

# Habits & session structure

Lasting change happens when we allow God to shape who we are and the values we live by.

This is why *Difference* is about formation. It's about process not event, recognising that we need new patterns of speaking, thinking, praying and acting.

Let's look at the two elements that give you the framework to run *Difference*.

## 1. What you learn through the course

Firstly, the main take-away from doing the *Difference* course is **three** formational habits.

Drawing deeply on Jesus' encounters in the Gospels and the wisdom of expert peacemakers, we've distilled three habits that have the potential to 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, and as we shape our habits, we can build practices that have a deep and lasting impact on our actions, our thoughts and ultimately our character.

Let's take a look at each of the three habits now.

### **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. 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.

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<sup>1</sup> David T. Neal, Wendy Wood, and Jeffrey M. Quinn, 'Habits – A Repeat Performance', Duke University, 2006

<sup>2</sup> Lakoff and Johnson 1999, in Martin 2008

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.

Curiosity helps us move beyond our echo chambers. Away from presumptions and towards wondering.

## **Be Present**

*Encounter others with authenticity and confidence.*

Our encounters 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 encountering them as they are.

The Christian faith teaches that God became human and chose to be part of a hurting world as seen in John 1 where it says “*the Word became flesh and walked among us*”. 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. Bringing our vulnerabilities and insecurities, as well as our convictions and our strengths - into our encounters can open up new depths of relationship.

In times of disagreement or division, being present can help us dismantle dividing walls, moving away from hostility toward hospitality.

## **Reimagine**

*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 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.

Reimagining helps move us away from hopelessness towards creativity, courage and renewal.

These habits aren't a 3-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.

These habits will help you step out of our echo chambers, dismantle dividing walls and believe a new horizon is possible as you dare to reimagine.

## The structure of the sessions.

Difference is a series of conversational and dynamic sessions that each follow the same structure.

Each session is split into the same three parts:

*We start with STORY.*

Stories matter. We are invited to be caught up in God's story of restoration and renewal. To see divides crossed and relationships transformed we need to be story-seekers, curious about the story we don't know and the voice that isn't heard.

This section includes a film of someone who has faced conflict/division or a difficult relationship and a gospel story from the life of Jesus. Both stories relate to the theme of the session, approaching it from different angles.

*The middle section of each session is called SPACE.*

The spaces we create can have a powerful impact on the relationships we build and allow God to be at work in us. In this section participants engage with their own experiences through an activity, which may include an interactive exercise or guided reflection. This section helps embed the habits of being curious, being present and reimagining.

You want to prepare well for this section of the session so you are clear about the instructions. Check out the extra training film on how to run the interactive activities in module 3.

Lastly the session ends with a moment of **SANCTUARY**, 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 in your everyday context and what your top takeaway is.