

This short series is designed to be used by a new Growth Group or as a 'health check' for an existing group.

1: How are we Growing?

WELCOME

Start with (good!) refreshments. You could share one good thing that's happened to you over the last few weeks.

WORSHIP

Use music, silence, prayer, meditation, reflection, songs, hymns, etc. or be creative with drawing, writing, symbols, poetry etc to help people to draw near to God. You could try this...

This is a simple way to help everyone more easily pray out loud...

Each write on a small piece of paper one short thing you are thankful for & fold it shut. Mix up all the pieces of paper & each take one. Read them out in turn with 'Thank you God for...' and all join in with 'Amen'.

WORD

Read Mark 12:28-34

Normally, it's best to pick just a few of the questions below, but this week, please have a go at them in order – and stop to leave yourselves time for 'What's Next?' at the end.

Share together as many short answers as you can to this question:

- How would it feel to be part of a group of people that was following Jesus' teaching in this passage perfectly?

Split into groups of 2s-4s. Each group take 3 sheets of paper. At the top of the first sheet write: 'Up: Loving God'; on the second: 'In: Loving One Another' and on the third: 'Out: Loving Others'.

- For each sheet in turn, write down as many different ways as you can think of in which you can love God/one another/others.

- Now share & discuss what you've written with the whole group.
- Each of you now place a '+' against two things that you feel personally you're better at & '-' by two you think you're weaker at.
 - Talk about what you've marked as a group.
 - As a group, how can you help one another grow in your strengths and weaknesses?

Have a look at section 1 of 'What is a Growth Group?' You can find it on the church website under 'Grow in Faith' at the bottom of the 'Growth Groups' page. (<https://www.whitfieldparish.org/grow-in-faith/growth-groups/>)

- **If you're an existing group:** Write Up, In, Out on a piece of paper. Each mark '+' by the area you think your group is strongest in and '-' by the area you think your group is weakest in.
 - Talk about what you've found.
 - How do you want to be different in a year's time?
(you could record your answers to refer back to in the future)
- **If you're a new group:** Talk about:
 - How do you hope as a group you will grow Up, In and Out?
 - What difference do you hope your group will make?
(you could record your answers to refer back to in the future)

WHAT NEXT?

Have a look at Section 2 of 'What is a Growth Group?'

Talk about what pattern of meetings you are going to try. (You might want to revisit some of these questions next time)

- When and where are you going to meet fortnightly?
- What do you want to do on the weeks in between?
- What approximate timings are you planning for your fortnightly meetings? Start/finish, times for socialising/using notes etc

Finish by sharing prayer requests and saying short prayers for them.

2: Growing 'Up'

In this session we explore how we can grow closer to God ('Up').

WELCOME

Spend time relaxing & sharing together. You could try this...

Think of one person who has had a major influence on your life. Share with the group how they have influenced you.

WORSHIP

Use music, silence, prayer, meditation, reflection, songs, hymns, etc. or be creative with drawing, writing, symbols, poetry etc to help people to draw near to God. You could try this...

Put a model of a house or a brick in the middle of the room.

Read Luke 6:46-48 twice. Now, have a few of minutes of quiet. In the silence, think about different areas of your life...

- In what ways in your life are you putting into practice Jesus teaching? Thank God for those solid foundations.

After, say together: 'Lord, we thank you.'

Read Luke 6:49 twice. Now, in a couple more minutes of silence, consider...

- In what areas of your life have you heard Jesus' teaching, but are not putting it into practice? How could you change? Ask God for his help.

Finish by saying together: 'Lord, please help us. Amen'

WORD

Read Mark 1:14-20 & 29-39

Discuss your initial reactions to the passage:

- Does anything in the passage jump out at you? Why?
- Does anything connect with something you've been doing, reading or thinking about?

- Is there anything you haven't noticed before?

Now use **some** of the questions below (*and set a time limit to leave yourselves time to do the 'What Next?' section*)

- Look at verses 16-20. What did it mean for these first disciples to follow Jesus? How did it affect their lives?
- Imagine Jesus arriving one day where you spend a lot of time and saying 'Come follow me'. What difference would it make to your life?
- What does it mean to be a follower of Jesus? Who or what do you find particularly helps you to follow him?
- In what practical ways can you encourage one another to follow Jesus more closely in your Growth Group?

Have a look at the 'Up' section of 'What is a Growth Group?'

- Jesus spends time doing things amongst the crowds and also withdraws to pray. Both were part of his ministry and lifestyle. As a group, how can you get a good balance between the aspects listed under 'Up'?
- What practical steps could you take to grow in any of these areas as a group?
- How can you help one another to encounter God during your times together as a group, or during the week?

WHAT NEXT?

- Now split into 3s-4s and each share one practical thing you could do to help you grow closer to God in the next fortnight. Pray for one another, asking God to help the others in your group.

If you're brave & want to, next time you meet, share how you got on!

3: Growing 'In'

This session explores how we can grow stronger in our love for one another ('In').

Leave yourselves plenty of time for 'What Next?' this time!

WELCOME

Spend time relaxing & sharing together. You could try this...

If you're feeling brave, those who want to could share how you've been getting on with your 'discipleship challenge' from the last session!

WORSHIP

Even if you don't usually, try using this suggestion this week...

Read out 1 Corinthians 12:4-11. List all the different ministries, jobs and organisations in the church that you can think of (however 'small'). Go round the group, each saying a short thank you to God for one of them.

WORD

Read Mark 10:32-45

Discuss your initial reactions to the passage:

- Does anything in the passage jump out at you? Why?
- Does anything connect with something you've been doing, reading or thinking about?
- Is there anything you haven't noticed before?

Now use some of the questions below (*and set a time limit to leave yourselves time to pray!*)

- Compare James and John's requests in vs35-37 with the path that Jesus describes in vs 33-34. What are your thoughts?
- Imagine how the disciples felt when they heard of James and John's request (v41). Try and think of all the possible reactions that they might have had. What ongoing impact would each reaction have had on the whole group?

- What attitudes do you think help/hinder a Growth Group or church in creating community?

In verse 35, look at James and John's approach to Jesus

- When have you noticed similar attitudes today towards Jesus/The Church/Growth Groups?
- Are your attitudes ever similar? It might help to think of how you pray or use your time.
- How would your life be different if you followed Jesus' advice in verse 43-45?

WHAT NEXT?

Have a look through the 'In' section of 'What is a Growth Group?'

Talk about how you can fulfil these aims.

In particular:

- How can you serve one another by sharing round different roles in the group – leading parts of the meeting (using these notes), organising care, arranging socials, hosting, refreshments?
- How you can improve your care for one another?
- How can you ensure confidentiality and stop gossip?
- What group socials could you plan at different times from when you normally meet? Think of ways to maybe include those who don't normally come or family members. Put some in the diary!

Share, then pray:

1. ...for anything you would like prayer for personally (for you yourself –e.g. health, a job situation, a relationship – however trivial it seems)
2. ...for someone you know who's not there with you.

4: Growing 'Out'

This session explores how we can grow in loving others ('Out') – sharing God's love with our community and beyond.

WELCOME

Spend time relaxing & sharing together. You could try this...

If you can remember, share how you first came to the church. How did you feel coming as an 'outsider'? What would have made it easier?

WORSHIP

Use music, silence, prayer, meditation, reflection, songs, hymns, etc. or be creative with drawing, writing, symbols, poetry etc to help people to draw near to God. You could try this...

Play some quiet instrumental music on a CD. Each close your eyes and imagine Jesus coming into the room and asking you to come with him to somewhere in your community. Where do you think he would take you? What would he show you? What would he say to you? Talk to him about it.

WORD

Read Mark 6:7-13 & 30-34

Discuss your initial reactions to the passage:

- Does anything in the passage jump out at you? Why?
- Does anything connect with something you've been doing, reading or thinking about?
- Is there anything you haven't noticed before?

Now use **some** of the questions below (*and leave plenty of time for the 'What Next? Section including prayer!'*)

- 'Apostle' means 'one sent'. Being sent was part of the job title! How do you think they felt being 'sent out' by Jesus (v7-13)? How do you think they felt coming back?

- To what extent do you feel being 'sent' is a part of your commission as a Christian?
- How do you think the disciples felt when the crowds caught up with them and Jesus decided to start teaching them (v34)?
- Jesus showed compassion both to his friends (v31) and to the crowd (v34). How can you as a group go into your community and 'show compassion' on them?
- Jesus' compassion includes teaching (v34), healing (v13), spiritual warfare (v31), physical feeding (v41). How can we practically show compassion in these ways?

WHAT NEXT?

Have a look through the 'Out' section of 'What is a Growth Group?'

- Talk about how you can fulfil these aims.
- Think about your group. What ways do you already reach 'out'? What new ways could you try?

If you haven't already...

1. Plan a social for the whole church which you organise as a group. Make it something that outsiders could also be invited to.
2. Choose a community group that you have a group contact with (police, school, council etc) and/or a mission partner organisation. Commit to finding out more information about them and praying for them on a regular basis as a group. You could even let them know that a group was praying for them.

Now pray for these things & then pray for one another.

AND FINALLY...

Having looked at these 4 sessions on Growth Group Basics, what do you feel are your group's strengths and weaknesses?

If you haven't already, pick 2-3 specific things you can do to enrich the group –maybe one Up, one In, one Out.

Now pray for your group, asking for God's blessing.

EXTRA...

(you could do this as a separate week or include it at another time or leave it for the future)

Read Acts 2:42-47

This passage gives just one short snapshot of the very early church. It's not meant as a complete picture for church today, but it is a useful checkpoint.

Each write down each phrase from the reading ('they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching', 'they devoted themselves to fellowship', 'to the breaking of bread' etc).

- Which of these activities are best done as growth groups or as a church?
- Which of these activities are you good at as an individual which are you weaker on?
- Which are you strong/weak on as a group?
- What is your response?