

# WEEK 3: SERVE SACRIFICIALLY

## LEADERS RESOURCES

### A. COURSE OUTCOMES: OUR OVERALL GOALS

By the end of the course people will be able:

- To articulate the gospel for themselves and communicate it to others, without embarrassment or distortion
- To understand how the above actions help us to interpret and practise the breadth and depth of the gospel
- To recognize how the good news of Jesus Christ is rooted in the book of Acts and in the 4 Gospels

### B. AIMS FOR THIS WEEK: WHAT WE ARE TRYING TO ACHIEVE

1. To consider the concept of covenant and what that means
2. To think about what love looks like in action, especially in the life of Jesus and the Early Church
3. To reflect on the cost it takes to love in this way

### C. PLAN YOUR SESSION: A CHECKLIST

- Pray for your session and for those who will attend
- Read the passages, perhaps in different translations, to bring out the meaning
- Read the notes summary for the week.
- Note the key words and other passages you can explore if you have time.
- Read through the session plan
- Don't forget to review your session afterwards

### D. SUMMARY FOR THE WEEK: TO INFORM YOUR THINKING

God is proactive in reaching out to those he has made. He makes promises (covenants), gives a sign and sometimes requires a response as a result. In the time of Noah he promises to preserve the earth and never again to flood the earth (sign = the rainbow). In the time of Abraham he promises to create a nation from Abraham's descendants who will bless all nations (sign = circumcision). In the time of Moses he chooses a special people and in return calls them to live differently (sign = the Sabbath). In the time of Jeremiah he promises that all will know him, and that he will change their hearts, if they will receive him (sign = baptism). This was fulfilled in the time of Jesus. These covenants show how God was bringing salvation to the world, out of love for all he has made – the *missio dei*.

Jesus came in response to God's love for his world, to embody that love in a life. At the Last Supper, he demonstrates his commitment to serving those he has made by washing their feet. The disciples, though, were obsessed with privilege and status, asking him more than once about who is the greatest (Luke 9:46ff; 22:24ff). Jesus response is that he is among them as a

servant. He then institutes a new covenant in his body and his blood.

In the readings today Dorcas is loved by the local community and known for her practical service. She made them clothes, and when she died they mourned her loss, bringing out physical examples of what she had made for them. Jesus, in his reading from Isaiah in the synagogue, announces the new reign of God which will affect every aspect of life. The route to this full life for him meant the way of the cross – it cost him everything to bring the new covenant into being. The church today needs to embody this spirit of sacrifice and service in the way we treat one another, and those outside the church too. We need to offer a deep fellowship and welcome.

When we think of how we are called to play our part in this world, we think of vocation. We should especially include the young, including children, in any discussion of this subject. If they are to fulfil their potential they need chances to serve in the church, and to be challenged to play their part in serving in the world. When we are young we are not constrained by social niceties, but often say what we think, and dare to do things that those older would never dream of trying. We need these characteristics in the church now! And we need to help them develop.

## E. WORDS FOR THE WEEK: KEY WORDS FOR THIS SESSION

**Covenant: *Diatheke*.** Unlike in normal understanding which means an agreement between two parties, in the biblical sense it means the commitment of one party (God) and an undertaking in response (people). God loves his people and calls them to live differently as his people.

**Missio Dei.** The work of God to set creation (and the whole of the cosmos) free from the powers of sin and death. As God's people we are caught up in the plans and purposes of God. But there is no divide between the pastoral and the missional. The church's life together and its witness to the world is inseparable ie the 'what' and the 'how' of serving the world are inextricably entwined together. Being holy means to love God and to love our neighbor, in a triangle of love and service.

## F. OTHER SCRIPTURES TO REFERENCE

*Matthew 25:40 Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family you did it to me.*

*John 13:35 By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.*

*Philippians 2:5-8 Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death - even death on a cross.*

## G. LIVING THE MISSION OF JESUS

We know we have been created to participate in the work of the Kingdom of God. This week we are focusing on servanthood. A servant does not choose where he/she is deployed, but is willing to go wherever they are sent. Sometimes that means staying where they are, sometimes changing vocational direction. This fits strategic priority 3 – being pioneering faith communities. It's not about what we want but what the world needs. It also resonates with strategic priority 4, being willing to give time and other resources where there is need.

## H. REVIEWING YOUR SESSION

We would encourage you to spend a little time We would encourage you to spend a little time reviewing your session once you have led it through.

Here are some questions to think about:

- What went well and why – what evidence is there that it did?
- What would you change if you did it again?
- What advice would you pass on to the person who is leading the group next time?

## CORE MATERIAL

Use the following structure to guide you through your session. Each part has a suggested time to enable you to be finished in 90 minutes.

## 1 OPEN WITH PRAYER (3 MINUTES)

Use the following prayer from the scriptures for your time together as a group:

*7 The end of all things is near; therefore be serious and discipline yourselves for the sake of your prayers. 8 Above all, maintain constant love for one another, for love covers a multitude of sins. 9 Be hospitable to one another without complaining. 10 Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received. 11 Whoever speaks must do so as one speaking the very words of God; whoever serves must do so with the strength that God supplies, so that God may be glorified in all things through Jesus Christ. To him belong the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen. (1 Peter 4:7-11)*

Or this classic prayer of service from St Ignatius:

*Father, you have given all peoples one Teach us, good Lord, to serve you as you deserve; to give and not to count the cost, to fight and not to heed the wound, to toil and not to seek for rest, to labour and not to ask for any reward, save that of knowing that we do your will. Amen.*

Or

Use this meditation of Mother Theresa  
*Here I am Lord – body, heart and soul. Grant that with your love I may be big enough to reach the world, and small enough to be at one with you.*

## 2 INTRODUCTION (2 MINUTES)

Read the following aloud or use your own words to explain what it says:

*Today's session is all about how we respond to the needs of those around us. We hear Jesus announce the coming of the reign and rule of God through a new beginning, transforming situations of poverty and injustice, bringing healing and wholeness. He offers the grace of God to all. We also hear of Tabitha, who served her local community in acts of practical service.*

*We follow a God who came not to be served but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many. It cost him his life, but through him we now share in his risen life. What part do we have to play in serving this broken world?*

## 3 BIBLE BASE (30 MINUTES)

### Read Luke 4:14-21

- <sup>14</sup> Then Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding country. <sup>15</sup> He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone.*
- <sup>16</sup> When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, <sup>17</sup> and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:*
- <sup>18</sup> 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free,*
- <sup>19</sup> to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.'*
- <sup>20</sup> And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. <sup>21</sup> Then he began to say to them, 'Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.'*
- <sup>22</sup> All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth. They said, 'Is not this Joseph's son?'*

### Questions:

Reflect on the good news Jesus was announcing in verses 18 and 19.

Which phrase are you drawn to?

This announcement in Nazareth framed Jesus' ministry.

How did Jesus deliver on his "manifesto" outlined here?

Ultimately Jesus' agenda cost him his life.

God's call will cost us everything.

Now back to the phrase you picked out.

What would it look like if the Church was fully engaged with that in today's context?

### Now read Acts 9:36-42

- <sup>36</sup> Now in Joppa there was a disciple whose name was Tabitha, which in Greek is Dorcas. She was devoted to good works and acts of charity. <sup>37</sup> At that time she became ill and died. When they had washed her, they laid her in a room upstairs. <sup>38</sup> Since Lydda was near Joppa, the disciples, who heard that Peter was there, sent two men to him with the request, 'Please come to us without delay.'*
- <sup>39</sup> So Peter got up and went with them; and when he arrived, they took him to the room upstairs. All the widows stood beside him, weeping and showing tunics and other clothing that Dorcas had made while she was with them. <sup>40</sup> Peter put all of them outside, and then he knelt down and prayed. He turned to the body and said,*

*'Tabitha, get up.'* Then she opened her eyes, and seeing Peter, she sat up. <sup>41</sup> He gave her his hand and helped her up. Then calling the saints and widows, he showed her to be alive. <sup>42</sup> This became known throughout Joppa, and many believed in the Lord.

#### Questions:

Tabitha was a follower of Jesus and known as someone who served the poor.

She served her local community by doing good works and specifically making clothes.

What would people say about your church, or you personally? What are you known for?

Peter on the other hand had an itinerant ministry.

His role was to teach the early Christian communities, and to encourage them in their lives of faith (v32).

How can we as a church encourage people in their discipleship?

Whatever our part in the service of Jesus, sometimes it can be very costly to continue in that role.

What examples can you give about the costliness of serving God? Why do we keep on keeping on?

Remember today those whose work for God takes them away from home, sometimes to life-threatening situations.

#### 4 WORKING IT OUT (10 MINUTES)

Either watch the 3rd film on the USB stick about how people are standing up for the downtrodden.

Or

Read one or two of the following examples out loud as examples of what people are doing about this in the Diocese of Winchester.

##### Welcoming the Isolated.

In September 2015 the Cathedral started 'Tea at Three'. This is a monthly tea for older people, which we set up to address Hampshire's biggest social need, social isolation. The scones are generously subsidised by Hampshire County Council, and our guests are welcomed by members of the Cathedral's Pastoral Group (Winchester Cathedral)

##### Nightlife Support.

Street Pastors voluntarily patrol city centres while party-goers enjoy the night time economy. Their mission is to show the practical love of Christ by listening, assisting and safeguarding those who may be vulnerable. They represent the helping hands of the Lord, and discuss spiritual things when asked. Winchester Street Pastors work in partnership with the police, local council and other statutory bodies every Friday and Saturday night (9.30 pm – 3 am) (Winchester Street Pastors)

<http://streetpastors.org/locations/winchester/>

#### Work with the Unemployed.

There have only been a few times in my life that God has spoken to me clearly; I knew this was one of them. God was asking me to use all the skills and abilities I'd gained over many years working in a variety of industries to serve him. In 2013 I gave up my professional employment and set up a social enterprise which helps people who are unemployed get back on their feet; we do this by upcycling wood waste from the construction industry. Everyone needs compassion; coming alongside people who are unemployed and valuing them, teaching them to value themselves and the world's natural resources is how God has led us to use all that we are in service to him (Andrew Challis, Bursledon)

<http://www.southamptonwoodrecycling.org.uk>

#### 5 COFFEE BREAK (15 MINUTES)

During this time of coffee encourage people to talk about what they have heard and seen. Make sure everyone gets a chance to contribute if they want to.

##### To open up discussion:

Having discussed this together what do you think God might be calling you to do about it?

## 6 SERVING SACRIFICIALLY

In the passage from Luke Jesus reveals something of how he understands his public role.

But what about all his other roles?

How many can we think of? (eg brother, uncle, carpenter, neighbour...)

### Together as a group:

How many roles do you have? List them together.

### For personal reflection:

Focus on one role, or one area of your life, and make a private list of all the people you relate to in that role/sphere of life.

Then go through the list and notice who you think might be most open to spiritual things... who might be moving towards God?

## 7 COMMUNICATING MY STORY

As well as listening to people, it can be helpful to reflect back or paraphrase something they said, or perhaps ask a gentle (open) question, both to show we're genuinely interested, and to help them open up a bit more (see responding skills sheet).

Think of one or two people in whose lives God seems to be at work.

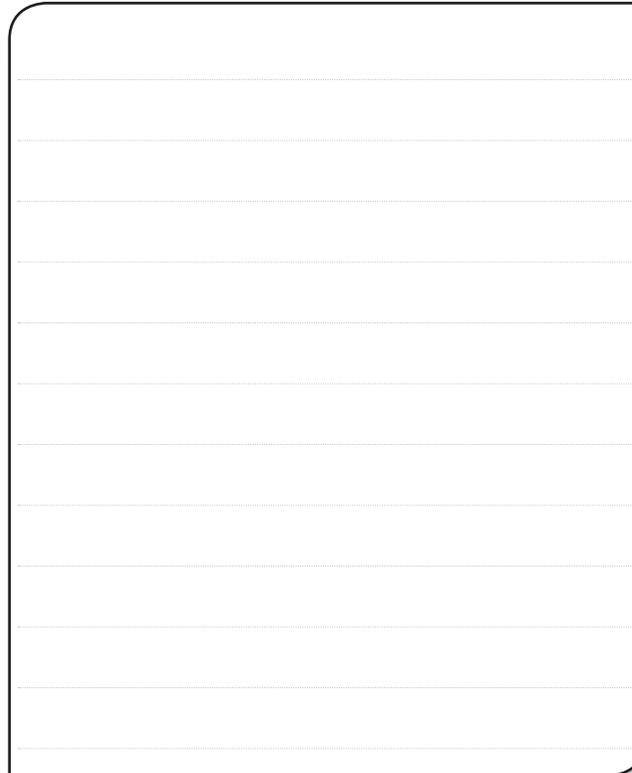
Now get together in 2s and 3s. Decide who will speak first, who will listen first (and who will observe first, if you are in a 3). Take it in turns to talk about the one or two people in confidence, and rather uncertainly. You will have 6 minutes each if you are in a pair (4 minutes each if you are in a 3).

If it seems appropriate, prompt the speaker with an open question to draw them out.

In the same groups, debrief each other, focusing on how well those listening responded to the person speaking.

### Together as a large group:

What did you learn about how we recognize God at work in people's lives? How did you feel as you talked about this?



## 8 THIS WEEK'S TASK

During the week:

- Consider the various areas of your life, and the different people you relate to
- Identify one or two who you feel you might be able to encourage on their journey of faith
- Reflect prayerfully on how you might grow these relationships (see individual booklet).

## 9 PRAYER

Close this session in prayer, giving thanks for those who have gone before us on the journey of faith, those we look up to as servants of Christ.

## 10 RESOURCES

The individual booklet and the responding skills sheet is available on the USB stick and on the website.

## 11 NEXT WEEK'S THEME

Next week we will be looking at how we can help people grow up in their faith – teach effectively.