

cell outlines

SEPTEMBER 2019

These Cell Outlines are written by Youth and Children's Ministries. They are available every month from our web site.
For more information and other Cell resources, visit salvationarmy.org.uk/children-and-youth-resources

INTRODUCTION

This month we will be looking at the story of Peter and Cornelius in Acts 10, one of the biggest moments in the book of Acts, when the gospel message first broke through to the Gentiles. Peter was a leading ambassador in the missionary adventure of the Early Church, but he still had some learning to do as he was called to cross cultures and break down prejudices for the sake of the gospel. There were significant barriers that needed to be breached for the message of Jesus to leave Jerusalem and reach out throughout Judea and Samaria, and Peter discovered that this message could break down all walls between people, no matter their religious, racial, social class or geographical background.

The story of the gospel spreading beyond Jewish boundaries toward the Gentiles highlights our own prejudices that God must break down if we are going to be effective in his service. How willing are we to break down cultural barriers, to reject prejudice, to change our opinions and to reach out to people who are not like us with the love of Jesus?

In Session Three we will focus on the spiritual discipline of submission – this can be a tricky one to understand. It is recommended that group leaders read the further information attached at the end of the session outline, so you are able to guide your group through the discussion and activities and help them understand it.

Session Four is a practical week in which you should aim to do something tangible to break down cultural barriers, to reject prejudice, to change our opinions and to reach out to people who are not like us with the love of Jesus. There are several ideas included in the session outline, so please do read through these at the start of the month as you may need to start chatting to your group members about this and make any preparations in advance.

And don't forget about the 'Remind App'. By signing up to this, young people (and anyone else) will receive daily discipleship questions, thoughts and challenges directly to their phones on the theme of the month's cell notes. Please encourage your young people to sign up to this by going to www.remind.com/join/followsa and downloading the 'Remind' app to their mobiles.

UNPACKING PETER'S VISION AND MEETING WITH CORNELIUS

WELCOME

Discussion starters

- 👉 What is the weirdest dream you have ever had?
- 👉 When you are hungry, what food do you dream about eating?!
- 👉 When have you had your mind or opinion totally changed by a seemingly random experience?

MEMORY GAME

Prepare a sheet in the middle of the group with a load of different toy animals on it (or other objects if you don't have any animals). Allow the group members to look at the animals for a few seconds. Then take the sheet and contents away. Give the group two minutes to individually write down as many of the animals/objects that they can remember seeing on the sheet. The winner is the person who remembers the most!

WORD

1. Read Acts 10 to 11:18

We have just read one of THE biggest moments in the Book of Acts. Back in Acts 1:8, the risen Christ said that he wanted the news about him to be spread throughout Jerusalem, all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. Previously, we have seen the gospel move through the first three of those categories. Like ripples spreading out on a lake, the gospel has been spreading out, converting Jews in Jerusalem, Jews in all Judea, even half-Jews in Samaria. But now, here in Acts 10, the gospel has broken through an enormous racial barrier on its way to the ends of the earth – Gentiles are now becoming Christians! Moreover, it is obvious that they are becoming Christians because they are speaking in tongues just like the apostles at Pentecost. It really is like Pentecost all over again. Here is THE moment when God's Spirit pours out into the hearts of the Gentiles.¹

2. Watch this short YouTube animation to help unpack the story for your group.

- ▶ Peter Visited Cornelius: The Gospel Project for Kids- www.youtube.com/watch?v=xKU9MyuGrj0

3. Split into two groups. Ask one group to focus on Peter, and the other group to focus on Cornelius. Ask them to prepare a summary to present to the other group of the following:

- * Describe the appearance of Cornelius/Peter as you imagine him.
- * Describe the character of Cornelius/Peter that you can see from this Scripture.
- * How was God preparing Cornelius to meet with Peter / Peter to meet with Cornelius?
- * Describe the first meeting from Cornelius/Peter's point of view.
- * Describe the outcome of this meeting, both for your character and the reaction of his friends/family/community.
- * Describe how you see the Holy Spirit at work in this story.

If you would like, you could give each group a copy of the handout attached at the end, or simply recreate this on a large piece of flip-chart paper. Or allow groups to create their own visual representation of their discussion.

4. The vision.

Ask the group what they think Peter's vision means.

Can you come up with soundbites of what God wanted Peter to learn through this vision?

¹Mission Unstoppable. Bryson Smith



Use any of the following information to explain to the group and ensure they understand what this vision means.

Perhaps the greatest barrier to the spread of the gospel was the Jewish-Gentile conflict. According to Jewish Law, certain foods were forbidden to be eaten. The food laws made it difficult for Jews to eat with Gentiles without risking becoming defiled. In fact, the Gentiles themselves were often seen as 'unclean'. Before having this vision, Peter would have thought that a Gentile Roman officer could not accept Christ; he thought the gospel was only for Jews. But God wanted Peter to understand that Gentiles were also included. In the vision God was showing Peter that he was about to cleanse the hearts of the people whom the Jews considered to be unclean. The unclean/common animals in the vision symbolised Gentiles, and God showed Peter that he should not call the Gentiles unclean because God calls them clean. Jews and Gentiles alike are acceptable to God and included in his plan of salvation.

God used this vision to prepare the heart of Peter to go back with the men that he sent to Joppa, for the Jews had a tradition that they would not enter the home of a non-Jew, as to enter would somehow contaminate them or make them unclean. God wanted Peter to take the gospel to Cornelius. The very fact that Peter invited them into Simon's home is proof that Peter truly understood the meaning of the vision, and that it had nothing to do with food, but only about the salvation of the Gentiles. And we have even greater proof that Peter understood the true meaning of the vision, for he then freely entered the home of Cornelius.²

5. Use any further questions for group discussion as you find appropriate, along with the further information for group leaders included at the end.

- ❑ What evidence was there in the character of Cornelius that the Holy Spirit was working in him?
- ❑ Why do you think Cornelius needed a vision to encourage him to invite Peter?
- ❑ How did God prepare Peter for Cornelius?
- ❑ What would the command in 10:15 have meant to Peter?
- ❑ What does Peter mean by considering some animals as 'unclean'?
- ❑ Why do you think Peter's vision is repeated three times?
- ❑ What lesson does Peter say he learned from the vision of the foods?
- ❑ How does Peter live out this lesson?
- ❑ What evidence is there that Cornelius expected God to work (vv24-26)?
- ❑ What would have been the consequences if Peter or Cornelius had not obeyed God?
- ❑ What is the message that God has for Cornelius (vv33-34)?
- ❑ Why is Peter criticised by the believers in Jerusalem?
- ❑ What does Peter say in response to the criticism?

WITNESS

1. Discuss together any times when you have felt particularly challenged by God. Have there been any times when you have had to break out of your comfort zone in order to obey God?

What was your response?

2. Show your group the following fake 'Scriptures':

- ❑ 'For blond people have sinned and those with blue eyes have fallen short of God's glory' – Romans 3:23
- ❑ 'For God so loved England that he gave his only Son, that anyone who's English shall not die but live for ever' – John 3:16

Ask your group if they're familiar with these famous Bible verses. Hopefully, they'll tell you that you've got it very wrong!

²www.all-creatures.org/discuss/svtacts10.1-11.18-flh.html



Look up and read the correct versions of these verses with your group. Ask them who is being talked about. Who is included in the statements?

Explain that in God's eyes all people are the same – none of us is good enough to meet God's standards. But God loved all of us so much that he sent Jesus to die in our place. There are no exceptions to this at all – it is regardless of our gender, nationality, popularity, class, skin colour, eye colour, financial status... There's no room for prejudice in God's Kingdom! Ask your group how they think this should affect the way we treat other people. Discuss their ideas for a few minutes.³

3. Discuss: Are there any barriers – language, culture, prejudice, geography, economic level, or educational level – that keep you from telling others about Christ?

Carry your thoughts for this section into a time of prayer together.

WORSHIP

1. Finish with a time of prayer. You could ask the group to hold their hands over their eyes as you pray for God to show you all where you are prejudiced. Then they could hold their hands palms upwards as you pray for God to change your hearts so that you are able to see people as he sees them – as unique, special, and lovely. Then invite the group to turn their hands into fists as you pray for them to be able to stand up for those who are the victims of prejudice – to fight against prejudice rather than people.⁴

2. Either of the following tracks would be good to end your time together.

🎵 'No Outsiders' – Rend Collective

'There are no outsiders to your love. We are all welcome, there's grace enough.'

There are several versions of this song on YouTube. At the start of this acoustic version – www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=29&v=U25dcsiO87k – the writers of the song talk about the meaning of the song.

🎵 'I C Love' – LZ7

'Forget the labels, kick them in the dust, let's turn the tables, there's so much more to us.'

³www.energize.uk.net/meeting-plans/249

⁴www.energize.uk.net/meeting-plans/247

Further information for group leaders.

We have just read one of THE biggest moments in the Book of Acts. Back in Acts 1:8, the risen Christ said that he wanted the news about him to be spread throughout Jerusalem, all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. Previously, we have seen the gospel move through the first three of those categories. Like ripples spreading out on a lake, the gospel has been spreading out, converting Jews in Jerusalem, Jews in all Judea, even half-Jews in Samaria. But now, here in Acts 10, the gospel has broken through an enormous racial barrier on its way to the ends of the earth – Gentiles are now becoming Christians! Moreover, it is obvious that they are becoming Christians because they are speaking in tongues just like the apostles at Pentecost. It really is like Pentecost all over again. Here is THE moment when God's Spirit pours out into the hearts of the Gentiles.⁵

God sent an angel to Cornelius, and the angel knew the gospel perfectly well. He could have explained the way of salvation to Cornelius and left Peter out of the loop. But instead he gave instructions to Cornelius on how to contact Peter so that Peter could go and preach the gospel to the Gentiles. Isn't it just like God – when he is pleased to open the gospel to the Gentiles, he picks a Gentile who represents something that every loyal Jew hated – a military commander from the occupying Roman forces! Peter had to break out of his comfort zone in order to obey God. And Cornelius would have had to overcome any prejudice that he may have had against asking an uneducated Jew to explain spiritual truth to him. He might rather have had a member of the Jewish Sanhedrin come, but he would have missed the way of salvation.

Note also how the Lord worked gradually with Peter. First, Peter was staying at the home of a Christian brother who was a tanner. The Jews viewed tanners as unclean, since they had daily contact with the skins of dead animals. And their houses were smelly places. The party from Cornelius easily could have found Simon the tanner's house: Go to Joppa and follow your nose!

Then, the Lord repeated the vision three times for Peter, in order to impress the point on him. No sooner had the vision ended than the three visitors from Caesarea arrived. Peter could have told them where the local Gentile motel was located, but instead he invited them in and gave them lodging (10:23). The prejudices were coming down gradually. When Peter arrived at Cornelius's house, he was surprised to find not just a handful of Gentiles, but a whole house full! Peter's opening comment, about it being unlawful for a Jew to associate with a foreigner (10:28), was not a rude comment, as some think. Rather, he was just acknowledging the obvious and explaining why he was deliberately violating the commonly understood customs.⁶

Perhaps the greatest barrier to the spread of the gospel in the first century was the Jewish-Gentile conflict. The first believers were Jewish, and to them it was scandalous even to think of associating with Gentiles. But God told Peter to take the gospel to a Roman, and Peter obeyed despite his background and personal feelings. God was making clear that the good news of Christ is for everyone! We should not allow any barrier – language, culture, prejudice, geography, economic level, or educational level – to keep us from telling others about Christ.⁷

⁵ *Mission Unstoppable*. Bryson Smith

⁶ bible.org/seriespage/lesson-25-breaking-down-our-prejudice-acts-101-33

⁷ *Life Application Bible*. Kingsway



Write the name of your character in the outline of the man.

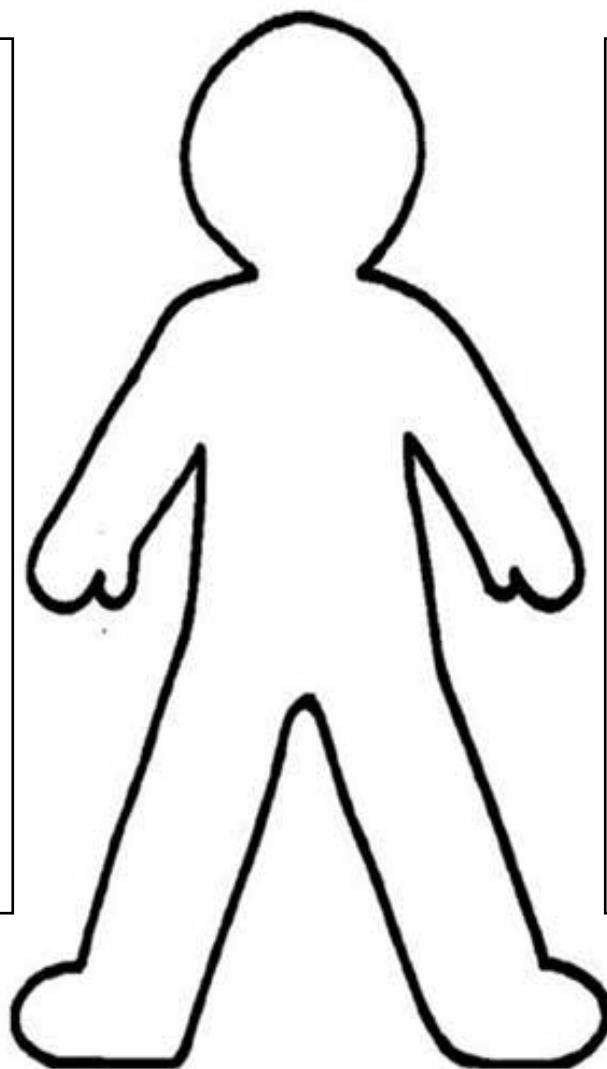
Describe the appearance of Cornelius/Peter as you imagine him.

(Draw on the outline if you want to!)

Describe the character of Cornelius/Peter that you can see from this Scripture.

How was God preparing Cornelius to meet with Peter / Peter to meet with Cornelius?

Describe the first meeting of these two men from Cornelius'/Peter's point of view.



Describe the outcome of this meeting, both for your character and the reaction of his friends/family/community.

Describe how you see the Holy Spirit at work in this story.

Anything else:

WHAT DOES PETER'S VISION MEAN FOR US TODAY: WHAT 'UNCLEAN FOODS' MIGHT GOD BE CALLING 'CLEAN'?

WELCOME

1. Provide a selection of food items laid out in front of your group.

Ask them to discuss the food (without tasting): which ones they like, which ones they don't like. Try to include some food items that they may have never tasted and ask whether they expect to like it or not!

Then allow group members to taste each food item.

Discuss again – has anyone changed their opinions after having tasted the food?

NB. Check for food allergies before doing this activity.

2. Start the group in your normal clothes and with your normal hairstyle. Tell your group you will be stepping out of the room and when you return they should look at you and immediately write down their feelings, impressions and thoughts based solely on your appearance. Leave the room and come back wearing a white lab coat (or one of the other costumes listed below). Give the group members a minute to write down their impressions, and then leave again, and repeat with a different costume.

You could come back wearing any of the following: dreadlocks; a nose ring, lip ring, eyebrow ring or other unique piercing; a suit jacket; ragged, dirty clothes; a Muslim head covering for a woman / turban for a man; a yarmulke; a spiked, coloured wig; jewellery, carrying a shopping bag from an 'upscale' store; glasses (if you don't already wear them) and so on.

Alternatively, you could hand out a bag with props/costume to each person. In turn ask them to put on the item(s) and ask the other group members to discuss their immediate impressions. (You could also do this same activity with photographs of people instead of costumes/props.)⁸

Discuss the fact that we all have our own set opinions or ideas about other people, and sometimes this can even be called prejudice against another 'type' of person. Prejudice is when you have a preconceived idea or opinion about something that is not correct. This could include the way we think about how certain groups of people will respond to the message of Jesus. We form these opinions based on fear, worry, upbringing, tradition, culture etc. It's our natural inclination to feel uncomfortable about people who are different from us and to gravitate towards those who are similar to us.

In the Bible passages that we read about Peter and Cornelius, we see the Holy Spirit starting Peter on a journey towards reaching out to and accepting even those people he had been taught to despise, and rethinking some of his long-held religious beliefs in the light of Jesus' message that the good news of the gospel is for everyone.

WORD

1. Recruit four young people to take part in this sketch.

Four people stand in a line. Each speaks to the audience as if they were answering the question 'Are you prejudiced?' They can obviously see each other, but are unaware of what the others are saying. They each talk about the person on their left, apart from the fourth person who points back to the first.

Young girl:

'Me? Prejudiced? I'm not prejudiced – not like him (points to man in football shirt). He is so sexist it's unbelievable. He thinks women should be tied to the kitchen sink. He expects his wife to have his dinner on the table every evening, and he doesn't even know how to use a washing

⁸Activity adapted from: humaneeducation.org/blog/2014/6-activities-exploring-prejudice-discrimination



machine. He is so patronising to the women he works with. But that's what football fans are like, isn't it? They just annoy me so much with their stupid chanting and ugly football shirts. They're just a bunch of thugs. I'd never go out with a football fan.'

Man in football shirt:

'No, I'm not prejudiced at all. If you want to see prejudice you just need to look at her (nods in old lady's direction). I heard her in the corner shop last week, complaining about young people hanging around on street corners. Said she felt intimidated by them and that their parents should make them stay inside after 6 pm. She said all young people are lazy and bad mannered, and they should bring back National Service. That's typical of old people, isn't it? They think the world shouldn't change and just moan about everything. Old people are all miserable – I never want to get old.'

Old lady:

'There's not an ounce of prejudice in my body. Live and let live is my motto – unlike him (points at man in wheelchair). He's really got it in for homeless people. Says they should be rounded up off the streets and made to work. He says anyone can get a job and a home if they really try. People like him are so ignorant. Just because he's disabled, he thinks everyone should listen to his opinions. People like him play on our sympathy and sponge off the state.'

Man in wheelchair:

'No, I'm not prejudiced. I'm very tolerant, me. Wish I could say the same for her – she's really racist (points back to first girl). You probably wouldn't think it to look at her, but you should hear some of the things she says. I don't even want to repeat them actually. But then what do you expect from teenage girls? They don't use their brains, do they? All they can think about is boys and make-up. She'll probably be pregnant with her own council flat in two years time.'

All four together in chorus:

'Me? No, I'm not prejudiced!'

Discuss with the group:

- 👉 Who showed prejudice in the sketch?
- 👉 What's a definition of prejudice? (A preconceived opinion or bias, making up your mind about someone because of the group they belong to rather than what they are actually like.)
- 👉 Do you agree that it is hard to see where we are prejudiced? Why is that?
- 👉 What different types of prejudice are present in our world today? (Make a list!)
- 👉 How do they affect the people involved? Do you recognise any of these prejudices in your own life?⁹
- 👉 Who in your world of relationships is most unlike you? How is your communication with that person affected by these differences?
- 👉 How have you or a 'group' you belong to been excluded by others?
- 👉 When have you felt separated from people because of cultural or racial differences?
- 👉 Think of the 'type' of person that you find the most difficult to be with or talk to. Do you know someone personally who fits in into this 'category' of people? How can you find out more about why these people live like they do? What could you do practically to support them in some way?

3. Jesus and prejudice

Split into five smaller groups and give each group one of the following Scriptures to read. Ask them to answer the following questions, and then give a summary back to the rest of the group. What can we learn from Jesus in how he responded to people that were marginalised or pushed aside? How can we follow Jesus' example in treating prejudices today?

⁹Adapted from www.energize.uk.net/meeting-plans/247

- John 4:1-30 Jesus and a Samaritan woman
Luke 7:36-50 A woman washes Jesus' feet
Luke 19:1-10 Jesus and Zacchaeus
John 8:1-11 The woman caught in adultery
Matthew 8:1-3 Jesus heals a leper
- * Who did Jesus meet?
 - * What prejudice did he challenge?
 - * What did other people think?
 - * What did Jesus do?
 - * What was the result?
 - * Is this type of prejudice still around?

WITNESS

1. Watch the following video made by Bristol City Council called 'We Are Bristol'.

As you watch, ask the group members to consider their own community/town/city. In what ways are people in the community different from you, in what ways are they the same?

 We Are Bristol (3mins 20) - www.youtube.com/watch?v=0g8lLrUEf1k

2. Discuss with the group

- 👉 What groups of people would you expect to be unreceptive to the gospel?
- 👉 What are some of the culturally different groups in our own town/city that Jesus might want us to reach? How can we do this?
- 👉 Think of something practical that you can do to stand against this prejudice and show them something of the love of Jesus.
- 👉 What barriers/prejudice in your life keep you from telling others about Jesus?
- 👉 Think of one person that you usually avoid. Next time you see them, how can you make an effort to talk with them and be interested in their lives?

3. In Session Four there is the opportunity to do something practical, in your community, in response to your discussion over the last couple of sessions. This would be a good opportunity to begin making some plans for this event.

4. Challenge the group to learn the following Scripture for your next session.

“In Christ, there is no difference between Jew and Greek, slave and free person, male and female. You are all the same in Christ Jesus.”

Galatians 3:28 NCV

WORSHIP

1. Watch the following short film together – join in with the singing when you can! (Maybe you could even get your group to join hands!)

We Are One – www.presenceproject.com/we-are-one



2. Inspire your prayers using the words of this poem:

Dear Father of all,

Help us to see the world through your eyes, without dividing lines,
To see just land and water, mountains, trees and skies.
Help us to lay aside our class and skin, our background and race,
To know our shared humanity, to see a brother or sister in every face.

Help us to wear forgiveness, to lay down our pride and pain,
To seek first to understand, Lord, may peace and reconciliation reign.
Help us to feel your compassion so we can freely forgive.
May we weave new threads of grace and cause seeds of hope to live.

Help us to play our own small part, with acts of kindness and of care.
May we arise as your children and seek out what is justice and fair.
Cause us to make new bonds of trust with neighbours near and far,
And so to fashion a world where peace comes to Earth in this hour.

A prayer for peace by Julie Palmer copyright © 2019 www.lords-prayer-words.com

THE SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE OF SUBMISSION

This can be a tricky spiritual discipline to get your head around! It is strongly recommended that group leaders read the further information attached at the end, so you are able to guide your group through the discussion and activities and help them understand it.

WELCOME

1. One goal football

Explain that you're going to play a game of football (it doesn't have to be football – it could be basketball, for example). Appoint a goalkeeper, ask them to stand in the goal, and throw them the ball. Now tell everyone else that there are no teams. This is an individual game, and everyone is out for themselves. That means everyone needs to try to stop the others from scoring, and to try to score themselves.

Unless you have a young Marcus Rashford among your ranks, this should descend into a stalemate, or total chaos. It's incredibly hard to score against an entire team, but if anyone manages it, they get a point. Once the game gets frustrating, stop and explain the point below.

The Point: If we're all out for ourselves, there's chaos. And while there might be a few winners in the game of life, there will inevitably be a lot more people on the losing side.¹⁰

2. Tug of war.

Alternatively, you could try a tug of war.

Provide a large length of thick rope and have all the group member stand around the rope, holding it in a circle. On 'Go!' each person should try to pull the rope in their own direction. This should prove difficult!

Then put the group into two teams and play a classic game of tug of war.

Use this activity to make the point above.

WORD

1. Give out the following Scriptures on slips of paper – one or two to each group member – and ask them to read them aloud for the group. Ask the group what they think is the common theme running through all these Bible verses.

1 Peter 5:6

¶ Be humble under God's powerful hand so he will lift you up when the right time comes. (NCV)

Mark 8:34

¶ If any of you wants to be my follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross, and follow me. (NLT)

¶ Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. (NIV)

Matthew 10:39

¶ Those who try to hold on to their lives will give up true life. Those who give up their lives for me will hold on to true life. (NCV)

Ephesians 5:21

¶ Submit yourselves to one another because of your reverence for Christ. (GNT)

Mark 9:35

¶ Anyone wanting to be the greatest must be the least – the servant of all! (TLB)

¶ Whoever wants to be the most important must be last of all and servant of all. (NCV)

¹⁰ www.energize.uk.net/meeting-plans/1680



Philippians 2:3–9 (TLB)

F Don't be selfish; don't live to make a good impression on others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourself. Don't just think about your own affairs, but be interested in others, too, and in what they are doing. Your attitude should be the kind that was shown us by Jesus Christ, who, though he was God, did not demand and cling to his rights as God, but laid aside his mighty power and glory, taking the disguise of a slave and becoming like men. And he humbled himself even further, going so far as actually to die a criminal's death on a cross. Yet it was because of this that God raised him up to the heights of heaven and gave him a name which is above every other name...

2. Before you start this activity, explain the spiritual discipline of submission in simple terms: 'putting the needs of others before our own'. (See further information for group leaders to help you with this.)

Stick seven sheets of flip chart paper around the room, writing one of the following seven terms in the centre of each sheet:

God, The Bible, Family, Neighbours, The Church, The broken, The world

Explain that these are the seven 'acts' of submission; seven directions in which we can choose to submit; seven groups of people or institutions, the needs of which we can put before our own. (See the further information for detailed notes on these seven.)

Now give out felt-tip pens, and invite the group to walk around the room, brainstorming any ideas they have for how to practise submission to each of these seven, and writing them in pen on the relevant sheets. For instance: they could submit to God by coming to church, by praying regularly, or by asking him to speak. They could submit to neighbours by offering to mow their lawn, or throwing the next-door kids' ball back without them having to ask for it.

Give them five minutes to do this, and then read some of the best examples to the whole group.¹¹

WITNESS

1. Place the Scriptures that you read at the beginning in the centre of the group and discuss. Which Scriptures do they find the most inspiring? Which the most challenging? What one small thing can each person commit to actioning in their lives to outwork the words of these Scriptures?

2. Read and discuss the following quote:

“ In submission we are at last free to value other people.

Their dreams and plans become important to us.

We have entered into a new, wonderful, glorious freedom – the freedom to give up our rights for the good of others.

For the first time we can love people unconditionally.

We have given up the right to demand that they return our love.

No longer do we feel that we have to be treated in a certain way.

We discover that it is far better to serve our neighbour than to have our own way.

We are able to lay down the terrible burden of always needing to get our own way.

Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*

Look again at the seven areas from the activity above.

Richard Foster says that in submission:

‘We are able to lay down the terrible burden of always needing to get our own way.’

¹¹ Adapted from www.energize.uk.net/meeting-plans/1680



Ask the group: In which of these areas do you find it the most difficult to submit, do you notice that you really like to have your own way? What can you do to change your attitude in this situation?

WORSHIP

Write a prayer using the first letters of the word, and share them together:

S

U

B

M

I

S

S

I

O

N

2. Listen to any of the following worship songs. As you do so, give each person a piece of clay (or plasticine). Ask them to continually shape and mould the clay as they listen to the words of the song, and to pray quietly that they would continually allow God to mould and shape them. Also, to make a commitment to outworking the discipline of submission in their daily lives and to letting go of the need to always get their own way.

- 🎵 'All That I Am' – Rend Collective
- 🎵 'The Stand' – Hillsong
- 🎵 'Gracefully Broken' – Matt Redman
- 🎵 'My Heart is Yours' – Passion



Information for group leaders.

The most radical social teaching of Jesus was his total reversal of the contemporary notion of greatness. Leadership is found in becoming the servant of all. Power is discovered in submission. The foremost symbol of this radical servanthood is the cross. Jesus' life and teaching did away with all claims to privileged position and status. (Remember how Jesus washed the feet of his disciples? – John 17)¹²

There are few more divisive or loaded terms in the Christian Church than 'submission'. The word may immediately conjure up images of oppressive patriarchs, overbearing husbands or even slaves willingly conceding to their masters. In the context of the spiritual disciplines, however, submission doesn't mean any of these things. Instead, it's the working through of Jesus' challenge that 'Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all' (Mark 9:35).

Practising submission is simply choosing to put the needs, joys and ambitions of others ahead of our own. It's about considering, every day, how we can make ourselves 'the very last'; to prefer our friends, our families, and even our enemies above ourselves.

In his book *Celebration of Discipline*, Richard Foster suggests seven 'directions' in which we can practise submission. Some of them are much easier than others – all involve personal sacrifice, self-discipline, and doing things we probably wouldn't choose to. So we submit:

- * **To God...** being able to say to God: I'll go where you want me to go, not just in the big things like where we choose to live or work, but in the minutia of every day.
- * **To the Bible...** making a lifelong commitment to reading and – through the intervention of the Spirit – understanding the Bible better, so that we might then be informed in every decision about the way of God.
- * **To our family...** we submit to our parents as we honour them, just as God commands Moses. As adults, we submit to our wives and husbands out of reverence for Christ, and thus look to 'die' for one another in the way that he ultimately loved the Church.
- * **To our neighbours...** because true community is about seeing that no one goes without. It is about stepping out of the isolation of our own homes and recognising that we should 'do life' with the people whom we live alongside.
- * **To the Church...** an intrinsic part of God's rescue plan for the world – so we must learn to submit to it. Giving ourselves and our resources to the local church – even when we don't agree with every matter of style or policy – is a vital aspect of the discipline of submission.
- * **To the broken...** The Bible is literally overflowing with references to the poor, and to the imperative for God-followers to serve them. This is perhaps the most intuitive application of Jesus' command for us to become 'the very last' – we are even to submit ourselves to those the world would value least of all.
- * **To the world...** In one of the most extraordinary passages in the New Testament, John 13:1-17, Jesus washes the feet of his disciples. This is not about who they are – it is all about who he is. And Jesus really wants us to understand that this picture is for us to replicate. So for all of us, young and old, the discipline of submission requires us to ask: what does it mean to wash the feet of the world?

Submission is compelling because it points to and models the way of the crucified Christ. It requires us to ask, what does it really mean to live out Jesus' words in Luke 9: 'If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me'?¹³

When we practise the spiritual discipline of submission, we learn more about ourselves, we become far more patient, we learn humility, and we understand how to be honest with others and ourselves. By allowing ourselves to be accountable and open to direction, we become stronger in our faith because we no longer have to hide our weaknesses from others. We are able to listen to others with minds that are open, and we break the cycle of always

¹²Notes from *Celebration of Discipline*. Richard Foster.

¹³www.energize.uk.net/meeting-plans/1680



thinking of ourselves first. When we learn to be submissive, we learn to put ourselves in God's hands far more, which allows us to build our relationship with him.

Submission is such a great challenge because it addresses my deep need to get my own way, because for me, getting my own way means that I 'win'. Yet I am continually humbled by the realisation that most of life is not about 'success' or 'winning' or 'being the best'. In Christ, we are called to something entirely different: If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me (Mark 8:34).

The cornerstone for the biblical understanding of submission is Jesus' astonishing statement in Mark 8:34: Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.

Jesus calls us to self-denial; this is not self-hatred. Submission is not about hating ourselves; rather, it means to have a right respect and relationship with God. Self-denial is simply a way of coming to understand that we do not have to have our own way. Our happiness is not dependent on getting what we want. Self-denial declares that we are of infinite worth and shows us how to realise it. Self-denial means freedom to give away to others. It means to hold others' interest above our interests. In this way self-denial releases us from self-pity.

More than once Jesus made it quite clear that self-denial is the only sure way to love ourselves. 'Those who try to hold on to their lives will give up true life. Those who give up their lives for me will hold on to true life' (Matthew 10:39).

¹⁴youthtruthusa.com/2011/10/26/spiritual-discipline-of-submission

¹⁵www.cymt.org/blog/2012/08/15/submit-spiritual-disciplines-for-youthworkers

¹⁶Celebration of Discipline. Richard Foster



ACTS INTO ACTION

This is a practical week in which you should aim to do something tangible in response to all you have been discussing this month, something that challenges your group to break down cultural barriers, to reject prejudice, to change our opinions and to reach out to people who are not like us with the love of Jesus.

You will probably need to be preparing for this throughout the month. For some of these activities you will need to contact the relevant authorities to gain permission. You will also need to gather parental consent for your group members to be involved, as well as complete risk assessments. But, don't reinvent the wheel – if there are organisations/groups in your area already involved in any of these ideas, speak to them and try to partner up on a project.

Here are a few ideas, but feel free to come up with your own!

- * Write a song together that reflects your response to prejudice, your understanding that the gospel is for everyone, and your commitment to breaking down barriers between people.
- * Share this with your corps; film it and splash it around social media; and/or sing it on the street corners in your town!
- * Is there a group of people in your community who have never heard the gospel message? If so, consider a project where you can tell them about Jesus – in actions as well as words.
- * Are there people in your community that are marginalised or pushed out of mainstream society in some way? If so, consider a practical project to show them that they are welcome in your church/Christian community and that the message of Jesus also includes them.
- * Make a film about diversity and/or unity in your community. Spread it far and wide on social media.
- * Design and paint a mural / graffiti wall about unity and togetherness. You will need to ask permission from your town/city council – or the owners of the wall – first.
- * God spoke to Peter through a vision about food. We have learnt that Jews and Gentiles would never eat together due to their cultural differences, or even enter one another's homes. Plan a meal for your church, or for the wider community, that includes as many different cultures and customs eating together as possible.
- * Plan a fundraising event to support a local or national charity or organisation that is taking a stand against prejudice and marginalisation.
- * Take food to the homeless people in your town. (If your corps or another church already has a project working with homeless people, chat to them about what you would like to do and maybe join in with one of their services.)
- * Do you have any refugees in your town? Visit these families, or contact their social workers, and find out what practical needs they have. Chat to your corps/church and try to meet some of these needs if you can. Tell them they are welcome in your church/Christian community.
- * The Salvation Army International Projects Office has loads of campaigns running, all of which aim to make equality a reality for people in developing countries. There is loads of information, fundraising ideas and presentations. You could even come up with an idea to raise money to buy from the Just Gifts catalogue – giving a gift to tackle poverty and injustice around the world. Visit www.salvationarmy.org.uk/id/about-us
- * The Salvation Army also has projects in the UK working with the elderly, refugees, people in poverty, victims of modern slavery, domestic abuse, homelessness, addictions, and has a voice in influencing social policy. Perhaps your corps is involved in a project supporting vulnerable people in some way. How can your group get involved? Take a look at the website for more info. www.salvationarmy.org.uk
- * A personal response: Ask each person to think of one person that they usually avoid – perhaps because they feel so different from them, they don't understand them, they harbour unnoticed prejudice against them. Ask each person to consider an individual response. It can be anything to try to break down the walls that they have



built up. Perhaps they could arrange to go out for a pizza together, bake some cookies for that person, send them a message on social media to break the wall of silence.

- * Ask group members to share with each other (they don't need to say the name of the other person) and then to keep each other accountable.