



**difference.**

# **Host Guide**

## **In Person**

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# Overview

## Aim

The aim of the course is to explore what it means to follow Jesus in a complex and divided world. *Difference* equips participants to cross divides, navigate disagreement and pursue a just and flourishing world.



## 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.

🖱 [difference.rln.global](https://difference.rln.global)

📷 [difference.rln](https://www.instagram.com/difference.rln)

🐦 [@DifferenceRLN](https://twitter.com/DifferenceRLN)

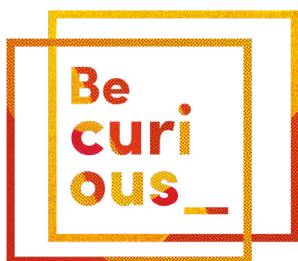
# Difference teaches three Habits

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 habitual<sup>1</sup> and neuroscientists have estimated that up to 95% of our behaviours are controlled (at least in part) by the subconscious mind.<sup>2</sup>

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.



## 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.





## Encounter others with authenticity and confidence.

Our encounters with others are often the places we first notice complexity, division and difference, and they are the focus of so many of Jesus' teachings. 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 is about how we show up, not just the act of showing up. It means having the courage to bring our whole, unique selves, not just the version of ourselves we want others to see. Bringing our vulnerabilities and insecurities, as well as our convictions and our strengths, into our encounters can open up new depths of relationship.



## Finding 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 intractable 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 and for God to stretch 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.

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

# Sessions

The *Difference* course has five sessions:

## 1 God's Call

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

## 2 Crossing Divides

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

## 3 Navigating Disagreement

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

## 4 Practising Forgiveness

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

## 5 Risking Hope

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



# Optional gatherings



We also provide notes for optional gatherings before and after your course:

## Pre-Gathering

If your group don't already know each other, we recommend a Pre-Gathering to give more time for introductions and 'Setting the group culture'. You can do this as a separate session or extend Session 1 by 30 minutes.

## Re-Gathering

We recommend all groups meet again around a month after finishing Session 5 to share experiences and plan what to do next. This could be done over a meal.



# Using Session Guides

## Session structure

Each session of the course follows the same structure.

### 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 participants engage with their own experiences through an activity, which may be 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 and your participants think about what to apply to your everyday context and what your 'top takeaway' is.



**Note:** Session 1 has a longer 'Welcome' and a shorter 'Story' section; otherwise the sessions follow the timings listed below:

Section	Detail	Time
<b>Welcome</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Feedback from previous week</li> <li>Session theme</li> <li>Prayer</li> </ul>	<b>⌚ 10 mins</b>
<b>Story</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Film</li> <li>Bible reading</li> <li>Small group discussion</li> </ul>	<b>⌚ 35 mins</b>
<b>Space</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Activity and guided reflection</li> <li>Feedback</li> </ul>	<b>⌚ 30 mins</b>
<b>Sanctuary</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Prayer</li> <li>Top takeaway</li> </ul>	<b>⌚ 10 mins</b>
<b>Application</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Suggested actions</li> </ul>	<b>⌚ 5 mins</b>

Use these elements to help...



## Timings

Each section of the session has timings to help you keep to the 90 minutes.



**00:00**

Add your own time stamps to help keep each section on track.



## Slides

Within each session there are optional slide prompts. Slides are available on the Host Dashboard.



## Notes

There are notes for you in every session to provide extra guidance.

# During each session

Each session has a set of notes to help you host it, giving guidance on what to say, questions to ask and activities to run.



## Film

Films of people who have faced conflict, division or a difficult relationship. Films are available on the Host Dashboard.



## Bible Passage

Gospel accounts from the life of Jesus.



## Small Groups

Activities or discussions where your participants are divided into small groups.



## Prayer

Prayers to read out to your group, or to put into your own words.



## Activity

Instructions for activities in the SPACE section of each session.



## Top Takeaway

A moment for participants to share their takeaway from the session.



## Signposts

Key points to guide you through the session. You can read them out or put them into your own words.



# Before each session



## Reflections

Each session has a reflection before the session to help you best prepare for hosting the group.

## Read

Read the guide for the session, paying close attention to the instructions, pastoral notes and the session theme.

## Set up

Set up the space to make it a welcoming environment (music, lighting, chairs and tables). Have a laptop and screen prepared to show the slides and film for the session, and consider having refreshments ready to serve.

## Pray

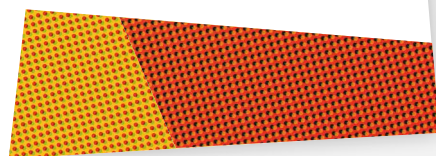
Pray with your co-host(s).

## Consider inclusivity

Please read through all of the interactive sections carefully to consider where alternatives are needed to make it an inclusive session for those with reduced mobility.

# The Sessions →

# 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?

🖥️ Slide 4



## Bible passage The Beatitudes

(Matthew 5:5–9)

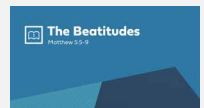
🕒 10 mins

### 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 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

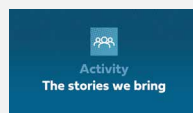
🕒 5 mins

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.

**i** **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...**

# 2 Crossing Divides

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

## Three key points:

- 1** Sometimes the brokenness around us is the result of discomfort or prejudice inside us: beliefs and attitudes that we develop through our upbringing or inherit through the society and culture around us. These attitudes create 'walls' that divide us from others.
- 2** Jesus' example challenges us to find out where assumptions and prejudice stop us engaging with others and to realise that others too might have barriers that stop them engaging with us.
- 3** Jesus also shows us that we can begin to overcome these barriers by making time and space for those on the 'other side' and being curious about their story.



## Reflection



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

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 will be to identify the walls we create and the people on the other side.

## Session starts here

# Welcome

🕒 10 mins

🖋️ 00:00

## Feedback

🕒 5 mins

Ask participants to share briefly an experience they've had over the past week relating to the previous session. Have your own example to share.

## Introduction

🕒 5 mins

🗣️ Tell participants:

In this session, we will explore where assumptions and prejudice divide us from others and how we can learn to cross those divides.

## Pray

Open the session with prayer, inviting participants to bring to mind divides they are aware of and asking God to be at work in the group as they explore what it might mean to cross these divides.

🖥️ Slide 1





## Signpost

It is easy to distrust and feel wary of those who are different from us. We often find ourselves in echo chambers, drawn to voices that reinforce our own perspective or experience. It is increasingly easy to avoid or shut out those who make us uncomfortable or fearful, creating a dividing wall between us. But we are called to respond differently and to be curious about others, as people made in the image of God just like we are. This session is about responding to God's invitation to know ourselves better by seeing our walls and the people on the other side.

### Pastoral note

#### Tell your group:

*This session is designed to help us think about the people we hold at arm's length for the wrong reasons, where prejudice or assumptions lead to walls being created, sometimes without us realising it. This session is not about situations where abuse has occurred, which is never permissible and in which distance is needed for safety and security.*

## Story

 35 mins

 00:00

#### Tell participants:

In this part of the session, we are going to **Be Curious** as we engage with two stories. We choose to wonder about the other person and about how God might expand our perspective.

#### Introduce the stories:

- First, we're going to hear the story of Sami – a Christian living in Bethlehem – and how he crossed divides.

- After this, we will look at the biblical account of how Jesus crossed divides when he met a Samaritan woman.
- We will then have 15 minutes to discuss the stories in small groups.
- Listen out for moments in both where people practise the habits of:
  - **Being curious** Listening to others' stories and seeing the world through their eyes.
  - **Being present** Encountering others with authenticity and confidence.
  - **Reimagining** Finding hope and opportunity in the places where we long to see change.



## Film Sami's story

🕒 10 mins

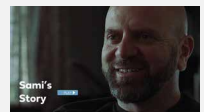
1) Watch the film

2) As a group, discuss:



What does Sami's story say to you about crossing divides?

🖥️ Slide 2



🖥️ Slide 3



## Bible passage The Woman at the Well (John 4:1–30)

🕒 10 mins

### Background

🗣️ 3) Share the background

- This is the longest recorded conversation that Jesus had.
- The Jews and Samaritans distrusted one another, because of historical hostility and continuing differences in belief and religious practice.

🖥️ Slide 4



- This was a very unusual encounter between Jesus and the woman. Most Jews would not travel through Samaria, but Jesus and his companions did. They were effectively in enemy territory and would have been out of their comfort zone. Although the woman was at her own familiar well, she was speaking to an unknown man in a culture that did not allow men and women to socialise outside the family.
- The fact that the woman was alone and collecting water at the hottest time of day suggests that she was socially marginalised and avoiding meeting others.
- The conversation takes place in a culture where a woman could not pursue a divorce herself. To have been married more than once for a woman likely meant being on the receiving end of divorce or being widowed.

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



## Small groups

🕒 15 mins

### 5) Discuss in small groups:



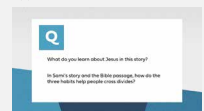
What do you learn about Jesus in this story?



In Sami's story and the Bible passage, how do the three habits help people cross divides?

If time allows, two or three people feedback a highlight to the whole group.

#### 🖥️ Slide 5







## Signpost

Jesus, the Samaritan woman and Sami all show courage in crossing divides that many others wouldn't dare to question. By allowing themselves to be curious about who was on the other side, they opened up new possibilities. To do the same in our own lives, we first need to recognise the walls we put up and what keeps those walls in place.

# Space

 **30 mins**

 00:00

**i** **Note:** *The following activity is designed to help participants discover divides or barriers in their own lives and where these come from. Encourage people to be really honest with themselves. Later in the session, there will be an opportunity to explore how we can begin to overcome these.*

### **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.

### **Remind the group:**

This is not about situations where abuse has occurred, in which distance is needed for safety. The purpose of the following activity is to help us acknowledge where prejudice or difference lead us to create walls to avoid others or keep them at arm's length. If this activity raises anything you would like to talk about further then please speak to us or seek support at the end of the session.



# Activity

## Discover our walls

**i** **Note:** For this activity, you will need 'bricks' and pens to enable participants to build the wall.

### 1 **Ask participants to do the following:**

- **Think** of a group of people or person whom you avoid or distance yourself from. This could be a person or groups of people you avoid, don't engage with, distrust or feel uncomfortable with because they're different. You won't be asked to name this group of people or person at any point in the activity.
- **Reflect:**
  - Why do you find it hard to engage with them?
  - How do you feel when you think of this person/these people? (e.g. *'I feel excluded / threatened / suspicious'*).
- **Share** with the person next to you why you find it hard to engage with them. There is no need to say who you are thinking of.
- **Call out** words that describe how you feel when you think of the person/people you are thinking of (e.g. *'threatened'*).
- **Take one of the 'bricks'** and **write** on it a behaviour which you might engage in in response to the person/people you are thinking of (e.g. *'I walk away / I ignore them / I keep the conversation at a surface level'*).
- **Place** the bricks next to each other, **creating a wall**.

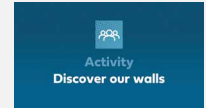
### 2 **Gather everyone around the wall.**

### 3 **Ask a volunteer to read the words aloud. Take a moment to reflect.**

### 4 **Tell the group:**

- Our reactions can build a wall between us and the other person, which eventually becomes so high that we can no longer see the face of the person on the other side.
- In our minds, the other person becomes the image we have created of them.

### Slide 6



**5** Invite everyone to sit back down and to reflect on the person or people on the other side of their wall whom they identified earlier.

**6** ■ Ask participants:

Imagine you are that other person/people. What do you think might make it difficult for them to engage with you? Step into their shoes and be curious about their view of you.



## Signpost

Our inner lives and human relationships are complex. We all have walls that are hard to cross and there are walls that we find ourselves behind. Sometimes we inherit walls without realising it from attitudes ingrained in our culture or unquestioned by our family and community. But when we take time to notice these walls, we can start to liberate ourselves to feel curious about the story of the other, and to realise that we are 'the other' to someone else.

**7** Gather participants in front of the wall again.

**8** ■ Ask participants to:

- Think of one step you could take this week to encounter someone on the other side of your wall.

Invite them to call out their ideas.

**9** As the participants call out words, take down each brick one by one. Offer these to God in prayer.

**10** ■ Tell participants:

- These behaviours can remove bricks in the walls we build or inherit.



## Signpost

As we go about our lives, we have opportunities to recognise unexpected others as people made in God's image and to be curious about their story. When we do this, we can challenge the walls of our echo chambers and comfort zones, and maybe even inspire others to do the same.

# Sanctuary

🕒 10 mins

✍️ 00:00

**i** **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.*

🗨️ **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.

## **i** Pastoral note

*Acknowledge that some walls may still be too big for us to walk towards after this session. Encourage participants to talk to God about these too and to share with someone if they need further support.*

🖥️ Slide 7







## Prayer

### Offering our story to God

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.

Think back to Sami's story and the dividing wall in Bethlehem. Ask God to help you see where divides have dehumanised others and how you might **Be Curious** about their story.

Think back to the woman at the well. Ask God where he might be calling you to **Be Present** somewhere you wouldn't normally place yourself.

Think back to your own walls. Bring them before God and ask God to help you **Reimagine** your response, perhaps enabling you to remove some of the bricks in that wall this week.

Loving God, fill us with your Spirit now,

Help us to **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 or something they feel inspired to do between now and the next session.

# Application

🕒 5 mins

✍️ 00:00

Suggested actions for your group:

## 1 Be Curious

The least impacted by a division, injustice or hurt are often the least aware it exists. Which division could you try understanding more about?

## 2 Be Present

Visit 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.

## 3 Reimagine

Consider the possibility that someone unlikely could become a friend.

**i** **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.

## Heads up

### Navigating Disagreement

Before the next session, ask participants to think about a disagreement they have with someone which they would be prepared to explore further in Session Three – Navigating Disagreement.

🖥️ Slide 8



# End

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

# 3 Navigating Disagreement

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

## Three key points:

- 1** We can have good relationships even when we disagree. In fact, relationships are strengthened when we are able to negotiate conflict well.
- 2** When we're curious about those we disagree with and engage authentically, we can build trust which is needed to have difficult conversations and see where we might need to change.
- 3** This is not about agreeing, saying that difference doesn't matter or that 'it's all relative', but about choosing the way we engage with deep disagreement.



## Reflection

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

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.

Jesus isn't threatened by divergent 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.

## Session starts here

# Welcome

🕒 10 mins

🖋️ 00:00

# Feedback

🕒 5 mins

Ask participants to share briefly any experiences they've had over the past week relating to the previous session. Have your own example to share.

# Introduction

🕒 5 mins

## ■ Tell participants:

In this session, we will acknowledge that God is with us as we face the challenge of disagreement and explore how navigating disagreement well can become an opportunity for stronger relationships.

# Pray

Open the session with prayer, inviting participants to bring to mind disagreements they are facing in their own lives and asking God to be at work in the group as they explore how to navigate disagreement.

🖥️ Slide 1







## Signpost

We all encounter conflict and it rarely feels comfortable, but we don't need to be overwhelmed by it. Jesus' example shows us that we can respond to disagreement with curiosity and generosity without compromising our convictions. In fact, sometimes conflict can be an opportunity to deepen and strengthen relationships in ways we have never imagined.

## Story

🕒 35 mins

✍️ 00:00

### ■ Tell participants:

In this part of the session, we are going to **Be Curious** as we engage with two stories. We choose to wonder about the other person and about how God might expand our perspective.

### ■ Introduce the stories:

- We're going to hear the story of Mariam – a Christian living in London – and her experience of disagreement and conflict.
- Following the story, we will look at the biblical account of a conflict that arose when a woman washed Jesus' feet.
- Listen out for moments in both where people practise the habits of:
  - **Being curious** Listening to others' stories and seeing the world through their eyes.
  - **Being present** Encountering others with authenticity and confidence.
  - **Reimagining** Finding hope and opportunity in the places where we long to see change.



## Film

🕒 10 mins

### Mariam's story

1) Watch the film

2) As a group, discuss:



What does Mariam's story say to you about navigating disagreement?

🖥️ Slide 2



🖥️ Slide 3



## Bible passage

🕒 10 mins

### The Woman Who Washes Jesus' Feet

(Luke 7:36-50)

#### Background

🗨️ 3) Share the background

- News of Jesus had spread and many people were wondering who Jesus was, making both Simon and this woman curious. Simon, a respected religious leader, had invited Jesus into his home.
- In this context, the men would have been reclining to eat and women would have been serving. By being present, this woman was breaking a social taboo.
- There are a lot of themes in this passage, including forgiveness, which we will look at in the next session. Our focus now is on conflict and disagreement. Conflict arises between Simon and Jesus and, although unspoken, between Simon and the woman. On one level, it is a conflict about acceptable behaviour. At a deeper level, it is a conflict about God's approval and God's character.

🖥️ Slide 4



- The woman undoubtedly knows that her actions will provoke strong reactions, but she still chooses to do the unexpected and express her conviction with both boldness and humility – this combination of honesty, courage and humility gives us a powerful model for engaging with conflict.

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



## Small groups

🕒 15 mins

### 5) Discuss in small groups:



What do you learn about Jesus in this story?



In Mariam's story and the Bible passage, how do the three habits help people navigate disagreement?

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

#### 🖥️ Slide 5



## Signpost

Jesus seeks to encounter the person behind the conflict, the issue or the label. He chooses to engage, naming the conflict and enabling it to be brought out into the open. He invites Simon to look again at the dignity of someone initially dismissed as having little value. Approaching disagreement in this way can change our experience of conflict and ultimately our relationships. To do this involves taking the risk to commit some time and energy to the person we disagree with, rather than disengaging.

**i** **Note:** *This activity is designed to help participants explore their responses to disagreement and how they might better understand those with whom they disagree. The emphasis is not on debate or identifying the best arguments on either side of an issue, but on seeing disagreement through the eyes of another person.*

🗨️ **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 Iceberg

🕒 15 mins

**1** Label one side of the room 'agree' and the other 'disagree'.

**2** 🗨️ **Tell participants:**

- Notice one side of the room is marked 'agree' and the other 'disagree'.
- I'm going to read a series of statements.
- As I read each one, decide if you agree or disagree and move to that area of the room according to the strength of your opinion.

**i** **Note:** *Those with a strong view will stand on one of the far sides. Those who do not feel strongly will stand nearer to the middle.*

**3** Select one or two trivial statements from the list below (or create your own statements) as a warm-up to the activity

**4** 🗨️ Ask two or three people to feed back their view from each side.

**5** Now read a polarising statement from the list below and repeat the activity, asking two or three people to feed back their view from each side.

🖥️ Slide 6



**6**

■ Ask the group to reflect silently on the following. Say:

Notice how you were listening to the two perspectives:

- Were you relieved to hear a view that reinforces your own?
- Were you feeling defensive and preparing your counter-argument?
- Were you making assumptions about other aspects of this person as they shared their view?

**7**

Read one more polarising statement and ask people to again move accordingly to the side of the room that reflects their point of view.

**8**

This time, instead of asking for feedback, invite participants to now move to the exact opposite position, occupying the space in contrast to their view.

**9**

■ Tell participants:

- 'Step into the shoes' of someone with the opposite view to your own.
- Be curious about the person with that view.
- What are their life experiences? What might they be hoping for, or fearful of?

**10**

■ Ask two people:

- Share the opposite view as if it were your own (using 'I', 'me' – not 'she/he/they').
- Where do you think the person who holds that view might be coming from?
- How does it feel to see the issue from the other person's point of view?

## Trivial Statements:

- Dogs are better than cats
- Money is there to be spent, not saved
- Tea is better than coffee



## Polarising Statements:

- Capitalism works
- Equality can go too far
- Globalisation is a force for good
- Preventing climate change is the most pressing need of our time
- The UK should apologise for colonialism
- Our society has fewer moral values than it did 50 years ago
- Church and politics shouldn't mix
- Killing is never justified



## Signpost

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. When we're curious about that 90% in others, we open up new possibilities within disagreements.



## Groups of 3

🕒 15 mins

1

■ Ask participants:

- Arrange yourselves into **groups of three**.
- Each group is to gather around two chairs.

2

■ Guide the groups through the activity instructions below:

- In each group, one person will volunteer to explore a disagreement that is meaningful to them. This is **Person 1**.

Continued...

**i Note:** *The disagreement could be one of the issues from the activity above, or an example of their own.*

- The remaining two, number yourselves 2 and 3.
- **Person 1**, sit in the first chair and share your perspective on the disagreement, while the other two actively listen.
- **Person 2**, reflect back what you've heard.
- **Person 1**, now sit in the second chair, which represents the opposing view, and 'step into the shoes' of the one who disagrees with you.
- **Person 1**, share the disagreement from the opposing perspective as if it were your own (using 'I' statements). **Person 2** and **Person 3** again listen deeply.
- **Person 3**, reflect back what you've heard.
- **Person 1**, return to the first chair, representing your own true perspective.
- **Reflect as a group** on what made it difficult to be present in these disagreements and what helped you reimagine the opposing points of view.

**3**

**If there is time, groups can repeat the activity with another volunteer.**



## Signpost

Disagreements can be complex and difficult. But often, it is not our disagreement that prevents good relationships; it is our instinct to draw back from relationship when disagreement arises. We cannot force another person to act in a particular way, but we can choose how we respond. Together, the three habits can help us see a new way forward and show that we are committed to the other person in spite of our conflict. When we practise these habits, we nurture our relationships and build trust with others so we can have difficult conversations without giving up our own convictions.

# Sanctuary

🕒 10 mins

✍️ 00:00



**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.*

### 🗨️ 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.

🖥️ Slide 7





## Prayer

### Offering our story to God

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

Think back to Mariam; bring before God someone with whom you disagree or are in conflict. Ask God to help you **Be Curious** about their story.

Think back to Simon the Pharisee. Bring before God any conflicts you are afraid to address openly. Ask God to help you **Be Present**.

Think back to what we've learnt about listening, hearing and expressing our views. Ask for God's help where you struggle to **Reimagine** a conflicted relationship.

Loving God, fill us with your Spirit now,

Help us to **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 or something they feel inspired to do between now and the next session.

# Application

🕒 5 mins

✍️ 00:00

Suggested actions for your group:

## 1 Be Curious

Seek to understand something new about a person or an opinion you disagree with.

## 2 Be Present

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

## 3 Reimagine

When you next encounter someone you disagree with, look to strengthen the relationship, rather than to win the argument.

**i** **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.

## Heads up

### Practising Forgiveness

At the end of this session, encourage participants to reflect on their experiences of forgiveness – both of forgiving others and of being forgiven. Forgiveness is not neat and tidy – they don't need to have a perfect story. It may help to describe it as an experience of moving beyond hurt. Reflecting on these experiences will help participants engage with the next session, but they won't be expected to share these experiences in full.

🖥️ Slide 9



# End



# 4 Practising Forgiveness

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

## Three key points:

- 1** As people forgiven by God, we are released into a transformed, intimate relationship with him.
- 2** Jesus teaches that forgiveness is at the heart of what it means to follow him. But one of the reasons it is so powerful is that it is costly and it is hard to live out.
- 3** Forgiveness is not just for the big moments; it is also a basic, everyday need.



## Reflection



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

Two words sum up our identity as Christians and as reconcilers: 'forgiven forgivers'. God, in Jesus, has freely forgiven us and it is because we are forgiven that we are able to forgive others.

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 to us and choose to allow God to transform that destructive memory, releasing ourselves and others. But 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. Practising the three habits with ourselves and others can help us make forgiveness an integral part not only of our behaviour but of our character.

**i** **Note:** *The topic of forgiveness can be particularly emotive for some people. In this short session, we don't advise participants discuss experiences of trauma for which they have not received any prior support. Be prepared with further support outside of your group for participants, should any of them need it.*

## Session starts here

# Welcome

🕒 10 mins

🖋️ 00:00

# Feedback

🕒 5 mins

Ask participants to share briefly an experience they've had over the past week relating to the previous session. Have your own example to share.

# Introduction

🕒 5 mins

🗨️ **Tell participants:**

In this session we'll explore the power and the complexity of forgiveness in our relationships, learning how to see forgiveness as an everyday act.

# Pray

Open the session with prayer, inviting participants to bring to mind situations or relationships where they hope for forgiveness and asking God to be at work as they explore what it means to practise forgiveness.

🖥️ Slide 1





## Signpost

Jesus teaches again and again about forgiveness in the Gospels. This suggests two things: firstly, that it is a crucial part of finding life in all its fullness; secondly, that forgiveness is pretty hard to get our heads around and even harder to live out every day. Despite how difficult it is (or perhaps because of it) forgiveness is a powerfully releasing experience. Forgiveness does not excuse the wrong. Instead, it is powerful because we recognise a wrong has been done. This session is about allowing ourselves to be open to the possibilities of forgiveness in our relationships, while being honest about the places we get stuck.

## Story

 35 mins

 00:00

### Tell participants:

In this part of the session, we are going to **Be Curious** as we engage with two stories. We choose to wonder about the other person and about how God might expand our perspective.

### Introduce the stories:

- We're going to hear the story of Craig – a Christian living in Cape Town – and his experience of forgiveness.
- Then we're going to look at the biblical account of Jesus and Peter on the beach.
- Listen out for moments in both where people practise the habits of:
  - **Being curious** Listening to others' stories and seeing the world through their eyes.
  - **Being present** Encountering others with authenticity and confidence.
  - **Reimagining** Finding hope and opportunity in the places where we long to see change.



## Film

### Craig's story

🕒 10 mins

1) Watch the film

2) As a group, discuss:



What does Craig's story say to you about practising forgiveness?

🖥️ Slide 2



🖥️ Slide 3



## Bible passage

### Jesus and Peter on the Beach

(John 21:1–19)

🕒 10 mins

### Background

🗨️ 3) Share the background

- This is the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after the resurrection. Before Jesus was executed, Peter said that he didn't know Jesus three times, even though he had promised to be loyal to him through thick and thin.
- This is the first recorded conversation between Jesus and Peter since this happened.
- Peter's three denials are mirrored by Jesus' three questions. The overwhelming catch of fish reminds us of when Jesus first called Peter to follow him.
- Peter must have felt at least a bit nervous, embarrassed and ashamed about encountering Jesus after his betrayal, but he still takes the initiative – he jumps into the water and goes towards Jesus.

🖥️ Slide 4



- Jesus creates an environment (breakfast on the beach) where he and Peter can meet and connect at a deeper level.

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



## Small groups

🕒 15 mins

**5) Discuss in small groups:**



What do you learn about Jesus in this story?



In Craig's story and the Bible passage, how do the three habits help people practise forgiveness?

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

🖥️ **Slide 5**



## Signpost

These stories show both how joyful and how messy forgiveness can be. Giving and receiving forgiveness can be transformational, but it does not feel comfortable – it makes us vulnerable, as both Peter and Craig experienced. The complexity of forgiveness is not a surprise to God and we can be assured of his unfailing presence with us as we wrestle with it in our own lives.

**i Note:** *These activities are designed to show the power of forgiveness to transform relationships and move them forward, as well as the complexity of our lived experience of forgiveness. You may want to acknowledge that bringing experiences of forgiveness to mind can sometimes be difficult and reassure your group that there is no pressure to share anything they do not want to. We don't advise you discuss experiences of trauma for which participants have not received any prior support.*

🗨️ **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

### Stepping into the story 🕒 15 mins

**1** Tell your group that you are now going to 'step into' the story of Jesus and Peter on the beach.

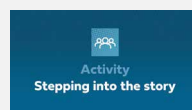
**2** 🗨️ Read the following reflection to guide your group:

Imagine that you are Peter:

You have gone out fishing. The events of the last few days are fresh in your mind as you handle the boat, the oars, the net. You have seen Jesus – your friend, mentor and the one you believe is the Messiah – taken away and killed. You said you'd never abandon him, but when it came to the crunch it got too much and you pretended that you didn't know him at all.

You catch nothing – it's pointless. Then, your attention is drawn to a man on the shore. He calls out and suddenly the fish start pouring in. You know it has to be Jesus. Nothing else matters now. You jump straight into the water to go to him.

🖥️ Slide 6





**3**

■ Read the following questions, allowing time for personal reflection in between:

- 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?

**4**

■ As a group discuss:

- What surprised or struck you as you reflected on this?
- What did 'forgiveness' mean here? What words or phrases come to mind?



## Signpost

In the Lord's Prayer, the prayer to forgive and be forgiven comes straight after the prayer for daily bread. There is the suggestion that forgiveness is a daily and essential need we all share. Every person's experience of forgiveness is different. Sharing these unique stories can help us tease out how to nurture forgiveness in our own lives.



## Small groups

🕒 15 mins

1. Explain to the group that you are going to read a quote for the group to reflect on.
2. 🗨️ Introduce and read the quotation:
  - Archbishop Desmond Tutu and his daughter Reverend Canon Mpho Tutu lived through apartheid in South Africa and wrote about forgiveness.
  - The following quote is from their book, *The Book of Forgiving: The Fourfold Path for Healing Ourselves and Our World*.  
  
🗨️ *'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.'*
3. 🗨️ Ask the group to think about the words:
  - What resonates with your own experience?
  - What do you find challenging?
4. Split participants into groups of 3–4 for 10 minutes to discuss together.

### 🖥️ Slide 7





## Signpost

Our experiences shape our understanding of forgiveness and we are each at different stages of our own unique journey. Taking steps to **Be Curious**, **Be Present** and to **Reimagine** can move us forward in making forgiveness part of our daily life. This doesn't mean it will be easy. Sometimes the most we can do is pray and ask God for the desire to forgive the one who has hurt us. But when forgiveness is able to break through in our relationships, it has unique power to heal, humanise and release us, restoring trust and opening up new possibilities.

# Sanctuary

🕒 10 mins

✍️ 00:00



**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 at least one minute of silence between each paragraph to allow people to pray.*

### 🗨️ 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.

🖥️ Slide 8





## Prayer

### Offering our story to God

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.

Think back to Craig's story. Bring before God any relationships suffering from past hurts. Ask for God's help to **Be Curious** about the hurts, the other person or where God is at work.

Think back to the story of Jesus and Peter at the beach. Ask God where being present with another – or allowing them to **Be Present** with you – might help to transform the relationship.

Thank God for his forgiveness and his understanding of where you are at. Ask God to help you take a step forward if you feel in a difficult place. Where do you most need God to help you **Reimagine**?

Loving God, fill us with your Spirit now,

Help us to **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 or something they feel inspired to do between now and the next session.

Suggested actions for your group:

## 1 Be Curious

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

## 2 Be Present

Seek God's presence in places or relationships where there is pain or injustice.

## 3 Reimagine

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

**i** **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.

## Heads up

### Risking Hope

At the end of this session, encourage participants to reflect on a situation or relationship where they are hoping for change but feeling stuck. There will be an opportunity to explore this further in the next session.

🖥️ Slide 9



# End

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



# 5 Risking Hope

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

## Three key points:

- 1** Living out Jesus' gospel in our relationships is risky and costly, often disrupting the power and value systems around us.
- 2** Jesus shows us how God's creative, self-emptying power brings hope and new life like nothing else.
- 3** Not everyone will respond as we want and we are not called to fix every problem, but rather to take everyday acts of faith that join in with God's bigger picture of restoration.



## Reflection

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

The kingdom of God is transformative because it is enacting something brand new that is often counter-cultural. It is a message of genuine hope because it turns broken systems of power upside down – 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.

## Session starts here

# Welcome

🕒 10 mins

🖋️ 00:00

## Feedback

🕒 5 mins

Ask participants to share briefly an experience they've had over the past week relating to the previous session. Have your own example to share.

## Introduction

🕒 5 mins

🗨️ Tell participants:

In this session we'll explore the risk and cost of following Jesus' gospel in our relationships, and how the hope it brings is radical and transformative.

## Pray

Open the session with prayer, inviting participants to bring to mind situations or relationships where they are looking for hope or courage and asking God to be at work as they explore this together.

🖥️ Slide 1





## Signpost

Pursuing healed, restored relationships can be risky, costly and complex. It's easy to be overwhelmed when we struggle with forgiveness, feel powerless, or meet resistance in ourselves and others. But these aren't signs that we should give up. We can expect to encounter difficulties when we are living out a new way which interrupts the values and power structures that surround us. In Jesus we see the cost of reconciliation, but we also see how God's creative, self-emptying power brings hope like nothing else. This session is about finding ways to keep going as we try to live this out day by day.

## Story

 35 mins

 00:00

### Tell participants:

In this part of the session, we are going to **Be Curious** as we engage with two stories. We choose to wonder about the other person and about how God might expand our perspective.

### Introduce the stories:

- We're going to hear the stories of Guvna B and Tom – Christians living in different parts of the UK.
- Then we're going to look at the biblical account of Jesus washing the disciples' feet.
- Listen out for moments in both where people practise the habits of:
  - **Being curious** Listening to others' stories and seeing the world through their eyes.
  - **Being present** Encountering others with authenticity and confidence.
  - **Reimagining** Finding hope and opportunity in the places where we long to see change.



## Film

🕒 10 mins

### Guvna B's and Tom's stories

1) Watch the film

2) As a group, discuss:



What do Guvna B and Tom's stories say to you about the risk and hope involved in restoration?

🖥️ Slide 2



🖥️ Slide 3



## Bible passage Jesus Washes the Disciples' Feet

(John 13: 1-17)

🕒 10 mins

### Background

🗨️ 3) Share the background

- Slaves were looked down on in the ancient world. Washing feet is something a Gentile slave could be required to do, but not a Jewish slave. Foot washing is also something wives did for their husbands, children for their parents and disciples for their teachers.
- This is a fragile moment for Jesus – washing the feet of the disciples who will abandon him and Judas who will betray him, and preparing for the costly and lonely journey to the cross.
- Jesus is completely present – getting his own hands dirty and engaging up-close with the disciples' own humanity.

4) Invite a volunteer to read the passage

🖥️ Slide 4





## Small groups

🕒 15 mins

5) Discuss in small groups:



What do you learn about Jesus in this story?



In the three stories, how do the habits help people risk hope?

If time allows, two or three people feedback a highlight to the whole group.

🖥️ Slide 5



## Signpost

Hope isn't about wishful thinking, it's about trusting in God and acting accordingly. When Jesus washed his disciples' feet, he modelled something completely new. Peter didn't understand at first, and it didn't prevent Judas' betrayal, but Jesus still chose to serve them. Guvna B and Tom also took the risk of doing something new to bring hope in the place where they found themselves. The next activity is an opportunity to think about how we might be released to live out that hope in our own complex, everyday lives.

## Space

🕒 30 mins

🖋️ 00:00



**Note:** In the following activity, your group will share situations where they get stuck in trying to heal divides and will resource one another to approach these situations with a fresh perspective.

■ 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

### Three-legged stool

🕒 20 mins

- 1 Split participants into groups of 3–4
- 2 Tell your group that you are now going to do a reflective exercise.
- 3 ■ Read the following to guide your group:

Imagine you are sitting on a three legged stool.

First, focus on the seat at the top of the stool. This represents the hopes that you hold - not your own wishful thinking, but the things you believe are possible or do because of your trust in God. What do these look like for you? Call to mind a change you are longing to see in your life, your wider community or in society (e.g. *those seen as 'outsiders' being fully welcomed into a church community / family relationships or friendships restored*).

Invite small groups to share between them what comes to mind.

- 4 ■ Read the following to the whole group:

Like our 3-legged stools, these longings for change can feel risky to lean on. We might not want to apply too much pressure for fear of losing balance, or even falling over completely. Our hopes can be rocked by resistance and opposition, both from within ourselves and outside.

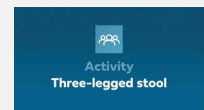
- Think about where you feel resistance or opposition to the hopes you've been reflecting on (e.g. fear of getting things wrong / not being sure where to start).

Invite participants to share aloud with the whole group what comes to mind for them.

- 5 ■ Read the following to the whole group:

Now focus on the three legs of your stool. These represent our three habits – **Be Curious**, **Be Present** and **Reimagine**. These habits can

🖥️ Slide 6





help us sustain our hopes against resistance. What difference could these habits make to the situations you and others have shared?

Invite participants to share aloud with the whole group what comes to mind for them.

6

■ Ask the group:

- What one step could you take this week to put the habits into action?

Invite small groups to share between them what comes to mind.

## Group prayer

🕒 10 mins

Invite the small groups to pray for each other and the situations they have been reflecting on during the exercise.



### Signpost

Throughout this course, we have seen the risks involved in seeking transformed relationships. God knows that we can't do it alone and he calls us into community with one another on this journey. Before his ascension, Jesus promises us the Holy Spirit to empower and encourage us. We are not able or called to fix every problem we encounter, and we cannot control how things turn out. God instead calls us to dare to act in hope in the present moment, knowing that this is part of God's much bigger story of restoration.

## Sanctuary

🕒 10 mins



**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.

🖋️ 00:00

🖥️ Slide 7



■ 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.



## Prayer

### Offering our story to God

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

Think back to Guvna B's and Tom's stories. Bring before God the brokenness you see in communities you are part of. Ask God for curiosity about how you could bring hope in those places.

Think back to the story of Jesus washing the disciples' feet. Ask God for the courage to **Be Present** even when others don't respond as we hope or expect.

Think about the stories of risk and hope we have heard and shared throughout these sessions. Ask God for people who can come alongside you to help you keep **Reimagining**.

Loving God, fill us with your Spirit now,

Help us to **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 or something they feel inspired to do next.

# Application

🕒 5 mins

🖋️ 00:00

Suggested actions for your group:

1

### Be 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?

2

### Be Present

Set aside some time to be with people who would help you keep going in a difficult situation.

3

### Reimagine

the ways in which your top takeaways from this course could have a wider impact – in your community and across God's world.



**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 8



## Heads up

### Re-Gathering

If you have planned a Re-Gathering, provide details of the time and place and to confirm that people can make it.



## Feedback

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

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



# End

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

# Pre-Gathering Optional

**This resource is designed for groups that don't already know each other, to run before Session 1.**

We recommend a Pre-Gathering to give more time for introductions and the 'Setting the group culture'. You can do this as a separate session or extend Session 1 by 30 minutes. These notes are designed to be used in any context and require no additional materials. If you host this as a separate session, we recommend sharing some food or a meal together.

## Session starts here

### Ice breaker

Go round the group, inviting each person to introduce themselves and say a word or phrase that describes how they feel arriving at this gathering.

### Introducing the course

You might like to start this section by sharing what you, as the host, are hoping for from the *Difference* course.

■ Tell participants:

Navigating a divided and complex world can be hard. We encounter this in our relationships, in our communities and in our wider systems and structures. Many of us long to make a difference, but often we don't know how to respond or where to start.

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 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.

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.

## Building relationship

■ Tell participants:

Throughout Scripture and throughout history, sharing space, food and time have been closely linked with building relationships. This first gathering is to help us create that kind of hospitable space for each other over the next five sessions.

## Group culture

Follow instructions for 'Setting the group culture' from Session 1 on page 14 of this guide, opening with 'As we start this course, we want to set a group culture together that honours the stories and experiences everyone brings...' There's no need to repeat this section when you host Session 1.

## Prayer

Pray to close the session, offering to God all that's been shared and the upcoming sessions. Feel free to shape this according to what is appropriate in your context. You may wish to pray as a group or you, as host, may want to pray for your group.

# End

# Re-Gathering

## Optional

**This resource is a guide to support all groups when you meet together after finishing Session 5.**

These notes are designed to be used in any context and require no additional materials. We recommend gathering around a meal and offer the reflection below at the beginning. After an opening reflection on the significance of sharing food together, the Story, Space and Sanctuary elements will guide you as you share experiences and plan what to do next.

## Session starts here

### Ice breaker

Go round the group, inviting each person to say a word or phrase that describes what has stayed with them most from the course (e.g. 'listen', 'cross divides', 'creativity' etc).

### Reflection

■ Tell participants:

Throughout Scripture and throughout history, eating together has been closely linked with the building of relationship. Through the course, you may have noticed that many significant moments in the accounts of Jesus involved hospitality: Jesus asking the Samaritan woman for a drink; Jesus as a guest at table with Simon the Pharisee; Jesus making breakfast for Peter on the beach.



Henri Nouwen, the Dutch theologian, wrote:

*'Hospitality is not to change people but to offer them space where change can take place. It is not to bring men and women over to our side, but to offer freedom not disturbed by dividing lines.'*<sup>1</sup>

It is this space and freedom that this time of regathering is all about. It is an opportunity to reflect, to pray for each other and to continue to think about next steps, together and individually.

<sup>1</sup> Henri Nouwen, *Reaching Out* (Zondervan, 1998), p.55.

## Story

Invite each person in your group to share their own stories from the time since you last met together.

■ You may use the following questions to facilitate this:

- Where have you had the opportunity to practise the habits?
- Give examples of things that have gone well and challenges you have faced.

## Space

### Next steps

Encourage your group to reflect further on the hopes they had at the end of the course and their experiences since then.

■ You may use the following questions to facilitate this:

- How have your experiences made you reflect on your journey during this course and where you/we should go from here?
- Has your thinking on specific issues shifted at all over the past month?
- What are the next practical steps you could take as individuals or as a group?
- What do you as a group need to make this happen?

**i Note:**

- *Create space for open discussion but make sure that your group ends up with practical steps they can take forward.*
- *Decide on a way of continuing to support one another as a group and keep practising the habits e.g. by deciding on another date to meet (as a whole group or in smaller groups).*
- *Encourage your wider church family with stories from the course.*

## Sanctuary

Open up a space for prayer, welcoming the presence of the Holy Spirit and asking God to re-envision the group as they go forward. As always, feel free to shape this according to what is appropriate in your context. You may wish to pray as a group or you, as host, may want to pray for your group.

You could use following notes to guide this time of prayer:

- Bring before God each member of the group and the stories they have shared. Ask God to continue to work through each of them.
- Bring before God the commitments your group has made. Offer them to God, asking him to show your group new opportunities and possibilities.

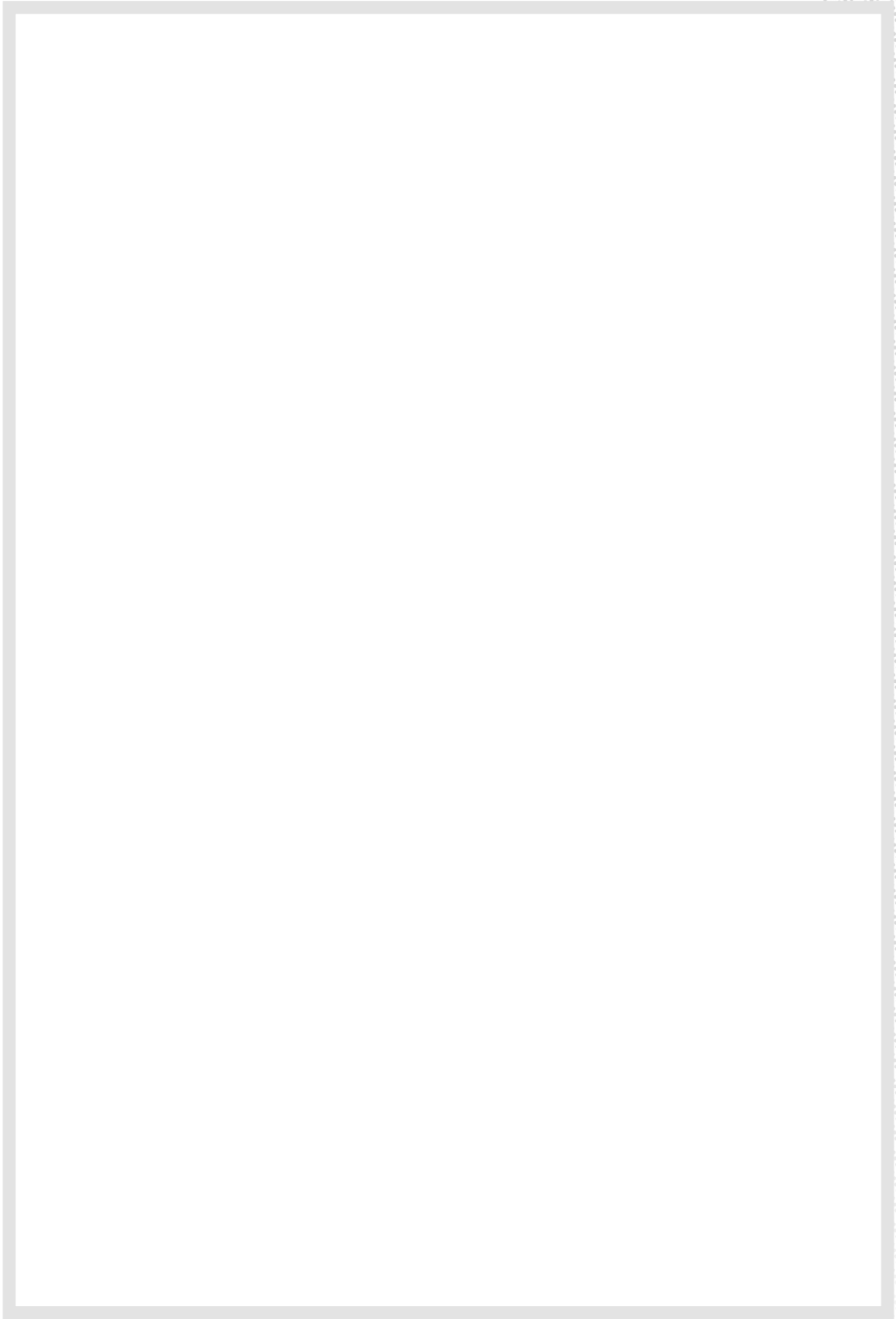
You could conclude by asking each member of the group to offer one word that describes how they see God at work through the group.

**i Note:** *Remind participants that, if they haven't done so already, they can stay connected by signing up to the Difference mailing list: [difference.rln.global](mailto:difference.rln.global)*

End

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

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











# difference.

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