

Small Group Material

Rule of Life - Reaching Out

Welcome (10 mins) Can you remember a time when you helped a stranger in distress? What happened?

Worship (10 mins)

Here's a song to listen to: This is Amazing Grace by Phil Wickham

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cgsbaBlaoVc>

Praise God for his grace and sovereignty.

To Consider (10 mins)

Read: God made us to live with others, closely. To work with them, have company with them, be family to each other, and to serve and help wherever we can. Lockdown and isolation is not God's plan for humanity! The Christian faith is at once a personal and corporate experience - we do not exist only for ourselves, but to be agents of God's kingdom in the world. So we cannot rest in a bubble! There are people to love, listen to, feed and heal. Jesus asks us to reach out, and to do it with each other, in pairs and communities of faith. (From Martha's sermon notes)

God cares deeply about how we treat one another. The twofold Royal Commandment to love God and to love our neighbour are God's instructions to us. We did not create them; rather, they have been given to us as concrete ways God expects us to live.

The call to love one another finds its grounding in God's love for us. God has loved us, so also we should love one another (1 John 4.11). Jesus, too, said, 'Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.' (John 13.34) God has shown his love for us, and he expects that we in response should love one another.

When we look at it from God's perspective, we see things very differently. Every single human being – in fact, all of creation – is a precious work of God. Proverbs tells us, 'Those who oppress the poor insult their maker, but those who are kind to the poor honour God.' (Proverbs 14.31)

If we see through the eyes of God, we would see with compassion. God cares about our needs, our hurts, and our brokenness. He understands our sinfulness – it comes as no shock or surprise. But instead of judging us, he is ready to forgive, to mend, to restore us to health. We are all precious in the sight of God. The Lord desires that we see through his eyes.

Jesus lived a life of compassion for 'the least'. He mended and cared for the sick, he forgave the sinful, he shared meals with prostitutes and tax collectors, and yet his compassion never undermined his sense of justice. Rather he blended the two together. His love of God led him to grab a whip and throw out the merchants in the temple. When faced with injustice, Jesus fought against it with a holy passion.

The Bible tells us, 'For I, the Lord, love justice' (Is 61.8). The Old Testament prophets pronounced the justice of God and nearly always it had to do with the way certain nations were treating the poor and the oppressed. The Psalmist declares, 'The Lord works righteousness and justice for all the oppressed.' (Ps 103.6)

God desires that we 'defend the cause of the weak and the fatherless; maintain the rights of the poor and oppressed.' (Ps 82.3) God has shown us the way that he wants us to live: 'He has told you, O Man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice and to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God.' (Micah 6.8) (A Spiritual Formation Handbook by James Bryan Smith, p41/42)

Have you ever had to confront and injustice? How did you respond?
(Keep this brief but you may get some interesting stories!)

Word (15 mins) Read Luke 10. 25-37

1. In Martha's notes for this week, she lists aspects of 'reaching out' as including 'mission, justice, relationships, community, generosity'. Which of these aspects does the Good Samaritan show - and how?
2. How did the priest and the Levite fail to reach out in those areas?
3. We are all gifted in different ways. Which of these five aspects of reaching out come most naturally to you and which do you struggle with? (*Encourage the group to affirm one another as they share and to point out ways others 'reach out'.*)
4. Consider ways in which they are interlinked...

Get Inspired (10 mins)

Here are short films (5.30mins) from Tear Fund about its work called CCM (Church and Community Mobilization). Through CCM, churches inspire and empower citizens to identify needs in their community and to mobilise their own resources to address them. The process is led by specially trained facilitators who encourage participation from everyone.

At the start of the process, the church must understand its identity, purpose and role in the immediate community, learning about and applying its biblical mandate and thus truly becoming 'salt and light' in the community.

Watch one of these films.

1. CCM advocacy is working in partnership with the local authorities as here in Uganda and Bolivia:

https://learn.tearfund.org/en/themes/church/church_and_advocacy/church_and_community_mobilisation_ccm_advocacy/

or

2. CCM transforming a community in Sierra Leone (5.33 mins)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YTIK7IYSgsY>

What struck you about the film? How were you inspired? What could we learn from it?

Getting Practical (20 mins)

Let's start by doing something together! We are going to come up with all sorts of ways in which we (as a church *and* as individuals) have been - **and could** - reach out in these five areas (mission, justice, relationships, community, generosity). Don't be bashful!

(Leader, if there haven't been many ideas of how we could reach out, push the group to come up with ideas in all the areas - don't leave any blanks!! Remember mission includes evangelism.)

The best way to do this would be by someone screen sharing a blank document, listing the categories and then adding everyone's suggestions.

After 8-10 mins or once the flow has dried up, ask for any reflections on the list. What do we seem 'good' at? Where do we find reaching out difficult? Why is this? (*Calling? Courage? Commitment? Leadership?*) How could we grow in our less active areas?

Then give people a few minutes to reflect personally on how they could grow and reach out with God's love more... (2 mins)

Share and pray for each other as we respond to God's commandment to 'love our neighbour'.

Get Praying (15 mins)

Pray for the church around the world as it seeks to reach out into its own communities. Ask the group to name particular countries and their needs. For the work of Tear Fund and other development agencies. Pray for us at St Mary's, for the development of the branch, for Emma and her team. For God to call a CAP centre manager and a Children's and Families worker.

After your prayer, you could use these words of commissioning: 'Go in peace to love and serve the Lord' with the response,

'In the name of Christ, Amen!'