

Rhythm 1: By God’s grace I will seek to be transformed into the likeness of Christ

An introduction to the Rhythms of Grace:

The term ‘Rhythms of Grace’ is taken from Eugene Peterson’s paraphrase (*The Message*) of Matthew 11:29:

“Walk with me and work with me – watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace”

The five rhythms we will look at in the next few weeks are not meant to be a set of rules to dictate how we behave or something to make us feel guilty if we don’t live up to them each day, but instead they describe a series of aspirational statements, that we seek, with God’s help, to commit to. We ask God, by his grace, and through his spirit to transform us as we commit and open ourselves up to Him in these different areas, and as we do so, He will nurture spiritual growth in us as we grow as disciples of Christ.

The Five Rhythms of Grace:

The five rhythms of grace are outlined below. As a group read them through, by either reading them out loud in turn or reading them quietly to yourselves.

- Rhythm One:** By God’s grace, I will seek to be transformed into the likeness of Christ.
- Rhythm Two:** By God’s grace, I will be open to the presence, guidance and power of the Holy Spirit.
- Rhythm Three:** By God’s grace, I will set aside time for prayer, worship and spiritual reading.
- Rhythm Four:** By God’s grace, I will endeavour to be a gracious presence in the world, serving others and working for justice in human relationships and social structures.
- Rhythm Five:** By God’s grace, I will sensitively share my faith with others and support God’s mission both locally and globally.

DISCUSSION: *In 2’s and 3’s discuss how you feel about the five rhythms of grace. Which do you feel excited about? Which do you find most challenging?*

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Worship and Reflect:

“Discipleship is more than getting to know what the teacher knows. It is getting to be what he is”
(Juan Carlos Ortiz)

Jesus was a rabbi (the ancient Hebrew word for “teacher”) and like other rabbis of the time, he gathered apprentices (his disciples) to live alongside him and to learn from him. Unlike much of our 21st century teacher-pupil relationship, the aim of these apprentices was not simply to acquire knowledge so that they could *know* what their teacher knew in order to gain some qualification, but their aim was to *be like* their teacher, to *become* what their teacher was.

Ask one person to read **Philippians 2: 5-11** (what is thought to be a very early Christian hymn) very slowly, having a long pause to reflect between each verse. As it is read, allow the words to sink in, and bring your own prayers of gratitude to Jesus for who he is, either in the quiet of your own hearts or out loud. Ask Him to transform you into his likeness in these coming weeks.

Share: Briefly share together any reflections you have, after hearing the passage.

Study and discuss

Introduction

“A rabbi’s apprentice rarely left his teacher’s side for fear that he would miss a teachable moment. He watched his rabbi’s every move, noting how he acted and thought in any given situation... A disciple’s deepest desire was to follow his rabbi so closely that he would start to think, and act, just like him...When Jesus said ‘Come, follow me’ (Matthew 4:19), Jesus wasn’t just inviting people for a walk down to the beach; he was calling them to **imitate** his way of life”

(Steve Chalke, *Apprentice: Walking the way of Christ*)

“Being a Christian disciple is not so much about what you know as about whom you are becoming. It’s not about information, as much of western theology and practice would like to persuade us: it’s about radical **transformation** by the Holy Spirit of God – transformation in the individual, the local church and the community it serves, living beautifully in every part”.

(Martin Cavender, Director of *ReSource*)

Questions:

- How does the description of first-century disciples match up with your own view of ‘being a Christian’?
- What challenges you (and us as a church!) about this definition?
- Two different concepts are described here ‘imitation’ and ‘transformation.’ What is the difference between them? Which do you think is a more accurate description of how we ‘become like Christ’? [we will return to this!]

So how do we become transformed to be more like Christ?

*Picking up on this theme - ‘is it imitation or transformation’? God’s work or ours? Split into two different groups to look at the following passages - group 1 looking at the first set, and group 2 the second. Ask each group to divide a piece of paper into two halves. On one side, as they read the verses, they should write down “what **we** are to do” and on the other side “what **God** does.”*

GROUP 1:

2 Corinthians 3:18
Psalm 51:6-12
Galatians 5:22-26
John 15:1-4

GROUP 2:

Ephesians 4:20- 5:1
Colossians 3:1-14
2 Timothy 2:22

Now give each group in turn a chance to feedback to each other.

- Can you together now come up with a description of how we become like Christ?

Summary: Build the forms - Let God fill them

Larry Christenson in *The Renewed Mind* uses the following analogy to describe what is happening. He describes it as being like putting up a concrete structure. Before the concrete can be poured in, wooden frames ('shuttering') are put up which form the shape that the cement will take and act to hold it in while it is setting. After the concrete has set, the wooden structure is taken away and the concrete remains.



This wooden framework he says, represents *our role*. We are to construct the outward form of Christ, the 'outer temporary framework' into which God will pour his enduring work of transformation (the 'concrete') by his Spirit. We construct this temporary structure by choosing to go God's way (e.g. choosing to 'put on' patience, love compassion etc. and choosing to follow the way of the spirit and not our sinful desires). But it does not end there, for if it did, when we did not keep it up it would all fall down again and we would have to start from scratch. No, into this temporary framework that we 'put on,' God pours his spirit to transform us from the inside in a permanent way. He transforms us and gives us a new heart and new desires (Ezekiel 36:26-7) aligning them with his.

Therefore being transformed to the likeness of Christ is about us co-operating and working together with the Holy Spirit. ***We are called to do the temporary outer work (imitation), for God to pour his grace in, and bring the inner and lasting work of transformation.***

Discuss: Do you find this a helpful analogy to explain how this transformation occurs?

You might all like to do **Exercise 1** in the "Live it out" section now, before you go any further.

Disciples on an accompanied journey

Hebrews 10:24-5 says, "And let us consider how we may spur one another on towards love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another – and all the more as we see the Day approaching"

- Transformation therefore is a journey, a process which we are all on. How can we as a small group 'spur one another on' to be more Christ-like disciples? What practically can we do?

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Live it out – exercises to help us to put this into practice!

*In groups of 3's and 4's, look at the following exercises together before the end of the session. Each person is encouraged to select **one** (or something different of their own choice) to try to commit to in the following week or fortnight. These exercises help us to 'construct the outer temporary structure'. As you try and live them out, pray that God would transform you from the inside as you open yourself to him. Where possible, and where appropriate, share what you are committing to do with others in your group, and then pray for each other.*

1) Put up the shuttering and ask God to fill it.

Using Larry Christenson's analogy

- a) Identify a specific issue that you want to ask God to bring transformation in.
- b) Identify four things that *you* could intentionally do (this is the "wooden shuttering") e.g. pray blessing for my difficult neighbour, speak words of affirmation to my spouse, put on a worship CD when I am tempted to view internet material that is unhelpful etc. and seek to live them out.
- c) Pray each day for the specific 'grace' that you are desiring e.g. 'I pray for the grace to be patient with my neighbour and to love them as you love them.'

2) Growing the fruit. Select one of the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23) to focus on developing in the coming week or fortnight. Each morning pray that God would give you more of that fruit and consciously, with God's help try and live that out in your life each day.

3) Learning from Jesus. If we are to be transformed to be more like Jesus, we need to spend time with him, observing and learning from him. Choose one of the gospels to start reading through a chapter a day, taking time to 'walk with Jesus' and observing how he thinks, speaks and acts. Ask God each day to help you to learn to 'be what he is.'

4) Resisting temptation. Identify an area where you are prone to be tempted. Memorise 1 Corinthians 10:13 and whenever you are tempted, quote this scripture to yourself and pray that God would show you the 'way out'. It may well help you to share what you are tempted by with one other person so they can support you in it.

5) Tongue tied. Each morning ask the Holy Spirit to transform your speech so that it is more Christ-like, positive, loving and building others up. Make a commitment to think about the words you use to respond to different situations and ask the Holy Spirit to guide you with the words to say in different situations.

6) Reviewing your day (The Examen). This is a simple daily pattern of prayer (developed by St. Ignatius of Loyola) which helps individuals prayerfully reflect on the events of the day in order to detect God's presence, discern his direction, and grow in Christ-likeness. You can download a version from <http://www.ignatianspirituality.com/ignatian-prayer/the-examen/how-can-i-pray/> . Commit to trying this for a period of time, asking God to transform you through it.

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Prayer for the week ahead

End with the following prayer and commit to praying this prayer each day before the small group meets again...



**Father God,
 By your grace, and through your Spirit, transform me more into the likeness of Christ this day.
 Grow in me the fruit of the Spirit,
 Prune me to speak, think and act as you would do,
 Give me the strength to resist the temptations that that come my way today.
 Help me to remain in you, and bear much fruit for you, I pray.
 Amen.**

Further reading...

Larry Christensen *The Renewed Mind*

Rhythm 2: By God’s grace, I will be open to the presence, guidance and power of the Holy Spirit.

The Rhythms of Grace:

Remind yourselves of the five rhythms of grace, by either reading them out loud in turn or reading them quietly to yourselves.

- Rhythm One:** By God’s grace, I will seek to be transformed into the likeness of Christ.
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- Rhythm Five:** By God’s grace, I will sensitively share my faith with others and support God’s mission both locally and globally.

REVIEW:

In the same small groups as last week, share your experiences since you last met.

- *How did you get on with the spiritual exercise you committed to last time?*
- *Can you identify any new ways in which God is at work in you?*

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Icebreaker:

If somebody asked you about what the Holy Spirit had done for you, what one-word answers would you give? You might all like to write your answers on post-it notes and put them together.

Study and discuss:

In Rhythm 1 we have already talked about how the Holy Spirit makes us more like Jesus and brings out in our lives the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23). In this session we will look at some other ways in which the Spirit works.

It may be helpful to get a large piece of paper here and write on it the different works of the Spirit as you work through these different sections. If you are short of time the group might like to split into three smaller groups and look at a section each and then feedback.

a) The Spirit dwells within us

When Jesus tells his disciples that he must leave them, he directs them not to worry or be afraid because he is going to ask the Father to send the Spirit to be their advocate, their helper.

Look up the following passages. What do they say about the Holy Spirit – who is He for and what does the Spirit do?

- John 14:16-17, 26-27
- John 16:7-15
- Joel 2:28-9

b) The Spirit empowers us for ministry

After Jesus had risen from the dead, he promised the disciples the ability and the courage to speak and act for him. He said it would happen when the Holy Spirit came to them. In Acts 1:8 Jesus says to his disciples *“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth.”*

Briefly look up the following passages. How and what is the Holy Spirit empowering the disciples for? What is the physical evidence of the Holy Spirit’s work?

- Acts 2:1-11
- Acts 11:12
- Acts 4:29-31
- Acts 19:11-12

c) The spirit gives us gifts for His mission

Read **1 Corinthians 12:4-1**. The Holy Spirit gives us different gifts to enable us to do many of the things that Jesus himself did.

- What are the different gifts identified here that the Spirit gives? Look also at Romans 12:6-8 – what other ones appear there? Briefly discuss any you don’t understand (but don’t get bogged down here!)
- What does the passage say about how and to whom the gifts are given?
- What does it say the gifts are given for (v7)? What does this mean in practice?

Share stories:

Can anyone give any illustrations of how they have known the Spirit working in any of these ways in their own lives?

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Live it out – Be Open to the Spirit

How therefore are we to be ‘open to the Spirit’?

The work of the Spirit is a gift from God which He gives us and we receive. We can open ourselves to the work of the Spirit by doing two things. First we are to ask and desire the gifts in us – in *1 Corinthians 12:31* Paul tells the Corinthian Christians to ‘eagerly desire the gifts’ of the spirit. Secondly, we like the first disciples, are to practice the discipline of patient waiting (*Acts 1:4*).

Paul also encourages the Ephesians to ‘be filled with the spirit’ (*Ephesians 5:18*). Here, in the original Greek, the sense is not a one-off filling by the Spirit, but the idea of a continual filling – constantly and repeatedly – ‘go on being filled with the Spirit’. As we live lives full of the Spirit, we live in such a way that we ‘overflow’ God’s spirit to others and so we need to be continually refilled and ‘topped up’. In addition, as we grow in Christ our ‘capacity’ for Him increases!

Inviting the Spirit to fill us afresh

Invite everyone to have an opportunity to be open to the spirit now – to be filled afresh, and to eagerly desire the gifts and to patiently wait before God. Before doing so, explain what will happen and give everybody a chance to share how they feel about it. Remind people that whilst sometimes the Spirit’s work is dramatic and instant, more often than not the Spirit’s transformation in us is a much more quiet transformation which over time shapes our thoughts,

desires and actions. If anyone is afraid at all, then remind them that one of the roles of the Spirit is to be our comforter (John 14:26 KJV), He is not someone we need to fear.

- Invite people to close their eyes and focus on God. Then either sing together ‘Spirit of the Living God’ (words below) or get someone to say a prayer to invite the Holy Spirit to come.
- Spend some time in silence, inviting everyone to open themselves to the Holy Spirit, asking God to fill them afresh, and praying for a particular work of the Spirit in their lives (for example to make them bolder as a witness for Christ; to see more clearly the truth of who God is; for a word of guidance; for a particular gift of the Spirit that they desire). It might be helpful to ask people to hold their hands open as a sign of their openness to receive. You may also like to invite people to pray for each other.
- After an appropriate time invite people to share anything that they wish to. It may be that they feel that the Spirit has been speaking to them and giving them a verse or a word or picture to share.

Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me.
Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me.
Melt me, mould me, fill me, use me,
Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me.

Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on us.
Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on us.
Melt us, mould us, fill us, use us,
Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on us

Exercises for the week ahead

Encourage everyone to select one of the following exercises to try to commit to in the following week or fortnight. If there is time, share what you are committing to do with others in your group, and then pray for each other.

1) Yield to the work of the Holy Spirit. Spend an extended time in prayer this week, specifically asking for the Spirit to begin working in your life in a new and powerful way. Remember, you are seeking God. Make no demands; have great expectations. Your only task is to surrender yourself to God, to open the door so the Spirit can come in and begin changing the way you think and live. This may lead to a time of confession.

2) Discover your Spiritual gifts Spend time reading and praying through the Spiritual gifts again (1 Corinthians 12:8-11; Romans 12:6-8; Ephesians 4:11-13). Explore these gifts through prayer, asking God to guide you to a gift (or perhaps more than one) that may be neglected and needs to be stirred up in your life or the life of your church fellowship (1 Timothy 4:14). Eagerly desire this gift in prayer.

3) Read the Scriptures with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit opens our minds when we read the Bible, making us receptive to its message. More specifically, the Spirit helps us understand what the text is saying to us personally and applies its message to our particular situation. Select a passage from the Bible to reflect on. As you read, ask the Holy Spirit to highlight a specific verse or word that is specifically meant for you to hear. When you have discovered what God wants you to hear, spend 10 to 15 mins reflecting on why it has impressed you and what God wants to say to you through it.

4) Listen for the Spirit’s promptings throughout the day. As you go about your daily business constantly pray that the Holy Spirit will guide you and prompt you. If you feel God leading you to talk to particular people or say or do particular things then follow the Spirit’s lead and see what happens. The pastor of the largest church in the world, Paul Yonggi Cho, before he gets out of bed each morning, prays ‘Good morning Holy Spirit. What shall we do together today?’ Why don’t you follow his example and pray that each morning this week?

5) Listen to the Advocate when making decisions. One of the most important and basic ministries of the Holy Spirit is to provide guidance (Romans 8:14, Galatians 5:25). Do you need to make an important decision? Seek the Spirit - your Advocate - to help you. Take your concern to God in prayer. Ask God to give you direction, insight, leading. It may be an intuitive sense; it may be a friend's advice that you sense comes from God; or it may be a door of opportunity opening or closing. In all decisions, test the Spirit by examining the Scriptures. The Spirit of God will never lead you into a decision that is contrary to the principles and commandments found in the Bible.

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Prayer for the week ahead

End with the following prayer and commit to praying this prayer each day on your own throughout the next week or fortnight.



**Father God,
By your grace, enable me to be open to the Spirit this day.
May the presence of the Spirit continue to make me more like Christ,
May the guidance of the Spirit, direct my words, thoughts and actions,
May the power of the Spirit enable me to fulfil your mission for me today and always.
Amen.**

Further reading...

Alison Morgan *Doing What Jesus Did: A Fresh Look at the Gifts of the Spirit.*
Jack Deere *Surprised by the power of the Holy Spirit*

My notes...

What I have learnt... what I will seek to put into practice...

Rhythm 3: By God’s grace, I will set aside time for prayer, worship and spiritual reading.

The Rhythms of Grace:

Remind yourselves of the five rhythms of grace, by either reading them out loud in turn or reading them quietly to yourselves.

- Rhythm One:** By God’s grace, I will seek to be transformed into the likeness of Christ.
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- Rhythm Five:** By God’s grace, I will sensitively share my faith with others and support God’s mission both locally and globally.

REVIEW:

In a big group or in smaller groups, share your experiences since you last met.

- *How did you get on with the spiritual exercise you committed to last time?*
- *Can you identify any new ways in which the Holy Spirit is at work in you?*

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The third Rhythm of Grace identifies three practices that will strengthen and give balance to our spiritual lives – prayer, worship and reading the Bible. They are not a menu from which we can choose; each is a necessary component. Together they feed and nourish us, in body, mind and spirit. In Rhythm 1 we thought about doing the ‘outer work’ while God transforms us from the inside; these spiritual disciplines are another essential way that we do the ‘outer work’ and invite God to transform us and deepen our relationship with Him.

[Note: There is a lot to cover in this section and all that can be done is merely to skim the surface of these huge areas. You probably won’t manage to get through it all so you may need to concentrate on which areas will be most useful for the group, but do leave enough time to work through the ‘Living it out’ section and pray for each other at the end.]

a) Worship :

Worship comes from the old English word ‘worth-ship’ meaning to attribute worth to someone or something, describing how worship is first and foremost about giving glory to God. The two main New Testament words used for worship are *proskuneo* meaning ‘to come towards to kiss’ and *latreuo* meaning ‘to serve or to minister.’

Before you do anything else, spend a few minutes in worship together. A suggestion is below, although you might want to do something different e.g. sing together or listen to some other music.

Revelation 4: The Throne in Heaven.

Invite everyone to spend a short time in silence, with their eyes closed, quieting their hearts and coming into God's presence. Ask one person to read Revelation 4 very slowly (You might like to play some suitable background music whilst doing this) and ask people to imagine joining the heavenly scene described in this chapter. After a suitable period of time, invite people to bring short prayers of praise to God either out loud or quietly in their own hearts.

Share: Briefly share together any reflections you have after the worship.

- Why do you think we are called to worship God? Does God need our praise?

Worship as a transforming encounter

James K.A. Smith in his book "Desiring the Kingdom" describes how worship can be a 'transforming encounter' which re-aligns and restores an individual's desire back towards God, where the day-to-day secular pressures and influences around us have drawn us away from him. Like a magnet attracting a compass needle, every time we come to God in worship we re-shift and re-orientate ourselves towards God again.

- Does this idea make you think differently at all about worship? What do *you* think is happening in us as we worship?
- How do you worship God outside of Sunday services?

b) Reading the Bible and spiritual reading

Read: Psalm 119:1-16,105 & 2 Timothy 3:16-17

- Using these verses and your own experience, why is regular and consistent reading of scripture useful for us?
- Studying Scripture can simply increase our information and knowledge of God, without significantly transforming us to be more like Christ. Do you agree with this? If so, how do we, in our use of scripture, move from *information* to *transformation*? Share your own experiences.

Reflection on Scripture is the key discipline

Research carried out by Willow Creek Community Church across over 1000 churches concluded that "personal time reflecting on Scripture is far and away the most powerful catalyst for spiritual growth."

(From *MOVE: What 1000 Churches Reveal about Spiritual Growth*, G. Hawkins & C. Parkinson)

John Ortberg in his book "*The Life you've always wanted*" (chapter 11) reminds us that "*the goal is not for us to get through the Scriptures. The goal is to get the Scriptures through to us.*" He suggests one way of doing this is to carefully meditate on scripture (to "marinate" if you like in Scripture – Colossians 3:15), to allow scripture to truly transform us, wash and renew our minds (Romans 12:2).

He outlines a five stage process:

1. Take time to ask God to meet you in scripture
2. Read the Bible in a repentant spirit with a readiness to obey and put into practice what it says.
3. Meditate on a fairly brief passage or narrative, reading it slowly several times if necessary and allowing certain words to stand out and sink into your heart.
 - Ask the question "God what do you want to say to me in this moment?"
 - If you are reading a story you may want to imagine yourself as part of the scene
4. Take one thought or verse with you to "chew on" throughout the day.
5. Allow this thought to become part of your memory.

Spiritual reading of course, encompasses more than just reading the Bible and you may well want to use a future small group session to all bring along a passage from a Christian book which has particularly inspired you and talk about it.

c) Prayer & setting aside time...

Prayer is ‘talking to God about what we are doing together.’ (Dallas Willard)

‘Prayer lays hold of God’s plan and becomes the link between His will and its accomplishment on earth. Amazing things happen, and we are given the privilege of being the channels of the Holy Spirit’s prayer.’ (Elisabeth Elliot)

‘Prayer has far more to do with what God wants to do in us than with your trying to “reach” or “realize,” still less “entertain,” God in prayer. This truth eliminates anxiety and concern as to the success or non-success of our prayer, for we can be quite certain that, if we want to pray and give the time to prayer, God is always successful and that is what matters. . . . What we think of as our search for God is, in reality, a response to the divine Lover drawing us to himself.’
(Ruth Borrowes in *Essence of prayer*)

‘Prayer is not asking. Prayer is putting oneself in the hands of God, at His disposition, and listening to His voice in the depth of our hearts.’ (Mother Teresa)

- What do you think of these descriptions of prayer? How do you view prayer? Do you see prayer as you talking to God, or a two-way conversation?

Read Mark 1:35-39 & John 5:19-20

Jesus was a person of prayer who had an intimate relationship with the Father. Not only did he make it a priority to take time out from the crowds to find a quiet place to pray to his Father, he described how he could do nothing apart from God. In this passage from Mark we sense that everything he did led from his intimate relationship in prayer with his Father.

- How do you pray? Do you have a regular time of prayer or does it tend to be in response to things that happen? What have you found has helped you pray?
- Try to imagine how Jesus must have prayed (The Lord’s prayer gives us a starting point). What different types of prayer do you think he would have used? and what different types should we (and do we) use?

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Live it out – exercises to help us to put this into practice!

In groups of 3’s and 4’s, look at the following exercises together before the end of the session. Each person is encouraged to select one or more of the following exercises to try to commit to in the following week or fortnight. Where possible, and where appropriate, share what you are committing to do with others in your group, and then pray for each other.

1) Commit to a daily time of prayer, Bible reading and worship

Set aside some time each day this week to spend reading the Bible, praying and worshipping. If you are not used to this, then start simply – and use some of the suggestions below. If you are in the habit of doing this each day, try something a little more challenging or different this week.

Some Suggestions:

- **Bible Reading Notes.** For example *Daily Bread*, *Closer to God* or *Encounter with God*.

Material adapted from Bryan Smith, J., Grayball, L. A Spiritual Formation Workbook (HarperSanFrancisco 1993).

- **On-line resources (which also have Mobile phone and iPad apps)** which can be read or some have audio versions too:
You Version - <https://www.youversion.com/en-GB/mobile>
 This is a great (and FREE!) on-line Bible which also gives you lots of different Bible plans to read the Bible daily, a verse for the day and many more things. Highly recommended for using the Bible on the move!
Word Live - <http://www.wordlive.org/Home/145653.id>
 Daily reading guides from Scripture Union, with three different styles to choose from – classic, alt and lectio – with readings each day, things to reflect on and pray about.
Word for today (UCB) - <http://www.ucb.co.uk/word-for-today.html>
 The on-line version of the UCB 'Word for today.'
Pray as you go - <http://www.pray-as-you-go.org/>
 Daily podcasts, more reflective and meditative.
- **Meditation** Meditate on a piece of Scripture this week – using the John Ortberg method described above as a guide. Reading a psalm a day might be a good place to start. For a more challenging approach you could try *The Ignatian Adventure* by Kevin O'Brien.

2) Rhythm of prayer

Try incorporating a fixed rhythm of prayer into your life this week. It may help to set your watch or phone alarm to remind you to pray.

For example:

Morning – read Psalm 63 or Psalm 95 to prompt a time of prayer.

Noon – pray the Lord's Prayer and spend two minutes in silence listening to God

Evening – read Psalm 4, 91 or 134 to prompt a final time of prayer.

Alternatively you might like to use the **Community of Saint Chad's morning and evening prayer booklets**, which will guide you through a structure for prayer.

3) Enjoy spending some time with God and worshipping him through painting, drawing, writing a poem, song or any other creative process you'd like to explore this week.

4) Journaling – Try journaling this week where you spend some time each day writing your reflections on your time with God. Alternatively you could start using a prayer journal, where you make a note of what you pray for each day and how the prayers are answered.

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Prayer for the week ahead

End with the following prayer and commit to praying this prayer each day on your own throughout the next week or fortnight.



**Father God,
 By your grace, enable me to be set aside time to meet with you each day,
 Teach me to reflect and meditate on your Word and give me the grace to
 be obedient to it,
 Draw me into a deep encounter with you in prayer,
 And may my whole life be a living sacrifice of worship to you,
 In the name of Jesus Christ, our Saviour, Amen.**

Rhythm 4: By God’s grace, I will endeavour to be a gracious presence in the world, serving others and working for justice in human relationships and social structures.

The Rhythms of Grace:

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REVIEW:

In a big group or in smaller groups, share your experiences since you last met.

- How did you get on with the spiritual exercise you committed to last time?
- Can you identify any ways in which God is at work in you?

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Study and Discuss:

Rhythm Four reminds us to follow the example of Jesus, who showed compassion to all. He healed and cared for the sick, forgave the sinful, and shared meals with prostitutes and corrupt officials. He also addressed issues of injustice and fought against it.

For discussion:

Around the world, fantastic work is done by both Christians and non-Christians in this area of serving those in need and fighting injustice. Do you think there is anything unique about Christian service in these areas compared to other secular service? Do you think as Christians we can be any more empowered for this work? What does it mean to serve ‘by God’s grace’?

a) Motivated by love

Jesus believed that true compassion was motivated by love. When asked which commandment was the greatest, he said:

‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets depend on these two commandments. (Luke 10:27)

To illustrate this he went on to tell the parable of the Good Samaritan.

Read and discuss 1 John 4:11-12, 19

Dallas Willard in his book *The Great Omission* (p23) describes how he came to realise that he did not love his very difficult neighbours. He writes “The Lord helped me see that I really had no love for them at all...I had to admit that I had never earnestly *sought* to be possessed by God’s kind of love, to become more like Jesus. Now it was time to seek.”

- How easy do we find ‘loving our neighbour’ (and not just the person next door to us!)?
- What do you think it means to ‘seek to be possessed by God’s love’ for others? What light do these verses from 1 John shed on this? Can anyone share any testimony of how God has done that in their lives?

b) Doing it for Him & Seeing the Image of God in people

Jesus also said that when we care for the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick, and those in prison, we are serving him: “*I tell you the truth, whatever you do did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me*” (Matthew 25:40).

“Seeing the image of God in people generates compassion....if we start with the presupposition that the person is created in the image of God rather than simply being a sinner, we will be compelled to look to their heart and attempt to call forth the image of God we know is there, no matter how hidden” (Alan and Debra Hirsch *Untamed*)

- How does this verse and this quotation help us in our service of others?
- Who are the ‘poor, the abandoned and the imprisoned’ in our communities today?
- What would it look like if we cared for them, as Jesus did in his day?

c) Generous giving

Read Acts 4:34-35 and 2 Corinthians 9:6-13.

In both these passages we see ‘the grace of giving’ in evidence within believers in the church.

- What principles of giving are outlined here?
- Why is generous giving a ‘grace from God’?

d) Working for justice

Throughout the Bible, justice for the oppressed is an important issue. Jesus in setting out his ‘manifesto’ in Luke 4:18-19 declares that he came to bring release for the oppressed. Psalm 82:3 says, “*give justice to the weak and the orphan; maintain the right of the lowly and the destitute.*” Care for the poor and marginalised is not only about provision. Christians have to go beyond direct aid and join the struggle for justice. We may be called to oppose the structures and institutions that deny those in need access to certain occupations, job promotions, essential services, educational opportunities, adequate housing, and more.

- What steps can we as Christians, and as the church, take to work for justice in our community, and further afield?
- Are any individuals in the group involved in particular initiatives? How could you as a group encourage and support them?

e) True, Christ-like service and worship (if time permits)

As we have already seen in Matthew 25, serving others is a way of serving God and offering him our worship. This week, view any service you do as worship being offered to God (Romans 12:1).

One of the most remarkable aspects of practising this rhythm is its double effect: in the process of helping others, we, too, are helped. John Wesley once said that ‘true happiness comes from helping others’. We begin the task of carrying one another's burdens out of compassion, but in the end we find that we too have been truly blessed. There is, however, a pitfall we should be aware of before we enter into any project of service. In his book *Celebration of Discipline*, Richard Foster notes the important difference between self-righteous service and true service. He lists nine important points to consider as we engage in works of compassion (see below).

True Service or Self-Righteous Service?

1. Self-righteous service relies on human effort, whereas true service flows out of a relationship with God. Listen to the promptings of God as you begin and lean on his strength to do the task.
2. Self-righteous service is impressed with ‘the big deal’, whereas true service makes no distinction between the large and the small. Be indiscriminate in your choice, knowing that God often considers a small task the most important.
3. Self-righteous service requires external rewards, whereas true service rests contented in hiddenness. Avoid doing things for others as a means of getting applause or reward, relying instead on the divine nod of approval.
4. Self-righteous service is concerned with results, whereas true service is free of the need to calculate them. Do not let expectations guide your service, and do not be disappointed if your service effects no external change.
5. Self-righteous service picks and chooses whom to serve, whereas true service is indiscriminate in its ministry. Be careful not to neglect the poor and the lowly in favour of the rich and powerful or vice versa!
6. Self-righteous service is affected by moods and whims, whereas true service ministers on the basis of need. Do not let your feelings, which ebb and flow, determine your actions; rather let the service discipline your feelings.
7. Self-righteous service is temporary, whereas true service is on-going. Compassion is a way of life which spontaneously meets human need, not merely an occasional helping hand.
8. Self-righteous service is insensitive, whereas true service withholds as freely as it gives. Listen with tenderness and patience before you begin. Be sensitive to what people really need, not merely what you think they need.
9. Self-righteous service fractures community, whereas true service builds community. Be careful not to let your ‘good works’ become debts that others must repay. Direct your efforts towards building unity in the community.

Richard Foster’s thoughts help us to begin to understand why we need to ask God for this grace, rather than trying to do things in our own strength and power.

- Reflect on these together. Which do you find most challenging? Which do you need to ask God to help you with?

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Live it out – exercises to help us to put this into practice!

In groups of 3’s and 4’s, look at the following exercises together before the end of the session. Each person is encouraged to select one or more of the following to try to commit to in the following week or fortnight. Where possible, and where appropriate, share what you are committing to do with others in your group, and then pray for each other, that God would guide and give you his grace for this exercise in the coming week.

1) Blessing and acts of generosity. Seek to bless at least one person this week - perhaps through a letter or phone call to someone who is struggling, or a gift or a particular act of service to encourage and support them.

2) Look for an injustice and take a stand. Ask God to show you this week where there is any injustice in your home, workplace, community or wider world that he wants you to graciously take a stand on. As a first step, examine yourself to see if anything you are doing is oppressing someone else. If God puts any particular situations on your heart then pray and seek God as to what action you might take. You might need to seek the wisdom of others too before you proceed.

3) Practising Hospitality. Practising hospitality is a great way to remind ourselves of the grace God extends to us. Pray about who you could spend time with this week – perhaps over a meal or a coffee, or a visit. Why not spend time with someone who is more of an ‘outsider’ or ‘on the fringe’ and who you might not normally socialise with?

4) Mission Possible As a group, consider what kind of ‘mission’ you could take on. Is there something that your church is doing that you could be part of? Is there something within your community that you can serve and support?

5) Mood Changer This week, try to bring a breath of fresh air to your workplace or home. Aim to speak well of everyone, try and turn gossiping conversations around and if you do find fault in someone, find a way to flip it round so you can come alongside them and help them to grow.

6) Generous Giving Find time over the next week or so to prayerfully review your giving. Ask God to give you the ‘grace of generous giving’ and seek how he is leading you to use your money, trusting that when we hand our finances over to him he promises to supply our needs (2 Cor. 9:8).

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Prayer for the week ahead

End with the prayer of St. Francis of Assisi, and commit to praying this prayer each day on your own throughout the next week or fortnight.



Further reading

Richard Foster *Freedom of Simplicity*

Prayer of St Francis of Assisi

***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***

By God's grace, I will sensitively share my faith with others and support God's mission both locally and globally.

The Rhythms of Grace:

Remind yourselves of the five rhythms of grace, by either reading them out loud in turn or reading them quietly to yourselves.

- Rhythm One:** By God's grace, I will seek to be transformed into the likeness of Christ.
- Rhythm Two:** By God's grace, I will be open to the presence, guidance and power of the Holy Spirit.
- Rhythm Three:** By God's grace, I will set aside time for prayer, worship and spiritual reading.
- Rhythm Four:** By God's grace, I will endeavour to be a gracious presence in the world, serving others and working for justice in human relationships and social structures.
- Rhythm Five:** By God's grace, I will sensitively share my faith with others and support God's mission both locally and globally.

REVIEW:

In a big group or in smaller groups, share your experiences since you last met.

- How did you get on with the spiritual exercise you committed to last time?
- Can you identify any new ways in which God is at work in you?

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Study and discuss:

Rhythm Five reminds us of the great commission that Jesus gave his followers just before he ascended into heaven:

“Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” (Matthew 28:19-20)

and in Acts 1:8

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth”

Sharing stories:

In 2's or 3's briefly share who it was who first shared their faith with you? How did they do it?

- How do you feel about 'sharing your faith' or 'witnessing' with others?
- What comfort do you have here in these verses about what God promises as we step out?
- What do you think it means to make **disciples** of all nations? Why do you think Jesus used this term here rather than 'believers'?
- “A church which bottlenecks its specialists to do its witnessing is living in violation of both [Jesus Christ] and the consistent pattern of the early Christians. Evangelism was the task of the *whole* church not just the 'name characters'” (Leighton Ford, former Vice President of the Billy Graham Association). Discuss!

Who is on your frontline?

The London Institute of Contemporary Christianity's (LICC) new *Imagine* project which aims to help equip individuals and churches to share their faith, uses the term 'frontline' to help Christians see where God has placed them to join in God's mission.



Your Frontline: the place where you spend much of your time

Your Frontline: the place where you meet people who don't know Jesus

Your Frontline: the place God has called you

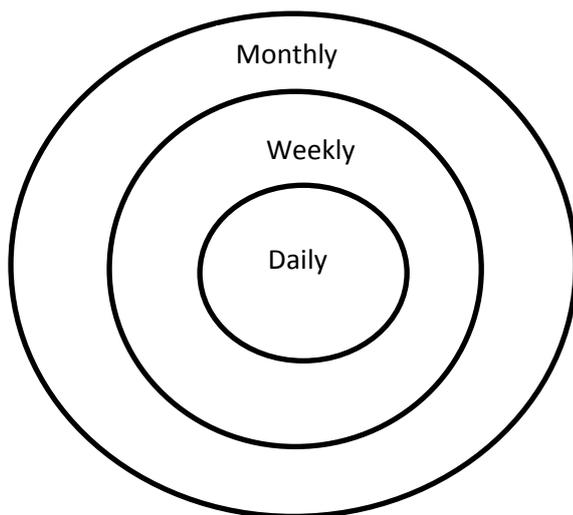
Your Frontline: the place of possibility and potential

(<http://www.licc.org.uk/imagine-church/resources/life-on-the-frontline/>)

For many this may be the workplace, for others it may be the school gates, being with the grandchildren, the golf club or the community centre.

Exercise – where are your frontlines?

On a piece of A4 paper, draw 3 concentric circles. In the first one write down the places which you visit, and the names of the 'not-yet Christians' who you come into contact with daily; in the second one, the places you visit and those who you see weekly; in the third one the places and those who you see monthly or more.



- Where would you describe your frontlines as being?
- Do you see any evidence of God being at work there already?

These are the places God has placed you, these are the people God has placed you alongside to fulfil his mission.

Pray for them and for those places in the coming days.

- Who do you sense God is particularly calling you to get alongside?

“Living in 3D”

Bill Hybels in his book *Just walk across the room* describes three distinct concepts for us to consider as we step out to share our faith:

- **Develop friendships** – by engaging in the lives of people around you
- **Discover stories** – take time to listen to people's stories before sharing your own story
- **Discern next steps** – by following the Holy Spirit's direction

He goes on to say...“These days, I'm more convinced than ever that the absolute highest value in personal evangelism is staying attuned to and cooperative with the Holy Spirit...my objective is not to contrive ways “to get

someone saved;” rather my objective is to walk when he prompts me to walk, talk when he says

“As I have travelled around the world...I've developed a deep concern for a dangerous trend that is alive and well in many evangelical churches. The longer a person attends church, the fewer evangelistic discussions they engage in with family members and friends”

Bill Hybels

to talk, fall silent when I'm at risk of saying too much and stay put when he leads me to stay put" (Bill Hybels, *Just walk across the room* p35, 37).

- Has anyone experienced this 'prompting' of the Holy Spirit in this way? (This can come through a variety of different forms, for example 'gut feelings,' prompts through scripture, 'chance' meetings with people)
- How do you think we can be open to these promptings more?
- It has been said that in this postmodern world the question non-Christians are asking is often no longer 'is it true?' but 'does it work?' How important do you think 'telling our own stories' is in sharing our faith? What stories might you tell of what God has done in your life?

What else does the Bible have to say?

Distribute these verses between people in 2's and 3's. Ask them to look up the verses, discuss what they think each verse tells us about sharing our faith and then feedback to the whole group.

1 Peter 3:15

1 Corinthians 9:22

Matthew 5:16

Matthew 10:19,20

Live it out – exercises to help us to put this into practice!

In groups of 3's and 4's, look at the following exercises together before the end of the session. Each person is encouraged to select one or more of the following to try to commit to in the following week or fortnight. Where possible, and where appropriate, share what you are committing to do with others in your group, and then pray for each other, that God would guide you and give you his grace for this exercise in the coming week.

1) Pray for the 'not-yet-Christians' who you come into contact with. Commit to praying for 2 or 3 of the people on your 'frontline' chart each day, asking that God would draw them to himself and that he would give you opportunities to be a witness to them this week. Maybe you could meet with a few others who are also on your 'front-line' and commit to praying together?

2) Be intentional. Commit to being intentional in your actions over the next few days. For example this might mean sitting down for lunch with others rather than working through your lunch break (ask the Holy Spirit to direct you who to sit next to!), initiating conversations with people and asking 'open questions' to hear their stories, dropping into conversation things of faith and openly talking about church, offering particular acts of service as a witness and to spark conversation.

3) Be open to the Holy Spirit's promptings. Seek throughout the day to ask the Holy Spirit to prompt you – maybe to say or do something, or to talk to someone. And be obedient to those promptings and see what happens!

4) Review your church/non-church life balance. Review what you do in a typical week. Are you so busy with church activities that you do not come into contact with many 'not-yet-Christians'? If so, is God asking you to change something – maybe to join a local club or take on a different activity to give you a new 'front-line'?

5) Invite someone to church or to a church group. Pray about who you might invite and to what and then if you sense it is right to do so, ask them. You may be surprised at their willingness to come!

6) Consider joining a short-term mission team in this country or overseas. Look at the Christian Vocations website for details of all the different opportunities available <http://www.christianvocations.org/> or consider 'Gap year' openings for 6-12 months through the Diocesan St Chads Volunteer Programme for 18-35's http://www.lichfield.anglican.org/assets/downloads/Departments/worldmission/st_chads_leaflet.pdf

7) Find out about, and pray for, one of the church's mission partners Consider ways in which you could support, raise awareness of, and pray for any of the church's Mission Partners.

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Prayer for the week ahead

Commit to praying the following prayer each day this week...



**Lord,
My life is in your hands.
Use me to point someone towards you today.
I promise to cooperate in any way I can.
If you want me to say a word for you today, I'll do that.
If you want me to keep quiet but demonstrate love and servant hood,
by your Spirit's power I will.
I'm fully available to you today, so guide me by your spirit.
Amen.**

Further reading

Bill Hybels *Just Walk Across the Room*

My notes...

What I have learnt... what I will seek to put into practice...