

Spiritual Growth Groups for Lent - Guidance

The purpose of these groups is mutual encouragement: a kind of cheering on in our walk with God, recognising the realities of life as it really is! The groups are deliberately small (3 or 4 people) to give members the chance to explore these realities more fully. The idea is to meet once a week over the five weeks of Lent before Holy Week (basically March plus the first week of April). The group could be a family or a group of friends or homegroup members. If you are interested in joining such a group and don't have one ready-made, we are collecting names so that you can be linked with others who would like to do this. The arrangements for the meetings are made by the group members.



The meetings are not Bible studies, nor a time to give each other advice. They are a chance to give each other the 'gift of listening'. This may seem surprisingly simple, but people who have tried this have found it amazingly helpful. We know that God is interested in us, accepts us as we are and works from there; it is good when we do that too!

In order to help the conversations, a few 'guiding principles' should help:

1. Having agreed on when to meet, try to make all the meetings (emergencies excepted).
2. Have a discussion about confidentiality when you first meet. It would be normal to agree that members will not pass on things shared in the group.
3. Pray at the beginning of each meeting, that God would be guiding you towards things that are helpful and truthful, that each person present could grow a little in following Jesus.
4. There will be some material for each of the five weeks to provide a basis for the conversation. This is based on the five 'rhythms of grace' (ways of walking with God) that we have looked at before - they are listed below. The idea is not to study the material in a learned way, but to let it help us look at our lives. For example we could ask:
 - Are there ways that I am doing well at this?
 - Are there things I am excited by, that I would like to explore more?
 - Are there things that challenge me, things that I would like to change?

Each person is given the chance to speak, without interruption and without pressure. The speaker chooses what they want to share, aiming to be honest about their experience of the rhythm being looked at that week. This is followed by a short time of silent reflection, before the speaker is asked if they have anything to add, then other members give any comments or reflections, aiming to encourage the speaker in their walk with God. It is best to avoid advice-giving/ trying to 'fix the problem' (if there is one) and focus instead on helping the person towards clarity.

5. It is good to set a time limit (say 15 mins) for speaking. There is no requirement to be articulate or speak continuously!

6. Pray again at the end, placing each person in God's care and asking for the Holy Spirit to guide them.

7. Very occasionally, it may happen that the subject matter is bigger than the group feels able to handle in the time allotted. If this happens, it is good to give thanks for the truth that has been spoken, and then agree on a way to take it forward (for example the person could ask one of the clergy or leadership team to meet them). In this way the group is helping the person in their walk with God.

8. If you wish to stop attending the group before the end of Lent, it is good to let the others know personally (best at a meeting). Our experience with groups like this is that, more often, the opposite happens - the group wants to carry on meeting after the agreed period is over! If this happens, wonderful! Agree on a further period you wish to commit to.

There is no particular need for a formal leader of the group. You might decide to appoint a different person each time as timekeeper, or you might decide on one person as coordinator for all the meetings. Like many things - this is up to you.



The Rhythms of Grace

Rhythm One

By God's grace, I will seek to be transformed into the likeness of Christ.

Rhythm Two

By God's grace, I will be open to the presence, guidance and power of the Holy Spirit.

Rhythm Three

By God's grace, I will set aside time for prayer, worship and spiritual reading.

Rhythm Four

By God's grace, I will endeavour to be a gracious presence in the world, serving others and working for justice in human relationships and social structures.

Rhythm Five

By God's grace, I will sensitively share my faith with others and support God's mission both locally and globally.