



difference.

Your Guide

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Stay Connected

Sign up to our mailing list and follow us on social media to receive inspiration for being **curious**, being **present** and **reimagining** in your everyday life, as well as the latest news about what we're up to and how you can get involved.

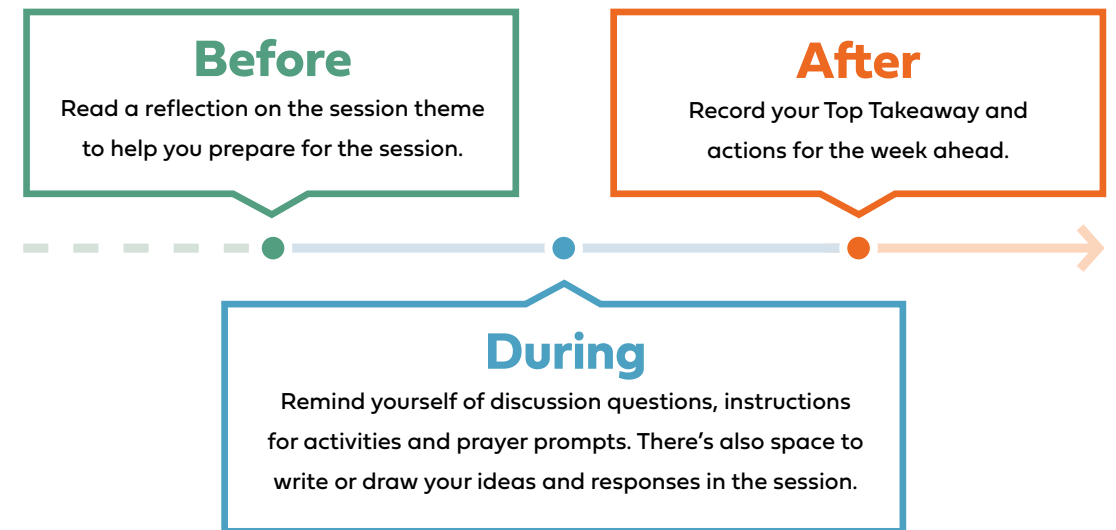
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Using Your Guide

Welcome to the *Difference* course. This Guide is designed to help you prepare, process your thoughts, and reflect on your ideas and actions. Use this Guide before, during and after each session:

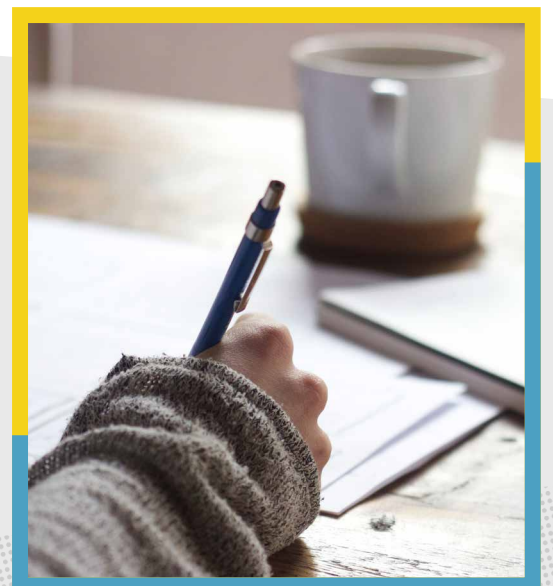


Aim

The aim of the course is to explore what it means to follow Jesus in a complex and divided world.

Difference equips you to cross divides, navigate disagreement and pursue a just and flourishing world.

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Difference teaches three Habits

Drawing deeply on Jesus' encounters in the Gospels and the wisdom of expert peacemakers, we've distilled three habits that can transform everyday relationships.

Our habits matter. 45% of our daily actions are habitual¹ and neuroscientists have estimated that up to 95% of our behaviours are controlled (at least in part) by the subconscious mind.²

There is a close relationship between what we believe and what we do. If we can shape our habits we can build practices that have a deep and lasting impact on our actions, our thoughts and our character.

Let's take a closer look at the three habits: **Be Curious**, **Be Present** and **Reimagine**.

These habits aren't a three point plan where one habit follows another. There is no correct order in which to practise them and each habit feeds into the others. When we learn to recognise these habits in action, we often notice that they're being practised simultaneously.

¹ e.g. David T. Neal, Wendy Wood, and Jeffrey M. Quinn, 'Habits - A Repeat Performance', Duke University, 2006

² e.g. Lakoff and Johnson 1999, in Martin 2008

The Three Habits



difference.

Be curious_

listen
to understand

pray
for those who
we tend to turn
away from

Moving...

...away from **...towards**

Presumption → Wonder
Ignorance → Valuing others

difference.

“Reconciliation is not the ending of all difference, but the transformation of how we deal with difference.”

Archbishop Justin Welby

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Be present_

listen

by giving our full attention

pray

in lament for the reality of pain and fracture

Moving...

...away from

Hostility
Avoidance and distance

...towards

Hospitality
Connection and empathy

difference.

Be curious_

Listen to others' stories and see the world through their eyes.

In Genesis 1 we read that every person is made in the image of God with value and a unique story of deep worth. When we are curious enough to seek out that story, we affirm that person's innate value. Demonstrating a true interest in who the other person is and how they have experienced the world can make it possible to begin to tread trickier territory together, because the other person knows they have been heard and honoured.

Curiosity about the other also leads us to discover some of the limitations of our own story and perception. It cultivates humility, acknowledging that we don't have all the answers without diminishing the value of what we bring.



Re imagine_

listen

to where God is leading us

pray

for God's perspective and renewal

Moving...

...away from

Self-sufficiency
Hopelessness

...towards

Community
Creativity, courage and renewal

difference.



Encounter others with authenticity and confidence.

Our encounters with others are often the places we first notice complexity, division and difference. Being present in encounters means showing up and sticking around - making time for the other, dedicating our attention to them and meeting them as they are.

The Christian faith teaches that God became human and chose to be part of a hurting world. God's response to injustice and hurt is to step into the context in a totally new way, teaching us what it means to be present. Being present means having the courage to bring our whole, unique selves, our vulnerabilities and insecurities, as well as our convictions and our strengths, and by doing so we can open up new depths of relationship.



Find hope and opportunity in the places where we long to see change.

Our worlds are shaped by our imagination, and when divisions and conflict seem like they will never change and we face repeated disappointment, it can sometimes be hard to find hope or to imagine an alternative where healing, restoration and thriving relationships are possible.

Yet we read in Revelation 21 that God is making all things new. The habit of reimagining encourages us to be renewed by the Holy Spirit, stretching our understanding of what is possible. It is rarely a solo experience and often done in community. For relationships to be restored, the systems and structures with which we are familiar may need to shift in new and reimagined ways.



Session structure

Each session will develop these habits through:

Story

Stories matter, so we start with a section called **Story**. This includes a film of someone who has faced conflict, division or a difficult relationship, and a Gospel account from the life of Jesus. Both stories relate to the theme of the session, approaching it from different angles.

Space

The middle section of each session is called **Space**. The spaces we create can have a powerful impact on the relationships we build. In this section, we engage with our own experience through an activity, which maybe an interactive exercise or guided reflection. This section helps embed the habits of being curious, being present and reimagining.

Sanctuary

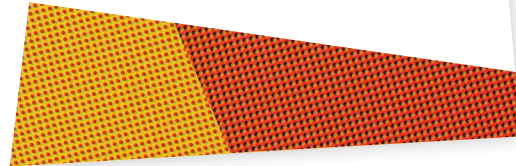
Lastly, the session ends with moment of **Sanctuary**. This is a time to reflect and know God's presence, to pray and ask God to be at work as you think about what to apply to your everyday context and what your Top Takeaway is.

The Sessions →

1 God's Call

Bible passage

The Beatitudes
(Matthew 5:5-9)



Before

Reflect

When we see complexity and division in the world around us, we can feel disheartened and overwhelmed. But Jesus also lived 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 three 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.

Heads Up

Think about a time when you encountered division or conflict, or a time when you felt you belonged. There will be an opportunity to explore that further in this session.

During

Story



Pastor Ray's story

What does this film say to you about God's call?

 Write your notes in these spaces...



The Beatitudes

(Matthew 5:5-9)

What strikes you about the link Jesus makes between being peacemakers and our identity as God's children?

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)

Space

The stories we bring

Use the space below to write or draw your responses during the Space activity.

What is most on your mind as you start the Difference course?

Think of a time when you encountered division or conflict,
or a time when you felt you belonged.

What struck you about sharing your stories?

In Small Groups



In a group of three, take turns to share a time when you encountered division or conflict, or a time when you felt you belonged.

Sanctuary



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.

After →

Top Takeaway


Write or draw one thing you want to take away from this session.

Act

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


Be Curious_

When could I listen more and wonder?

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


Be Present_

Where am I showing up and sticking around?
Who could I have better encounters with?

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

Reimagine_

Where am I in need of renewed hope?
How could I act on the hope I have?

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

End

2 Crossing Divides

Bible passage

The Woman at the Well
(John 4:1-30)

Before

Reflect

We live in a world of divides: categories and labels that not only distinguish but which separate us from one another. Healthy boundaries are essential in our relationships, but walls we put up due to prejudice or assumptions can prevent us from asking those on the other side about their story. This only increases distrust and distance, and we stop questioning our own assumptions. Differences can then become a cause of suspicion, rather than curiosity.

Some of these divides are of our own making, some we inherit. Consciously and unconsciously we often surround ourselves with people who think like us, dividing the world into the categories of 'us' and 'them'.

Jesus lived in a world of divides and power imbalances. Roman citizens had rights not afforded to anyone else. Within his own religious community there were strict guidelines about who to meet and what to eat. Sharing a meal with non-Jews was not permitted. Jesus was continually engaging in encounters with those on the other side of all sorts of divides. He spent time with the most unlikely people – those whom society had already made up its mind about – as we see in the story of the Samaritan woman at the well.

The first step for us in following him is to identify the walls we create and the people on the other side.

During

Story



Sami's story

What does this story say to you about crossing divides?

Write your notes in these spaces...



The Woman at the Well

(John 4:1-30)

What do you learn about Jesus in this story?

In the film and the Bible passage, how do the three habits help people cross divides?

Space

Discover our walls

Use the space below to write or draw your responses during the Space activity.

Sanctuary



Divides and prejudice are part of the story of all of our lives. But we have an opportunity to be part of a new story.

After →

Top Takeaway


Write or draw one thing you want to take away from this session.

Act

God invites us to see where difference or prejudice divide us from others and offers us opportunities to see them as he does.


Be Curious_

When could I listen and wonder more?

 **Try** understanding more about an area of division you don't know much about. The least impacted by a division, injustice or hurt are often the least aware it exists.

Be Present_

Where am I showing up and sticking around?
Who could I have better encounters with?

 **Try** visiting somewhere you wouldn't normally choose to go e.g. a church with a different tradition of worship, or a cafe in a different part of town.

Reimagine_

Where am I in need of renewed hope?
How could I act on the hope I have?

 **Try** considering the possibility that someone unlikely could become a friend.

End

3 Navigating Disagreement

Bible passage

The Woman Who Washes Jesus' Feet
(Luke 7:36–50)

Before

Reflect

In the face of disagreement, our natural instinct may be to withdraw and not to rock the boat. Or our tendency may be the opposite – to charge towards the other and only see the rift.

At best, either of these responses will just keep us stuck where we are. But imagine what could happen in our world if every person involved in conflict sought to understand their enemy better, enabling them to disagree well.

Jesus isn't threatened by differing views, as we see in his meeting with Simon the Pharisee and the woman who washes his feet. He is not afraid of the conflict that will arise by honouring the woman: rather he names the conflict and expresses his view with respect and through storytelling. The woman who washes Jesus' feet would have been in no doubt about the conflict that her actions would spark, but she finds a way to express her conviction both openly and with deep humility.

Being a reconciler is not about eradicating or ignoring difference or saying there are no moral absolutes. It is about finding ways of hearing one another, generously and honestly, in both the things we have in common and where we differ enormously. On this foundation, trust can begin to be built in the midst of even the strongest disagreement.

Heads Up

Think about a disagreement you have with someone which you would be prepared to explore further in this session.

During

Story



Mariam's story

What does this story say to you about navigating disagreement?

Write your notes in these spaces...



The Woman Who Washes Jesus' Feet

(Luke 7:36–50)

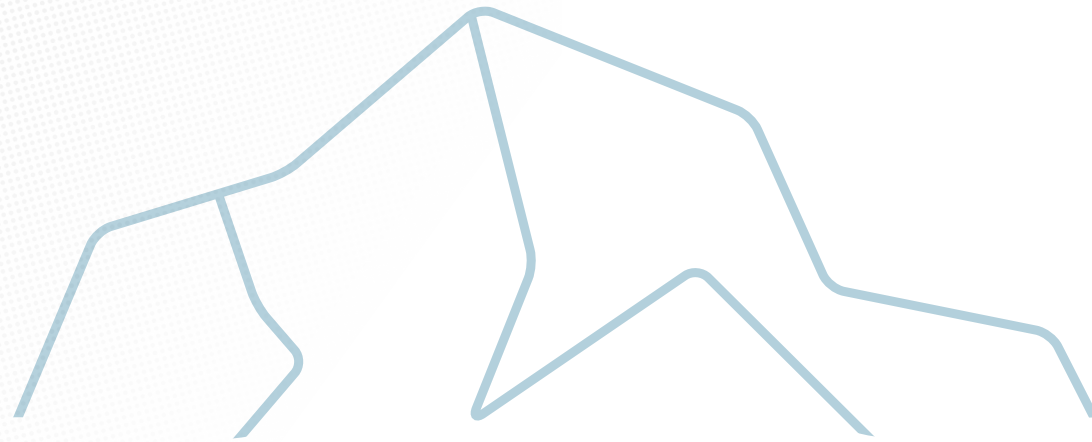
What do you learn about Jesus in this story?

In the film and the Bible passage, how do the three habits help people navigate disagreement?

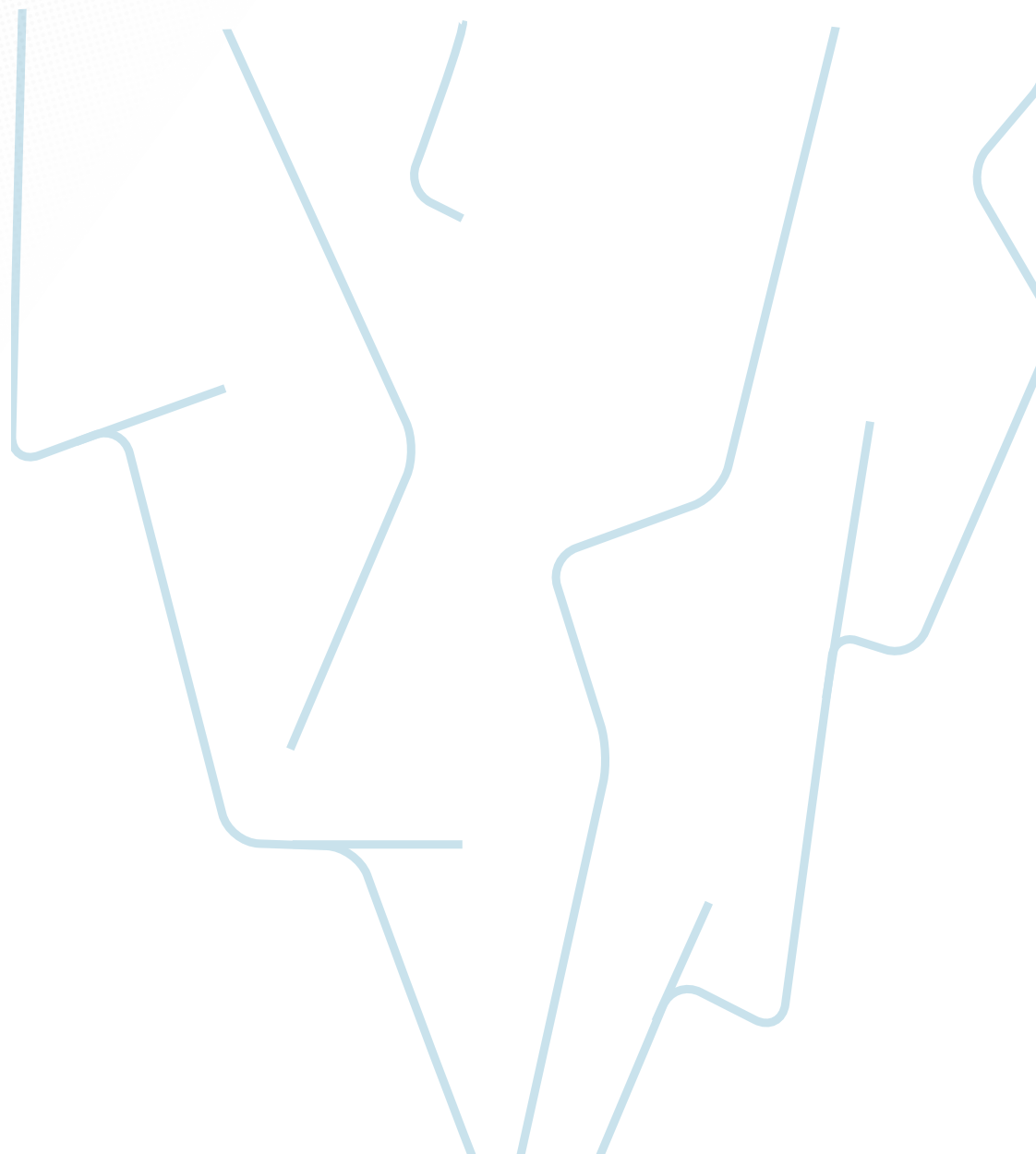
Space

The Iceberg

Use the space below to write or draw your responses during the Space activity.



When we disagree, we often see only the position or opinion of the other person. This could be compared to the 10% of an iceberg that is visible above the surface.



Below the water is another 90% of the iceberg. These might be our motivations, experiences, needs and fears – the many complex elements that lead a person to hold a position or view.

In Small Groups



In a group of three, you might volunteer to explore a disagreement that is meaningful to you.

First, share your perspective on the disagreement.

Then share the perspective of the person you disagree with.

Others in your group reflect back what they've heard.

Sanctuary



The path of our lives will bring us into contact with conflict and disagreement. But we have an opportunity to reimagine our response.

After →

Top Takeaway


Write or draw one thing you want to take away from this session.

Act

God is with us as we face the challenge of disagreement, which can become an opportunity for stronger relationships if handled well.


Be Curious_

When could I listen and wonder more?

 **Try** seeking to understand something new about a person or an opinion you disagree with.


Be Present_

Where am I showing up and sticking around?
Who could I have better encounters with?

 **Try** noticing your physical responses in disagreements. How could your body language show an openness to the other person?

Reimagine_

Where am I in need of renewed hope?
How could I act on the hope I have?

 **Try** looking to strengthen your relationship with someone you disagree with when you next encounter them, rather than to win the argument.

End

4 Practising Forgiveness

Bible passage

Jesus and Peter on the Beach
(John 21:1–19)

Before

Reflect

God, in Jesus, has freely forgiven us and it is because we are forgiven that we are able to forgive others. We are forgiven forgivers.

Every experience of painful relationships is different. Sometimes forgiveness feels challenging but not impossible. In other situations, forgiveness is a much longer and thornier process. In some cases, the perpetrator may be unknown or may not be alive, making closure and complete reconciliation impossible. This session provides an opportunity to explore the complexity of both forgiving and asking for forgiveness.

Despite how difficult it is (or perhaps because of it) forgiveness is a liberating, heart-expanding, game-changing opportunity for us as we seek to be reconcilers. Forgiveness does not excuse the wrong. Instead, it is powerful because we recognise a wrong has been done. It takes courage, hope and grace, and it cannot be rushed.

We might often focus on the big moments of forgiveness, but we are also invited to make forgiveness part of the daily rhythm of our lives. In the prayer Jesus taught his disciples, we are encouraged to pray for our daily bread and then to pray to be forgiven as we forgive others.

Heads Up

Reflect on your experiences of forgiveness – both of forgiving others and of being forgiven. This will help you engage with this session, but you won't be expected to share these experiences in full.

During

Story



Craig's story

What does this story say to you about practising forgiveness?

Write your notes in these spaces...



Jesus and Peter on the Beach

(John 21:1–19)

What do you learn about Jesus in this story?

In the film and the Bible passage, how do the three habits help people practise forgiveness?

Space

Stepping into the story

Use the space below to write or draw your responses during the Space activity.

How do you feel as you move through the water towards Jesus?

What does it mean for you to eat breakfast with Jesus on this beach?

How do you know that Jesus has forgiven you?

How does this moment change the way you see

- yourself?
- your relationship with Jesus?
- your relationship with others when they let you down?

In Small Groups



"When I cultivate forgiveness in my small everyday encounters, I am preparing for a time when a much larger act of forgiveness will be asked of me, as it most certainly will... When I develop a mindset of forgiveness, rather than a mindset of grievance, I don't just forgive a particular act; I become a more forgiving person... What was once a reason for rupture and alienation becomes an opportunity for repair and greater intimacy."

The Book of Forgiving: the Fourfold Path for Healing Ourselves and Our World, by Archbishop Desmond Tutu and Reverend Canon Mpho Tutu.

In groups discuss:

- What resonates with your own experience?
- What do you find challenging?

Sanctuary



An important part of our identity in Christ is that we are 'forgiven forgivers'. God, in Jesus, has forgiven us and forgiveness is a gift that we are entrusted to share generously with those around us, helped by the Holy Spirit.

After →

Top Takeaway


Write or draw one thing you want to take away from this session.

Act

God is with us in the mess and complexity of trying to put forgiveness into practice in our relationships.

Be Curious_

When could I listen and wonder more?

 **Try** being curious about the story of someone who has hurt you and about your own feelings towards them. (You might ask, 'I wonder what's going on for them' or, 'I wonder why this made me feel like that'.)


Be Present_

Where am I showing up and sticking around?
Who could I have better encounters with?

 **Try** seeking God's presence in places or relationships where there is pain or injustice.

Reimagine_

Where am I in need of renewed hope?
How could I act on the hope I have?

 **Try** reimagining a relationship or situation where forgiveness seems unachievable. Pray for hope and that God would be at work.

End

5 Risking Hope

Bible passage

Jesus Washes the Disciples' Feet
(John 13:1-17)

Before

Reflect

The kingdom of God is transformative because it is bringing something brand new that is often counter-cultural. It is a message of genuine hope because it turns broken systems of power the right way up – but this doesn't always feel comfortable and sometimes meets resistance.

We know that there are times when following Jesus' example in our relationships still feels like an uphill struggle. There are situations when it is hard to be curious, when our presence doesn't seem to make a difference and when we feel we've done all the reimagining we can do. Living out God's call in our encounters is a task we invest in over time that leads us through costly, sometimes risky, territory.

But what we see in Jesus is not only that he has walked this rocky path before us but that, through it, he is bringing in new life. When Jesus washes his disciples' feet, he takes the risk that his actions and attitude won't be understood, welcomed or appreciated, at least in the short term. Yet nevertheless, he chooses to use an act of startling 'normality' to do something extraordinary. He embodies hope – through his actions and presence, he becomes a sign of God's kingdom where power is not grasped and where relationship is sacrificial.

As we prepare for what's next, we need to know that we are called to be part of God's bigger story of restoration in the world – even when we can't see the impact. And we need to be resourced by the Holy Spirit and one another as we keep going.

Heads Up

Reflect on a situation or relationship where you are hoping for change but feeling stuck. There will be an opportunity to explore this further in the session.

During

Story



Guvna B's and Tom's stories

What does this story say to you about the risk and hope involved in restoration?

Write your notes in these spaces...



Jesus Washes the Disciples' Feet

(John 13:1-17)

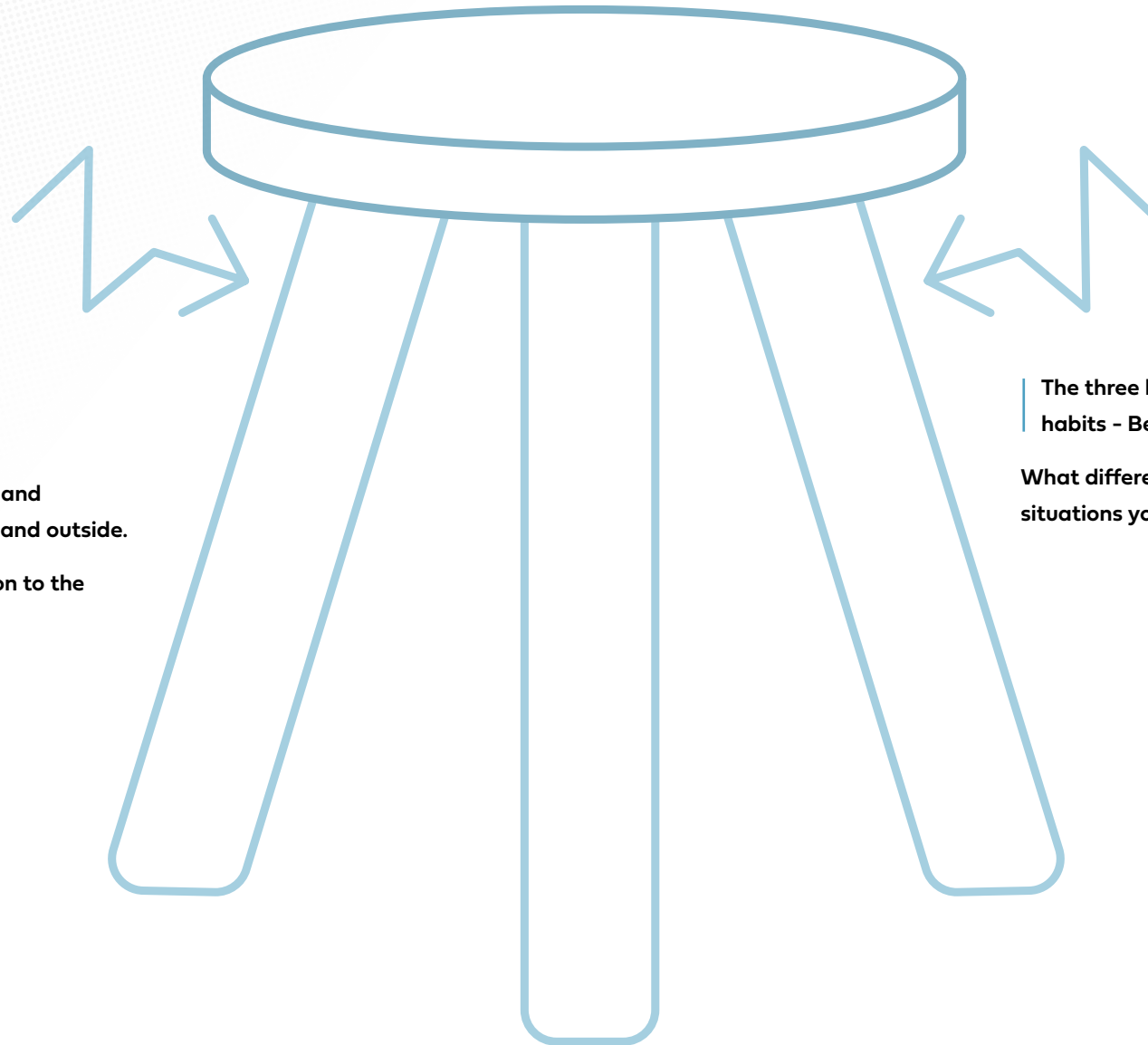
What do you learn about Jesus in this story?

In the film and the Bible passage, how do the three habits help people risk hope?

Space

Three-legged stool

Use the space below to write or draw your responses during the Space activity.



The seat at the top of the stool represents the hopes that you hold - not your own wishful thinking, but the things you believe are possible because of your trust in God.

What do these look like for you?

Our hopes can be rocked by resistance and opposition, both from within ourselves and outside.

Where do you feel resistance or opposition to the hopes you've been reflecting on?

The three legs of the stool represent the three habits - Be Curious, Be Present and Reimagine.

What difference could these habits make to the situations you and others have shared?

Sanctuary



As we come to the end of the course, we know that the risk and cost of following Jesus in our relationships is real. But we are part of an even bigger reality in which God is making all things new.

After →

Top Takeaway


Write or draw one thing you want to take away from this session.

Act

Doing relationships God's way will sometimes be risky and resisted but the hope it brings is radical and transformative.

Be Curious_


When could I listen and wonder more?

 **Try** being curious about how God could use you to bring hope to your context. What do you need to be able to take a first step?

Be Present_

Where am I showing up and sticking around?


Who could I have better encounters with?

 **Try** setting aside some time to be with people who will help you keep going in a difficult situation.

Reimagine_

Where am I in need of renewed hope?

How could I act on the hope I have?

 **Try** reimagining the ways in which your Top Takeaways from this course could have a wider impact – in your wider community and across God's world.

End

The Encounter Prayer

The prayer below invites God to move within us – to help us to desire and to pursue the renewal that we may feel unable to seek in our own strength. It can be prayed before or during any encounter, and in any of our relationships.

Loving God, fill me with your Spirit now,

Help me to **Be Curious** about others' stories – listening as often as I speak.

Give me the courage to **Be Present** – engaging my whole and unique self.

Inspire me to **Reimagine** what's possible – finding hope by glimpsing you at work.

In Jesus' name. Amen.

Stay Connected

Sign up to our mailing list and follow us on social media to receive inspiration for being **curious**, being **present** and **reimagining** in your everyday life, as well as the latest news about what we're up to and how you can get involved.

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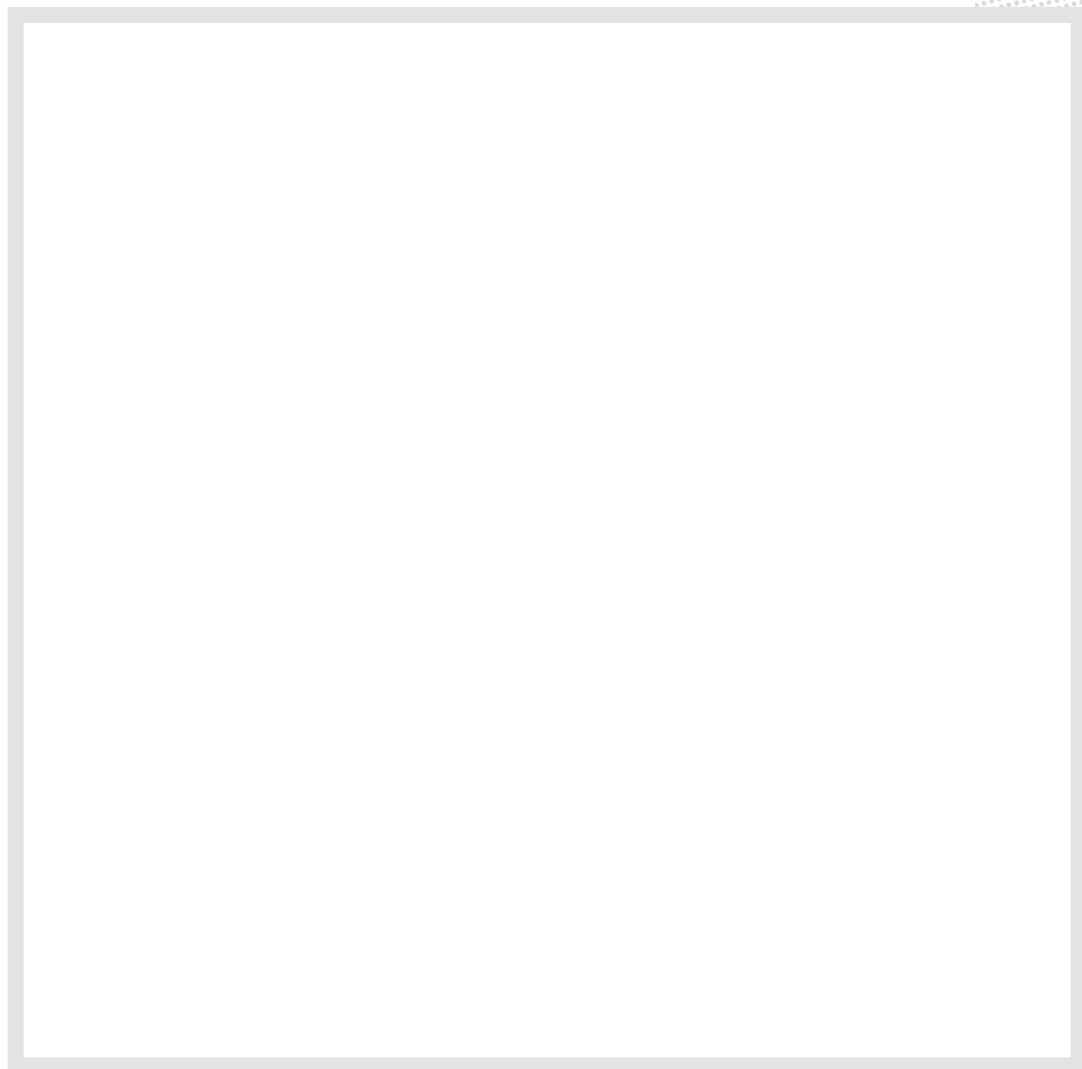
We'd love to hear how you've found being a part of this course. Please complete a feedback form for the end of the course by visiting difference.rln.global/feedback or by scanning this QR code.



Share your story

Do you have a story to share with us about the impact Difference has had for you?

For example, the impact it has had on your faith, or how the habits have helped you to see a relationship differently or cross divides.



We'd love to hear your story - if you'd like to share it with us, take a photo of this page and email it to hello@rln.global

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