

GATHERING □ GROWING □ GOING
Swansea and Brecon Vision Resource 2014



⁶So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, ⁷rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness. Colossians 2.7 (NIV)

LEADER'S RESOURCES FOR THE COURSE

INDEX

Leader's Introduction to the Course	2
About Contextual Bible Study	3
Leading a Contextual Bible Study	4
Session 1 Jesus prays alone	5
Session 2 Jesus appears to his disciples	5
Session 3 The poetry of Isaiah	6
Session 4 Jesus heals on the Sabbath	7
Session 5 On the road to Emmaus	8
Leading guided prayer and meditation	9
Session 1 Silent Prayer	9
Session 3 Holy Reading (Lectio Divina)	9
Session 3 Ignatian meditation	9
Session 3 Bible Texts for Holy Reading and Ignatian meditation	10

LEADER'S NOTES: INTRODUCTION TO THE COURSE

We live in changing times; times when the role of the Church and the place of Christianity in daily life are regularly challenged. Even the familiar landscape of the Church in Wales is being re-designed. In these circumstances it is easy to become anxious.

But the gospel is still good news for us and for the world; it is an antidote to worry, especially in difficult times. This course offers us an opportunity to re-acquaint ourselves with the basic truths, values and practices of Christianity. Its purpose is that we can become sure of what we know and grow more confident in our ability to live and share our faith.

A recent research project, the Church Growth Research Programme, identified a series of actions that are strongly associated with church growth. Included in these is the need to empower, encourage and to raise the confidence of congregations; to enable active discipleship; and to be intentional about working for growth.

GATHERING□GROWING□GOING...

- is a short course based around five leaflets called "Simple Guides":

Prayer – A Simple Guide

Christianity – A Simple Guide

Reading the Bible – A Simple Guide

Living as Disciples – A Simple Guide

Pilgrimage – A Simple Guide

The Simple Guides are freely available to every parish. They are the basis of this course as well as for wider use. Copies are available from both the Eastmoor Centre and the Diocesan Centre in Brecon. The Leader's Notes are available to download from the Diocesan and Vision websites.

WHO CAN DO GATHERING□GROWING□GOING?

Gathering□Growing□Going is a course for groups; they may be small and local or, where parishes in Ministry Areas have already begun to work together, it may be an opportunity for a number of parish groups to get together.

Where the group is large, think of ways of reducing the scale by breaking into smaller groups or having discussions in twos and threes as well as in plenary.

WHAT KIND OF VENUE SHOULD YOU CHOOSE?

Whether you are meeting in someone's home or in a larger venue, make sure that it is warm and comfortable and that you have facilities for tea, coffee and refreshments so that you are able to offer a warm and generous welcome.

WHO CAN LEAD THE COURSE?

It could be the Vicar, Lay Reader or someone else who has both a mature faith and the skills to facilitate your group.

Leaders are encouraged to use their own imagination and creativity to make the most of the material. The notes for each session provide a rough guide to timings and one or two options for the meeting.

WHAT WILL THE SESSIONS BE LIKE?

Each week the study guide will follow the same general pattern:

- Welcome and introductions.
- Opening prayer.
- A description/reminder of the purpose of Gathering□Growing□Going.
- A brief description of the week's topic.
- A short, contextual Bible Study enables participants to relate the topic to their lives.
- The relevant Simple Guide will be discussed in both plenary and small groups.
- One resource from the Simple Guide will be explored further.
- The meeting will close with prayer.

PREPARATION

Read the Simple Guide series and think about how the topics relate to your church.

Before each session

- Re-read the relevant Simple Guide
- Read the Leader's notes and work out the details of how you will lead your group.
- Make copies of any Bible reading or reference material for the group.

At the beginning of the session

- Remember to set out 'confidentiality ground rules' in respect of information shared within the group. One of the strengths of study groups is that people can get to know each other better. The group must be a place of safety and trust.
- It is helpful to let the group know when the session will end (and to stick to it). The sessions are designed to be around 90 minutes including refreshment; if you wish to make them shorter, select material you wish to prioritise.



ABOUT CONTEXTUAL BIBLE STUDY

Contextual Bible Study is a process of working with a Biblical text as a resource for transformation. For more information you can download a short paper (1) or, if you are thinking of using the method elsewhere, a longer document (2) by Gerald West.

1. <http://www.anglicancommunion.org/ministry/theological/bible/docs/pdf/bible/3.4%20Contextual%20Bible%20Study.pdf>
2. <http://www.korsvei.no/korsvei/vedlegg/17kontekstuellbibelstudiemanual.pdf>

The Bible Studies offered in this course are short forms and are limited to three questions.



LEADING A CONTEXTUAL BIBLE STUDY

This form of Bible study is intended to be accessible to all in the room; it relies on people's ability to interpret the text without prior knowledge. Facilitation is the key to its success; the leader must be a good facilitator.

If there are Biblical experts/professionals in the room, invite them to assist this process by encouraging others to speak and by valuing all contributions. Their expertise will be valuable but must not dis-empower others.

The process is called 'contextual' for two reasons: because, in this process, people interpret the Bible passage through the context of their own lives and then explore ways of relating it to their parish context.

30 minutes has been allocated for this process.

It is an exercise that begins in small groups and concludes in plenary.

Sit people in groups of 3 or 4.

Give each group a copy of the reading, a Bible, a large sheet of paper and a pen or marker.

Ask someone to read the passage of Scripture.

There are three questions.

Do not give all the questions to the groups at once; – let them consider one question at a time.

Ask the first question (you may want to give each group a written copy of the question).

Give them 5 minutes to answer.

Repeat this for the 2nd and 3rd questions. Allow 5 minutes for each question.

By now you should have about 10 minutes remaining. In this time, have a plenary discussion with the answers the groups have written down.

YOU WILL NEED

- Bibles – one per group of 3 or 4 people (enabling people to check the preceding or following narrative passages)
- A large sheet of paper for groups to write down their answers
- A pen or marker
- Printed copies of the readings
- Copies of the individual questions to hand out to each group



SESSION 1 – PRAYER

Jesus prays alone

³⁵In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed. ³⁶And Simon and his companions hunted for him. ³⁷When they found him, they said to him, “Everyone is searching for you.” ³⁸He answered, “Let us go on to the neighbouring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came out to do.” ³⁹And he went throughout Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons.

Mark 1.35-39 (NRSV)

QUESTIONS

1. What is the passage about?
2. What is Simon hoping for when he finds Jesus?
3. What can we learn about prayer from this text?



SESSION 2 – CHRISTIANITY

Jesus appears to his disciples

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

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

John 20.19-23 (NIV)

QUESTIONS

1. Where were the disciples?
2. “As the Father has sent me, I am sending you”. What do you think Jesus meant?,
3. What do you understand by Jesus’ words, “Receive the Holy Spirit”?

SESSION 3 – READING THE BIBLE

The poetry of Isaiah

- ⁸ For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
nor are your ways my ways, says the LORD.
- ⁹ For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
so are my ways higher than your ways
and my thoughts than your thoughts.
- ¹⁰ For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven,
and do not return there until they have watered the earth,
making it bring forth and sprout,
giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater,
- ¹¹ so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth;
it shall not return to me empty,
but it shall accomplish that which I purpose,
and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.
- ¹² For you shall go out in joy,
and be led back in peace;
the mountains and the hills before you
shall burst into song,
and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.

Isaiah 55.8-12 (NRSV)

QUESTIONS

1. What does this passage communicate about the nature of God?
2. What do you understand 'my word' to mean (v.11)?
3. In what contexts would this passage be particularly meaningful?



SESSION 4 – LIVING AS DISCIPLES IN THE WORLD

Jesus heals a man in the synagogue on the Sabbath

⁶On another Sabbath Jesus went to the meeting place and taught. There was a man there with a crippled right hand. ⁷The religion scholars and Pharisees had their eye on Jesus to see if he would heal the man, hoping to catch him in a Sabbath infraction. ⁸He knew what they were up to and spoke to the man with the crippled hand: “Get up and stand here before us.” He did.

⁹Then Jesus addressed them, “Let me ask you something: What kind of action suits the Sabbath best? Doing good or doing evil? Helping people or leaving them helpless?”

¹⁰He looked around, looked each one in the eye. He said to the man, “Hold out your hand.” He held it out—it was as good as new! ¹¹They were beside themselves with anger, and started plotting how they might get even with him.

Luke 6.6-11 (*The Message*)

QUESTIONS

1. Why do you think Jesus was teaching in a synagogue?
2. Why did Jesus choose to heal publicly on the Sabbath?
3. What are the implications of this passage for Christians today?



SESSION 5 - PILGRIMAGE

On the road to Emmaus

¹³Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, ¹⁴and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. ¹⁵While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, ¹⁶but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. ¹⁷And he said to them, “What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?” They stood still, looking sad. ¹⁸Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, “Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?” ¹⁹He asked them, “What things?” They replied, “The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, ²⁰and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. ²¹But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. ²²Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, ²³and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive.

Luke 24.13-23 (NRSV)

QUESTIONS

1. What are you (as a church) discussing as you journey together at the moment?
2. What are your hopes?
3. Where have you encountered Jesus today?



LEADING GUIDED PRAYER AND MEDITATION

SILENT, CONTEMPLATIVE PRAYER (Session 1.7)

Each week there is an opportunity to explore one of the resources in the Simple Guide in more depth. In the first session the group will be able to engage in silent prayer together. Some people may be familiar with praying together in this way; for others it will be a new experience. For this reason the time allocated for the whole exercise is quite short – and includes time for a brief discussion afterwards.

It is important to lead newcomers to silent prayer in a way that enables them to feel safe.

Look at the notes in PRAYER – A SIMPLE GUIDE. As Leader you will need to explain and lead the process, including both the ‘Centring’ and ‘Ending’ parts of the prayer. You may find this website helpful: <http://www.catholicireland.net/praying-body-and-soul-methods-and-practices-of-anthony-de-mello/> It is based on Anthony de Mello’s prayer exercises and offers a range of ways in which the leader might enable a prayer group to relax and become focussed.



HOLY READING - LECTIO DIVINA (An option for Session 3.7)

Read the notes in READING THE BIBLE – A SIMPLE GUIDE. For additional information see an article by Father Luke Dysinger, O.S.B. which has guidance for individual Lectio Divina and also for groups. <http://www.beliefnet.com/Faiths/Catholic/2000/08/How-To-Practice-Lectio-Divina.aspx>



IGNATIAN MEDITATION (An option for Session 3.7)

This is a way of entering a gospel event with the senses of sight, smell, touch, taste and hearing by engaging our imaginations. See PRAYER – A SIMPLE GUIDE and “Praying with the Bible”. Or, for more information, see: <http://www.ignatianspirituality.com/ignatian-prayer/the-what-how-why-of-prayer/praying-with-scripture/>

HOLY READING (LECTIO DIVINA) BIBLE TEXT

Christ's love for us

¹⁴For this reason I kneel before the Father, ¹⁵from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name. ¹⁶I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, ¹⁷so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, ¹⁸may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, ¹⁹and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fulness of God.

²⁰Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, ²¹to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

Ephesians 3.14 – 21(NIV)



IGNATIAN MEDITATION BIBLE TEXT

Jesus calms the storm

³⁵On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, “Let us go across to the other side.” ³⁶And leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. Other boats were with him. ³⁷A great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped. ³⁸But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke him up and said to him, “Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?” ³⁹He woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, “Peace! Be still!” Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm. ⁴⁰He said to them, “Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?” ⁴¹And they were filled with great awe and said to one another, “Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?”

Mark 4.35–41 (NRSV)