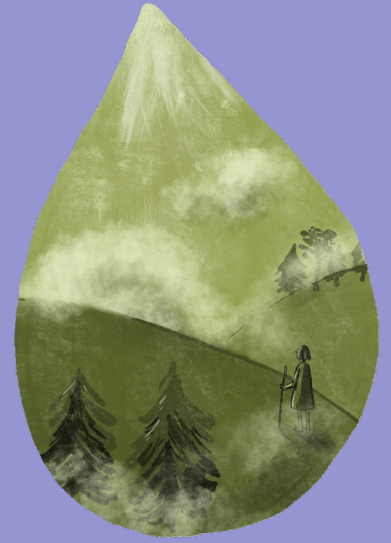
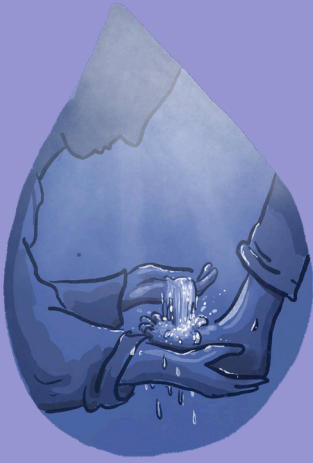


Church Leader's Guide



Earth, Water, Wind and Fire

Understanding baptism



**COME
AND
SEE**

Acknowledgements

This guide for church leaders was written by Joshua Townson with contributions from Joanna Gallant.

Scripture quotations are taken from the NRVSA. Copyright © 2021 National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States of America.

Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Design by 15-north.co.uk

Words © Oxford Diocese 2025, unless otherwise indicated.

Contents

Introduction	4
Getting your parish/benefice involved	5
Format of weekly sessions	6
Six sessions	
Week one – Fashioned from the earth	7
Week two – The waters of cleansing	9
Week three – The waters of salvation	11
Week four – The water of life	13
Week five – The breath of God	15
Week six – New fire	17
Contemplative practices	
Stilling	20
Noticing	22
Dwelling	24
Mending	26
Blessing	28
Filling	30

Introduction

Come and See takes place during Lent each year. It's our big, warm, open invitation to everyone for an adventure in faith and trust. It's something for the local church and the whole community... including children and young people, families and schools.

Come and See: Earth, Water, Wind and Fire is a series of resources offering a holistic approach to those with an established faith and also enquirers to explore Christian beliefs. In this booklet you will find information for church leaders and course organisers.

Background

For some years, we have been trying to develop a simple pattern of Christian formation focused on the Church year: a season of invitation in Epiphany; an invitation to explore faith and go deeper in Lent; a season of deepening faith and sacramental life after Easter.

We've been learning how to support people's everyday faith through simple one-to-one conversations and Personal Discipleship Plans. *Come and See*, which takes place each Lent, is part of our common vision to become a more Christ-like Church for the sake of God's world. It invites new people to discover Christ and helps the whole church to be formed as more confident disciples, living out our everyday faith.

Sunday and small group content

The core of this *Come and See* leader's guide is a series of six sessions exploring profound truths about baptism, which can be used in small groups or as part of a series of Sunday services. Meetings can be held online, in person, or a hybrid approach, whichever suits your group.

Note that there are separate resources for children, young people and families. You'll find details of these on page 5. You can choose to mix and match the activities and approaches of each resource to better tailor content for your group.

Each week, which includes a film from Bishop Steven, the small group sessions will consider what it means to be baptised as a Christian.

Additional readings are offered each week to support wider consideration of the week's theme and to encourage discussion in the group.

Daily emails (Lent 2025 only)

Whether or not people are planning to join a small group or other session, be sure to ask everyone (your congregation, church families, enquirers and the local community) to register online for *Come and See* at oxford.anglican.org/come-and-see

Everyone who signs up will receive a daily email with a short, written reflection that they can also listen to if they wish. Each Sunday, they will receive a link to a short film from Bishop Steven (see below).

It's important to remember that *Come and See* is invitational. Not everyone in a small group will use the daily content, and not everyone using the daily content will attend a small group. The materials are designed to complement one another and can be used on their own.

Weekly film from Bishop Steven

Six films by Bishop Steven are released each Sunday through Lent (though remain available throughout the year). The films are 5–7 minutes long and available to download or stream. A transcript is provided along with a subtitled version of each film. The films tie in with the weekly Sunday/small group sessions in this booklet.

As a church leader, you'll receive a link to the film at least a fortnight in advance.

Church leaders may also choose to use the films as part of Sunday worship during Lent. Feedback from previous years shows that Bishop Steven's messages were highly valued and widely appreciated.

Contemplative Toolkit

Creating space for encounter with God is another key element of *Come and See*, so we have included complementary prayer practices from the Contemplative Toolkit. Again, the practices, which you can find in the following pages, are suitable for enquirers and those with an established faith. They can be used by individuals, or when you meet as a small group, and with all ages.

Getting your parish/benefice involved

1. Invite your parish

Order our posters to stimulate interest and postcards to hand out, and invite the congregation to register.

Resources and registration are via **oxford.anglican.org/organiser-materials**
oxford.anglican.org/come-and-see

2. Invite people in your local community to Come and See

Your organiser's email will include a link to resources for you to share on your own channels and via email. You'll also find artwork to include Come and See advertising in your parish newsletter and pew sheets. The registration link for people to use is:

oxford.anglican.org/come-and-see

3. Tag your parish on A Church Near You

This is a good moment to check your parish/benefice ACNY listing to make sure your on-site and online services are listed and to tag them with 'Come and See'.

4. Ask your PDA for support

Our Parish Development Advisors (PDAs) are available to help every parish/benefice, so feel free to contact them at any time for help and support to offer Come and See in your area:

Berkshire and City of Oxford

Rhodri Bowen

07741 736 480

rhodri.bowen@oxford.anglican.org

Dorchester (Oxfordshire)

Anne Perry

01865 208246

anne.perry@oxford.anglican.org

Buckinghamshire

Revd Asa Humphreys

0787 655 3884

asa.humphreys@oxford.anglican.org

Children, young people and families

This year the resources for children and young people are suitable for home, school and church environments.

Weekly resources for families with primary-aged children

There are special materials for children, with a weekly email featuring video messages on the same theme as the resources for adults, an activity and a reflective prayer practice. The activity and prayer are adaptable for under-fives.

Weekly resources for young people

There are video, activity and prayer resources aimed at young people in secondary school.

Format of weekly sessions

Gathering and re-connecting

To help people “arrive”, chat, and have time to reconnect with one another. Sharing what we’ve been up to during the week builds a sense of community and mutual understanding.

Opening prayer and reading

Begin each session with prayer. We have provided a prayer for you to use. You may also like to add more space for prayer in your church’s own worship style.

Conversation starter

Each session includes an open question to help the group get to know each other: “Where have you seen God at work this week?”

A way of noticing where God has been at work is to reflect on the day using the fruits of the Spirit. Whenever you have seen kindness, gentleness, patience, faithfulness, generosity in your day, you can see God at work in the world for good. When you have been loving, joyful, peaceful, or sought justice, then God has been at work in the world for good.

Opening a discussion

These are questions which begin to draw participants into the theme for the week. They give people a space to share their own experience of faith and their thoughts about the course so far.

Film from Bishop Steven

We have found that if participants can watch this in advance, it really helps the quality of the discussion. It’s a good idea to watch it again together if time allows. Your leader resources include a download link, so that you’re not reliant on a Wi-Fi connection in church.

Bible reading

This is a reading connected with the theme for the day. You may like to ask a participant to read this out.

Leader notes

Following the Bible reading is a written reflection, expanding on the themes introduced in Bishop Steven’s

film and the reading. This is designed to generate thinking a little bit deeper about God and faith, and to be accessible to all participants. You may choose to ask someone to read this section out during the session.

Discussion questions

Come and See is designed so that enquirers and Christians who want to go deeper can ask their questions about baptism and the Christian faith in a safe and inviting atmosphere. The most important thing is to allow people the space to openly and honestly discuss the week’s theme.

You may feel you need to stimulate the conversation, so we have prepared optional questions to support you to do that. Don’t feel you have to work your way through a list of questions – see them as support, not an agenda.

Often the most lively conversations begin from a single thread. As you guide the discussion and conversation, go in the most helpful direction for the group and especially for those who are exploring faith.

Some of the questions are aimed more at enquirers and others take us into deeper theological and personal places. There is no prescription on which ones to use in your sessions, the most important thing is to allow the conversation to flow and for people to be able to explore their faith.

Concluding prayers

This section recommends a practice from the Contemplative Toolkit. A photocopyable version of each contemplative practice is included with this guide for small group members to take home with them

Next steps for everyday faith

This section contains suggestions for you to share with participants on how we can take the theme of the session away with us to live out in our everyday lives. You may want to share the suggestions directly with your group members for them to reflect on during the week. You can pick them up again as conversation starters at the beginning of the following session.

Week 1: Fashioned from the earth

Gathering and reconnecting

To help people settle, take time to reconnect, hear how people are.

Opening prayer

Holy Father, thank you for this time to come together and explore the mystery of baptism. We ask that you give us open hearts and ears to hear the offer you make through your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen

Conversation starter

When was the last baptism you attended?

Opening a discussion

- Do you normally prefer to say baptism or christening?
- What do you think when you hear the word baptism?

Weekly film from Bishop Steven

This can be watched together and/or you can agree to watch before you meet.

Based on the film and daily reflections this week:

- What have you heard that intrigued you?
- What challenged you or left you with a question?

Reading

When they had come near Jerusalem and had reached Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, "Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her; untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, just say this, 'The Lord needs them.' And he will send them immediately." This took place to fulfil what had been spoken through the prophet, saying,

"Tell the daughter of Zion,
Look, your king is coming to you,
humble, and mounted on a donkey,
and on a colt, the foal of a donkey."

The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them; they brought the donkey and the colt, and put their

cloaks on them, and he sat on them. A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. The crowds that went ahead of him and that followed were shouting,

"Hosanna to the Son of David!

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!
Hosanna in the highest heaven!"

Matthew 21.1–9

Reflections on the reading

At the start of Lent many Christians are marked with the sign of the cross. As Bishop Steven reminded us in the video, this mark is made using ashes created by burning last year's palm crosses, an action that reminds us of the beginning and end of our journey – "Remember that you are dust, and to dust you will return."

This is a summary of the human journey: birth to death. On the face of it, it's a bit sad: we are born, we travel through our lives, and when we come to the end we die and return to the earth.

This is the same journey undertaken by the palm leaf used to make the ashes. It came into life as a sapling, grew, then was eventually cut down and burnt, returning it to the simple carbon atoms from which it was made.

But this is not the only journey that the leaf has taken. In between it was turned into palm crosses, celebrating the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem, riding on a donkey. As Jesus entered the city people threw palm leaves in front of him as a way of honouring their Messiah. As Christians we celebrate this every year by making palm crosses and giving them out on Palm Sunday, the final Sunday before Easter.

This means that at the start of Lent we are marked by the palm crosses we used to celebrate the end of Lent last year. These palm crosses have taken a new, special journey – travelling with Christians through the year. Their final end – being burnt and returned to carbon atoms – is itself used to mark the start of the journey of Lent which we know will again end with the celebration of Christ's triumph. This is a very different journey – in death we see new life!

This is the great story of Jesus Christ. His journey doesn't end with death but with resurrection. Baptism – as Paul says in Romans 6.4 – is our chance to join in with Christ's journey. We are marked with the Holy Spirit and the path of our lives is changed forever, altering that journey from dust to dust with the offer of new life at the end. As Bishop Steven says, the font is a sign of a much greater spiritual reality. This greater reality is the life and death and resurrection of Jesus and the gift of the Holy Spirit, the fire and breath of God. When we are baptised we are baptised into Jesus.

Baptism isn't the end of the journey but the beginning of a new path. Bishop Steven also reminds us that the font is the place we are set free from slavery and begin a new life with Christ. It's the place where we begin the lifelong journey of turning away from sin and towards faith in Christ.

Just like the palm crosses, our story is changed, not ended. We are offered a new way of travelling through life that doesn't end at death but begins with the triumph of Christ over death. Baptism is not the end of our journey but the start. The start of a new life travelling with Jesus as our guide.

Introductory questions

It is good practice to give participants the space to ask their own questions but if you need some pointers to generate further conversation you can use one or more of the questions below.

- How do you respond to the offer of a different journey?
- Why do you think that the font is traditionally located by the front door of a church?
- What do you think about the way the story of the leaf is changed by being transformed into palm crosses?
- What was Jesus' journey?
- If you haven't been baptised, what do you think of God's call to travel a different road?

Going deeper

- What milestones do you think mark the Christian journey?
- What do you think it means to reject sin and turn to Christ?
- How might the human journey be different from the journey of other animals?

Concluding prayers

The Contemplative Toolkit **Stilling** practice can be used at the end of your meeting.

Next steps for everyday faith

Take some time this week – either five minutes to yourself or as part of your prayers – to reflect on the journey of your life and what difference it would make to take seriously Jesus' invitation to travel a new path with him.

Optional

You may like to share the following reading and ask people to reflect on the idea of journeying with Christ.

"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house there are many dwelling-places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also. And you know the way to the place where I am going." Thomas said to him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him."

John 14.1–7

Week 2: The waters of cleansing

Gathering and reconnecting

To help people settle, take time to reconnect, hear how people are.

Opening prayer

Holy Father, cleanse us that we may have hearts and souls open to faith and to the message of salvation in your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen

Conversation starter

Where have you seen God at work this week?

Opening a discussion

- How did you feel after last week's session?
- How did you get on with the next steps for everyday faith?

Weekly film from Bishop Steven

This can be watched together and/or you can agree to watch before you meet.

Based on the film and daily reflections this week:

- What have you heard that intrigued you?
- What challenged you or left you with a question?

Reading

Then an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Get up and go towards the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." (This is a wilderness road.) So he got up and went. Now there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of the Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, in charge of her entire treasury. He had come to Jerusalem to worship and was returning home; seated in his chariot, he was reading the prophet Isaiah. Then the Spirit said to Philip, "Go over to this chariot and join it." So Philip ran up to it and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah. He asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?" He replied, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip to get in and sit beside him. Now the passage of the scripture that he was reading was this:

"Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter, and like a lamb silent before its shearer, so he does not open his mouth. In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who can describe his generation? For his life is taken away from the earth."

The eunuch asked Philip, "About whom, may I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?" Then Philip began to speak, and starting with this scripture, he proclaimed to him the good news about Jesus. As they were going along the road, they came to some water; and the eunuch said, "Look, here is water! What is to prevent me from being baptised?" He commanded the chariot to stop, and both of them, Philip and the eunuch, went down into the water, and Philip baptised him. When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing.

Acts 8.26–39

Reflections on the reading

This week's theme is all about the transformation that comes through the washing of baptism but, as Bishop Steven says, "the power of baptism is, of course, not in itself." Baptism doesn't happen in isolation and without the context of faith it is powerless. If baptism is to have an effect it needs three things: it needs the Holy Spirit, it needs someone to offer the gift of Christ, and it needs someone who is ready to receive it.

The story of the Ethiopian eunuch is one of the examples mentioned by the bishop in today's video. It's a wonderful story of the Holy Spirit directing Philip to share the gospel of Christ and, in turn, the joyous reception of the gospel by the Ethiopian man.

It's also a reminder of the importance of journeying together as a church community. The whole story happens in the context of a journey. At the prompting of the Holy Spirit Philip joins a party of pilgrims heading south out of Jerusalem and, hearing one of the other travellers reading Isaiah, he takes the opportunity to strike up a conversation about Christ.

It's a simple encounter on the open road but the context of an extended period of time journeying together gives Philip and the Ethiopian man the opportunity to talk

about faith. Bishop Steven tells us, "in the early years of the church it was normal to be baptised as an adult, often following a long period of preparation lasting several years." Becoming a Christian was a journey that took time, through a period of learning about faith and getting ready to become a member of the community. This was not a journey taken alone, though. The existing members of the church walked alongside the one to be baptised, preparing to be transformed by welcoming a new member into their midst.

What's interesting about this story is that the ending is really the beginning. It ends with the baptism of the Ethiopian man but the beginning of his life of faith in Christ. Even though we don't hear of him again in the Bible, Church tradition tells that he went away and founded a church in Ethiopia which eventually became the Ethiopian and Eritrean Orthodox Churches, still going strong today.

In baptism Christians are made ready to live a life of faith. As Bishop Steven says, "The people made from dust and earth are washed, forgiven, cleansed and healed. Some may not have been baptised; this is an opportunity to seek this new beginning of baptism and find healing, rest and peace. Others may have been baptised many years ago; this is an opportunity to come to the font again at Easter and renew your baptismal promises and recover your first love."

Regardless of where you are on your journey, baptism calls you to be transformed and to begin – or begin again – your journey with Jesus.

Introductory questions

It is good practice to give participants the space to ask their own questions but if you need some pointers to generate further conversation you can use one or more of the questions below.

- Have you been baptised?
- Do you think of your life as walking with Jesus?

- How can church act as a community traveling together?
- How could you open yourself up to being transformed by baptism and faith?
- Why might church be important to the practice of faith?
- What do we do as a church community to help people walk on their journey with Christ?

Going deeper

- What does it mean to be cleansed from sin?
- How does the Holy Spirit work in this passage?
- What would help you share your faith like Philip?

Concluding prayers

The Contemplative Toolkit practice **Noticing** can be used at the end of your meeting.

Next steps for everyday faith

Try to take time every day this week to thank God for somebody in your life who has journeyed with you for a long or short time. Those who travel with us shape our lives. Sometimes that can be frustrating, but it is still good to remember the times they have positively supported us in our lives and express gratitude for their presence with us.

Optional

You may like to share the following reading for reflection:

But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us.

Ephesians 2.13–14

Week 3: The waters of salvation

Gathering and reconnecting

To help people settle, take time to reconnect, hear how people are.

Opening prayer

Lord, thank you for this time together. We pray for your help to support and care for each other as we learn more about you through this course and our lives. Amen

Conversation starter

Where have you seen God or love this week?

Opening a discussion

- How did you feel after last week's session?
- How did you get on with the next steps for everyday faith?

Weekly film from Bishop Steven

This can be watched together and/or you can agree to watch before you meet.

Based on the film and daily reflections this week:

- What have you heard that intrigued you?
- What challenged you or left you with a question?

Reading

There were the Egyptians advancing on them. In great fear the Israelites cried out to the Lord. They said to Moses, "Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? What have you done to us, bringing us out of Egypt? Is this not the very thing we told you in Egypt, 'Let us alone and let us serve the Egyptians'? For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness." But Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid, stand firm, and see the deliverance that the Lord will accomplish for you today; for the Egyptians whom you see today you shall never see again. The Lord will fight for you, and you have only to keep still."

Then the Lord said to Moses, "Why do you cry out to me? Tell the Israelites to go forward. But you lift up your staff, and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it, that the Israelites may go into the sea on dry ground. Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea. The Lord drove the sea back by a strong east wind all night,

and turned the sea into dry land; and the waters were divided. The Israelites went into the sea on dry ground, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left.

Exodus 14.10b–16,21–22

Reflections on the reading

The Crossing of the Red Sea is one of the most famous stories from the Old Testament. Pursued by the Egyptians, trapped between their former slave-masters and the sea, the Israelites start to panic. God, if anything, seems baffled by their response, probably because it must have seemed obvious to the Lord what to do, but it's doubtful that any of the Israelites foresaw what happened next. God divides the sea in two and the people walk through, as if walking on dry land!

As Bishop Steven tells us in today's video, throughout Christian history this story has been seen as one of the most important metaphors in the Old Testament, pointing to the place of baptism in the journey of faith. It is a sign of the need for us to "pass through the water" in order to escape from the slavery of sin to the freedom of new life in Christ.

Once again it is the story of a journey and once again it is not the end but the start. The Israelites are called by God to travel through the heart of the sea and out the other side into the freedom he has promised for his people, but it's only after they've crossed over that the Israelites begin their forty years of wandering in the desert as they search for the promised land.

Before they could take the first step on that journey, before even they could pass through the water, the Israelites had to overcome their disbelief. In the story they're angry with Moses because they think he has sold them up the river by bringing them to the edge of freedom, only for them to die at the hands of their slavers. God appears bemused and frustrated by their response. They didn't believe that the Lord would fulfil the promise to them, and so getting over the sea to safety seemed impossible.

Baptism asks more than just a commitment from us. It asks us to change our way of thinking through repentance. You may be familiar with the word repentance, but it's often forgotten that its meaning is not just about a rejection of sin but a change of mind (or attitude) that makes Jesus and the love he offers the key to how we live our lives.

Bishop Steven says that “everyone who lays down their life for others, who dies to self, who gives themselves away, will keep it and find the deepest joy and fulfilment we can know. This dying to self is not once and for all. It’s a daily commitment to costly discipleship which lives out our baptism every day of our lives.”

There is no doubt that this asks a lot of us and, as the bishop tells us, it’s not a one-time thing but something faithful Christians should be doing every day as we try to travel our journey of life with Jesus. The story of the crossing of the Red Sea reminds us that what might seem to us impossible, is possible with God’s help. Before we take the first step on our journey, through baptism, we must put aside the old way of thinking and open ourselves to the belief that, with the help of Christ, living like this is truly possible.

Introductory questions

It is good practice to give participants the space to ask their own questions but if you need some pointers to generate further conversation you can use one or more of the questions below.

- How do Christians live with repentance in the way we have discussed today?
- How do Christians struggle to live with repentance in the way we have discussed today?
- What do you think of the call to die with Christ?
- What might this change of mind look like in your life?
- How could you open yourself up to this new way of thinking?

Going deeper

- What other Bible passages do you know that feature the idea of death and rebirth/new life?
- What examples do you know from the saints of lives lived for God?
- What does death mean in the example of Bonhoeffer?

Concluding prayers

The Contemplative Toolkit **Dwelling** practice can be used at the end of your meeting.

Next steps for everyday faith

This week try to notice when you act a little selfishly. Don’t hang on to any guilt about this but do ask yourself, how might I have responded differently?

Optional

You may like to share the following reading for further reflection:

For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin. For whoever has died is freed from sin. But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. The death he died, he died to sin, once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Romans 6.5–11

Week 4: The water of life

Gathering and reconnecting

To help people settle, take time to reconnect, hear how people are. If need be, remind each other of names, perhaps share a joy and challenge from the week.

Opening prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, you gave your whole life in service to the world and told us that there is no greater love than to lay down our lives for our friends. Help us to be ready to love the world as you do, and support us as we journey with you in faith. Amen

Conversation starter

Where have you seen God or love this week?

Acts 18.24–19.7

Opening a discussion

- How did you feel after last week's session?
- How did you get on with the next steps for everyday faith?

Weekly film from Bishop Steven

This can be watched together or you can agree to watch before you meet.

Based on the film and daily reflections this week:

- What have you heard that intrigued you?
- What challenged you or left you with a question?

Reading

Now there came to Ephesus a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria. He was an eloquent man, well-versed in the scriptures. He had been instructed in the Way of the Lord; and he spoke with burning enthusiasm and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus, though he knew only the baptism of John. He began to speak boldly in the synagogue; but when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained the Way of God to him more accurately. And when he wished to cross over to Achaia, the believers encouraged him and wrote to the disciples to welcome him. On his arrival he greatly helped those who through grace had become believers, for he powerfully refuted the Jews in public, showing by the scriptures that the Messiah is Jesus.

While Apollos was in Corinth, Paul passed through the inland regions and came to Ephesus, where he found some disciples. He said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you became believers?" They replied, "No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit." Then he said, "Into what then were you baptised?" They answered, "Into John's baptism." Paul said, "John baptised with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, in Jesus." On hearing this, they were baptised in the name of the Lord Jesus. When Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied—altogether there were about twelve of them.

Reflections on the reading

In the early church the apostles were finding that they were meeting people who were called Christians but whose baptism appeared incomplete. They realised that even though they had been baptised in water, they had not yet received the Holy Spirit.

This is why they made sure to pass on the Holy Spirit when they baptised people. As Bishop Steven says, those baptised as adults are normally confirmed straight away with the words "Let your Holy Spirit rest upon them: the Spirit of wisdom and understanding; the Spirit of counsel and inward strength; the Spirit of knowledge and true godliness". This process is called confirmation because it literally confirms that following baptism the new member of the church has received the Holy Spirit.

It's interesting to note, though, that there is this difference between the baptism by water and the presence of the Holy Spirit. One doesn't necessarily imply the other. In week two we established that baptism needs three things: it needs the Holy Spirit, it needs someone to offer the gift, and it needs someone who is ready to receive it. Last week we discussed the change of mind that comes before we can receive God's gifts. This week we come to baptism as a gift of the Holy Spirit.

In the reading today the people of Ephesus that Paul met had received John's baptism. That is, they'd gone through the process of being immersed or sprinkled with water and accepted the need to change their minds in order to become followers of Christ.

Even so, they still lacked something because they'd never heard of the Holy Spirit. This tells us that repentance itself is not enough; someone has to share the Spirit with us.

The passage also shows us that this gift is very physical. Just as baptism requires us to use real water, the passing of the Holy Spirit is done by the physical laying-on of hands.

Reception of the Holy Spirit is a gift from one person to another. The Spirit flows through those people who have received and pass on the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is the river in Ezekiel and the living water spoken of by Jesus. Remember the words of Christ, read by Bishop Steven in today's video:

"Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, 'Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water.'" Now he said this about the Spirit, which believers in him were to receive.

John 7.37b–39a

As Bishop Steven says, this living water flowing from Jesus to the believers is an image of Jesus giving us the gift of the Spirit. As believers we are called both to receive and pass on the Spirit. A constant flow of gift-giving marks our journey of faith with love through the giving and receiving of the Holy Spirit.

Introductory questions

It is good practice to give participants the space to ask their own questions but if you need some pointers to generate further conversation you can use one or more of the questions below.

- What does it mean to share the Holy Spirit?
- Are there ways to share the Holy Spirit outside of baptism and confirmation?

- Have you been confirmed?
- What examples can you think of where someone has shared the Holy Spirit?
- How might Christians be able to give – as well as receive – the Holy Spirit?
- When have you seen Christians practise the laying-on of hands?

Going deeper

- What is the difference between repentance and the in-dwelling of the Holy Spirit?
- Why is the sacrament of confirmation important?
- Why do you think the bishop is the one who confirms believers?
- Why do you think evangelism is an important part of being a Christian?

Concluding prayers

The Contemplative Toolkit **Mending** practice can be used at the end of your meeting.

Next steps for everyday faith

See if you can find an opportunity to share the Holy Spirit through a demonstration of God's love or by an opportunity for evangelism during the week.

Optional

You may like to share the following reading for further reflection:

John proclaimed, "The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. I have baptised you with water; but he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit."

Mark 1.7–8

Week 5: The breath of God

Gathering and reconnecting

To help people settle, take time to reconnect, hear how people are.

Opening prayer

Holy Father, we ask you to send the Holy Spirit among us as we meet together today. May your Spirit come to us as a gift and bind us together in the love of friendship. Amen

Conversation starter

Where have you seen God or love this week?

Opening a discussion

- How did you feel after last week's session?
- How did you get on with the next steps for everyday faith?

Weekly film from Bishop Steven

This can be watched together or you can agree to watch before you meet.

Based on the film and daily reflections this week:

- What have you heard that intrigued you?
- What challenged you or left you with a question?

Reading

"If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you for ever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you."

"... the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid. You heard me say to you, 'I am going away, and I am coming to you.' If you loved me, you would rejoice that I am going to the Father, because the Father is greater than I. And now I have told you this before it occurs, so that when it does occur, you may

believe. I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming. He has no power over me; but I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father. Rise, let us be on our way."

John 14.15–17, 26–31

Reflections on the reading

Bishop Steven ends his video today saying who the Holy Spirit is:

"The Spirit will be our teacher; the Spirit will be our friend and companion; the Spirit will bring a peace which passes understanding, joy in the midst of sorrow, strength in times of trial, guidance when we are perplexed. The gift of the Spirit is the breath of God, filling the hearts and minds of the believer.

This is what we pray for in services of baptism and confirmation, that the very breath of God, the Holy Spirit, will make his home in the life of every Christian, and that every Christian's life will be joined to the life of God, now and for all eternity."

This is who the Holy Spirit is: the presence of God in our lives. Last week we discussed the Spirit as a gift shared person-to-person. The very first person to share this gift with us was Jesus himself. Through his ministry he gave the Spirit to the disciples, telling them to go out and share this gift with the whole world.

The Spirit is a person too, though. This is one of the most important beliefs of Christianity. Just as much as Jesus is a person who loves us, the Father and the Holy Spirit are persons who love us too. Most importantly, they are all God; the one God whom we meet as three distinct persons.

And we meet all three of the persons of God in today's passage. They can all be seen working together, but with unique roles. The Father is the one who sends Jesus and the Spirit. Jesus undertakes his earthly ministry through his birth, death and resurrection. The Holy Spirit is the person who stays with us; who travels the road together with us, guiding us along the new path of faith we talked about in week one.

Notice that the same phrase appears here and in the upper room after the resurrection mentioned in the example of Bishop Steven:

Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit."

John 20.21–22

When we open our hearts to the presence of the Holy Spirit we receive the gift of the peace of Christ. This is both an inward and an outward peace, and it is not necessarily an easy peace to hold on to, but through baptism and confirmation the Holy Spirit comes to dwell in us and promises to support us as we journey through our lives, helping to bring us back to that peace whenever we can't find our own way home.

Perhaps we might define this peace as a living memory – the memory that God is with us, not just in the historical person of Jesus, but in the ongoing presence of the Holy Spirit walking alongside us. Whenever we feel lost or alone we can remember this and hopefully take comfort and peace from his presence.

Introductory questions

It is good practice to give participants the space to ask their own questions but if you need some pointers to generate further conversation you can use one or more of the questions below.

- How do you feel about today's message?
- We dealt with some complicated ideas today; how did you find them?
- What does the Holy Spirit mean to you?
- How does it make you feel to remember that the Holy Spirit stays with us?
- What do you think Jesus might mean when he says "peace"?
- Is there anything we can do to make the world more peaceful?

Going deeper

- This week we have seen the one God in three persons. What does that mean to you?
- Do you know any other Bible passages that talk about peace?
- What do you think the Holy Spirit's role is within the Trinity?
- Do you know any other Bible passages talking about the Spirit?
- Have you discovered anything new about the Holy Trinity this week?

Concluding prayers

The Contemplative Toolkit **Blessing** practice can be used at the end of your meeting.

Next steps for everyday faith

Try to pause every day this week for thirty seconds. Close your eyes and remember that the Holy Spirit is with you and loves you. Try to take comfort in this peaceful presence in the midst of your life.

Optional

You may like to share the following reading:

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.

Philippians 4.4–9

Week 6: New fire

Gathering and reconnecting

To help people settle, take time to reconnect, hear how people are.

Opening prayer

Lord Jesus, thank you for guiding us through this season of Lent and our exploration of baptism. Help us to tread the path to which you call us, as servants of your kingdom. Amen

Conversation starter

Where have you seen God at work this week?

Opening a discussion

- How did you feel after last week's session?
- How did you get on with the next steps for everyday faith?

Weekly film from Bishop Steven

This can be watched together or you can agree to watch before you meet.

Based on the film and daily reflections this week:

- What have you heard that intrigued you?
- What challenged you or left you with a question?

Reading

Now when they heard Peter talking about the Messiah, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and to the other apostles, "Brothers, what should we do?" Peter said to them, "Repent, and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him." And he testified with many other arguments and exhorted them, saying, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation." So those who welcomed his message were baptised, and that day about three thousand persons were added. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute

the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

Acts 2.37–47

Reflections on the reading

In this week's video Bishop Steven talks about the transformation of fire offered by the Holy Spirit. This is like the change of mind that comes when we "pass through the water" of baptism that we discussed in week three.

These seemingly opposing forces – water and fire – work together in baptism to change us. The water washes away the sins of the past that hold us back from a relationship with God while the fire purifies us in the same way that a jeweller purifies gold and silver in a furnace.

But the fire burns without destruction. It's not that we are completely destroyed and have to start again, rather the fire burns away those bits of us that keep us trapped in the negative thoughts and habits of the past. We can then live as we were supposed to – in the peace and love of God.

As we saw in week one, this isn't an annihilation of the path of our life but a new direction. We are prepared in baptism to walk the path that God sets out for us, with the Holy Spirit as our guide. Sticking to this path is an ongoing journey. Those old negative thoughts and habits constantly try to return and drag us back to where we started so that every day we must choose again the path set out for us in baptism.

This isn't always easy. Jesus himself says:

"Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the road is easy that leads to destruction, and there are many who take it. For the gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life, and there are few who find it."

Matthew 7.13–14

Sometimes we will fail to choose the right path, but the way is never closed to us; it only takes a fresh choice to walk it and we can find our way back. Some church traditions practise confession (or reconciliation), which is a tangible way to make the choice to return to God's

path by confessing our sins to Christ out loud. Whether or not your own church tradition involves confession, God stands ready to forgive us when we stray from his path.

The great prophet Nehemiah, when talking to God about people falling back into sin, says to him:

"... you are a God ready to forgive, gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and you did not forsake them."

Nehemiah 9.17c

Our Father does not hold grudges against us. If we fall he wants us to find our way back to him and, as we saw last week, he has sent the Holy Spirit to stay with us and guide our way back to him whenever we stumble on our journey. We need only to ask for his help.

Will you ask?

Introductory questions

It is good practice to give participants the space to ask their own questions but if you need some pointers to generate further conversation you can use one or more of the questions below.

- How might God's way be different from the normal path?
- How has your understanding of baptism developed through this course?
- Why is it important to remember and refresh our baptismal vows?
- If you haven't been baptised, what do you think of God's call to travel a different road?
- If you haven't been baptised, how might you respond to the invitation to baptism?
- What do you think about baptism as fire and water?

Going deeper

- As we come to the end of this course, what is your understanding of the sacrament of baptism?
- How is confession (or reconciliation) important to the journey of faith?

- What does it mean to be purified like silver and gold?

Concluding prayers

You may like to offer a personal prayer for renewal in the life of the Spirit?

The Contemplative Toolkit **Filling** practice can be used at the end of your meeting.

Next steps for everyday faith

- How might you put what we have learnt into practice in your faith journey?
- What are the next couple of steps in your faith journey?

To help you continue to grow in your faith there are courses for individuals and small groups on the diocesan Learning Hub.

Sign up to eNews for details of the latest courses, training, quiet days and retreats, all designed to help you explore prayer, the scriptures, your gifts and vocation, and much more.

oxford.anglican.org/email-sign-up

Optional

You may like to share the following reading:

Happy are those
who do not follow the advice of the wicked,
or take the path that sinners tread,
or sit in the seat of scoffers;
but their delight is in the law of the Lord,
and on his law they meditate day and night.
They are like trees
planted by streams of water,
which yield their fruit in its season,
and their leaves do not wither.
In all that they do, they prosper.

The wicked are not so,
but are like chaff that the wind drives away.
Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgement,
nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous;
for the Lord watches over the way of the righteous,
but the way of the wicked will perish.

Psalm 1

Contemplative Toolkit Practices

For each practice there is a page which can be given out to participants. On the back is a script for the course leader if the practice is to be used in your weekly session.

Stilling – seeing things more clearly

In our busy world, we often forget the ancient wisdom that we are human beings not human doings.

Noticing – becoming aware of how life can energise or drain us

This practice is about noticing apparently small and insignificant details of life and realising that they are signs pointing to personal, spiritual and community truth.

Dwelling – finding meaning in the words of the Bible

Christians believe that God uses the Bible to communicate with us. This practice is about the way the Bible can 'come alive' as we read it.

Mending – forgiveness and healing

As we move through these practices, we touch on some of the more difficult aspects of life: addressing the hurt within ourselves.

Blessing – focusing on human flourishing and growth

In this practice, we use the tree of life as a symbol to think about how we can be blessed and how we might bless others.

Filling – the presence of the Holy Spirit

In this practice we notice where we feel spiritually empty, and open ourselves up to the flow of God's life-bringing Spirit.

Stilling

Stilling is a powerful practice. In our busy world we often forget the ancient wisdom that we are human beings not human doings.

For this practice you sit still, notice your breathing and gently call to mind good things received, difficult burdens carried or things you long for. This helps you become more grateful, humbler and more purposeful. It is also a beautiful and profound way to pray, and Christians have been doing it for most of their history.

1. Place

Find a comfortable chair, and maybe a cushion, in a place where you will be undisturbed for 10 minutes. Bring a rug or blanket if you like.

2. Posture

Sit back in the chair, upright and alert but at ease. You could support your back with the cushion and wrap the rug around you. Put your feet flat on the floor if possible. Check your neck and shoulders – are they relaxed?

7. Pray

Psalm 46 says: 'Be still and know that I am God'. As you finish, say these words to yourself a couple of times as you slowly breathe in and out.

6. Palms up – please

Imagine someone is placing something good into your hands. What do you long for deep inside? It might be for yourself or for others. Ask God for this: 'Please God...'



5. Palms down – sorry/sorrow

Imagine you are dropping or letting go of something; it might feel heavy, sad, tiring, burdensome or shameful.

It might be something you've done, or something that was done to you.

You might want to say sorry, or say sorry to God: 'God, I feel sorry/sad about _____. Help me to let go.'

3. Presence

Breathe in slowly, counting to three:

1... 2... 3.

Visualise or feel what you hope to receive from this time.

Then breathe out slowly counting to three:

1... 2... 3.

Let go of anything that feels heavy or difficult about today. It's often helpful to close your eyes.

4. Palms up – thank you

Turn the palms of your hands upwards. Call to mind good things from the past day, weekend, week, the good things placed into your hands. Christians believe that God creates all good things in our world. You can thank God for those good things: 'Thank you God for...'

Stilling

Stilling is an ancient form of prayer that helps us to slow down to be human beings, not just human doings.

Relax. This is not all down to you; in fact you are part of the receiving.

Breathe deeply, smile for yourself. It is important that we reduce our own anxiety to be comfortable holding the silence and space needed.

Smile, breathe and make eye contact with each person in the group.

Explain that you are going to be practising stillness together as it is a great thing to do! It reduces our stress and our anxiety, and it enables us to be more present to the now, to God, to ourselves and to others. It is a deeper, happier way of being.

And once again, smile, breathe and make eye contact with each person in the group.

Script

I invite you all to sit comfortably and in a way that is balanced, leaning neither forwards nor backwards.¹ Now close your eyes.

The Bible says, “Be still and know that I am God” (pause).

Now, simply smile and breathe (pause).

Be aware of your breathing, feel the breath coming in, and your breath going out. Try and lengthen the in-breath, breathing not just from your chest, but from your belly. Try and lengthen the out breath too (pause).

You may find it helpful to bring to mind the words “Be still and know” as you inhale, then “that I am God” as you exhale.

If you find your mind racing during this practice, return to this breathing pattern.

When you are ready, you might like to place your hands on your knees, palms upwards. Think about the good things you have received from today, from the weekend, or from the last week. You are invited to thank God for these gifts.

KEEP SILENCE 1 minute (or more)

Next, place your hands facing palms down on your knees. Imagine you are now dropping things. These might be things that feel heavy, tiring, shameful, burdensome, difficult or awkward to carry. Let go of them.

KEEP SILENCE 1 minute (or more)

Finally, turn your palms upwards on your knees, ready to receive. What would you like to receive in the rest of the day or the days ahead? What do you long for in the deepest core of your being? You are invited to bring this to mind or to offer it to God.

KEEP SILENCE 1 minute (or more)

Once again, God reminds us through the psalmist, “Be still and know that I am God.” (pause).

[You may want to offer a simple prayer here drawing the time to a close]

I invite you now to open your eyes, bring your attention back into the room, have a stretch, and smile.

Stilling

Stilling is a powerful practice. In our busy world we often forget the ancient wisdom that we are human beings not human doings.

For the practice you sit still, notice your breathing and gently call to mind good things received; difficult burdens carried or things you long for. This helps you become more grateful, humble and more purposeful. It is also a beautiful and profound way to pray, and Christians have been doing it for most of their history.

1. Place

Find a comfortable chair, and maybe a cushion, in a place where you will be undisturbed for 10 minutes. Bring a rug or blanket if you like.

2. Posture

Sit back in the chair, upright and alert but at ease. You could support your back with the cushion and wrap the rug around you. Put your feet flat on the floor if possible. Check your neck and shoulders – are they relaxed?

7. Pray

Place 40 eyes. Sit still and know that I am God. As you think, let these words be yourself a couple of times as you slowly breathe in and out.

6. Palms up – please

Imagine someone is placing something good into your hands. What do you long for (what would it be)? It might be for yourself or for others. Ask God for this: “Please God...”



Imagine someone is placing something good into your hands. What do you long for (what would it be)? It might be for yourself or for others. Ask God for this: “Please God...”

5. Palms down – sorry/sorrow

Imagine you are dropping or letting go of something. It might feel heavy, sad, tiring, burdensome or shameful. It might be something you've done, or something that was done to you. You might want to say sorry or say sorry to God: “God, I feel sorry/sad about... Help me to let go.”

3. Presence

Breathe in slowly, counting to three.

1... 2... 3.

Visualise or feel what you hope to receive from this time.

Then breathe out slowly counting to three.

1... 2... 3.

Let go of anything that feels heavy or difficult about today. It's often helpful to close your eyes.

4. Palms up – thank you

Turn the palms of your hands upwards. Call to mind good things from the past day, weekend, week, the good things placed into your hands. Christians believe that God creates all good things in our world. You can thank God for those good things. “Thank you God for...”

oxford.anglican.org/come-and-see

COME AND SEE

Print out the previous page for your group. Individual sheets are available to download from the website.

¹ We create a lot of strain on ourselves when we are using muscles to support the head rather than our head being supported down through the spine.

Noticing

This practice is based on a simple spiritual tool developed by St Ignatius of Loyola. It is about noticing apparently small and insignificant details of life and realising that they are signs pointing to personal, spiritual and community truth.

You are invited to notice times of consolation, when you feel energised, alive and full of life and possibility, as well as times of desolation, when you feel empty, drained, hopeless and lacking in energy and vitality. Open your hand. Start by touching your thumb, and then touch each finger in turn.

2. Where is God?

This is the index or pointing finger. It asks the question 'Where?' Withdraw a little from the busyness of the day. Take time to step into the stillness. Where did you find goodness? Christians believe God is the source of everything good.

3. What has stood out?

The tallest finger stands out. What has stood out in your day? Rewind the day, calling to mind the people you have met, the situations you encountered. If you were to write the newspaper headline for today, what would it be?

4. Where have you been at your weakest?

The fourth finger is the weakest finger. What might you have done differently today? Where have you not lived up to your commitments to yourself, to others, the world, or God? Where might you have hurt others and failed to notice at the time? Say or pray 'sorry'. You can ask for God's help.

1. What has been good?

A thumbs-up denotes what is good. What do you have to be grateful for? Think about where you have been blessed. You can thank God for those moments.

5. What little change can you make?

The little finger provides balance when writing, typing, or holding a cup. Is there anything in your life which is out of balance and needs adjusting? What small change could you make to rebalance your life and the world around you?



Noticing

Relax and remember this is not all down to you; you're part of the receiving. Breathe deeply, smile for yourself. Then smile, breathe and make eye contact with each person in the group.

Explain the Noticing practice that you're going to do together is a form of the "Examen", an ancient and simple practice developed by St Ignatius of Loyola. Through it, we pay attention to seemingly small details in our lives that, if we engage with them, help us to grow spiritually.

Remember to smile, breathe and make eye contact with each person in the group before you begin.

Script

I invite you all to sit comfortably and in a way that is balanced, leaning neither forwards nor backwards. You may want to close your eyes.

Now, simply smile and breathe (pause).

Be aware of your breathing; feel the breath coming in and your breath going out. Try and lengthen the in-breath breathing not just from your chest but from your belly. Try and extend the out-breath, too. If you find your mind racing, return to this breathing practice (pause).

When you are ready, open one hand, touching the thumb with your other hand.

A thumbs up denotes what is good. Bring to mind the things that you are grateful for, the ways in which you feel blessed. Name, and thank God for these things.

KEEP SILENCE 1 minute (or more)

Next, touch your index or pointing finger. It asks the question, "Where?" Bring to mind where you have seen good. Where have you sensed God at work?

KEEP SILENCE 1 minute (or more)

Next, point to or hold the tallest finger. What has stood out in your day? Call to mind the people you have met, the situations you have found yourself in, and the things that you've experienced. If you were to write a headline for today, what would it be?

KEEP SILENCE 1 minute (or more)

Now touch your fourth finger. This is considered to be the weakest finger: it prompts us to explore what we might have done differently today. Where have you not lived up to your commitment to yourself, to others, to God, and to the world? Where might you have hurt someone, maybe not noticing at the time?

KEEP SILENCE 1 minute (or more)

Now, hold the little finger, the smallest finger that brings balance to tasks like writing or holding a cup. Is there anything in your life that is out of balance and needs change or adjustment? What small changes could you make for another day that will bring more balance to your life and the world around you?

KEEP SILENCE 1 minute (or more)

[You may want to offer a simple prayer here drawing the time to a close]

I invite you now to open your eyes, bring your attention back into the room, have a stretch, and smile.

Noticing

This practice is based on a simple spiritual tool developed by St Ignatius of Loyola. It is about noticing apparently small and insignificant details of life and realising that they are signs pointing to personal, spiritual and community truth.

You are invited to notice times of consolation, when you feel energised, alive and full of life and possibility, as well as times of desolation, when you feel empty, drained, hopeless and lacking in energy and vitality. Open your hand. Start by touching your thumb, and then touch each finger in turn.



oxford.anglican.org/come-and-see

COME AND SEE

Print out the previous page for your group. Individual sheets are available to download from the website.

Dwelling

Christians believe that God uses the Bible to communicate with us. This practice is about the way the Bible can 'come alive' as you read it.

It's a way of reading a passage which goes back to St Benedict in the sixth century. It isn't about looking for the right answer to a question or increasing your knowledge. It's about finding individual words or phrases which resonate with you or challenge you, and then wondering why. You pay attention to the words that feel good or catch your attention, and the way you respond to them.

1. Place

Find a comfortable seat, in a place where you won't be disturbed for 10 minutes. You will also need a short passage from the Bible. You could use a psalm. Bring a pencil and something to write on.

2. Grace

Take some slow deep breaths as you count to three, and then breathe out slowly, also counting to three. The word 'grace' is another word for a gift. What gift do you want or need from this time? Express it clearly to yourself and, if you want, to God.

3. Space

Read the passage very slowly to yourself a few times, out loud or in your head. St Benedict, who pioneered this exercise, asks us to imagine that we are a cow chewing the cud. What words or phrases 'taste' good or draw your attention? You could imagine that you are 'in the passage' as one of the characters.

6. Finish

As you think about today's practice, what are you grateful for? God loves to hear even the shortest prayer saying 'thank you' for the good things that he gives us.



4. Face to face

Imagine you are having a conversation, face to face, with Jesus or someone you deeply respect about what you found in the passage. Explain why it felt important to you. Imagine what they would say back to you.

5. Trace

It can be helpful to trace your responses to the Bible over time. Often certain ideas or themes return or develop. Jot your ideas in a journal with the date. Christians believe that God communicates with us through these gentle nudges and prompts as the Holy Spirit speaks to us.

Dwelling

Make sure everyone has copies of the Bible passage you are going to use.

Relax and start in the same way that you have the previous two practices. Explain that you are going to be “Dwelling” together in a passage of scripture, seeing where our attention is drawn and sharing that with others.

Script

I invite you to sit up, and to centre yourselves as we have done with the other practices.

Now, simply smile and breathe (pause).

In this session, we are going to practise ‘Dwelling in the Word’ together. We’re going to hear a piece of scripture read out twice.

As you’re listening, pay attention to a word or phrase that attracts your attention. You don’t need to know or analyse why your attention is drawn to that phrase, just observe what it is and ponder why your attention was drawn to it.

After a pause, I’ll invite you to pair up with someone else. Try to pick someone you don’t know particularly well, and give each other the gift of listening. Share what each of you noticed and have a conversation about it.

Pay attention to what your partner shares because I’ll be asking you to tell another pair what you heard your partner say. But first, let’s gather ourselves ready to listen to the scripture.

Would anyone like to read the text out for us? We need two readers. Thank you [name], you read first, and [name] you go second after a pause. If you’re unsure how long the pause should be, you can count silently to 30 or look at me for a signal.

PAUSE then reader 1.

PAUSE for 1 minute, then reader 2.

So, I invite you to find a partner and share what you each noticed. Remember to listen well and pay attention so you can share what you hear. You can write some notes down if it would help.

Give time for each person to share in the pair.

Now it’s time for your pair to find another pair and in your group of four, share what you have heard your partner say.

Bring the group back to quiet and stillness. Pause

You might invite people to share what they have heard or you might prefer for the conversation in fours to mark the end of the session.

Smile, breathe and make eye contact with each person in the group.

Acknowledge the end of the practice, maybe ending with a short prayer or blessing.



Print out the previous page for your group. Individual sheets are available to download from the website.

Mending

As we move through these practices, we touch on some of the more difficult aspects of life. We address the hurt within ourselves. You can decide whether you choose something small or something big to offer to God for mending and healing.

For this practice you ideally need a stone or pebble which fits in your hand, but you could use something else which feels heavy. The practice focuses on forgiveness: forgiving others, forgiving ourselves, and receiving forgiveness from God to live more freely. It is at the heart of Christianity, and it is something that all humans need to do to live well and flourish.

1. Pick up

Find a comfortable, quiet place. Start with your pebble on the ground. Pick it up and think about something which has hurt you. It might be a small thing or a bigger thing. It might be a situation close to you, or more distant.

5. Go

You can leave the pebble on the ground or you can leave it with God. You could find, draw or make a simple cross, and place the stone there. Jesus had many 'stones' thrown at him, but he refused to throw them back and instead forgave.

Perhaps you also feel the need to be forgiven?

2. Hold

Hold your pebble tightly in your non-dominant hand (the hand you don't use to write). Picture the time you were hurt by this situation or person and allow yourself to feel the pain you still carry. It is a bit like being hit by a stone that has been thrown at you. Observe which emotions are involved. Notice what you feel in your body. Notice your thoughts too.



3. Throw?

Move the stone to your dominant hand (the one you use to throw). The stone could be used as a weapon; it was thrown at you and you could throw it back. Would that make anything better? How might it make things worse?

4. Let go

Feel the burden of the hurt inside. Ask, 'Who is suffering? Have I carried this weight for long enough? Am I willing to forgive?' If the answer is no, that's OK. If you are ready to let the burden go, silently say: 'Breathing in, I acknowledge the pain. Breathing out, I am forgiving _____. ' Repeat these words for as long as feels helpful.

Mending

Forgiveness is a central theme of the Christian faith and a liberating and universal human need.

For this practice it is helpful for each participant to have a stone to hold. It is also useful to have a cross or picture of a cross on a table.

Relax and start in the same way that you have the previous practices. Explain that you are going to be doing the 'Mending practice' together, forgiving ourselves or others so that we can live more freely.

Script

I invite you all to sit comfortably and centre yourselves as you have before, lengthening your breathing and being present to the now. You may find it helpful to close your eyes.

Again, simply smile and breathe (pause)

Pick up a stone and, as you hold it, think about something that has hurt you. It might be a small thing or a big thing, recent or long past.

KEEP SILENCE 1 minute (or more).

Hold the stone tightly in your non-dominant hand (the one you don't use to write). Picture the time that you were hurt by that situation or person.

Allow yourself to feel the pain that you still carry. Observe your emotions. Notice what you feel in your body. Notice your thoughts.

KEEP SILENCE 1 minute (or more)

Move the stone to your dominant hand. The stone could be used as a weapon; it was thrown at you and you could throw it back. Would that make anything better? How might it make things worse?

KEEP SILENCE 1 minute (or more)

Feel the burden of the hurt inside. Ask, 'Who is suffering? Have I carried this weight for long enough? Am I willing to forgive?'

If the answer is 'No', that's OK. If you are ready to let the burden go, breath in and silently say 'I acknowledge the pain.'

Then, breathing out, say 'I am forgiving _____.' Repeat these words for as long as is helpful.

KEEP SILENCE 1 minute (or more)

You can put the stone down, or you could leave it with God. You might want to place the stone by the cross. Jesus had many stones thrown at him, but he refused to throw them back.

You may also feel the need for forgiveness.

KEEP SILENCE 1 minute (or more)

You may want to offer a simple prayer here drawing the time to a close.

I invite you now to open your eyes, bring your attention back into the room, have a stretch, and smile.

Mending

As we move through these practices, we touch on some of the more difficult aspects of life. We address the hurt within ourselves. You can decide whether you choose something small or something big to offer to God for mending and healing.

For this practice you ideally need a stone or pebble which fits in your hand, but you could use something else which feels heavy. The practice focuses on forgiveness: forgiving others, forgiving ourselves, and receiving forgiveness from God to live more freely. It is at the heart of Christianity and is something that all humans need to do to live well and flourish.

1. Pick up

Find a comfortable, quiet place. Start with your pebble on the ground. Pick it up and think about something which has hurt you. It might be a small thing or a bigger thing. It might be a situation close to you, or more distant.

2. Hold

Hold your pebble tightly in your non-dominant hand (the hand you don't use to write). Picture the time you were hurt by this situation or person and allow yourself to feel the pain you still carry. It is a bit like being hit by a stone that has been thrown at you. Observe which emotions are involved. Notice what you feel in your body. Notice your thoughts too.

3. Throw?

Move the stone to your dominant hand (the one you use to throw). The stone could be used as a weapon. It was thrown at you and you could throw it back. Would that make anything better? How might it make things worse?



4. Let go

Feel the burden of the hurt inside. Ask, 'Who is suffering? Have I carried this weight for long enough? Am I willing to forgive?' If the answer is no, that's OK. If you are ready to let the burden go, silently say: 'Breathing in, I acknowledge the pain. Breathing out, I am forgiving _____.' Repeat these words for as long as feels helpful.

Perhaps you also feel the need to be forgiven?

oxford.anglican.org/come-and-see

COME AND SEE

Print out the previous page for your group. Individual sheets are available to download from the website.

Blessing

How can you flourish like a beautiful tree? The Bible starts and ends with the tree of life. In this practice we use the tree of life as a symbol to think about how we can be blessed, and how we might bless others.

You might like to imagine parts of the body as different parts of the tree.

1. Foundation (heart)

Hold your hands to your heart. It's at your core, like the trunk of the tree. Think about yourself, your strengths and weaknesses, but most of all your inner goodness, which comes from God. Say 'God bless me and keep me safe as your beloved child.' Be still for a minute.

6. Finish

Say these words: 'Lord, make me an instrument of your peace' (the Prayer of St Francis). Make a note of the blessing that you are going to offer.

5. Fruitfulness

Think about the fruit on the tree of life. The joy of Christianity can be experienced in being a blessing to others in simple everyday ways. Think of a person you would like to bless this week. You could bless them with a phone call or a text, or a simple act of kindness.

2. Family and friends (legs)

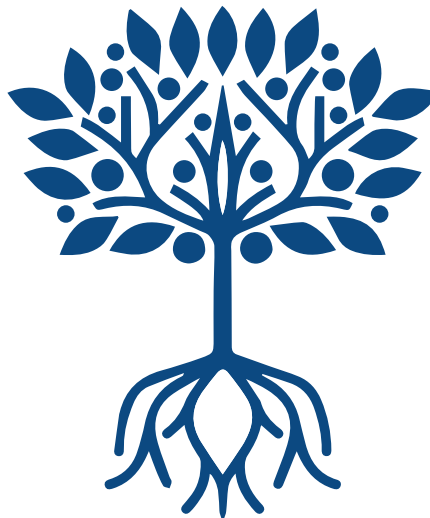
Think of the roots of the tree. Roots give us strength and security. Hold those you love in your mind, their strengths and weaknesses, but most of all their inner goodness. You can say: 'God bless each member of my family and my friends, and keep them as your beloved children.' Be still for a minute.

3. Neighbours (arms)

The branches stand for people we don't know so well, including perhaps people we don't even like. You can say: 'God bless each of my neighbours, near and far, and keep them as your beloved children.' Be still for a minute.

4. Flourish (fingers)

Leaves flourish on the tree of life. Hold creation in your mind in all its beauty and goodness. You can say: 'God bless all creation, and keep it safe and sacred.' Be still for a minute.



Blessing

In this practice we celebrate the blessings we have received and turn our focus to how we are actively a blessing in the world.

The Jesuits have a phrase, 'contemplatives in action', which captures beautifully that our inward journeying is always linked to outward action and expression.

Relax and start in the same way that you have the previous practices. Explain that we are now exploring the practice of blessing: noticing our blessings and exploring where we can be a blessing to others and the world around us.

Script

I invite you all to sit comfortably and centre yourselves as you have before, lengthening your breathing and being present to the now. You may find it helpful to close your eyes.

Again, simply smile and breathe (pause).

Think about yourself; your strengths and weaknesses but most of all, the essence of you which comes from God. Notice the ways in which you are blessed; bring these things to heart and mind with gratitude.

KEEP SILENCE 1 minute (or more)

Thinking about friends and family, hold in mind and heart those you love with gratitude. You can say, "God Bless each of my friends and family, keep them as your beloved children."

KEEP SILENCE 1 minute (or more)

Moving then to think about those who we do not know so well, maybe even those we struggle to like. Bring them to mind and bless them in prayer and thought as we again say, "God bless each of them, keep them as your beloved children."

KEEP SILENCE 1 minute (or more)

Bring to mind the creation and the world around us. Hold its beauty and goodness in your memory and imagination with gratitude. Again you might pray, "God bless all creation, keep it safe and sacred."

KEEP SILENCE 1 minute (or more)

Joy in the Christian life is so often experienced in being a blessing to others in simple everyday ways. Think of those you could bless this week through an act of kindness. Hold them in mind as I read the prayer of St Francis:

*Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
and where there is sadness, joy.*

*O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek
to be consoled as to console;
to be understood as to understand;
to be loved as to love.*

*For it is in giving that we receive;
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned;
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.*

Amen.

(pause)

I invite you now to open your eyes, bring your attention back into the room, have a stretch, and smile

Blessing

How can you flourish like a beautiful tree? The Bible starts and ends with the tree of life. In this practice we use the tree of life as a symbol to think about how we can be blessed, and how we might bless others.

You might like to imagine parts of the body as different parts of the tree.

1. Foundation (heart)
Hold your hands to your heart. It's at your core like the trunk of the tree. Think about yourself, your strengths and weaknesses, but most of all your inner goodness, which comes from God. Say 'God bless me and keep me safe as your beloved child.' Be still for a minute.

2. Family and friends (legs)
Think of the roots of the tree. Roots give us strength and security. Hold those you love in your mind, their strengths and weaknesses, but most of all their inner goodness. You can say, 'God bless each member of my family and my friends, and keep them as your beloved children.' Be still for a minute.

3. Neighbours (arms)
The branches stand for people we don't know so well, including perhaps people we don't even like. You can say, 'God bless each of my neighbours, near and far, and keep them as your beloved children.' Be still for a minute.

4. Flourish (fingers)
Leaves flourish on the tree of life. Hold creation in your mind in all its beauty and goodness. You can say, 'God bless all creation, and keep it safe and sacred.' Be still for a minute.

5. Fruitfulness
Think about the fruit on the tree of life. The joy of Christianity can be experienced as being a blessing to others, in simple everyday ways. Think of a person you would like to bless this week. You could bless them with a phone call or a text, or a simple act of kindness.

oxford.anglican.org/come-and-see

COME AND SEE

Print out the previous page for your group. Individual sheets are available to download from the website.

Filling

Christianity is more than a set of beliefs and a story; it is the presence of the Holy Spirit – working in us to bring life, change and growth.

In this practice we notice where we feel spiritually empty, and open ourselves up to the flow of God's life-bringing Spirit. *"Those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life."* (John 4:14).

1. Place

Find a comfortable chair, and maybe a cushion. Sit in a way that allows you to relax your neck and shoulders.

2. Moment

Smile and deepen your breathing. Bring your attention to the moment and to the sensation of sitting and breathing. If your thoughts start racing, consciously bring your attention back to your breath.

6. Drinking

Now imagine drinking in a refreshing glass of water, quenching and transforming the emptiness. As you do so invite the Holy Spirit to similarly flow and refresh you. You might like to ask the Holy Spirit to share a word, an image or a verse from the Bible with you. Pause.



3. Stone

Imagine a stone that is having water poured on it. In your mind visualise how the stone is unreceptive and not absorbing the water. Bring to mind where your heart or life has become hardened. Pause.

5. Longing

St Augustine says our hearts are restless until they find rest in God. The psalmist puts it like this: "As a deer longs for flowing streams, so my soul longs for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God" (Psalm 42). Bring to mind your hopes, needs and longings. What is your soul thirsting for?

4. Sponge

Now imagine a sponge, and water being poured once again. Visualise the sponge soaking up the water, drawing it in and absorbing it. Bring to mind where you long for refreshment and life. Pause.

Filling

In this practice you can either ask the group to imagine the stone, the sponge, the water and the drink. Or you can assemble these things (including a glass of water for everyone) and enact the steps alongside the script.

Remember that you are part of this filling practice too, receiving for yourself. Breathe deeply, smile for yourself. Smile and make eye contact with the group.

Explain that in this practice we notice where we feel spiritually empty and open ourselves up to the flow of God's life-bringing Spirit. Remind the group that Jesus says, "Those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life." (John 4:14).

Script

I invite you to sit comfortably. You are welcome to close your eyes. To begin, simply smile and breathe.

Pause

Now deepen your breathing and bring your attention to the moment. If your thoughts start racing, bring your attention back to your breath.

Keep silence for a minute (or more)

Imagine (look at) a stone that is having water poured on it. In your mind visualise (watch) how the stone is unreceptive, and not absorbing the water. Bring to mind where your life or heart has become hardened.

Keep silence for a minute (or more)

Now imagine (look at) a sponge, and water being poured once again. Visualise (watch) the sponge soaking up the water, drawing it in and absorbing it. Bring to mind where you long for refreshment and life.

Keep silence for a minute (or more)

St Augustine says our hearts are restless until they find rest in God. The psalmist's cry is: "As a deer longs for flowing streams, so my soul longs for you, O God."

Bring to mind your hopes, needs and longings. What is your soul thirsting for?

Keep silence for a minute (or more)

Now imagine drinking (drink) a refreshing glass of water, quenching and transforming the emptiness. As you do so invite the Holy Spirit to similarly flow and refresh, bringing life in all its fullness.

Keep silence for a minute (or more)

Smile

I invite you to bring your attention back into the room.

Filling

Christianity is more than a set of beliefs and a story; it is the presence of the Holy Spirit – working in us to bring life, change and growth.

In this practice we notice where we feel spiritually empty, and open ourselves up to the flow of God's life-bringing Spirit. "Those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life." (John 4:14).

1. Place

Find a comfortable chair, and maybe a cushion. Sit in a way that allows you to relax your neck and shoulders.

2. Moment

Smile and deepen your breathing. Bring your attention to the moment and to the sensation of sitting and breathing. If your thoughts start racing, consciously bring your attention back to your breath.

6. Drinking

Now imagine drinking in a refreshing glass of water, quenching and transforming the emptiness. As you do so invite the Holy Spirit to similarly flow and refresh you. You might like to use the Holy Spirit to share a word, an image or a verse from the Bible with your Partner.



3. Stone

Imagine a stone that is having water poured on it. In your mind visualise how the stone is unreceptive and not absorbing the water. Bring to mind where your heart or life has become hardened. **Pause.**

5. Longing

St Augustine says our hearts are restless until they find rest in God. The psalmist puts it like this: "As a deer longs for flowing streams, so my soul longs for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God" (Psalm 42). Bring to mind your hopes, needs and longings. What is your soul thirsting for?

4. Sponge

Now imagine a sponge, and water being poured once again. Visualise the sponge soaking up the water, drawing it in and absorbing it. Bring to mind where you long for refreshment and life. **Pause.**

oxford.anglican.org/come-and-see

COME AND SEE

Print out the previous page for your group. Individual sheets are available to download from the website.

COME AND SEE

**Answering deep
questions of faith**

oxford.anglican.org/come-and-see