

Church Leader's Guide



The Way of Love

**COME
AND
SEE**

Acknowledgements

This guide for church leaders was written by Bishop Steven Croft with contributions from Joanna Gallant, Joshua Townson, Ruth Hamilton-Jones and Steven Buckley. With thanks to members of the Mission and Ministry team for their contribution to the daily pauses used in the daily email.

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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: The Way of Love is a series of resources offering a holistic approach to those with an established faith and also enquirers to explore their faith. 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.

The Way of Love

This edition of *Come and See* focusses on Jesus' summary of the Law and the Commandments.

In three of the four gospels, Jesus is asked which commandment is the most important. Jesus answers not with one commandment but with two: you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and mind and strength, and you shall love your neighbour as yourself.

These two commandments give a heartbeat, a rhythm and a shape to our lives. We are called into a deep relationship of love with God who has made us. We are also called to live a life of love with our neighbours: those who are like us and those who are not.

Sunday and small group content

The core of this *Come and See* leader's guide is a series of six sessions exploring Jesus' summary of the Law and the Commandments, 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 families, children and youth groups, and schools. 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 Jesus' summary of the Law and the Commandments from the perspective of six different pairings:

1. Two ways
2. Two treasures
3. Two tablets
4. Two trees
5. Two questions
6. Two houses

Additional readings are offered each week to support wider consideration of each week's pairing and to encourage discussion among those attending a small group.

The pages that follow are designed to support you with all you need to facilitate small group sessions.

Daily emails (Lent 2024 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 six films consider

each of the six pairings, so tie in with the weekly Sunday/small group sessions set out in this booklet.

As a church leader, you'll receive a link to the film at least a fortnight in advance. We ask that you take time to watch the film in advance so that we can 'pump-prime' views on YouTube and help even more people to discover the Way of Love for themselves.

It's also worth noting that 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 by everyone.

Contemplative Toolkit

Creating space for encounter with God is another key element of Come and See, so we have integrated 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.

Children, young people and families

Weekly resources for families

Family groups can also sign up for a weekly email for households with primary-aged children. The materials are written to allow either an adult or child to lead and will help the whole household to encounter and engage with the Way of Love throughout the week.

Sunday/mid-week groups for children and young people

A separate guide is available for organisers wishing to offer group sessions for children and young people. The guide includes short films made specifically for a younger audience, with questions to explore, an activity and prayers for easy use in a Sunday club or youth group.

Collective worship in schools

There are also resources, including short films produced by some of our school chaplains and youth workers, in a session guide designed especially to be used in collective worship in a school setting. You'll find this, along with all other leader resources, at oxford.anglican.org/organiser-materials

Getting your parish/benefice involved

1. Invite your parish

Order our posters to stimulate interest and invitations 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 Facebook and other social media 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. Need resources that are not online?

You can order booklets of the daily reflections for people who would prefer this to receiving a daily email. The booklets are £2.50 including postage.

You can order *Pilgrim Journeys: The Way of Love* from:

store.oxford.anglican.org

4. 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'.

5. 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)

Revd Charles Chadwick

01865 208246

charles.chadwick@oxford.anglican.org

Buckinghamshire

Revd Asa Humphreys

0787 655 3884

asa.humphreys@oxford.anglican.org

Dwelling in the Word



Many people in the Diocese of Oxford use a practice called Dwelling in the Word to listen to scripture, to each other and to God. By dwelling in the same text over the course of six weeks of Come and See, our hope and prayer is that this Word begins to dwell in us in a rich and meaningful way. The Word, the living text of the Bible, shapes our imaginations, intentions and actions.

How we dwell is deceptively simple. It is focused on hearing God speak through the scriptures to each other by his Spirit. There is no set way to introduce Dwelling in the Word, which has echoes of the ancient monastic tradition of Lectio Divina, but there are two important differences that make Dwelling in the Word a transformative spiritual discipline:

- Each individual tells another person where their attention is being drawn in the passage.
- Each person reports what they heard from the person they were listening to (not what they said themselves).

We encourage you not to compromise on these two aspects of Dwelling in the Word.

How to Dwell in the Word

Set aside around 20 minutes for this activity. Start with prayer inviting the Spirit to guide your attention to the Word of God.

- When everyone is ready, begin with one person reading the passage out loud to the group.
- Now let some silence unfold as people let the words have their impact. Notice where your attention lingers. This might be a word or a phrase.
- Ask a second person to read the passage out loud once more.
- Each person in the group finds someone they know less well and listens to that person as s/he says what they noticed or heard in the passage and whether that has led to any reflection or questions. There are no right or wrong answers.
- Each person should listen well as they will be asked to report back to the rest of the group (or another pairing if you're a large group) what their partner said.
- What have you heard that might be significant? Discuss as a group what God might be up to in the passage for your group on that day.
- It can be helpful for the facilitator to make a brief note of what s/he hears from the group. There may be a moment in your discussions that connects with what has been noticed or you may wish to bring this into a short prayer at the end.

Weekly sessions: suggested format

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 shared understanding.

Opening prayer and reading

Begin each session with prayer followed by the suggested reading, which will either be from Jesus’ summary of the Law or the Commandments.

Conversation starter

Each session includes an open question to help the group get to know each other: “Where have you seen God or love 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 or experienced 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 the pairings in the Way of Love, presented in Bishop Steven’s film.

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.

Second Bible reading

This is a scripture passage that helps to connect the commandments with the theme for the day. You may like to ask one of your participants to read this out.

Leader notes

Following the second Bible reading is a written reflection, largely based on Bishop Steven’s film, which aims to help you, as the course leader, to prepare and focus your thoughts before the session.

Discussion questions

Come and See is designed so that enquirers and Christians who want to go deeper can ask their questions about the commandments 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 more aimed 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 and the commandments.

Concluding prayers

This section recommends a practice from the Contemplative Toolkit. It’s designed to provide space for participants to reflect and collect their thoughts from the session. 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 the following session.

Week 1: Two ways

Gathering and reconnecting

To help people “arrive”, take time to reconnect, hear how people are.

Opening prayer

Opening prayer, including the reading of Matthew 22:34–40

Conversation starter

Notice:

When you think of Christians you know, how have you seen them following the two greatest commandments (verses 37–39)?

Opening a discussion

- What do you think about when you hear the word *commandment*?
- What do the two greatest commandments mean to you?

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 energised you?
- What challenged you or left you with a question?

Reading

Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. God’s love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us.

By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. And we have seen

and do testify that the Father has sent his Son as the Saviour of the world. God abides in those who confess that Jesus is the Son of God, and they abide in God. So we have known and believe the love that God has for us.

God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them. Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness on the day of judgement, because as he is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love. We love because he first loved us.

1 John 4:7–19

Leader notes

In his video Bishop Steven calls us to choose between two ways: chaos or divine plan. On the one hand, he says, the universe is vast and impersonal, cold and random. In this way humans are simply the product of coincidences and there is no purpose in life beyond the purpose we create; no ultimate sense of right or wrong beyond human custom; no moral authority beyond ourselves.

On the other hand, the second way is through faith in the God who created the heavens and the earth; who orders and adores them; and who sets in us a yearning for the eternal. He summarises: This God is a God of love.

The difference between these two ways is not love itself (atheists and those who are not Christians are loving) but rather, where love comes from. In the first way love is something that simply comes from our natural evolutionary impulse to form relationships with other members of our species in order to maximise our chances of survival. In the second way the origin of love is reversed: the natural evolutionary impulse to love is not simply biological but a participation in something eternal – a gift from God that existed before the universe began and in which we, as simple creatures within God’s creation, are blessed to be able to share. So, in today’s reading St John says, “let us love one another, because love is from God” and “We love because he first loved us.”

Over the coming weeks we will explore how any Biblical

idea of Law or commandment is a veil behind which we can glimpse the eternal love of God. This is shown to us by Jesus, who altered the way we think about the Law and our relationship to God. He explains that the Law shouldn't be seen as a simple set of rules but as something which points beyond itself to a way of being that joins in with God's eternal love.

Instead of setting out a series of rules for us to follow, Jesus was more concerned that we just be loving in the best way that presents itself to us in any given situation. This is how we join in with God's eternal love. Bishop Steven said in the film: "The Holy Spirit within us assures us of God's presence and fills our lives with love and joy and peace, no matter what circumstances we face." Notice the similar words of St John in today's reading: "if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us. By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit."

Consequently, we have the two ways: one where love is simply a creaturely impulse and nothing more, and the other where love is something greater than the whole of creation and we are blessed to join in that love by accepting God into our hearts and acting in a way that maximises our participation in it.

So, the invitation is to approach any biblical commandment or Law as a way to engage with the love of God that is given to us as a gift from above.

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 could try one or more of the questions below.

- How do you respond to the Ten Commandments?
- How do the two greatest commandments fit with the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1–17)?
- Do you think the Ten Commandments/Old Testament Law were replaced by the two greatest commandments?
- What relevance, if any, is there in still having "commandments" for Christians?

- In what ways have you noticed Christians keeping the two greatest commandments?
- What does it mean that love is something we join in with, instead of just a simple creaturely feeling? How might it change the way we feel about love?

Questions for going deeper

- What might it mean for how we define love if we say that it's something eternal that comes from outside of creation?
- How might God be inviting you to join in with God's eternal love at this time?

Concluding prayers

Contemplative Toolkit **Stilling** Practice script

Next steps for everyday faith

For this week:

- Take some time – either five minutes to yourself or as part of your prayers – to reflect on the difference it makes to your understanding of love if it's something that's eternal and that we get to share in, as opposed to something that only exists as a simple biological impulse. How would it change the way you approach the action or feeling of loving?

Optional

- You may like to share the following reading and ask people to reflect on the idea of love as a beautiful gift that we receive from God.

I am my beloved's, and his desire is for me.

Come, my beloved, let us go forth into the fields, and lodge in the villages;

let us go out early to the vineyards, and see whether the vines have budded,

whether the grape blossoms have opened and the pomegranates are in bloom.

There I will give you my love.

Song of Solomon 7:10–12

Week 2: Two treasures

Gathering and reconnecting

To help people “arrive”, take time to reconnect, hear how people are.

Opening prayer

Opening prayer, including the reading of Deuteronomy 6:4–9

Conversation starter

Notice:

Where have you seen God or love this week?

Opening a discussion

- How did you feel after last week’s session?
- How do you feel about the rest of the course?

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 energised you?
- What challenged you or left you with a question?

Reading

Your hands have made and fashioned me; give me understanding that I may learn your commandments. Those who fear you shall see me and rejoice, because I have hoped in your word. I know, O Lord, that your judgements are right, and that in faithfulness you have humbled me. Let your steadfast love become my comfort according to your promise to your servant. Let your mercy come to me, that I may live; for your law is my delight. Let the arrogant be put to shame, because they have subverted me with guile; as for me, I will meditate on your precepts. Let those who fear you turn to me, so that they may know your decrees. May my heart be blameless in your statutes, so that I may not be put to shame.

Oh, how I love your law! It is my meditation all day long. Your commandment makes me wiser than my enemies, for it is always with me. I have more understanding than all my teachers, for your decrees are my meditation. I understand more than the aged, for I keep your precepts. I hold back my feet from every evil way, in

order to keep your word. I do not turn away from your ordinances, for you have taught me. How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!

Psalm 119:73–80, 97–103

Leader notes

Psalm 119 is the longest of all the psalms and in it we hear the voice of an anonymous poet, writing hundreds of years before Jesus. In the short section we read today he’s reflecting on the meaning of God’s Law after, it seems, he’s received some sort of chastisement from God (he says: “I know, O Lord, that your judgements are right, and that in faithfulness you have *humbled me*”). Although, somewhat ironically, he then spends the rest of the section talking about how he always keeps God’s commandments! Nevertheless, his words give us beautiful clues to the depths of God’s love that sits behind the Law.

Despite the psalmist trying to convince God that he’s great at keeping the Law – a righteous superstar – he has to start by acknowledging that first and foremost he needs the help of God’s steadfast (meaning constant and unchanging) love. This reminds us of Bishop Steven’s words in today’s video: “our identity is grounded in the deep, powerful truth that God loves us. You are deeply loved, appreciated, known, valued and called into a friendship with God. Most of us spend our lives trying to grow in our understanding of that love. It’s a love we cannot earn and so we will never feel we deserve to be loved. It’s a love we need to receive, by faith and trust, and live in that faith.”

I wonder if this might even be what the writer of the psalm is trying to say in a poetic kind of way; despite his attempts to prove that he’s a good person, underneath it all he knows he relies on the love and mercy of God. So, he says: “Let your steadfast love become my comfort according to your promise to your servant. Let your mercy come to me, that I may live; for your law is my delight.” Really – beneath all the attempts to justify himself – the psalmist realises that he needs God’s love and mercy in order to keep the commandments.

This is why later on he can say “your commandment makes me wiser than my enemies, for it is always with me. I have more understanding than all my teachers, for your decrees are my meditation.” Clearly the psalmist’s teachers, and probably his enemies, knew the literal Law. In contrast, the psalmist has realised that he needs,

first of all, to rely on God's love and mercy, the truth that sits behind the Law. This hidden truth is like the pearl of great price and the treasure mentioned by Bishop Steven and it's just like the two ways we mentioned last week. On the one hand, there are the simple rules that form the Law – a series of human precepts that teach us how to behave – and on the other there is the holy truth that sits behind the Law: the eternal love that comes from God. In the words of Bishop Steven: the treasure is in discovering how much you are loved by God, in a love that searches and holds and embraces and saves and sustains and gives life.

The commandments and the biblical Law, then, are not something that exist in and for themselves, they exist to point us beyond them to the eternal love of God.

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 could try one or more of the questions below.

- When have you experienced or had a realisation of God's love?
- What do you think of the idea of God's love as a hidden treasure?
- When have you had to rely on God's love in your own life?
- How does the idea of the steadfastness of God's love make you feel?
- Notice how the psalmist attempts to justify himself, even after he's admitted doing something wrong. Where do you recognise this behaviour?

Questions for going deeper

- What do you think about needing God's help to keep to his commandments?
- Lots of writers throughout history have described the Law – and the whole of scripture – as a veil that we need to look behind to see the true meaning about God. Would you agree, and how might you go about searching behind the veil?
- There are a lot of parallels between the psalmist here and the Rich Young Man in Mark 10:17–22. What similarities or differences can you see? What perspective do these passages give us about the idea of how to be a "good person"?

Concluding prayers

Contemplative Toolkit **Noticing** practice script

Next steps for everyday faith

For this week:

- During this week try to take some time, even as little as thirty seconds, to slow down and open yourself up to God's love. Pause, shut your eyes, and ask God to show you his love.

Optional

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

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name. I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Ephesians 3:14–19

Week 3: Two tablets

Gathering and reconnecting

To help people “arrive”, take time to reconnect.

Opening prayer

Opening prayer, including the reading of Exodus 20:1–8

Conversation starter

Notice:

Where have you seen God or love this week?

Opening a discussion

- How did you feel after last week’s session?
- Are there times in your life when you’ve drifted away from God and come back? What has been helpful to you in those moments?

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 energised you?
- What challenged you or left you with a question?

Reading

“Come, let us return to the Lord; for it is he who has torn, and he will heal us; he has struck down, and he will bind us up. After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up, that we may live before him. Let us know, let us press on to know the Lord; his appearing is as sure as the dawn; he will come to us like the showers, like the spring rains that water the earth.”

What shall I do with you, O Ephraim? What shall I do with you, O Judah? Your love is like a morning cloud, like the dew that goes away early. Therefore I have hewn them by the prophets, I have killed them by the words of my mouth, and my judgement goes forth as the light. For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.

Hosea 6:1–6

Leader notes

Hosea is one of the oldest books of the Bible and the record of an ancient prophecy. Prophecy isn’t, as many people think, just about telling the future, it’s about explaining hidden truths, like the treasures we discussed last week.

This particular prophecy was written as a series of catastrophes were falling on the Israelites who had split into two kingdoms – Israel (Ephraim) in the north and Judah in the south – and were being attacked by all sorts of different enemies. People were desperate to know why all this was happening and the prophecy (explanation) Hosea gives in today’s reading is that God is angry with them because they have failed to properly follow the Law.

While anger is a human emotion often attributed to God in a metaphorical way, God’s love for his people remains constant; and just as the Law holds hidden truths about God, so too does all of scripture, and here Hosea is using the metaphor of anger to explain one aspect of the hidden truth.

This truth is that the Israelite people have not responded positively to the steadfast love of God. In the video today Bishop Steven talks about the first tablet of the Ten Commandments, which explains how to love God and to be his people. Hosea explains that the Israelites have totally missed the point. He says, “For I [God] desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.” What he means by this is that the Israelites have obsessed about keeping the Law but failed to understand or even look for the hidden treasure that sits behind it. That is, they’ve failed to see that the point of the Law is to join in with God’s love. Hosea’s message is this: It’s the Israelites who have abandoned God, not the other way around. God doesn’t fail in offering God’s love, it’s people who fail to choose to join in with it.

Jesus picks up this idea in Matthew chapter 12. The Pharisees are angry because the disciples have picked grain to eat and Jesus has performed a healing miracle, both on the Sabbath, both of which are against the Law. Jesus responds to their criticism by explaining that if you keep the Law but fail to practise love and compassion then you have missed the whole point. The Law is a guide that we must look behind in order to see the Love towards which it points.

This is visible even in the Ten Commandments. If we take the first two commandments about the Lord being the only God and not worshipping any idols, the message that sits behind them is that – “if you want to share in my eternal love then it needs to be me that you’re in a relationship with as my chosen people.” Wherever we look, the biblical Law points us beyond rules to the eternal offer of love that sits behind it. The first step to join in this love is to respond to it with a steadfast love of our own.

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 could try one or more of the questions below.

- This week we are challenged to consider how we can love God. In what ways do you find it easy or difficult to love God?
- Where have you noticed other Christians trying to express their love of God?
- Are there any changes to how you understand the biblical idea of Law?
- In what ways do you think Christians sometimes prioritise the Law itself over finding the hidden meaning of love behind it?

Questions for going deeper

- How does today’s reading predict the ministry of Jesus?

- What might this passage say about our relationship with Jesus?
- What differences are there between the idea of biblical Law and civil law?
- Are there any other Bible passages that come to mind where emotions are used as metaphors about God?

Concluding prayers

Contemplative Toolkit **Dwelling** Practice script

Next steps for everyday faith

For this week:

- Try taking a moment each day to ask God to help you look beyond the rules to see the offer of love and to respond with a love and compassion of your own.

Optional

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

“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint, dill, and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. It is these you ought to have practised without neglecting the others.”

Matthew 23:23

Week 4: Two trees

Gathering and reconnecting

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

Opening prayer

Opening prayer, including the reading of Exodus 20:12–17

Conversation starter

Notice:

Where have you seen God or love this week?

Opening a discussion

- How do these commandments make you feel?
- How have you experienced God's love in the past week?

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 energised you?
- What challenged you or left you with a question?

Reading

Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him. And during supper Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" Jesus answered, "You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand." Peter said to him, "You will never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me." Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my

hands and my head!" Jesus said to him, "One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet, but is entirely clean. And you are clean, though not all of you." For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, "Not all of you are clean."

After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord – and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them."

"I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

John 13:1–17, 34–35

Leader notes

We have looked in previous weeks at receiving love from outside ourselves, a participation in the eternal love that exists before creation. The Ten Commandments are ordered in this dual pattern, first talking about the love of God and then moving to love for our neighbour. And, of course, this is how Jesus summarises the Law in Matthew 22:37–39. It's the pattern Bishop Steven gave us in week one – "We love because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19) – and it's repeated in this passage in John's Gospel.

It starts by Jesus demonstrating his love. He, who is Lord and God, has taken the role of servant to show what it's like to be loved by God, who in his steadfast love is constant in being there for us. Jesus then goes on to tell the disciples to do the same thing for each other. In other words, he is saying: "in the same way that I (God) am loving you, you have to love your neighbour."

It's this active demonstration of love which, Jesus says, defines the Christian life. Bishop Steven discusses it in his video this week as our ongoing interpretation of the second tablet of the Ten Commandments. We try to find ways to live out the Law that demonstrate God's love in the most effective way so that we can be visual representations of God's love as participants within it.

In week one we mentioned the call to just “be loving” in however that presents itself to us in any given situation. In doing this we participate in God’s love and reflect it into the world around us.

This idea of reflecting God’s love is mentioned by Jesus when he says, “You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hidden. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.” (Matthew 5:14–16).

If we combine this with what we’ve learnt about the Law, commandments and scripture as pointers to the truth that lies behind them – the eternal love of God – we discover that Christians have a duty to interpret the Law so that we can be participants in that eternal love and show it to the world.

This isn’t just nice words though, it’s actually quite challenging. If we are being asked to reflect God’s love into the world, we really have to think about how we behave as Christians. Our behaviour isn’t just a reflection of us as people, it’s a reflection of God and it’s how the rest of the world will see God.

This could be quite an intimidating idea, but remember what we said in week two – we rely first on the love of God and then we can ask for God’s help to reflect that love into the world.

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 could try one or more of the questions below.

- What does it mean to be visual representations of God’s love?

- When do you find it challenging to be a reflection of God’s love?
- How might you behave differently, knowing your actions offer a reflection of God?
- How could Christians lovingly challenge and encourage each other about the way they behave?

Questions for going deeper

- How do you feel about interpreting God’s Law?
- How might the idea of continuous reinterpretation of God’s Law inform the way you think about sin?
- Following our discussions in weeks 1–4, how is God inviting you to interpret the Law in a way that bears the fruits of the Holy Spirit in your life?

Concluding prayers

Contemplative Toolkit **Mending** Practice script

Next steps for everyday faith

For this week:

- In advance of next session, try to notice a time during the week where you might have done something differently had you stopped and thought about the call to be an ongoing reflection of God’s love.

Optional

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

“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

Matthew 11:28–30

Week 5: Two questions

Gathering and reconnecting

To help people “arrive” take time to reconnect.

Opening prayer

Opening prayer, including the reading of Deuteronomy 6:4–9

Conversation starter

Notice:

Where have you seen God or love this week?

Opening a discussion

- Would anyone like to share anything that came out of the “Next steps for everyday faith”?
- How do we practise our faith at home in our everyday lives?

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 energised you?
- What challenged you or left you with a question?

Reading

If there is among you anyone in need, a member of your community in any of your towns within the land that the Lord your God is giving you, do not be hard-hearted or tight-fisted towards your needy neighbour. You should rather open your hand, willingly lending enough to meet the need, whatever it may be. Be careful that you do not entertain a mean thought, thinking, “The seventh year, the year of remission, is near”, and therefore view your needy neighbour with hostility and give nothing; your neighbour might cry to the Lord against you, and you would incur guilt. Give liberally and be ungrudging when you do so, for on this account the Lord your God will bless you in all your work and in all that you undertake. Since there will never cease to be some in need on the earth, I therefore command you, “Open your hand to the poor and needy neighbour in your land.”

Deuteronomy 15:7–11

Leader notes

This Old Testament passage is somewhat unusual amongst sections on the Law. It comes as part of the rule that debts have to be forgiven every seven years, and the reading today is expanding on what that means. But it’s unusual because it doesn’t give specifics; in fact it’s very general. It’s much more about principles than exact rules. God is saying to the people, “It’s not about what the rule is, it’s about finding ways to be generous.” In other words, as the Israelites are entering the Promised Land, God is telling them that they have the power to make it a good place where people in need can get help.

In the same way Bishop Steven talks in today’s video about making the world we want to live in. He uses the example of the Good Samaritan to show that God is looking for us to develop our attitudes as residents of the kingdom of God. This is about joining in with the activity of God’s love. God’s desire for the world is one where we love and care for each other and the creation in which we live. So, if we are to dwell in God’s love then we must work to build God’s kingdom.

Going back to the reading from Deuteronomy, we see an early attempt to explain what that’s like. God is saying, “Just because you know that the time of forgiven debts is coming soon, it doesn’t mean you shouldn’t lend to people. People will always need your help, and if you want to live in my kingdom then you should always give it to them.”

It’s very much about the interpretation of the Law instead of the rule itself, except instead of us doing the interpretation it’s God. The rule is that debts must be forgiven every seven years but the truth that sits behind the rule is that God wants us to be generous and caring. This absolutely applies to Christians now. God wants us to build the kingdom and be public expressions of God’s love.

But this is very challenging! How would you feel about this in your own life? Imagine if you had some spare money and someone in need asked to borrow it. If there were a high probability it wouldn’t be paid back, would you think twice about lending it? It’s probably fair to say that most people, including most Christians, would definitely think twice.

Jesus goes even further. He commands us to “Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. Do to others as

you would have them do to you. If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them... But love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return" (Luke 6:30–32, 35).

Not only does Jesus want us to give to everyone who needs our help, he also insists that we should be open to lending to our enemies without expecting that they'll pay us back. This is truly challenging, and something most of us would certainly struggle to do. But this is how God loves us. God continues to offer us love and a place in the kingdom even when we deliberately turn away. Jesus is saying to us that we should be as open with our love as God is.

The point, then, is that we have the power to be as loving as God. We can make the world around us into God's kingdom when we try, as Christians, to reflect God's love into the world. How much we actually do, that depends on us.

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 could try one or more of the questions below.

- How do you feel about today's message?
- Do you believe that Christians have the power to make the world a better place?
- How would you feel about lending someone money if you knew you might have to cancel the debt without it being repaid?
- How do you think your life would change (or has changed) by deliberately trying to enact God's kingdom in your everyday life?

- What do you think God wants his kingdom to look like?
- Christians have a history of trying and failing to live up to God's kingdom. Why do you think that is?

Questions for going deeper

- What does today's passage say about our economic system?
- It used to be illegal for banks in Christian countries to charge interest on loans because another verse in Deuteronomy (23:19) explicitly forbids it. What do you think about that?
- How is God inviting you to participate in building God's kingdom of love and generosity?

Concluding prayers

Contemplative Toolkit **Blessing** Practice script.

Next steps for everyday faith

For this week:

- Try to notice and act on one or two opportunities to be generous. Come to next week's session ready to share your stories.

Optional

- You may like to share the following reading:

The point is this: the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

2 Corinthians 9:6–7

Week 6: Two houses

Gathering and reconnecting

To help people “arrive” take time to reconnect.

Opening prayer

Opening prayer, including the reading of Matthew 22:34–40

Conversation starter

Notice:

Where have you seen God or love this week?

Opening a discussion

- Does anyone have any stories of generosity from this week?
- How do you feel as we come to the end of the course?

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 energised you?
- What challenged you or left you with a question?

Reading

To all God’s beloved in Rome, who are called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is proclaimed throughout the world. For God, whom I serve with my spirit by announcing the gospel of his Son, is my witness that without ceasing I remember you always in my prayers, asking that by God’s will I may somehow at last succeed in coming to you. For I am longing to see you so that I may share with you some spiritual gift to strengthen you — or rather so that we may be mutually encouraged by each other’s faith, both yours and mine. I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that I have often intended to come to you (but thus far have been prevented), in order that I may reap some harvest among you as I have among the rest of the Gentiles. I am a debtor both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish — hence my eagerness to proclaim the gospel to you also who are in Rome.

For I am not ashamed of the gospel; it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, “The one who is righteous will live by faith.”

Romans 1:7–17

Leader notes

As Bishop Steven says in today’s video, we have been exploring two ways over the last six weeks. In the first week we discussed love as a simple biological impulse versus something given from outside of ourselves – from outside all of creation – as a gift from God that we can join in.

Later on we talked about the simple biblical Law versus the hidden truth of God’s love behind the Law. This again is the ordinary and mundane – a set of rules – versus something greater that comes from outside, a meaning that God gives to the universe: God’s love.

In verse 16 of today’s reading St Paul has another two ways: Jews and Greeks (anybody who’s not Jewish). This is another pair representing simple, human Law versus the love that comes to us from outside and gives meaning to the Law and the universe. Crucially, Paul doesn’t mean that we should think of “Jews” versus “Greeks”; this would be totally the wrong message to take. What St Paul is actually saying is that the love that sits behind the Law and which comes from God is now accessible to everyone.

Before Jesus, the Jews alone were God’s chosen people – the people in a special relationship with him, living under his Law. This meant that anyone who wasn’t Jewish and following the Law was not part of God’s people. But Jesus finally revealed God’s love that sits behind the Law and opened it up to everyone to join in. So it’s not now Jews vs Greeks, St Paul is saying that what used to be only for Jews is now also open to everyone else through faith in Jesus.

And that’s what we’ve been exploring over these sessions, how we can join in with God’s love. Paul says that God’s righteousness is revealed through faith because faith is the call to see behind the Law and commandments and scripture and to live not just as robotic followers of rules, but as people actively engaged with God’s love and reflecting it into the world.

It's this active engagement in God's love that enables us to build the deep foundations Bishop Steven speaks about in today's video because God's love is not just something we simply do on our own, but something we receive from outside and join in. It's a gift, and as Christians our faith calls us to share this gift with others. It also offers us something we can rely on when we are struggling in our own lives. Faith offers us the hope of God's steadfast love, as St Paul says in 1 Corinthians 13.

At the end of this course, I hope you feel encouraged that God's love is eternal and unchanging and will always be there for us. God loves the world in the hope that we can join in that love as the people of God's kingdom. This great gift is offered to us freely and awaits our response.

How will you respond?

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 could try one or more of the questions below.

- How do you feel in response to God's love?
- As the course comes to an end, is there anything you think differently about?
- How was the course for you?
- How can the church community work together to better reflect God's love?
- How might you read the Bible differently after this course?

Questions for going deeper

- What does it mean that God's love is offered freely?
- What would you like to ask God for as you continue to walk the Way of Love?
- How can we invite others to join in God's love?

- How would you define love? Is God's love different to how humans love?
- How do baptism, confirmation, and Holy Communion fit in with the idea of active responses to God's love?

Concluding prayers

Contemplative Toolkit **Filling** Practice script.

This offers an opportunity to pray for renewal in the life of the Spirit.

Next steps for everyday faith

A wrap-up question:

- How has this course changed the way you feel about love or faith?
- Could you put what we have learnt into practice in your everyday faith?
- What are the next couple of steps in your faith journey? Would you like a chance to talk about this with an encourager? (Offer an informal chat with the option for a Personal Discipleship Plan.)

Optional

- You may like to share the following reading:

Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.

1 Corinthians 13:8–13

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 sit easy. 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?

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 – please

Imagine someone is placing something good into your hands. What do you long for about itself? 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/led about... Help me to let go.”

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...”



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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.

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.

3. What has stood out?

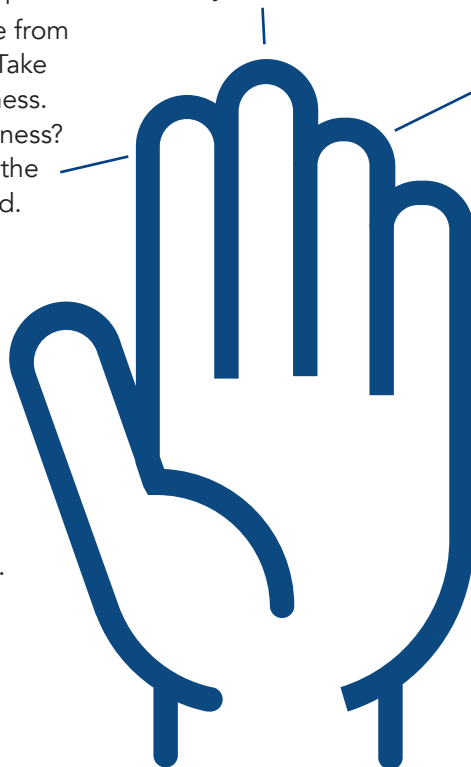
The tallest finger stands out. What has stood out in your day? Rewind the day, calling to mind the people you have met, the situations you encountered. If you were to write the newspaper headline for today, what would it be?

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.

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.



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COME AND SEE

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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

Breathe in slowly 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.



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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 a 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. Think of 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 write). 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.



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COME AND SEE

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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 phonecall 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 as 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 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 photograph or a letter, or a simple act of kindness.

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COME AND SEE

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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

Strike and deepen your breathing. Bring your attention to the moment and to the sensation of seeing 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.**

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COME AND SEE

Answering deep questions of faith

Come and See returns for Lent 2024. It's our big open invitation to ask deep questions of faith. Join us.

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