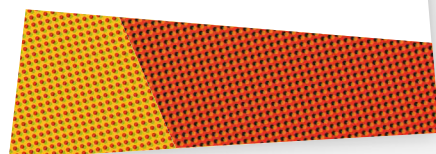


# 1 God's Call



**God can transform relationships in a conflicted world. God's call and equipping make that possible.**

## Three key points:

- 1** God restores what is broken and transforms relationships, and invites us to be part of this story, becoming peacemakers.
- 2** By nurturing the habits of being **curious**, being **present** and **reimagining**, we can follow Christ and be part of God's action in the world today.
- 3** Acknowledging the complexity of our own story can enable us to engage better with a fractured and hurting world.



## Reflection

**i** Read this ahead of the session to prepare yourself to host the group.

We begin this journey by asking God to awaken (or re-awaken) in us the calling to be reconciled with him and to be ambassadors of that reconciliation in our relationships and communities.

We live in between the wholeness that God intended in the beginning and the ultimate restoration of all things, of heaven and earth. In the centre of this story is Jesus. Through him, God becomes fully part of our messy, earthy lives – exposed to fragility, relationships that go wrong, limitations and disappointments. In his life, death, resurrection and ascension, we see the extent to which God goes to restore our relationship with him.

When we see the complexity and division in the world around us, we can feel disheartened and overwhelmed. But Jesus set for us the example for living in a fragmented world – he broke

down walls of division, crossed social boundaries and challenged conventions. When we follow his example and invite God to be at work within us, we discover new ways of responding to brokenness. We can begin this process with the practical habits: **Be Curious, Be Present** and **Reimagine**.

We are called to be fully human, not superhuman – embracing the fact that we are fractured, fragile, forgiven works in progress. No one is invincible but God can work through each of us. In fact, our brokenness and our mess are the very things that will help us to be reconcilers, if we are open to allowing God to work through them. The Bible tells the stories of numerous broken, vulnerable people who become instruments of God's grace.

**i Note:** *The session outline below is designed to last 90 minutes. If your group don't already know each other, you may like to allow more time for introductions and the 'Setting the group culture' section below. Or you may prefer to meet separately in advance of Session 1, following the Pre-Gathering guide on page 70.*

## Session starts here

# Welcome

🕒 15 mins

🖋️ 00:00

## Opening

🕒 5 mins

Open the session with prayer.

🖥️ Slide 1



## Introduction

🕒 5 mins

🗨️ **Welcome your group personalising the words below:**

Welcome to the *Difference* course. We're going to be spending five sessions together exploring the power of faith in a conflicted world.

This course will equip you with three formational habits to engage with difference and see transformation in your own life and in your everyday encounters.

**These habits are rooted in Scripture and seen in the life of Christ:**

- **Be Curious:** Listen to others' stories and see the world through their eyes.
- **Be Present:** Encounter others with authenticity and confidence.
- **Reimagine:** Find hope and opportunity in the places where we long to see change.

🖥️ Slide 2



Over the five sessions we will consider how these habits equip us to cross divides (session 2), navigate disagreement (session 3), practise forgiveness (session 4) and risk hope (session 5).

This course isn't issue-based; it's not focused on a specific divide or fracture. Through the act of listening to stories and reflecting on our experiences we create an opportunity to consider the issues that are most important for us and our wider community.

We're now going to watch a short film to discover more about the three habits of **being curious**, **being present** and **reimagining**.



## Film Habits

Watch the film

🕒 5 mins

🗨️ Tell participants:

Today's session explores how God can transform relationships, and how his call and equipping make that possible.

## Setting the group culture

🕒 10 mins

🗨️ Tell your group:

- As we start this course, we want to set a group culture together that honours the stories and experiences everyone brings. We want to create a space to listen to one another deeply, having honest, hopeful and creative conversations.
- The three habits offered by the course can help us do this: **Be Curious**, **Be Present** and **Reimagine**.

🖥️ Slide 3



🖋️ 00:00

### **Be Curious:**

- Value the story of each person with sensitivity and respect, acknowledging that each of us comes with different experiences and perspectives.
- Honour others' stories by not sharing their story without their permission.

### **Be Present:**

- Be ready to listen.
- Be present by being honest: don't feel pressured to say what you think you 'should' say or to give the 'right answer'. It's also okay not to know or to decide not to share.

### **Reimagine:**

- Invite the Holy Spirit to be at work, opening up new perspectives and possibilities.
- Be aware of the ways your life experiences shape your own perspective, and try to be open to how encounters with others could reveal different perspectives.

### **Ask your group:**

- Are there any other shared foundations or 'ground rules' that we need to make this a comfortable and respectful space where we can be honest?

**Give the group 5 minutes to discuss.**



## **Signpost**

In our encounters and relationships we can experience a mixture of flourishing and fracture, justice and injustice, hurt and healing. In Genesis we see how our relationships with God, with each other and with creation are connected and how a break in one can affect the others. But we also see that brokenness isn't the end of the story. God invites us into new life, bringing restoration and transformation.



🗨️ Tell participants:

In each session we will reflect on stories (film and Bible), have space to do an activity and end the session in a time of prayer we call sanctuary.

In this part of the session, we are going to **Be Curious**. We choose to wonder about the story God invites us into.

🗨️ Introduce the film and Bible passage:

- First, we're going to watch a film of Uncle Ray, Honorary Indigenous Minister and Community Chaplain living in Sydney, who shares his reflections on God's call in a fractured and complex world.
- After this, we will read what Jesus teaches in the Sermon on the Mount where we can dig into these themes more deeply.
- We will then have 15 minutes to discuss the stories in small groups.



## Film

### Uncle Ray's story

🕒 5 mins

1) Watch the film

2) As a group, discuss:



What does Uncle Ray's story say to you about God's call in a conflicted world?



## Bible passage

### The Beatitudes

(Matthew 5:5–9)

🕒 10 mins

### Background

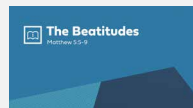
🗨️ 3) Share the background

- This passage comes from early in Jesus's ministry in the 'Sermon on the Mount' – the longest passage of Jesus' teaching in the Gospels.

🖥️ Slide 4



🖥️ Slide 5



- Jesus says that peacemakers are blessed because 'they will be called children of God'. Peacemaking is part of our identity as members of God's family.
- Jesus paints a picture of God's kingdom, where mercy, justice and peace are the hallmarks. The *Difference* course is about equipping us to live out this vision of restoration and healing in our own lives.

#### 4) Invite a volunteer to read the passage



## Small groups

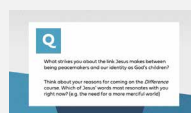
🕒 15 mins

### 5) Discuss in small groups:

- Q** What strikes you about the link Jesus makes between being peacemakers and our identity as God's children?
- Q** Think about your reasons for coming on the *Difference* course. Which of Jesus' words most resonates with you right now? (e.g. *the need for a more merciful world*)

**If time allows, two or three people feedback a highlight to the whole group after the small group discussion**

#### Slide 6



## Signpost

Jesus invites us to live in a brand-new way, which transforms us and our relationships. Reconciliation is about the restoration of what is broken into a new creation; not just 'out there', but within ourselves. We find ourselves stuck in patterns and structures where injustice, unforgiveness and ignorance are often at play, sometimes unseen. We need God's help to guide us and develop new habits of being and of relating to others in the complexity of our everyday lives.

## 🗨️ Tell participants:

In this part of the session, we are going to **Be Present** as we engage with an activity. We become aware of ourselves, our surroundings, the people we share this space with and of God's presence with us.



## Activity

### The stories we bring

#### 1 🗨️ Lead your group through the following reflection, saying:

Each of us carries different experiences which shape the way we see the world. Issues that seem abstract to some will feel very close to home for others. Your story matters. It shapes the way you see and interact with others.

We also know that there are limitations to each of our stories, which is why it's really important to hear one another.

Earlier on we looked at the three habits that we're going to explore throughout the *Difference* course. These are: **Be Curious**, **Be Present** and **Reimagine**. We're going to spend some time using these three habits to look at our own stories and listen to one another's.

#### 2 Now guide your participants through the following set of exercises:

### Be Present

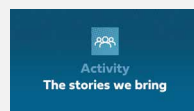
🕒 5 mins

#### 3 🗨️ Say:

Firstly, **Be Present** with your reality now. Take a moment to pause. Notice the pressures and activity of the day that you are carrying in your mind and feeling or body. In the quietness of this moment acknowledge God's presence and peace with you.

- Take a moment to wonder about the questions you are bringing to this session - what is most on your mind as you start the *Difference* course?

#### 🖥️ Slide 7



- 4** Invite participants to share some of these questions briefly aloud.

## Be Curious

🕒 20 mins

- 5** 🗨️ Split participants into groups of three. Say:

Secondly, **Be Curious** about your own story. Think of a time when you encountered division or conflict, or a time when you felt you belonged.

We will shortly go into smaller groups for an opportunity to share these stories. There will be three people in each group:

- Person 1 will share their story.
- Persons 2 & 3 will practise being curious about that story.
- Person 2 or 3 will reflect back what they heard as a way of actively listening.

Then rotate, so everyone has a chance to share their story.

Take 2 minutes to consider what you would like to share.

- 6** Draw small group discussions to a close after 18 minutes.

## Reimagine

🕒 5 mins

- 7** 🗨️ Invite the whole group to reflect on what they heard and noticed. Say:

Finally, **Reimagine**. What struck you about sharing your stories?

For example, do we all share similar experiences or have a diverse range of experiences? Was there anything else you noticed?

- 8** Invite participants to share their responses aloud.

- 9** 🗨️ Tell participants:

The habit of reimagining is rarely a solo activity. We need the imagination of others to find new possibilities. In the *Difference* course we explore what it means to come together as part of God's bigger story and to be enriched by one another's stories.



## Signpost

Being curious, being present and reimagining are three ways of responding daily to God's call:

- When we are **curious** about others, we begin to honour them as one made in God's image.
- When we are fully **present** with someone we disagree with, we begin to build a connection that makes it more possible to understand our differences.
- When we **reimagine**, we open ourselves to God's vision of renewal and healing – even in the places we least expect it.

Through this course, we will explore what it means to put these habits into practice in our everyday lives.

# Sanctuary

🕒 10 mins

✍ 00:00

### 🗨 Tell participants:

In this part of the session, we are going to **Reimagine**, noticing where we are most in need of renewed hope.

As we pray, we invite the Holy Spirit to expand our imaginations of what is possible, as individuals and as a community.



**Note:** *Reading each of the reflections that follow, guide this time of prayer in whatever way works best for your group. For silent prayer, we suggest leaving one minute of silence between each paragraph to allow people to pray.*

### 🖥 Slide 8





## Prayer

### Offering our story to God

Think back to what we learned of God's story of renewal and restoration. Ask God to renew in you a sense of identity as a child of God and of belonging in his story.

Think back to your reflections on your own story. Offer to God the thoughts and feelings that stirred in you.

Think back to the stories you heard from others. Thank God for anything that enriched your perspective. Ask God to help you see opportunities you have this week to encounter stories that are different from your own.

Loving God, fill us with your Spirit now,  
Help us **Be Curious** about others' stories –  
listening as often as we speak.  
  
Give us the courage to **Be Present** –  
engaging our whole and unique selves.  
  
Inspire us to **Reimagine** what's possible –  
finding hope by glimpsing you at work.  
  
In Jesus' name. Amen.



## Top Takeaway

Invite one or two people to share:

- a one-line takeaway from the session.
- something they feel inspired to do between now and the next session.

Suggested actions for your group:

1

## Be Curious

about other people's stories: try saying, 'Would you mind if I asked about your story?'

2

## Be Present

Read the Bible with people from different backgrounds or with different experiences from your own. What new connections and understanding do you discover?

3

## Reimagine

Pray for the Holy Spirit to give you eyes to see and ears to hear more than what you currently imagine is possible.



**Remind participants** to make notes in their Guide following the session, perhaps writing or drawing something they want to take away from this session and what they want to do in their daily lives as a result.

🖥️ Slide 9



## Feedback

At the end of the first session please encourage your group to complete a participants' feedback form by visiting **[difference.rln.global/feedback](https://difference.rln.global/feedback)** or by scanning the QR code in their Guide). If anyone in the group would prefer to fill in a paper version, please provide them with one of the forms available for download in the Host Dashboard.

Please also complete the hosts' version of the feedback form available in the same location.



# End

**Write any notes you may have here...**