁶ Get up, let us be going. See, my betrayer is at hand."

Discuss

1, What are the advantages and disadvantages of forgiving someone who has wronged you or someone you care for. Is it easier or harder to forgive someone you really care for?

2, What sins would you find it hard to forgive? What sins would you find it hard to receive forgiveness for? Do you sometimes feel a person does not deserve to be forgiven, even if they have said sorry?

^e Or into temptation

3, Forgiveness is costly, and there is a limit to how much we can humanly forgive. What can we do in such situations?

4, What does this passage speak to you about Jesus' feelings and actions?

5. Large group discussion (5-10 min.)

Facilitator brings the small groups together to share the main points they raised. Write comments on the flipchart.

6. Video Part 2 (17 min.)

Re-start video.

After Creative Reflection ('What does it feel like when you are not ready to forgive?') at 'Pause for silent prayer', pause video for 1-2 minutes of silent prayer.

Resume video.

Stop video after end credits.

7. Facilitator-led material (10 min.)

Facilitator to read out or paraphrase:

Reconciliation

* Having made the effort to begin forgiving, we hope to be reconciled to the person

who has wronged us. Forgiveness opens the door for reconciliation—but it cannot

force it. For reconciliation to work, both parties must consent to it and acknowledge

that a wrong has taken place.

* The prodigal son came home of his own accord to a father who had been waiting

and waiting. Both were willing to take the risk of re-entering into a restored relationship. It is a risk; a risk that Jesus took with us.

* While reconciliation is the ideal goal of forgiveness, full forgiveness is not dependent on reconciliation. Reconciliation may not be possible, or advisable, in all cases. A violent or abusive relationship may not be safe to re-enter.

Reconciliation requires willingness to change on behalf of both parties.

* A Christian approach to forgiveness hopes to move to reconciliation wherever

possible. We are not forgiving others merely for our own sake (although forgiveness is good for our own mental health), but also in the hope of restoring the other person.

* However, we have to test the waters. Like the father in the story of the prodigal

son, the Christian forgiver is ever looking out of the window, hoping to see the prodigal coming back. When the prodigal returns, the father rushes down the road.

* The father was greeted with the son's repentance. The father could then take

reconciliation a step further—'get the ring, the robe, the fatted calf!'

* When the son received the father's loving acceptance, then the father took reconciliation even a step further. The father restored the son to a whole network of relationships: to friends and family. And then they partied. At every point, the father initiated with generous love, and then waited for a response. He acted generously, but not blindly.

* Reconciliation does risk further re-wounding. What if the other party does not respond as hoped? One has to wait and see, step by step. If the person does respond as hoped, expect the party of a lifetime!

8. Large group discussion (10 min.)

Facilitator:

* What pitfalls might be encountered when trying to reconcile a relationship? Brainstorm ideas in the whole group and put comments on the flipchart.

Facilitator can mention these pitfalls:

* Rushing into reconciliation too soon; both parties may need more time.

* Face-to-face reconciliation in some cases may not be advisable if the relationship has been violent, or involves addictions (drugs, alcohol, etc.). The relationship may not be safe to re-enter.

* Both parties may need help to change patterns of relating. Perhaps mediation (or relationship counselling) is necessary to enable mutual understanding and fruitful communication.

9. Homework (4 min.)

Facilitator read out:

* Homework is private, it is for you; homework material is not publicly shared in the Beta sessions.

Facilitator reads out the Homework assignment on page 40 of the Participant's Booklet.

10. Pass out the photocopied 'Next Steps' handouts (2 min.)

These have been filled in where indicated by Facilitators in advance. (Where Facilitators have been unable to fill in parts of the handout participants can still use the information printed on them to find out information for themselves.)

Facilitator:

* The 'Next Steps' handout has some useful contact information. Some of us might want to follow up some of the issues raised so far in this course. There are basically six different routes to take for pastoral care or counselling which can be pursued in any combination:

* 1. Church-based pastoral care (for a talk with the minister, or help in arranging

- a regular prayer partner, or prayer ministry, spiritual direction or retreats)
- * 2. Professional counselling through the NHS (via a visit to your GP)
 - * 3. Christian counselling (qualified counsellors with a Christian perspective)
 - * 4. Private counselling
 - * 5. Help agencies
 - * 6. Self-help books and training courses

* Initial contact information is provided (wherever possible) on your Next Steps

handout. It is for participants to decide which, if any, next steps they may wish to follow up.

11. Prayer (5 min.)

Use the prayers provided below, or pray in a way comfortable for your group.

Dear God.

You died on the cross so that the most scarlet of my sins may become as white as snow. Deepen my faith in you that I may have the confidence to both forgive others and to be forgiven by them, Through Jesus Christ, my Lord, Amen.

Almighty and everlasting God,
who in your tender love towards the human race
sent your Son our Saviour Jesus Christ
to take upon him our flesh
and to suffer death upon the cross:
grant that we may follow the example of his patience and humility,
and also be made partakers of his resurrection;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

Be sure to keep in mind time boundaries.

Total time = 87 minutes

(not including meal or refreshments)

IF YOU WANT TO CONTINUE THE BETA COURSE AFTER LENT THEN THE REMAINING FOUR SESSIONS MAY BE TAKEN IN THE FOLLOWING ORDER WITH THE NORMAL READINGS:

Christian Community – some extra notes will be needed to make this leap

Loss and Change

Stress and Coping

Self and God.