



Diocese of Durham



UNIT 2

BUILDING OUR FAITH

THE **BLESSING** COURSE

LIVING AS DISCIPLES OF
THE GOD OF BLESSING

Blessing our communities in Jesus' name



Foreword

God is in the business of blessing. He blesses in creation (Genesis 1.22, 28). He blesses in the covenants he makes with humanity (e.g. Abraham Gen 12.1-4). He blesses supremely in our Lord Jesus Christ (Ephesians 1.3-14).

We are blessed people. So in response we bless God in praise and worship.

Then we are also called to be a people of blessing. God chooses to use us to bless others, as individuals and communities, and to bless the whole of creation. So we need to grow in our experience and understanding of this blessedness. Hence *The Blessing Course*.

The aim of the whole series is to help us grow as followers of Jesus so that we can be a people of blessing. We bless by our presence, by our prayers, by proclaiming the good news, and by serving.

It is my simple prayer that *The Blessing Course* will be a blessing to all who engage in it; and that we will all then be a means of God's blessing to others.

+Paul Dunelm
May 2016

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Introduction to Building Our Faith

Jesus said, 'Everyone who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell-- and great was its fall!'

Matthew 7.24-27

Notice in Jesus' story that both of the builders hear Jesus' words. But only the wise builder acts on them. A good builder needs to listen *and* to act.



Who or what do you listen to as you go through your day? Who or what is guiding how you live?

What does it mean for us, as Christians, to listen to God and to act accordingly? Our faith in God is the foundation of our lives. Building on that foundation means learning about our faith and seeking to live it out.

The purpose of this booklet is to help you to think about your faith and to act upon it. The booklet focuses on some of the key building blocks of the Christian faith. These include: God, the Bible, yourself as God's child, the Holy Spirit, and Christ's resurrection.

Session Contents and Structure

The sessions in this booklet are designed for group study and consist primarily of activities for you to engage in as a group. In between the activities are short explanatory paragraphs that are meant to guide your sessions. You may want to read these paragraphs aloud, or the group leader may summarise them briefly.

Each session is divided into three sections. The first section is called *Welcome and Worship* - all of the sessions open and conclude with worship. Worshipping God together honours God. It also reminds us that our sessions are about our spiritual growth and opens us to the work of the Holy Spirit.

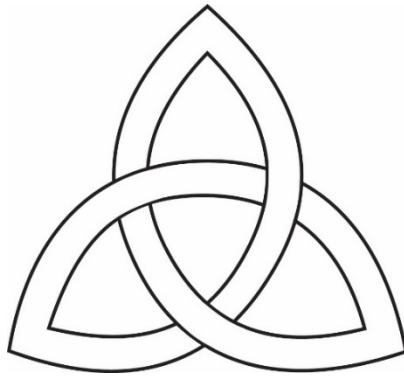
The next part of each session is called *Reflecting Together*. Here you will find opportunities to talk about your faith and what you believe. The final section, *Responding*, helps you to relate your thoughts about your faith to your own discipleship. It allows space for personal reflection and includes the closing worship.

At the very beginning of each session, you will also see a section labelled *Resources*. This provides a list of items you will need for that session. The group leader may provide the items in the list, or you may divide responsibility for these items among the members of your group.

Session 1

Who is our God?

In this session we think about God
as three-in-one:
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.



Resources

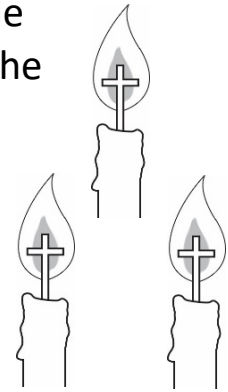
For this session you will need:

- 3 large candles and matches
- A small amount of play dough for each person (optional)
- One Bible per person
- Post-it notes in three colours
- Coloured pens or markers
- A large sheet of paper or cardboard divided into three sections: Father, Son, Holy Spirit
- The music for 'Holy, Holy, Holy' by Reginald Heber and John B. Dykes

Welcome and Worship

Place the three candles in a triangle formation in a visible place in the room. Open by saying responsively to God the prayer below.

As you say the prayer, ask someone to light the three candles one at a time, in response to the prayer to each member of the trinity.



Pray responsively:

Praise to you, God our Father, for the blessing of being
your children,

We give thanks that we may call God our Father.

Praise to you, Lord Jesus, for you have redeemed us and
made us part of God's family,

We give thanks that we may call Jesus our Lord.

Praise to you, Holy Spirit, for you unite us to God and to
one another,

We give thanks that God's Spirit is at work in our lives.

Amen.

Leave the candles lit throughout the session, to remind you of God's presence with you.

Reflecting Together

Who or what do you think of when you think of God?

- Activity 1.1 Give each person a small amount of play dough. You should use the play dough to form a shape or symbol in answer to the question 'Who or what do you think of when you think of God?' Alternatively, your group may prefer to respond to this question by drawing a figure on paper.
- Activity 1.2 Place your play dough or drawn figures on a table at the centre of the room, or around the three lit candles. Have a look at everyone's figures and talk about them together. You may need to explain your figure. Together consider what portrait of God is represented by the figures.

Now consider the ways that your figures reflect God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

- Activity 1.3 Use the figures to talk about your different views of God. Do your views of God tend to focus on one member of the trinity? Are all the members of the trinity represented in the play dough figures? If not, which member of the trinity is omitted and why might that be?

Draw or write your thoughts here:



The 5th century Bishop, Augustine of Hippo, famously said, 'If you can fully grasp it, it's not God.'

**'If you can fully grasp
it, it's not God.'**

Augustine of Hippo

God is so much greater than us that we cannot fully understand God.

Understanding God as three-in-one is something that none of us may ever fully grasp, at least not in this life.

The Bible helps us with this. We call God 'trinity' because the Bible reveals God to us as Father, Son, and Spirit. We see all three persons of the trinity together at Jesus' baptism.

- Activity 1.4 Read aloud Mark 1.9-11. Jesus' baptism is the first event in his public ministry.

What is the role of each member of the trinity in this passage?



Father

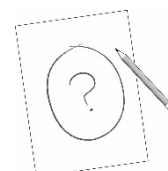
Son

Spirit

Notice in the Mark passage that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are *all present* at the same time.

- Activity 1.5 The trinity does not mean that God sometimes shows himself to us as Father, sometimes as Son, and sometimes as Spirit. He is all three *at the same time*.

What are the implications of this for how you think about God?



One way of thinking about God is to think about the different ways the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit work in our lives.

- Activity 1.6 Look together at Ephesians 1.3-14 in the box on the next page. What do you notice about the work of the Father (vs 3-6), the work of the Son (vs 7-12), and the work of the Spirit (vs 13-14)? If you would like, you may find it useful to highlight or circle what you notice, using different colours for each member of the trinity.

Ephesians 1.3-14 **(The Message)**

³ How blessed is God! And what a blessing he is! He's the Father of our Master, Jesus Christ, and takes us to the high places of blessing in him. ⁴ Long before he laid down earth's foundations, he had us in mind, had settled on us as the focus of his love, to be made whole and holy by his love. ⁵ Long, long ago he decided to adopt us into his family through Jesus Christ. (What pleasure he took in planning this!) ⁶ He wanted us to enter into the celebration of his lavish gift-giving by the hand of his beloved Son.

⁷ Because of the sacrifice of the Messiah, his blood poured out on the altar of the cross, we're a free people – free of penalties and punishments chalked up by all our misdeeds. And not just barely free, either. *Abundantly* free! ⁸ He thought of everything, provided for everything we could possibly need, ⁹ letting us in on the plans he took such delight in making. He set it all out before us in Christ, ¹⁰ a long-range plan in which everything would be brought together and summed up in him, everything in deepest heaven, everything on planet earth. ¹¹ It's in Christ that we find out who we are and what we are living for. Long before we first heard of Christ and got our hopes up, he had his eye on us, ¹² had designs on us for glorious living, part of the overall purpose he is working out in everything and everyone.

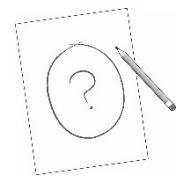
¹³ It's in Christ that you, once you heard the truth and believed it (this message of your salvation), found yourselves home free – signed, sealed, and delivered by the Holy Spirit. ¹⁴ This signet from God is the first instalment on what's coming, a reminder that we'll get everything that God has planned for us, a praising and glorious life.

- Activity 1.7 Using the Ephesians passage to help you, think of one word or picture that describes how the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit each work in your life. Draw the picture or write your word on the post-it notes. Each person in the group should draw or write one post-it note for each member of the trinity.

Place your post-it notes on the large sheet of paper under the appropriate member of the trinity. If you have more than one word or picture for a member of the trinity, use more than one post-it note.

- Activity 1.8 Talk about God using your post-it notes.

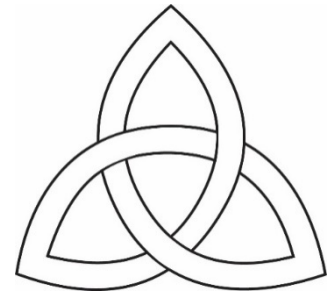
What do your words or pictures suggest about how you think of God?



What do they suggest about how you relate to God as Father, Son, and Spirit?

Responding

Do we have three Gods? No. Scripture repeatedly emphasises the unity of God. A simple way to summarise the trinity is to say that God is one, yet eternally three. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are eternally united.



The names we use for the trinity are based on their relationships to one another: Father, Son, and Spirit. At the heart of God is relationship, and that relationship is grounded in love.

- Activity 1.9 1 John 4.16 states that ‘God is love.’ God exists in an eternal relationship of love. If love is at the heart of God, what are the implications for how we relate to God?

Write your thoughts here:



Take home your figures to help you to think about your view of God this week.



Conclude in worship of God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit by singing together the hymn ‘Holy, Holy, Holy’ by Reginald Heber and John B. Dykes.

1. Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty!
Early in the morning our song shall rise to thee.
Holy, holy, holy! Merciful and mighty,
God in three persons, blessed Trinity!

2. Holy, holy, holy! All the saints adore thee,
casting down their golden crowns around the glassy sea.
Cherubim and seraphim falling down before thee,
who was, and is, and evermore shall be.

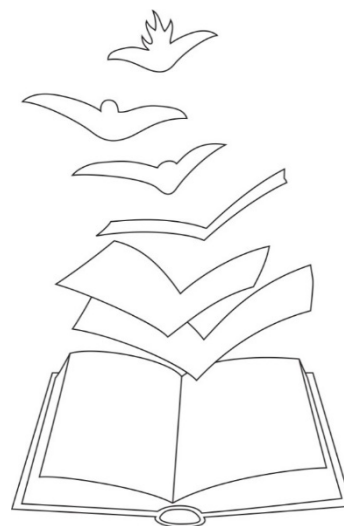
3. Holy, holy, holy! Though the darkness hide thee,
though the eye of sinful man thy glory may not see,
only thou art holy; there is none beside thee,
perfect in power, in love and purity.

4. Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty!
All thy works shall praise thy name, in earth and sky and
sea.
Holy, holy, holy! Merciful and mighty,
God in three persons, blessed Trinity.

Session 2

At Home in God's Story

The Bible is God's written word. It tells us the story of how God rescues us and his world. What might it mean for you to be part of that story?



Resources

For this session you will need:

- A lamp
- One Bible per person
- For Activity 2.3, you will need to create a large version of the Bible Story Timeline to hang on a wall and a name card for each of the people and events listed in the table. Your group may then blu-tack the name cards onto the timeline as part of the activity.
- Blu-tack

Welcome and Worship

Light the lamp and place it at the centre of the room, with an open Bible next to it. Dim the other lights in the room. As people enter, ask them to meditate on the following verse:

***Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.
Psalm 119.105 (NRSV)***

Turn off the lamp so that the room is dark. Ask everyone to imagine walking around the room in the dark. Turn the lamp on again. What does the light do? How does the light help us?

Call out one word answers to these questions as prayers of thanks to God for his word.

Reflecting Together

God has given us the Bible to help us live out our faith every day.

- Activity 2.1 Talk about a favourite Bible passage or story. Why do you like that passage or story? Has it encouraged you in your faith in any way?



The word 'Bible' means library. The Bible is a library of books. The Protestant Bible has two sections in its library: the Old Testament and the New Testament. The Old Testament has 39 books and the New Testament has 27 books.

The Catholic Bible includes a third section called the Apocrypha.

The Old Testament is the Bible that Jesus used. It is also called the Hebrew Scriptures, and is structured slightly differently from our Old Testament.

There are lots of different types of books in this library. The chart below lists the different types of books.

Type of Book	Book Titles
OLD TESTAMENT	
Law	Genesis to Deuteronomy
History	Joshua to Esther
Wisdom Literature	Job to Song of Songs
The Prophets	Isaiah to Malachi
NEW TESTAMENT	
Gospel	Matthew to John
History	Acts
Letters	Romans to 3 John
Apocalypse	Revelation

- Activity 2.2 Open your Bible to the contents page and look through the list of books together. Pick out one book that is not familiar to you. You may want to select a short book! Try to select a different book from other people in the group. Use the chart above to work out what type of book you have chosen. Flick through the book, reading a few sections. Tell the whole group: ‘what’s the book about?’ (you may want to do this activity in pairs)

The book I looked at:

What I discovered about this book:

The Old and New Testaments together tell the story of how God creates our world, how we are alienated from God, how God rescues us from this alienation and restores us to relationship with him.

- Activity 2.3 Attach the Bible Story Timeline to a wall. Place the name cards of the people and events (listed in the table below) where everyone can reach them. Use the Timeline and name cards to tell the *overall* Bible story together. If someone knows the story of one of the people or events, ask that person to tell the story in 2-3 sentences and to blu-tack the name card onto the timeline. If you get stuck, use the Bible passages to help you.

God creates the world. (Genesis 1)

Adam & Eve turn away from God. (Genesis 3.6-13)

Noah (Genesis 6.12-14)

God calls Abraham: God's rescue plan begins. (Genesis 12.1-3)

Joseph (Genesis 42.1-13)

God delivers his people from Egypt. (Exodus 14.13-16)

God makes a covenant with his people. (Exodus 24.1-10)

David (1 Samuel 16.1-13)

The prophets warn God's people of coming judgement if they continue to break the covenant. (Isaiah 1.1-20)

Ezra (Ezra 7.6-10)

Jesus is born. (Luke 2.1-14)

Jesus dies and resurrects. He establishes a new covenant.

(Luke 22.20, 24.44-49)

The Holy Spirit births the church and writes the new covenant on God's people's hearts. (Acts 2.36-42, Hebrews 10.15-17)

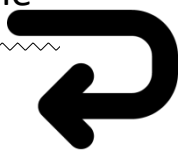
God restores all of creation to himself. (Revelation 21.1-4)

Bible Story Timeline

Beginnings	Patriarchs	Slavery in Egypt	Exodus and Wilderness
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Entering the Promised Land	The Kingdom of Israel (United)	The Kingdom divided in two	Exile	
		<i>Israel</i>		
		<i>Judah</i>	Exile	A remnant of Judah returns from exile



Jesus	Holy Spirit: Beginnings of the church	Church: living as God's people	Restoration
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Responding

The Bible is not a hodgepodge of disconnected stories and sayings. Its books all contribute in some way to telling the story of God's dealings with his creation, and especially with humanity. This story has a beginning, a middle, and a promised ending.

Right now, we are still on the Timeline, living in the time between the start of the church and God's promised restoration of all things to himself.

- Activity 2.4 Take a moment to reflect on your place in this story. Draw yourself on the Timeline. How does knowing that you are part of the story help you to live for God?

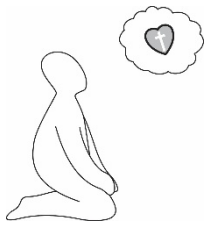


Knowing the Bible helps us to play our role in its story.

- Activity 2.5 Choose one book of the Bible that you would like to get to know a little better. You may want to choose the book that you looked at in Activity 2.2. Or you may want to choose a book that is about the life of the church, such as Colossians. Or you may prefer a story-based book such as 1 Samuel or Acts.

The Bible book that I would like to get to know better:

- Activity 2.6 Turn to the beginning of your chosen book. Read the first few verses prayerfully. Ask God what he might want to say to you through this book. In the coming week, listen to or read a portion of this book every day.



Turn on the lamp again. Conclude your session by saying together the following prayer:

Heavenly Father,

**We thank you that
Your word is a lamp to our feet
and a light to our paths.**

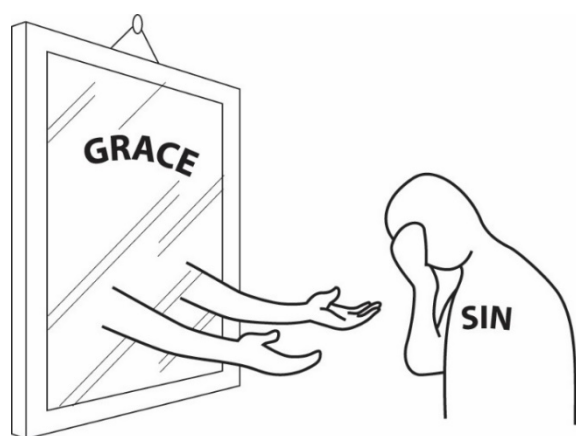
**Help us to hear from you
in your word.**

**Please guide our footsteps
and show us the way to walk
through your word this week.**

Amen.

Session 3

Made in God's Image, Healed by God's Grace



Here we consider our human situation. We are created to reflect God's image yet we are also riddled with sin.

Resources

For this session you will need:

- A large copy of the painting *The Creation of Adam* by Michelangelo
- Copies of the hands section of this painting on small cards, one for each person
- One Bible per person
- A large mirror
- A broken mirror
- Music and words for 'Amazing Grace' by John Newton or 'Here I am to Worship' by Tim Hughes

Welcome and Worship

Place the painting *The Creation of Adam* in a spot where everyone can see it, and leave it there throughout the session. Give each person a card showing the hands section of this painting.

Use the painting and cards to meditate quietly upon what it means that we are created beings who depend upon God for our existence.

Close the meditation by saying together the following prayer:

**Father, I abandon myself into your hands.
Do with me what you will.
Whatever you do, I will thank you.
I am ready for all, I accept all.
Let only your will be done in me,
As in all your creatures,
And I'll ask nothing else, my Lord.**

**Into your hands I commend my spirit.
I give it to you
With all the love of my heart.
For I love you, Lord,
And so need to give myself,
To surrender myself into your hands
With a trust beyond all measure,
Because you are my father.
Amen.***

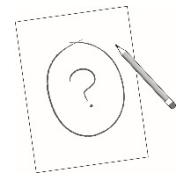
*Charles de Foucauld, 'Prayer of Abandonment to God', in the Northumbria Community Trust, *Celtic Daily Prayer: Book One The Journey Begins* (London: HarperCollins, 2000), p.29.

Reflecting Together

We are created beings, made in God's image.

- Activity 3.1 Read aloud Genesis 1.26-30. Our role in creation, as God's image bearers, gives us human dignity, rights, and responsibilities. What might be some of those rights and responsibilities?
- Activity 3.2 Place a mirror where everyone can see it. Ask one person to stand in front of the mirror and to tell everyone else what she or he can see.

What does the reflection in the mirror shows us about the person, and what does it not show us?



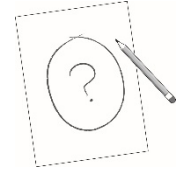
Each of us is like a mirror. We reflect God's image. That image is not necessarily a reflection of God's physical form. We 'look like' God in other ways. The image of God in us has to do with who God is.

- Activity 3.3 We saw in our first session that God exists in an eternal relationship of love. If one of the main ways that we mirror God is in how we relate to God, to ourselves, and to each other, what are the implications for how we live as disciples?

The image of God in us has been broken by sin.

- Activity 3.4 Read aloud Genesis 2.16-17 and 3.1-24.

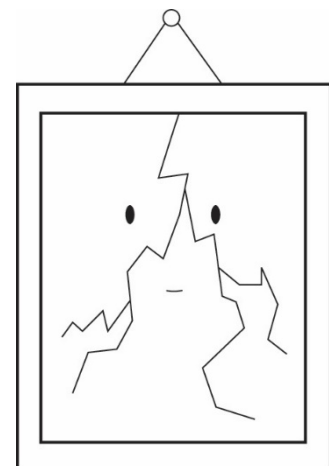
Based on these passages, what would you say that sin is?



Sin is more than a bad deed. Sin has often been described as an illness. Humanity is chronically ill with sin. Our sin disrupts and distorts our relationships with God, with our self, with each other, and with the created order.

- Activity 3.5 Place the broken mirror next to the whole mirror. Ask someone to stand in front of the whole mirror and then the broken mirror. Ask the person to describe the differences in the two reflections. Use these differences to help you think about the effect of sin in your life – how it shatters the image of God.

Draw or write your thoughts here:



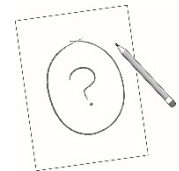
Responding

Sin has a cure. The mirror can be mended. God's grace is the cure for sin.

The word 'grace' means gift. Grace is something that is freely given. It is a gift to us from God. Grace refers to *how* God treats us: he treats us with favour - with love and mercy - despite our sinfulness.

- Activity 3.6 Talk about a time when you received a generous or much wanted gift.

How did it make you feel?



What are the implications for how you might respond to God's grace?

- Activity 3.7 Have one person read aloud Ephesians 2.1-10. Ask everyone else to close their eyes and listen for the contrast between the effect of sin in their lives (vs. 1-3) and the effect of God's grace (vs. 4-10). Then use the spaces on the next page to draw pictures that help you to express the difference in your own life.

The effect of sin

The effect of grace

The Ephesians passage makes clear that you can never be good enough to earn God's favour.

You can never work hard enough to earn God's favour.

You can never do enough good things to earn God's favour.

You can't mend the broken mirror. But God, in his grace, can and does. And that is good news.

With awareness of your own sins and in response to God's grace, say together the following prayer of lament, confession and absolution:

'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty.'
We long for the fire of God's cleansing to touch our unclean lips,
for our guilt to be removed and our sin wiped out.
So we meet Father, Son, and Holy Spirit with repentance in our
hearts.

Father eternal, giver of light and grace,
we have sinned against you and against our neighbour,
in what we have thought, in what we have said and done,
through ignorance, through weakness,
through our own deliberate fault.
We have wounded your love and marred your image in us.
We are sorry and ashamed, and repent of all our sins.
For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ, who died for us,
forgive us all that is past,
and lead us out of darkness to walk as children of light.

May the Father of all mercies cleanse us from our sins,
and restore us in his image,
to the praise and glory of his name, through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.*

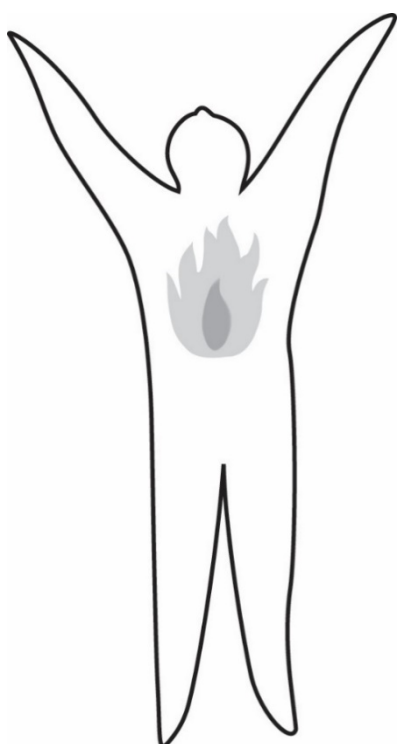
*Adapted from 'Penitence: Lament B4, Confession B33, and Absolution B78'
New Patterns for Worship, The Church of England,
<https://cms.churchofengland.org/prayer-and-worship/worship-texts-and-resources/common-worship/common-material/new-patterns-worshp/resource-section-themes/b-penitence>



Conclude in praise to God by singing 'Amazing Grace' by John Newton or 'Here I am to Worship' by Tim Hughes.

Session 4

The Holy Spirit at Work in Us



God does not leave us alone in this world. He gives us his Spirit to dwell in us and work in our lives.

Resources

For this session you will need:

- The music and words for 'Shine Jesus Shine' by Graham Kendrick
- Blank A5 cards, one per person, markers or coloured pens
- One Bible per person
- Ear muffs (or ear plugs)

Welcome and Worship



Play 'Shine Jesus Shine' by Graham Kendrick as people enter the room. When the song finishes, ask everyone to talk about the lyrics of the chorus:

***Blaze, Spirit, blaze
Set our hearts on fire.
Flow, river, flow
Flood the nations with grace and mercy.***

Both fire and water are images of the Holy Spirit. What do these images suggest about how the Holy Spirit works?

Pray, asking the Holy Spirit to guide your session together.

Reflecting Together

As we saw in our last session, God treats us with grace. An act of abundant grace is God sending his Holy Spirit to his people.

- Activity 4.1 What comes to mind when you think of the Holy Spirit?

Give everyone a blank A5 card and ask them to doodle on it their response to this question. The Holy Spirit is often talked about using images and everyone should be encouraged to doodle some of the images that they associate with the Holy Spirit. Then talk about what everyone has drawn.

God gives us his Holy Spirit to help us live for God and to guide our lives.

- Activity 4.2 Talk about a time when someone helped you to do something difficult. What difference did it make?
- Activity 4.3 The Holy Spirit helps us to do something very difficult: live for God in our broken world.

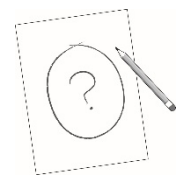
What difference might it make to have the Holy Spirit with you every day?



The Spirit is at work within us, making us Christ-like. This takes place when we let the Spirit guide us, instead of sin.

- Activity 4.4 Read aloud Galatians 5.13-26.

What are the differences between what is produced by our sinful nature (vs.19-21) and what is produced by the Spirit (vs.22-23).



The fruit of the Spirit in vs.22-23 is not something that you can grow through your own efforts. It grows when you rely upon the guidance of the Spirit. Its source is the Spirit.

- Activity 4.5 How do we keep in step with the Spirit (vs.25)? Ask for 2 volunteers. Person 1 will represent the Spirit. Person 2 will represent a Christian. The ear muffs represent sin. Place the ear muffs on Person 2.

Ask Person 1 to walk around the room at a slow steady pace, but changing direction with some frequency. Person 1 should very quietly state simple directions throughout the walk.

Person 2 should try to walk next to and to keep *in step* with Person 1, while not being able to hear. Person 2 should not look at Person 1, but should look around the room as they walk.

After 1 or 2 minutes, ask Persons 1 & 2 to stop. Ask Person 2 to talk about how difficult it was to keep in step with Person 1, and the reasons for that.

Remove the ear muffs from Person 2 and repeat the activity. This time Person 2 should try to keep in step with Person 1 while watching Person 1 and listening to what Person 1 says.

Afterwards, discuss together what this exercise suggests about how to keep in step with the Spirit.

Write or draw your thoughts here:



Responding

God's Spirit is Holy. 'Holiness' means to be set apart for God, to belong to God. The Spirit enables us to be God's people.

- Activity 4.6 Ask one person to read aloud the following passages. As the passages are read, close your eyes and imagine that the passages are being spoken to you.

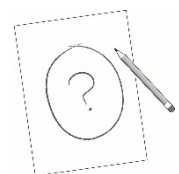
**I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you.
I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a
heart of flesh. I will put my Spirit in you and move you to
follow my ways.**

Ezekiel 36.26-27 (NIV)

**You are a letter from Christ ... written not with ink but with
the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on
tablets of human hearts.**

2 Corinthians 3.3 (NIV)

- Activity 4.7 What do you notice in these passages?



These passages suggest that the Spirit works specifically in our hearts. What are the implications of this?

Pray together as a group. This will work best if one person leads the group through the prayer time.

Begin by closing your eyes and opening out your hands on your lap, palms up. Opening your hands is a way of showing your willingness to receive the guidance of the Spirit.



Give thanks to God for his Spirit, and ask for the Spirit to be your guide and to make you more like Christ.

Pray together silently. During this time of quiet, ask the Holy Spirit to be at work in a particular area of your life, or ask the Spirit to show you one area of your life that the Spirit would like to work on.

You may want to note down the area below.

I would like the Spirit to be my guide in this area:

After a few minutes, the person leading should pray out loud, ‘Spirit, we give to you...’ and let everyone complete the sentence either silently or out loud.

Pray silently again for a few minutes, listening for anything the Spirit may want to say or show to you.

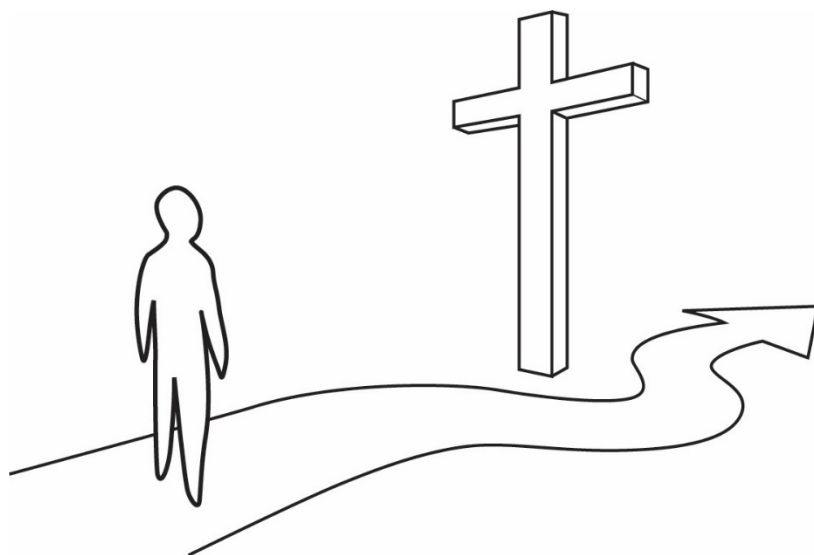


Conclude by singing together ‘Shine Jesus Shine’ by Graham Kendrick.

Session 5

Our Destiny in Christ

From death to life. From despair to hope. In this session we consider the transformative power of the resurrection.



Resources

For this session you will need:

- Several copies of the Eastern Orthodox icon *Resurrection* or *Anastasis*, also known as *Christ's Descent into Hades*
- Post-it notes, pens
- One Bible per person
- An acorn for each person
- A picture of an oak tree (or you may use conkers and a picture of a chestnut tree)
- Blu-tack

Welcome and Worship

Hang copies of the *Resurrection* icon at various places in the room. Ask everyone to stand up and look at copies of the icon. Discuss what you see with one another, focusing on the role of Christ.

It may help you to know:

- The figure in the centre is Christ. He is standing on the gates to Hades or hell.
- The chained figure beneath Christ's feet is death or Satan.
- The figures Christ is lifting out of the coffins are Adam and Eve.

(The figures on the left side of the icon are David, Solomon, and John the Baptist. The figures on the right side are possibly Moses and the prophets. But do not make these figures the focus of your conversation).

Remain standing and say together the following prayer:

Father,
we give you thanks through Jesus Christ your Son, our Lord.
Jesus is Lord of all creation.
We worship and adore you.
Jesus made his home among us.
We worship and adore you.
Jesus died to set us free.
We worship and adore you.
Jesus was raised to life again.
We worship and adore you.
Jesus reigns in glory now.
We worship and adore you.
Amen.*

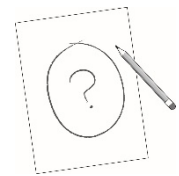
*Adapted from 'Praise and Thanksgiving G56', New Patterns for Worship, The Church of England, <https://cms.churchofengland.org/prayer-and-worship/worship-texts-and-resources/common-worship/common-material/new-patterns-worship/resource-section-themes/g-praise-thanksgiving>

Reflecting Together

- Activity 5.1 What do you hope for? Draw or write your answers to this question on post-it notes. Draw or write one answer per post-it note.

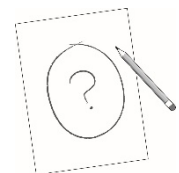
Attach everyone's post-it notes to a wall. Then arrange the post-it notes by category, such as: possessions, family, work, future. Leave these on the wall for the remainder of the session.

You may also want to draw or write your answers here:



- Activity 5.2 How does your faith in Christ affect what you have written on the post-it notes?

Draw or write your thoughts here:



In the Christian faith, our hope is in Christ, who saves us from the powers that enslave us and separate us from God.

- Activity 5.3 Read aloud 1 Corinthians 15.20-26.

How does verse 26 describe death?



What are the implications of thinking of death in this way?

Death is, ultimately, separation from God, the giver of life. This is evident in Genesis 3, where Adam and Eve's sin disrupts their relationship with God.

- Activity 5.4 As human beings, we follow the path of Adam: our destiny is death. Jesus' resurrection alters that destiny. Look at 1 Corinthians 15.20-22. The phrase 'resurrection of the dead' means 'the resurrection of dead corpses'. That is, our resurrection is physical. According to these verses, what is our destiny in Christ?

How does this destiny give you hope?

Because of Christ's resurrection, death loses. Life wins. Because death could not hold Jesus, it can no longer hold us.

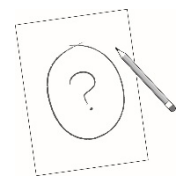
Think of the end of the Gospels. Jesus' *death* frightens his disciples. The *empty tomb* leaves them confused. It is encountering the *risen* Jesus, seeing him eat, and touching his resurrected body, that fills the disciples with joy and wonder. The resurrected Jesus is not a ghost. His body is transformed. And our destiny is to be like him. We will have new bodies.

Responding

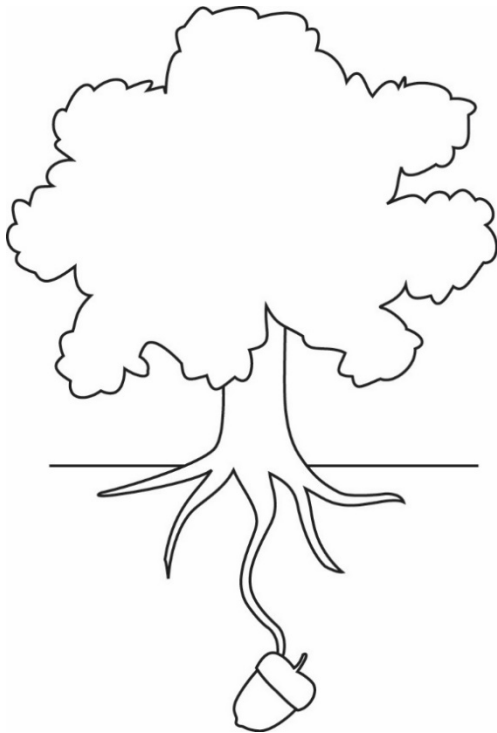
Paul, the author of this letter, anticipates a reaction against the idea of a bodily resurrection. In verse 35 he states that someone will ask: 'But how does this work? What kind of resurrection body will I have? Will I have a 76 year old's body (that's how old I am now), or do I get a 25 year old's body? Or must I go back to being 3?'

- Activity 5.5 Paul answers these questions with an analogy about a seed. Read aloud 1 Corinthians 15.36-38.

What is the point of this analogy?



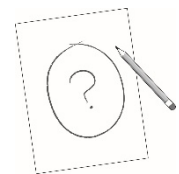
Talk together about how seeds grow and change into plants.



- Activity 5.6 Give each person an acorn. Blu-tack the picture of the oak tree to the wall. Compare the acorn and the tree. How do they differ? How are they connected?

- Activity 5.7 In the seed analogy, our current bodies are like the acorn. Our resurrection bodies are like the oak tree.

What are the implications of this for how you think about your life in Christ, both now and in the future?



Because of Christ, we have eternal life, and our bodies will be resurrected and transformed. The Holy Spirit gives us a taste of that life now, and prepares us for our future life with Christ.

Look back at the post-it notes on the wall. Recall the hopes you have listed there.

Conclude by saying the following Celtic blessing to one another:

**May the peace of Christ go with you,
wherever he may send you.**

**May he guide you through the wilderness,
protect you through the storm.**

**May he bring you home rejoicing
at the wonders he has shown you.**

**May he bring you home rejoicing
once again into our doors.**

**In the name of the Father, and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit.**

Amen*

*'Morning Prayer: Blessing', in the Northumbria Community Trust, *Celtic Daily Prayer Book Two: Farther Up and Farther In* (London: HarperCollins, 2015), p.869.

Put your acorn in your pocket or handbag and carry it with you this week to remind you every day about your hope of eternal life.

Notes

Notes

THE BLESSING COURSE

Units in this series

- Unit 1 - Being Disciples
- Unit 2 - Building Our Faith
- Unit 3 - Prayer & Our Spiritual Lives
- Unit 4 - Being The Church
- Unit 5 - Being God's Servants
- Unit 6 - Blessing Your Local Area

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