

Retreat Day including Sessions 2 and 3 - Outline for Leaders

In Advance of the Day

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| Well in advance! | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Book retreat house and arrange catering. | |
| Previous Session | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Having told your own discipleship story, ask the group to prepare to share their own at the retreat day. ● Share the Sharing your Discipleship Story/Spiritual Journey Map handout with the group in advance, in case it is useful to help them prepare. ● They can also (alternatively, or in addition) bring photos or objects along to help illustrate aspects of their journey. | |
| In advance | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Decide on the shape of the day, depending on how long you have and how many are involved. ● Familiarise yourself with the Session 2 'God's Story and Ours' and Session 3: 'Who is God and how does God see us?'. ● Prepare (or delegate) prayer and worship for the beginning and end of the day. | |
| 3-4 days before the retreat | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Send a reminder email to participants a few days beforehand, reminding them to bring a notebook and pen if they wish, a Bible, and to be prepared to share their discipleship story (remind them how long they have to share). They can bring photos, objects or their 'discipleship journey map' if helpful. | |

Suggested Timetable

| Time | Content | Who? |
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| From 09.45 | Arrival and Refreshments | |
| 10.00 | Welcome, Prayer and Worship | |
| 10.15 | Session 2: God's Story and Ours (The 'Why' of Discipleship) | |
| 11.00 | Sharing our Discipleship Stories - part 1 | |
| 12.30 | Lunch | |
| 13.15 | Sharing our Discipleship Stories - part 2 | |
| 14.45 | Quick tea break and Session 3: Becoming Whole-Life and Through-Life Disciples (The 'When and Where' of Discipleship) | |
| 15.30 | (All Together) Listening and Responding: How has God been speaking to us today? | |
| 15.50 | Prayer and Preparation for next Session | |

This outline above assumes a retreat day starting at 10am and finishing at 4pm, with lunch and refreshments breaks. It assumes that alongside prayer, worship and sharing each others' stories, the day will include Session 2 (God's Story and Ours - the 'Why' of Discipleship) and Session 3 (Becoming Whole-Life and Through-Life Disciples – the 'When and Where' of Discipleship).

Feel free to follow this outline or alternatively run Sessions 2 and 3 as standalone sessions on other dates. One reason for running Session 2 before the retreat day, or at the start of the Retreat Day, is that it introduces the practice of sharing our discipleship stories.

Give each participants a decent amount of time to share their story (15-20 minutes), plus 5-10 minutes afterwards for other participants to offer their encouragement and share anything they learned or noticed. Ideally, all participants would get to hear everyone else’s story, or in a longer group journey you could take several weeks for story-telling. If you have a very large group (more than 8) and want to do this in one retreat day session, you may need to split the group into two and run parallel sessions. Possible ways of using the time are as follows:

- For a group of six (or up to twelve split into two groups) : 20 minutes each + 10 minutes for conversation after each story
- For a group of eight (or up to sixteen split between two groups): 15 minutes each + 5-6 minute for conversation after each story

If you are splitting the group and they are confident with this arrangement, we would suggest putting people from the same household (or same church, if drawn from more than one church) into different groups.

Retreat Day including Sessions 2 and 3 - Leader’s Notes

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| 15 mins | <p>Welcome, Prayer and Worship</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Thank everyone for committing to the time together ● Although this is called a ‘retreat day’ the main focus will be on listening to each others’ stories of their journey of faith. Building relationships is key to our journey together. ● We will also be practising a key attitude of discipleship: to pay attention to what God is saying, and to respond. At the end of the day there’ll be an opportunity to reflect together on how God might have been speaking to us. ● You may allocate participants time slots in which to share their story (depending on numbers and time available, between 20 and 30 minutes each including 5-10 minutes for the group to respond). If you have a large group (more than 8) you will probably need to split into two smaller groups in different rooms, to hear everyone’s stories on the same day. Alternatively if you are not doing a retreat day, you can spend several weeks’ worth of group sessions giving each group member the chance to tell their story. ● Spend some time in prayer and worship, in ways suitable to your group. Psalm 71 (the prayer of an old man) may be a useful Psalm for setting the scene for our personal story-telling. | |

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| Session 2: God's Story and Ours (The 'Why' of Discipleship) <i>(Timings for a 45 minute session as part of retreat day – you can vary timings if using as a stand-alone session)</i> | | |
| 5 minutes | <p>Briefly summarise the purpose of this session:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As Christians, it's valuable to remind ourselves WHY we follow Jesus. • The video suggested there are two 'WHY's here: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Why does <u>God</u> call us into the life of the Kingdom? What is the 'big story' of God's relationship with creation? - Why have <u>we</u> each chosen to respond? What first excited us to become Christians, and what continues to attract us to Jesus today? • Revisiting and remembering this keeps us focused in our discipleship, and prevents our life with God becoming overly focused on tasks, programmes and activities. • When we share our stories with others, this can encourage others too. Our stories are most valuable when we are real, honest and open about the ups and downs. As well as being an encouragement, this also sets the tone of a group or conversation and allows others to be honest and open too. | |
| 5 minutes | <p>Summarise the section on God's WHY:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The video re-told the 'big story' of the Bible in five 'chapters' (creation, fall, Old Testament covenant, Jesus, and the Church's call to Kingdom and great commission up to God bringing about his 'new creation'). • Within this, we find ourselves somewhere in chapter 5, after the coming of the Holy Spirit, and the birth of the church at Pentecost, and before Jesus comes again. • Several Christian writers have found this a helpful way of re-telling the 'big story' of the Bible in an accessible and understandable way. • They also suggest that thinking of ourselves within this 'big story' can help guide and orientate us for how we live out God's Kingdom life today: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - We can gain confidence and encouragement from knowing that God is in control of history (even when it doesn't seem like it) - We can be strengthened by reflecting on how God has helped his people in the past - We gain our identity as followers of Jesus from being part of this big story - We gain cues and clues from the story so far, and from the ending to come, about how we live out God's commandments in the present day. (Some Christian writers call this 'faithful improvisation' – they don't mean we are making it all up as we go along, but that learn how to act in the present based on the content of the rest of the story) - We gain hope for the future, as we keep in mind how Jesus tells us the story will end. | |

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| 15 minutes | <p>Discuss... <i>(Use any of the following questions, according to the group's interests. We suggest using the asterisked questions if time is short)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If someone asked you: 'why follow Jesus?', how would you reply? (Think not only about what you'd want to say, but how someone else might hear it). • How helpful is it to think of the big story of the Bible in five 'chapters'? • *What is the most striking part of the 'big biblical story' to you? Is there anything important which this version has left out? • * How does this 'big story' provide a map or cues for your own discipleship? What does it suggest we should be and do as Christians today? • * The 'big story in five chapters' is one way of telling the big biblical story. What other ways can you think of? (Think as creatively as you like!) • How far do you think the 'big story' of Christian faith is known - and owned - by your church/group? • * What might help people in your church/group to go deeper into this 'big story' together? | |
| 5 minutes | <p>Summarise the section on Our WHY:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In the New Testament we can see all sorts of ways in which individual people's lives intersected with God's 'big story'. When they encountered Jesus, it changed their lives. • If time, you might want to read 1 John 1.1-4 again as an example – the author's personal excitement is very clear! • As Christians each of our lives, in different ways, have intersected with God's 'big story'. • As we will shortly hear from each other, there are many different reasons why we originally came to faith. • Our reasons for continuing to walk with Jesus today may also have changed at different points in our lives. • There's much value for us in regularly reflecting back on our stories of faith, and God has helped us through the ups and downs. • It's important to be real and honest about our stories. But where we find joy in that story, this can be a source of encouragement and inspiration to others. • Joy has often been thought an important hallmark of the authentic Christian life – e.g., 'the chief end of [humanity] is to worship God and enjoy him forever' (Westminster Confession). Many major theologians from Augustine onwards saw joy as one of the essential qualities of the catechist (or discipleship enabler). • That doesn't mean wearing a mask, enforced jollity or treating others as second-class Christians if they don't seem joyful enough! • It does mean reflecting on 'the hope we have in Jesus', remembering why the Gospel is genuinely good news for us, and letting this change us. | |

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| 10 minutes | <p data-bbox="343 212 1300 280">Discuss... <i>(Use any of the following questions, according to the group's interests. We suggest using the asterisked questions if time is short)</i></p> <p data-bbox="343 324 646 358">Your Personal Journey</p> <ul data-bbox="359 369 1300 795" style="list-style-type: none"> • What first attracted you to Jesus/the Christian story? • What aspects of God and Christian faith make you excited to be a Christian today? • Who are the Christians (past and present) who have been influential on your own life? Were joy or gratitude obvious in their lives? In what ways? • Has your understanding of being a Christian changed over the course of your life? How? • How far is thankfulness to God part of your Christian living? • How could you build more opportunities to enjoy God, or be thankful, into your pattern of everyday life? <p data-bbox="343 840 606 873">Your Church/Group</p> <ul data-bbox="359 884 1300 1232" style="list-style-type: none"> • How far is your local church or small group known for its joy? [NB: deep-down joy, not a pretend smile or manufactured happiness] • How are joy, thankfulness and excitement at the Gospel part of your own church's or small group's life? • * Are there spaces in your church's/group's life where you can share stories about the signs of God at work? • * How might joy and celebration become more a part of your church's/group's life together (<u>without</u> trying to enforce or manufacture it!)? <p data-bbox="343 1276 981 1310"><i>Either here or after you have shared your stories:</i></p> <p data-bbox="343 1321 1284 1355">Writing your story of life with God/creating your spiritual journey map</p> <ul data-bbox="359 1366 1300 1635" style="list-style-type: none"> • * How did you find writing and sharing your story? • * Was there anything else which would have helped you? • * How useful was the spiritual journey map practice to you? • * How could you use this with people in your own church/group? • Are there other ways in which you could re-tell your story (particularly for people who don't like either speaking in public or doing art)? | |

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| 5 minutes | <p>Remind participants of guidelines for sharing and listening to each others' stories:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When sharing your story, DO talk about moments when you have said 'yes' to God, times when you have paid attention to God and responded, and how God been with you through life's events, sustaining you and growing you. • DO be honest and open, as far as you feel able. • You DON'T need to share anything you don't want to. • DO share your spiritual journey map or another object or photo, if you brought one (no worries if you didn't). • DO tell your story in your own way – there's no single 'correct' way to do it. • DO please keep confidential any personal details that others share (the one important exception is safeguarding concerns). • DO please keep to the time you have been allocated, so everyone gets equal opportunity to share. (Group leaders: DON'T be afraid to give people 2 minutes' notice to wind up!). • After each person's story, there will be 5-10 minutes for others to respond. DO share... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - anything you have heard which has been a blessing or encouragement - anything you notice about how God has been at work in their lives • DO offer only encouraging or affirming reflections on other people's stories. At this stage in the life of the group, this is really important to building up trust and good relationships – especially if the people involved are new to each other. • DON'T judge, criticise or even analyse. We are not trying to diagnose or 'fix' anything here. | |
| Approx. 1 hr 30 mins | <p>Sharing Stories</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Split group into two if more than 8 people in total</i> • <i>Remind participants how much time they each have to share</i> • <i>Give a 2 minute notice to begin finishing story</i> • <i>Allow 5-10 minutes for group members to offer reflections, encouragement and affirmation</i> | |
| 45 mins | Lunch Break | |
| Approx. 1 hr 30 mins | Sharing Stories (contd) | |
| <p>[After this, depending on timings, you may wish to give everyone a quick refreshment break before returning for Session 3]</p> | | |

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| | <p>Session 3: Becoming ‘Whole Life’ and ‘Through-Life’ Disciples (The ‘When and Where’ of Discipleship) <i>(Timings for a 45 minute session as part of retreat day – you can vary timings if using as a stand-alone session)</i></p> | |
| 5 minutes | <p>Introduce the purpose of the Session and main ideas</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At some points in history, there has been a tendency for Christian life to focus disproportionately on what happens in church on a Sunday, and to think about Christian learning and growth primarily as something which takes place during childhood/adolescence. • However, there’s a growing recognition of discipleship as a ‘whole-life, through-life’ journey: 7 days a week, through all the seasons and stages of life. • So a key question for us as disciples/enablers of discipleship is: ‘when and where do we follow Jesus?’ • The simple answer is ‘everywhere, all of the time’ BUT what can help us break that down into meaningful, relatable things that we can actually apply to our lives? <p>Whole-Life Discipleship</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LICC’s concept of our ‘frontline’ – i.e., the places where we spent the majority of our time. • LICC’s 6M’s as one popular and helpful place to start thinking about what fruitfulness on our ‘frontlines’ looks like in practice. • Another approach is to think about how spheres of belonging – ‘Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the Ends of the Earth’ (Matt 28) – many people have used this symbolically to reflect on the widening spheres of life in which we belong/different groups we relate to. • In this session, however, let’s spend some time exploring the ‘four fields’ tool... | |
| 15 minutes | <p>Explore Together: Four ‘Fields’ of Christian Discipleship Tool</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refresh memory/draw out on flip chart • Purpose: to get us reflecting on different spheres of our Christian life • Underlying ideas: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Discipleship is both an individual and a shared thing - We have ‘inward’ and ‘outward’ lives as Christians • Key things to remember: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - This isn’t about putting specific Christian disciplines into one box or other – e.g., prayer should feature in all four ‘fields’ - No ‘field’ is more important than the others (but if nothing in the ‘inward’ fields, you may end up under-nourished...) - There are seasons in life when we spend more time in some fields than others – that’s OK. This isn’t about making you feel bad. - Not everyone will engage in the different fields in the same way – a housebound may not help at a food bank but could pray for it - More activity does not equal more depth or fruitfulness. | |

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On your own: Jot down on the ‘fields’ your engagement in each one of them (in prayer, practical activity, etc.) • With others: share what you have noted down: where are you more focused? Which box(es) are emptier? Does this reflect your current season of life? Where is God nudging you to give more time or attention? • With others: discuss whether this tool might be useful for other people in your church or group? • If time: discuss how you could support and equip others to be fruitful in any of these four ‘fields’. | |
| 5 minutes | <p>Summarise ‘Through-Life Discipleship’</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In this life we are creatures who exist in time – we simply can’t escape that, so faithful discipleship is, in part, about learning to be ‘creatures who swim in time’ (Jamie Smith). • The video re-told the story of the villagers of Le Chambon-sur-Lignon as an example of a community which asked themselves the question: ‘what do we do now?’ (in the face of Nazi persecution of the Jews). And they intentionally tried to answer that question in relation to their Christian faith. • They thought about God’s big story and their place in it. They thought about Jesus’ everyday commands. They thought about their generational calling. And they used these to ‘triangulate’ their plans to rescue persecuted Jews. • We can do the same: how do God’s big story and Jesus’ everyday commands line up together in a way which addresses our contemporary challenges? • There’s so much to be said about being ‘through-life disciples’. Elsewhere we’ll look at some research and ideas which can help us live faithfully minute by minute, day by day, week by week, through different seasons and stages of life. (see Go Deeper Activities and future session on ‘Understanding How we Grow as Disciples’). • In this session, a sensible place to start is to recognise that all of us have a past, a present and a future, which we choose to bring together before God. • Different elements of discipleship which come under each heading: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Past: being rooted in the big Christian story; cultivating habits of thankfulness for what God has done; lamenting sadness and hurts, repenting of sin. - Present: accepting God’s sovereignty (we cannot control everything), but also being open, attentive and interruptible by God and others; seeing every moment as a gift; seeking not to worry but to trust for our ‘daily bread’. - Future: Trusting God for the future; accepting we can’t know what’s coming; being strengthened by God’s future promises; working for bigger, eternal purposes which shape our life today. • Note Group Practice: Look Back, Look Up and Around, Look Forward (we will be making this part of our meetings) | |

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| 10 minutes | <p>Discuss:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you tend to spend more time thinking about the past, the present or the future? • What do you think is a healthy balance for Christians here? • What are the dangers of being too past (or present, or future) orientated to the exclusion of the other two? • How do you build a past, present and future focus into your personal rhythm of following Jesus? • How can your church or group pay the right amount of attention to both past, present and future? • Could the 'Look Back, Look Up and Around, Look Forward' be helpful here? | |
| 10 minutes | <p>Pray: Examen</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As a more reflective way to round off the session, lead the group through a 10 minute examen. • There are various versions online. One simple version is found here: https://www.ignatianspirituality.com/ignatian-prayer/the-examen/how-can-i-pray/ (A link is provided on the participant handout). | |
| <p>Listening and Responding, Preparation for Next Time <i>(whilst other elements can be postponed, make sure this section is part of the day)</i></p> | | |
| 20 minutes | <p>Listening and Responding Time</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give group members a few minutes on their own to consider the following questions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How has God got my attention? What's God said to me today? - How might I respond? • Check if the group are happy for you to keep (confidential) notes. • Give participants the opportunity to share their thoughts. • Then ask 'Is there a question which would be helpful for us to ask you the next time we meet?' • Explain that this is an opportunity, not a test, and not compulsory. However, it is a practice we will be using in every session from now on. Encourage people to be as specific as possible. General questions like 'How has my prayer life been?' or 'Have I been loving to my neighbour?' are hard to answer, whereas 'How have I listened to my friend this month?' or 'How have I got on with praying the Lord's Prayer in my coffee break?' are easier. • Write down each question. | |
| 10 minutes | <p>Wrap Up/Preparation for Next Time</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thank everyone for taking part • Ask them to watch the next video 'Who is God and How does God see us?' before next Session (link available shortly) • Finish with a prayer, or the Grace. | |